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Socialist OUTLOOK

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From all over
Europe,
workers and
unemployed
converge on
Amsterdam



Marching → against Maastricht Misery



Bernadette and Roisin

Roisin: fight on!

ON FRIDAY 23 May, Roisin McAliskey, held for six months in Holloway, was released on conditional bail to have her baby in Whittington Hospital, north London.

She had been held pending an extradition application by the German authorities, on "strong suspicion" of involvement in an IRA

bombing in Osnabruck, Germany. The last minute decision to grant bail by a High Court judge came after McAliskey's collapse.

Her baby daughter, Loinnir, (meaning a ray of light that comes from behind dark clouds) was born on Monday May 26.

On 2 June in the High Court, Roisin McAliskey's lawyer Gareth Pierce will again raise the issue of bail for Roisin, who suffers from chronic asthma and has experienced serious health problems throughout her pregnancy.

The hospital recommends she is sent to another hospital for rest and

Militant policies at CWU conference

John Stevenson

THE NATIONAL conference of the Communication Workers Union took place in the third week of May and passed a number of important resolutions.

Crucial among them was a call for the scrapping of Labour's "Party into Power" proposals - becoming the first union conference to pass a policy of outright opposition.

Another significant victory concerned the right of union delegations to the TUC and Labour Party Conference to decide policy on is-

suues where the CWU conference has made no decision.

This should mean that the union's executive will not be able to impose policy and the union's delegates will be accountable only to its conference.

The Telecom section of the conference expressed militant opposition to two key initiatives being made by BT in respect of the workforce.

The company is dividing its operations into "trading units" and is also proposing a new grading structure. Activists fear these proposals will lead to performance-related

pay and a worsening of terms and conditions.

Another motion expressed solidarity with the 31 sacked Critchley Labels workers, and a mass demonstration is to be held at the company premises on June 25.

Recent executive elections also saw important victories for the left on the Telecom side.

Ex-General Secretary Alan Johnson may well be rather relieved he is now a Labour MP - sadly he is likely to have a more comfortable time in the Parliamentary Labour Party.

recuperation, and that her prospects for recovering her health are not good if this does not happen.

As we go to press, it is expected, though, that the appeal will be lost and that Roisin and Loinnir will remain in Holloway for some time.

The German authorities clearly oppose bail for Roisin on the grounds that they "strongly suspect" her and that they cannot assess her health or the risk that she might flee (as if she is in a condition to do so!)

The campaign for bail for Roisin McAliskey continues. Write to: His Excellency, The Ambassador, Dr Jurgen Oesterhelt, Embassy of the Federal Republic, 23 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 9AT, Fax: 0171 824 1435

Delight at NACAB reinstatement victory

Steve Chivers

GLEN Sutherland, member of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, has been reinstated in his job after originally being sacked over the use of a photocopier for private purposes.

At the time of his dismissal he had worked for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) for 19 years.

Most of the £12.48 worth of photocopying was for his union and many of the members saw the sacking as deliberately ridiculing the organisation of a popular union activist.

Members' outrage turned into action when the three one-day strikes hit both NACAB's London

HQ and Citizens Advice Bureaux throughout the country.

An appeal panel convened in April refused to overturn the original decision but on May 23 an emergency meeting of NACAB's management committee reversed it and substituted a final written warning.

Glen sees the surprise decision as a great victory for the union. It was the first time that MSF members in NACAB had ever taken any strike action.

Others joined the union specifically to participate in strike action in his defence. The union is stronger than ever - maybe management will think twice about victimising anyone next time.

Hard Labour gets tough on unemployed

Paul McGowan

PROJECT Work, the Tories workfare scheme is to be ditched by Labour. Yet under the new government, the unemployed still face the choice of working for peanuts or losing their benefit.

David Blunkett has promised to keep and "improve" all aspects of the delivery of the hated Job Seekers Allowance. The jobless will be increasingly subject to sanctions through its provisions for refusing to take menial, dangerous, low paid work.

Labour's Welfare to Work programme will 'offer' youth education or training, a work trial with a company, or a placement with an environmental task force.

If the young jobless reject these

options they will also suffer benefit cuts. Single parents are likely to face similar treatment.

Labour would scrap the JSA if it were serious about providing opportunities for the unemployed. The JSA limits the hours the jobless can study. The lower rate of JSA awarded to under 25s is barely sufficient for them to buy food, let alone pay for stamps or fares to interviews.

The JSA is designed to get claimants off the register - not into work. Anybody can be penalised for taking insufficient steps to look for jobs under the legislation. Through 'directions', Employment Service staff can demand their clients do almost anything or have their money stopped.

Many claimants are coerced through the JSA into taking jobs

well below any decent minimum wage. However Jobcentre vacancies often pay more than those displayed in Employment agencies, which the jobless are increasingly forced to visit in compliance with their Jobseekers agreements.

The JSA enables private agencies to profit at the expense of the unemployed and civil servants.

Tony Blair should be creating jobs through improving public services. Yet he is

sacking firefighters, nurses and teachers to keep within Tory spending limits.

His ridiculous faith in private enterprise is shown in Welfare to Work. It will provide generous handouts to bosses to take on the young and long term unemployed. The same companies that have made vast profits by laying off thousands will now be paid vast sums to reemploy a few of them at crap rates of pay.

Undermined

Labour's adoption of the Tory economic programme threatens to undermine Welfare to Work. Blair hopes it will take 250,000 youth off the dole, but if he can't offer any more money to colleges soon they will cut their places by the same amount next year.

Labour seeks to pay for its scheme through a windfall tax on private utilities. Although we welcome taking a slice out of the profits for the common good, why shouldn't we have all their profits - which they have amassed over the last few years charging us exorbitant prices and making people redundant.

After more than two decades of mass unemployment, Blair's policies are no solution. Labour should embark on a massive programme of public works where those leaving the dole are paid a decent wage, instead of allowing the fat cats to milk the jobless and welfare state.

The death of Project Work was to a large extent due to workers and the unemployed forcing the bosses to boycott the slave labour scheme. Socialists must struggle against Labour's replacement and the JSA. We need public sector jobs not pri-

Principles get in the way of MSF merger

Terry Conway

MSF conference in Hove on June 14-17, will be a rather different affair than that planned by the top table.

The centre piece of the conference was to have been to agree the plans they had, they thought, stitched up with the leadership of IPMS towards the supposed launching of a new union.

This dream came to a timely end at IPMS own conference last month which failed to agree these "principles" but instead decided to commission a survey on IPMS's future as an independent union.

While MSF General Secretary Roger Lyons is still arguing that agreement can still be reached, the reality is that the project is dead in the water.

This will be an important boost for the left. The campaign against these proposals has been gathering steam within MSF but has not been easy.

Federal

The first objection to the supposedly new union was that the "Heads of Agreement" put forward by the two leaderships would lead to no such thing. Rather than a fully integrated new organisation, what was on offer was a federal structure, which would do nothing to strengthen workplace organisation and lead to a major reduction in democratic accountability.

Bill Brett, the General Secretary of IPMS stated at a briefing meeting for his union members that IPMS would not affiliate to CND.

Even if the annual conference of the new union had voted to maintain MSF's current affiliation, the proposed IPMS sector would have the right of veto - completely undermining the sovereignty of conference.

The role of regions, crucial in the existing political structure of MSF would be undermined. The executive would have had 72 members of whom nine would be from the regions - and three from Ireland.

Unwieldy

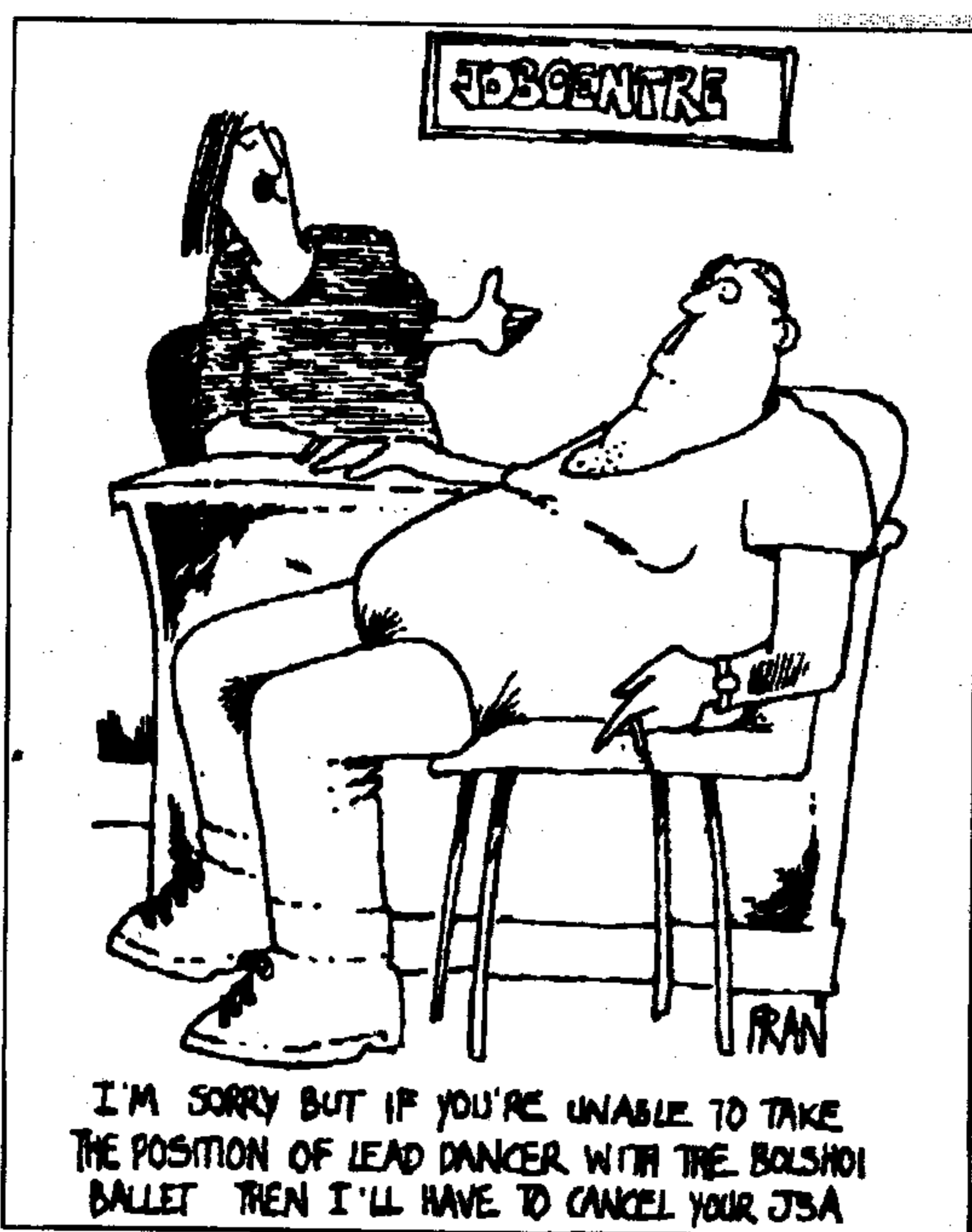
The bulk would be from the different "industrial" sectors - so regional input would have been almost non-existent. Such a large executive would have completely unwieldy, and real decisions taken by a smaller sub-committee.

MSF activists have a tough enough time imposing any accountability on the Executive as it is - as the current witch hunt against Joe Bowers, who stood against Lyons in the recent General Secretary election, illustrates all too graphically.

A further concentration of power in the hands of the centre would make battles against such outrages almost unwinnable.

IPMS members have given the lie to the myth put forward by Lyons that his train is unstoppable.

MSF conference needs to ensure that while he is reeling from this blow he is beaten back in other ways - particularly in terms of his determination to put his relationship with the Labour front bench before the interests of his members.



Blair: a dazzling star – or just a Clinton clone?

TONY Blair's hectic round of European summits has culminated in the Clinton smile-in at Downing Street.

Gushing with praise, every leader from Kohl to Chirac to Clinton has stood in line for the photo-opportunity of the month. With President Clinton taking his share of reflected glory, Tony Blair has shown that he is no rising star, he has already arrived in the firmament. Nothing succeeds like success it seems.

But is all the toadying just a desire to associate with success, or is there substance to all the rhetoric about 'new generation politics'?

Is Tony Blair the first of a new breed of leaders, steering a new course for a new era in global politics, "celebrating enterprise without excluding the poor", as the soundbite has it?

Dead centre

Or is it just a re-run of the American 'radical centre' which also started energetically but soon slid down the road into the inertia and paralysis of Clinton's current 'dead centre'?

Blair's own theme of the 'radical centre', which is neither left nor right but 'new', appeals greatly to world leaders at a time when they increasingly confront resistance from the people, especially from the working class and the youth.

The current crisis of the welfare system, growing unemployment and social and environmental degradation have led to a widely held public perception that the fabric of society and the planet itself are under threat.

Blair also enters the stage at a time when there is a realisation among European politicians of a growing disenchantment with the European union, in particular the single currency and its cost-cutting convergence criteria.

The French elections, even more than the British election before it, was dominated by the single currency. Resistance has been felt directly in mainland Europe, in the mass mobilisations and strikes



The media toasted the beautiful people. Nice suits, shame about the policies

directed against the effects of the Maastricht process. This could challenge and even derail the bosses' Europe.

Blair's theme for the Euro summit, after agreeing to sign up to the social chapter (as long as it doesn't imply a raft of new legislation in favour of workers' rights), was the need for a "Peoples' Europe" that would tackle the issue of unemployment and job creation.

It was a warning shot against the danger of politicians losing the support and confidence of the people of Europe for this most central capitalist project. Without a hint of embarrassment he then proceeded to crusade for "labour market flexibility", the effect of which will be to drive down wages and increase unemployment!

A proposed "jobs summit" will

now be led by Blair and Clinton together.

The pragmatic politics of the 'radical centre', which is paraded as neither left nor right, but by definition something of both, is the strategy of the carrot and the stick (like the donkey we are unlikely to get much carrot – unless there is an unexpected new economic boom).

Rich and poor

Blair explained to an approving Clinton that a fair society is one in which the rich and the poor can benefit: "We can't prosper as a nation unless we prosper together" he said. But then in almost the same breath he insisted that "Progressive parties today are parties of fiscal responsibility and prudence. You do not do anything for anybody by making a wreckage of the

economy."

Blair and Brown seem to believe that they can square the circle and avoid the issue of contradictory class interests. They seem to believe that it really is possible to celebrate free enterprise without excluding the poor, and to maintain profits while carrying out some social reforms.

While the Blair team has learnt much from Clinton and his aides, several of whom were sent over to advise on slick political marketing, they failed to learn the most important lessons.

Clinton's refusal to tax the rich and take control of the banks, left the government financially hamstrung when it came to implementing their major health reform, which was a total failure.

The fiasco all but destroyed Hillary Clinton's political credibility.

Although the Workfare programme, their second flagship policy, is credited with helping to create 4 million new (mainly low-paid) jobs, this was as much to do with a favourable trade cycle and five years of economic recovery. Speaking at No 10 the President was obliged to admit they had done less well in preserving social cohesion and what he called a 'social safety-net' for families.

Far from it. Before the last US election, Clinton dumped 60 years of Democratic Party adherence to the welfare reforms of the 1930s by signing tough new regulations designed to balance the budget and appease the Republican right.

Welfare cuts

This was always going to happen. In reality the massive cost-saving transformation of welfare provision means cuts; placed in the context of a Workfare scheme which created low paid and part time jobs, resting on the very low national minimum wage, in a flexible, fast moving, deregulated labour market, it means job insecurity and more unemployment.

This is just what US capitalism needs: a socially controlled but flexible, low paid, labour force, which also undermines trade unionism and acts as a downwards pressure on wages in general.

Today many US workers are forced to take two jobs in order to maintain their living standards. Overall the Clinton administration has succeeded in shifting wealth from the poor to the rich to such a degree that today the gulf between them, in a nation which has traditionally seen itself as the land of opportunity, is greater than in any other developed economy.

Here in Britain a tough fiscal policy, which excludes taxing the rich, and aims to meet the Maastricht criteria, will be achieved only at the cost of the welfare state and at the expense of the poorest sections of our society.

Frank Field is charged with reducing costs and terminating the welfare state as we know it. As even one of Blair's main cheerleaders, Will Hutton of the *Observer* stated, "People here in Britain did not vote for this."

Marches show solidarity with single parents

TONY Blair's hypocrisy knows no bounds. If he wanted to assist single mothers in getting a job then he would put real resources into childcare provision. A few million pounds of lottery money diverted into homework clubs is more than a joke – it's an insult.

The fact that current benefit rules exempt single mothers with children under 16 from any obligation to consider job offers or training is not what causes the situation where nearly 50 per cent of lone mothers were living on less than £100 per week in 1994.

Britain has one of the lowest levels of child care provision in Europe and one of the highest levels of un-

employment of single mothers. Funny that...

While the detailed sanctions behind the government proposals are yet to fully emerge, the tie-in with the "Welfare to Work" initiative makes clear that the motivation is cutting the benefits not giving

women choice. The Job Seekers Allowance has already "disappeared" the largest number of people since the poll tax – Labour will continue with it and bring in

these new attacks too.

Apart from childcare, the other main reason for the perilous situation of so many single parents in

Britain is down to that favourite hero of Blair's – Margaret Thatcher – and her policy of a "flexible labour market".

Wages have been driven down while childcare and other essential costs like housing and food go up, reducing the possibility of being able to afford to work.

Yet this is the direction in which Blair wants to continue to steer Britain – and take the rest of Europe with him.

The British Euromarchers had already raised slogans around the rights of single parents as they wound their way through the north before these latest attacks were announced. The Maastricht convergence criteria will lead to a further undermining of what few services and what little childcare provision exists.

The marchers on the road, and their supporters in the cities and towns they are passing through, are

fighting against all forms of social exclusion.

We may be relatively few in numbers, but we are tapping into a mood that wants a different Europe to that on offer from the bosses and bankers. That mood led to the Europe-wide strikes and demonstrations against the closure of Renault-Vilvoorde, and to the defeat of Chirac's right wing government in France.

Here in Britain not only have we won the support of many labour movement organisations and interest – and money – from many on the streets we have trodden: but TUC leader John Monks has been put under

enough under pressure to agree to debate with us.

Positive measures to support the 70 per cent of lone parents who are dependent on benefits in Britain today would focus on serious investment in childcare – and affordable quality, childcare that is available the

hours that parents need it and 52 weeks of the year. They would mean a commitment to a minimum wage and controls on rents that would end the poverty trap that so many are caught in.

Such demands need to be fought for across the labour movement. The slogans that have been chanted by the Euromarchers wending their

way to Amsterdam will still be needed after the Euro summit on June 14: we intend to make sure they are still heard.



Single Status - why UNISON must vote NO

Fred Leplat

A NEW set of harmonised conditions for both blue and white collar council workers has been negotiated by the TGWU, GMB and UNISON. Although the Single Status, as it is known, is in principle to be welcomed, the deal that has been eventually negotiated should

be rejected.

A conference of local government UNISON branches on May 20 came close to doing this. The national leadership only obtained a majority of 72,000, out of 700,000 votes cast, to recommend acceptance of the Single Status in a ballot of the membership.

The main areas of concern are:

* Despite this being a national agreement, employers will be able to negotiate changes, in particular special payments, at a local level.

* No additional finance is available, thus forcing councils to make cuts in order to pay the deal;

* The reduction to 37 hours (36 in London) for manual workers will not come into force until 1999, and then on the basis of increased productivity;

* A new national job evaluation scheme will not be compulsory, and according to the employers' own briefing "after reviews councils can move away from national scales and grades".

* The pay rise which is part of the package is only 2.5 per cent on average while the minimum hourly rate is £4, well below UNISON's minimum wage claim of £4.42.

Opposition to the deal was led by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison, who produced a special pamphlet, which was snapped up by the delegates.

UNISON's leadership will now try and sell this deal as a "historic offer" and will flood the membership with publicity to convince them to accept the offer.

But the CFDU is launching a campaign for a "No" vote, demanding instead proper harmonisation with a Single Status which would not lead to the break-up of national negotiations and which would not be financed by cuts or yet more increases in productivity.

After the landslide UNISON needs action, not words

Fred Leplat

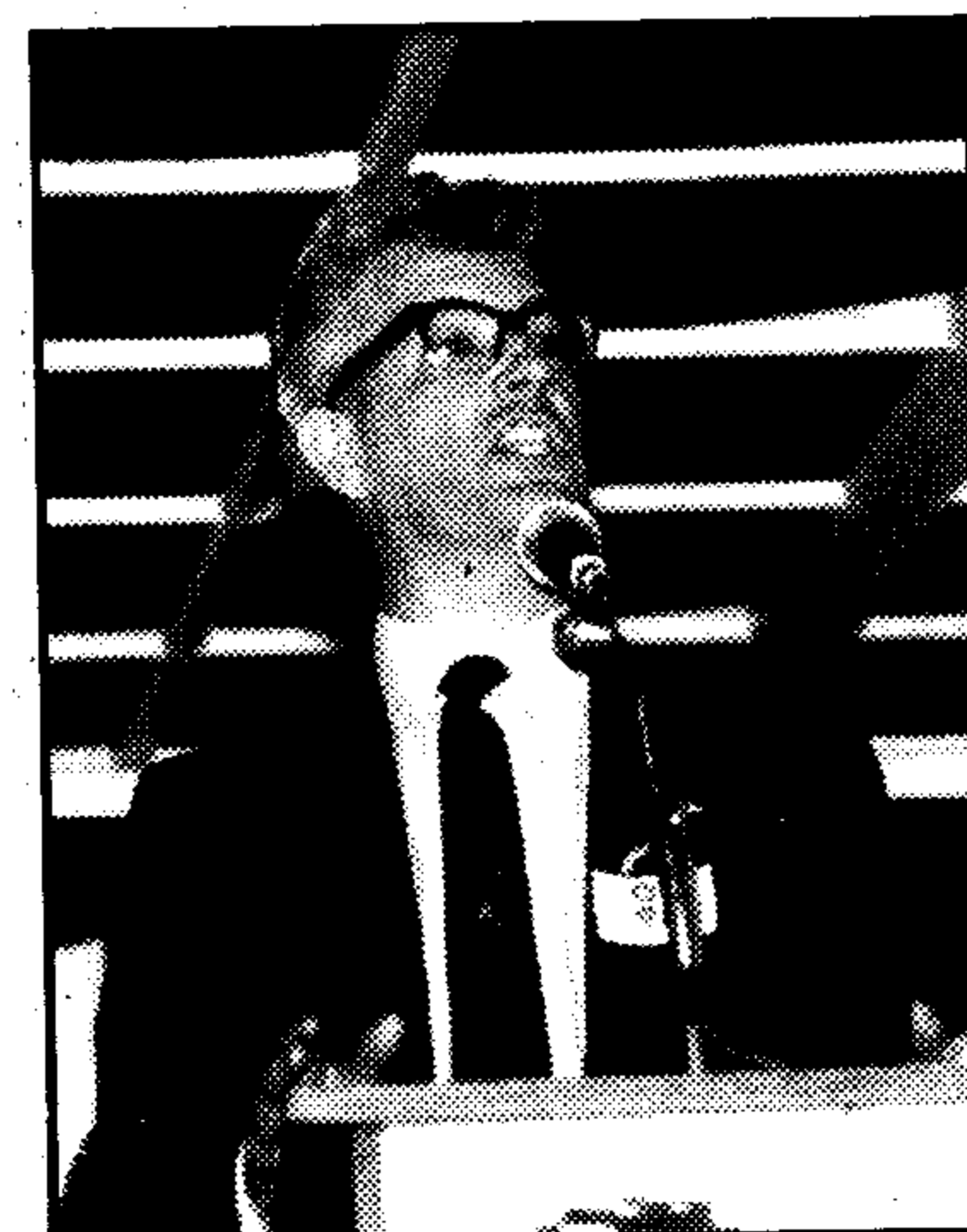
UNISON's conference in Brighton during the second week of June will indicate the mood of trade union activists in the public sector after the Labour's landslide election victory.

Local government and health, the two main areas where UNISON organises, have suffered acutely during 18 years of Tory government cuts and privatisation. The defeat of the Tories has been welcomed by all those who dedicate their working lives trying to deliver a public service, and there is clear disappointment that Labour will not break from Tory policies - instead sticking to their cash limits for the next two years.

Although the conference agenda was finalised before the election, there are some resolutions, including some from the NEC, calling on a Labour government to rebuild public services, introduce a minimum wage and abolish Compulsory Competitive Tendering.

The mood of conference is likely to be cautious and that there will be little support for a direct confrontation with Labour. Conference may well reiterate a list of progressive demands but fail to demand that the NEC organises serious national campaigns to achieve them.

UNISON does not need to restate its existing policies, such as taking the privatised utilities back into public control, abolishing the



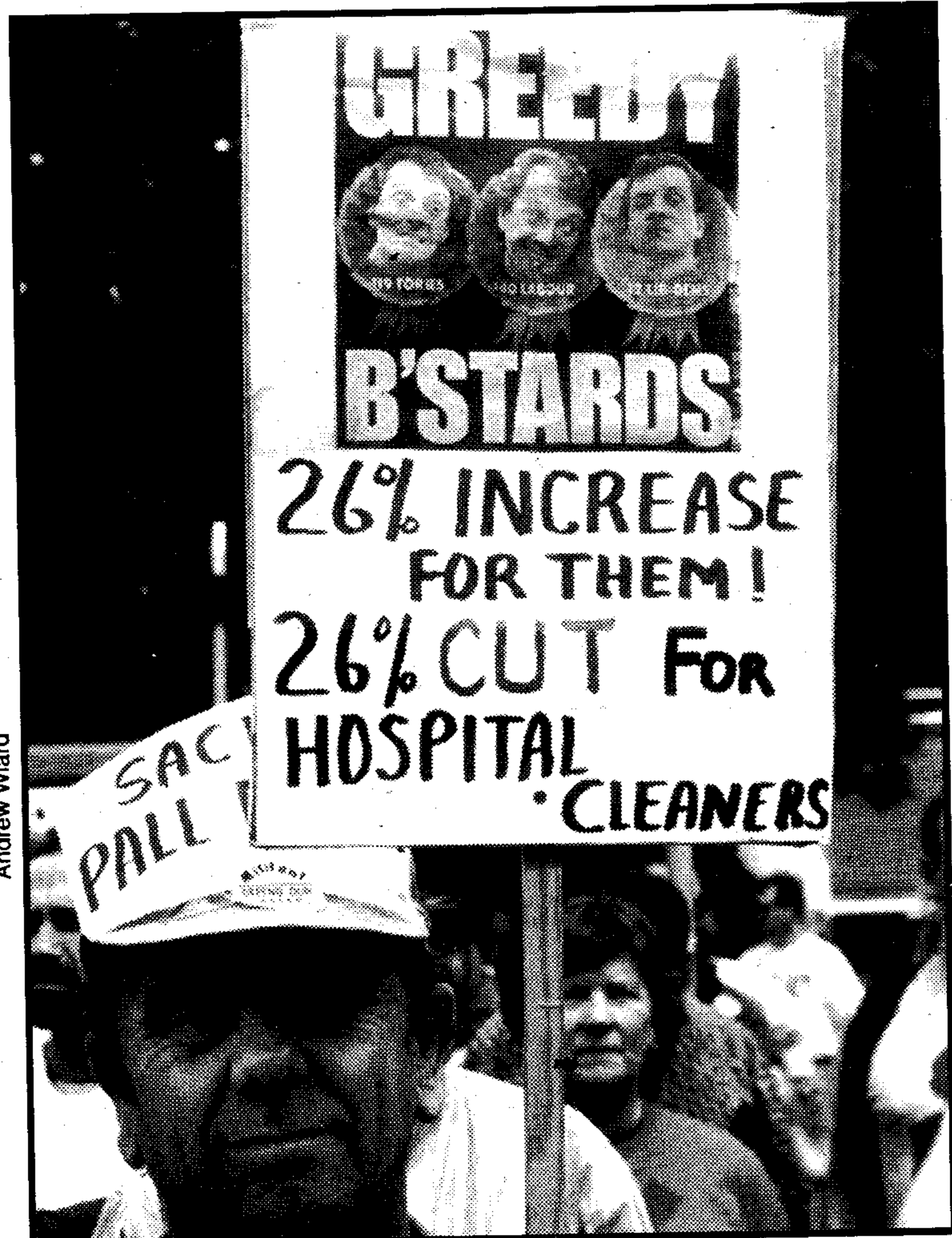
No sign of fight: Bickerstaffe

Private Finance Initiative and Compulsory Competitive Tendering, or for a minimum wage at £4.42 an hour.

Conference delegates and activists back in the branches need rather to ensure that UNISON fights for its policies and that Labour in government breaks from the Tory economic targets.

The decision by NUT conference at Easter to organise a demonstration before the autumn budget to call for further spending in education should be welcomed and supported by other unions as the start of a campaign to rebuild the welfare state.

UNISON should demonstrate alongside the NUT to demand extra money for local government and health services.



Andrew Wlaid

Rank and file support for Hillingdon strikers: but not from the NEC

Hillingdon strikers fight on despite betrayal

Fred Leplat

UNISON's National Executive are responsible for a despicable betrayal of a heroic dispute, similar to that of the Liverpool Dockers. Last year's UNISON conference in June gave a standing ovation to the Hillingdon Hospital strikers after a moving speech by General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe.

Conference then unanimously adopted a resolution instructing the NEC to organise a series of demonstrations and to spread the dispute against the employer's company, Pall Mall.

Yet they called only one demonstration, a week-long vigil outside the HQ of the parent company, and the meeting of union reps in Pall Mall was eventually convened in December 1996.

However the most shameful episode was the acceptance by an NEC sub-committee of a cash offer from the employers, without a ballot, and without a vote at a strikers' meeting.

The majority of the strikers did reject the offer and have continued their strike. UNISON members and branches have increased their financial support to sustain the strikers since official backing and strike pay has been stopped. Even film maker Ken Loach has given valuable support.

UNISON Regions have also voted to make donations worth £20,000, but these have been blocked by unelected regional secretaries. Calls for the reinstatement of official support to the strike have attracted the largest number of resolutions at this year's conference (along with the election of regional secretaries).

But most of these have been ruled out of order by the Standing Orders Committee, which judged that only the NEC has jurisdiction over industrial action!

Apologists for the NEC have argued that the strike could not win and it should be ended. However, the truth is that it was run into the ground by the NEC who failed to organise the sort of campaign that conference agreed to.

Since official backing was withdrawn, figures released indicate that Pall Mall barely broke even last year and their parent company is looking to sell it off. UNISON could have shaken Pall Mall by organising a union recruitment campaign and submitting claims for a minimum wage.

Alongside the Liverpool dockers, the Hillingdon strikers are a beacon for social justice in Britain today. UNISON conference will have an opportunity to vote a motion of censure on the NEC and attempt to reverse the betrayal of the strikers.

Civil Service unions: don't let them merge away our rights!

Darren Williams, Branch Secretary CPSA ONS Newport (personal capacity)

THE ISSUE of inter-union merger dominated the recent annual conferences of CPSA and PTC who between them represent the majority of civil servants.

A merger would create a 275,000 strong super-union, bringing together everyone from low-paid clerical and support grades to middle management. If carried out democratically, with an accountable leadership and a strong role for branches this could create a force capable of challenging management and the new Labour government.

A stronger union presence in the civil service has never been more sorely needed: civil servants like all public sector workers have been hard hit by the break up of national bargaining on pay and conditions and by the continuing freeze on the pay bill.

A single union for most staff might at least make industrial action easier to organise and more effective.

The right wing bureaucrats who run both unions are attempting to hijack the merger process for their own ends, however. Disregarding detailed resolutions passed at the 1996 conferences, they have drawn up a draft rule book which is calculated to strengthen their own position and minimise internal

democracy.

Among the most blatant of the proposals are to hold conferences and National Executive Elections only biennially, and to use more frequent referenda on policy issues rather than making decisions at conference.

This latter tactic has already served the bureaucrats well. An all-members postal ballot on the key proposals in this draft rule book was carried out immediately after Christmas with no warning - denying branches the chance to discuss the issues involved beforehand.

In a typically low turnout, the members voted 5-1 in favour - but with many clearly believing this was a vote on the principle on merger rather than on its terms.

Ballot to come

With the final merger ballot due to be held later this year, there is still everything to play for. At this year's annual conferences the left in both unions tried to force the leadership to redraft the rule book while keeping merger on track for the scheduled deadline of January 1 1998.

Censure motions, rejecting the proposed merger terms and insisting that the NECs return to the principles agreed last year were passed overwhelmingly but it remains to be seen whether the leaderships will be any more accountable in the year ahead than in the last one.

In CPSA, the more politically

polarised of the two unions, the "Left Unity" grouping suffered a considerable wipe out in the annual NEC elections, losing the three seats it previously held.

This emphasises the point that the left can pass all the conference motions it likes - but as long as the right enjoys unchallenged control of the union apparatus, it will still be able to treat the membership with the same arrogant contempt it has shown up to now.

To turn this situation around, Left Unity must organise more consistently instead of just once a year at election times. The right wing won the elections by a relatively narrow margin on a turnout of only 25 per cent.

Left Unity needs to become a democratic, campaigning organisation built from the bottom up. In this way it could win over a larger section of the currently passive membership by consistently demonstrating the link between union politics and the real, bread and butter issues that concern members.

If Left Unity - and the PTC left - do not begin to do this as a matter of urgency, civil service workers could soon find themselves lumbered with a merged union which is a byword for bureaucratic privilege and political sell-out.

Harsh reminder of the rights we don't yet have

Terry Conway

LYNNE KELLY was finally able to have her abortion on May 29, but the horrendous way she was dragged through the courts by her estranged husband stands as a stark reminder of how fragile women's abortion rights are in Britain today.

OK, so the courts agreed that Lynne had the right to decide under the 1967 Act but this did not stop a situation where the pregnancy has been forcibly extended for weeks including by court rulings.

During these weeks, despite the 1967 Act, Lynne Kelly's body has not been her own. This is a barbaric state of affairs – and yet this case is far from the first in Britain in recent years where a man has used to courts to try to prevent a woman having an abortion.

Yet I heard no Labour MPs – not even Labour women MPs – and no trade union leaders protesting that something must be done and quickly to prevent such situations every happening again.

While James Kelly eventually backed down, it is impossible to quantify the amount of distress his actions have caused to Lynne. At one point it seemed that she felt unable to go through with the abortion as she appeared to have been told that she would have to go through induced labour in order to terminate the pregnancy.

In reporting the fact that the abortion had taken place, *The Guardian* (May 31) commented "She was fourteen weeks pregnant. The foetus had reached the limit when a simple abortion was no longer possible".

This statement and others like it are a distortion of reality – and one that puts many women who for whatever reason have been unable to get an early abortion through needless agony.

I know – because I had an abortion at 22 weeks – and didn't in the end have to go through labour. My nightmare started not when I dis-

nant and would have to be induced.

I don't think I can describe how I felt. I knew that I didn't want a child then – but I did want children in the future. I certainly wasn't able to face the prospect of labour in that situation.

I felt completely powerless. In my silent panic I did nothing for

A change in the law would massively reduce the number of later abortions – abortions that no one, especially the woman having them – wants to be late.

covered I was pregnant but after a day care clinic threw me out when I was in bed waiting for a pre-med because they didn't have the apparatus to deal with the fact that I had asthma – not something they had bothered to ask me about in the six weeks I had been waiting for an appointment.

I was twelve weeks pregnant. I had expected a simple operation. I had, it's true being acutely conscious of the changes my body was going through since pretty much day one of the pregnancy. But I had no doubts about what I had decided – just a wish to get it over as quickly as possible and get on with my life.

These plans came to a sudden full stop that day in the Liverpool clinic. But worse was to come as when I approached my doctor to try for a NHS abortion – where I had been informed the necessary equipment would be available – I was told that by the time I was likely to get to the top of the waiting list I would be 16 weeks preg-

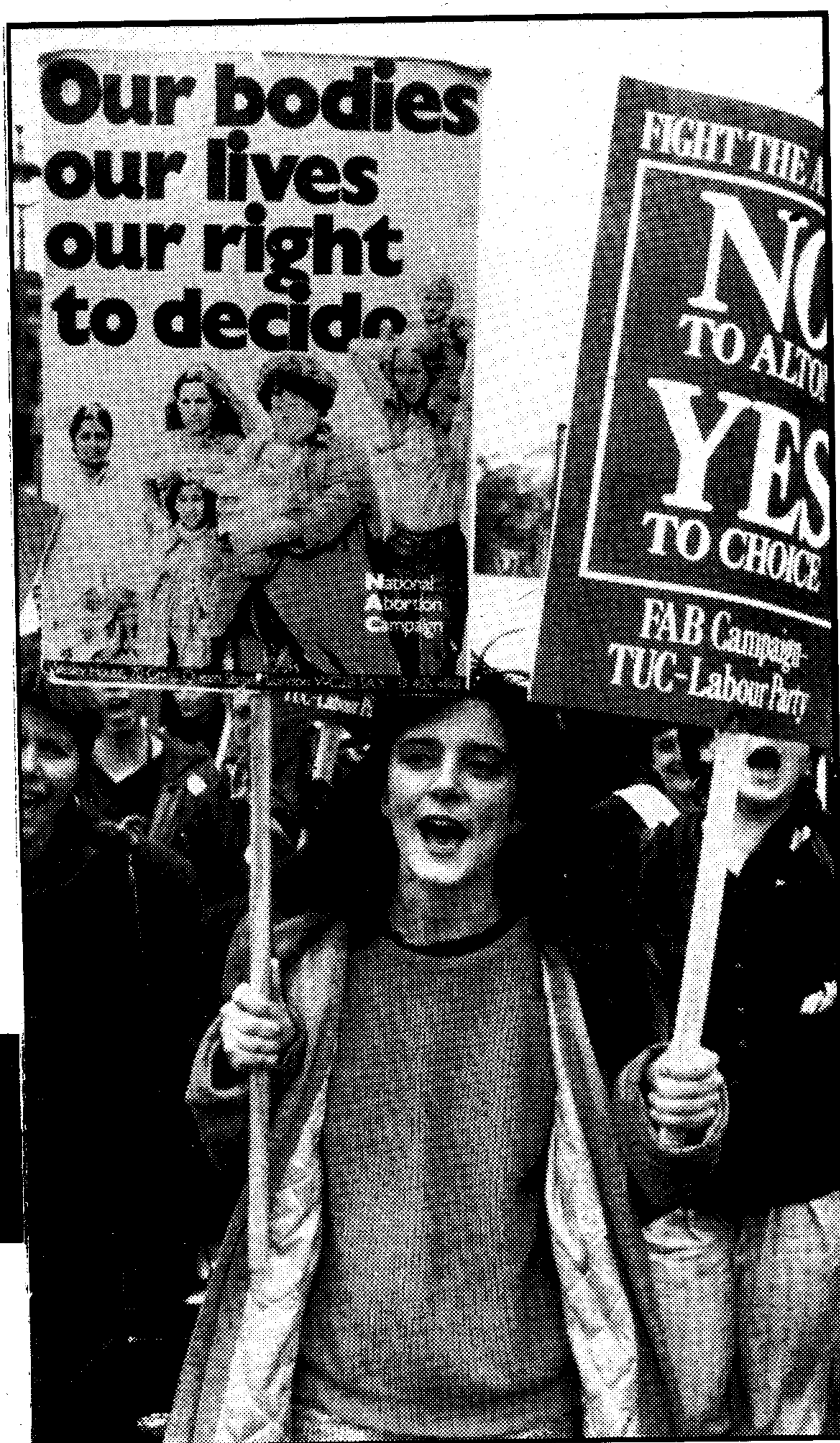
weeks, not knowing where to turn. I was fortunate in the end to muster the strength to talk with a friend who worked as a volunteer for an abortion counselling service – and discovered that they did late abortions without necessarily insisting on inductions.

They were not able to promise I would not need to be induced. That decision could only be made on medical grounds when I actually had the operation and was dependent both on the precise development of the foetus and of my body.

However they were supportive enough to give me back the self confidence I had been robbed of in the previous weeks. I was lucky enough to be able to get away with a D&C rather than the horrors I had feared.

The memories of those weeks have come back to me very powerfully as I have followed Lynne Kelly's tragedy.

My anger at the way I was treated by a supposedly supportive



charity must have been very different from the way she has felt when her anguish is at the hands of her husband. I know what deep despair I was thrown into – so when Theresa Gorman said that Lynne should just go ahead and have the abortion my response was that here spoke a woman who was unlikely to have been in such a situation herself.

Right to choose

Most of all though Lynne Kelly's story strengthens even more my determination to fight for changes both in the law and in provision so that women do have the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion.

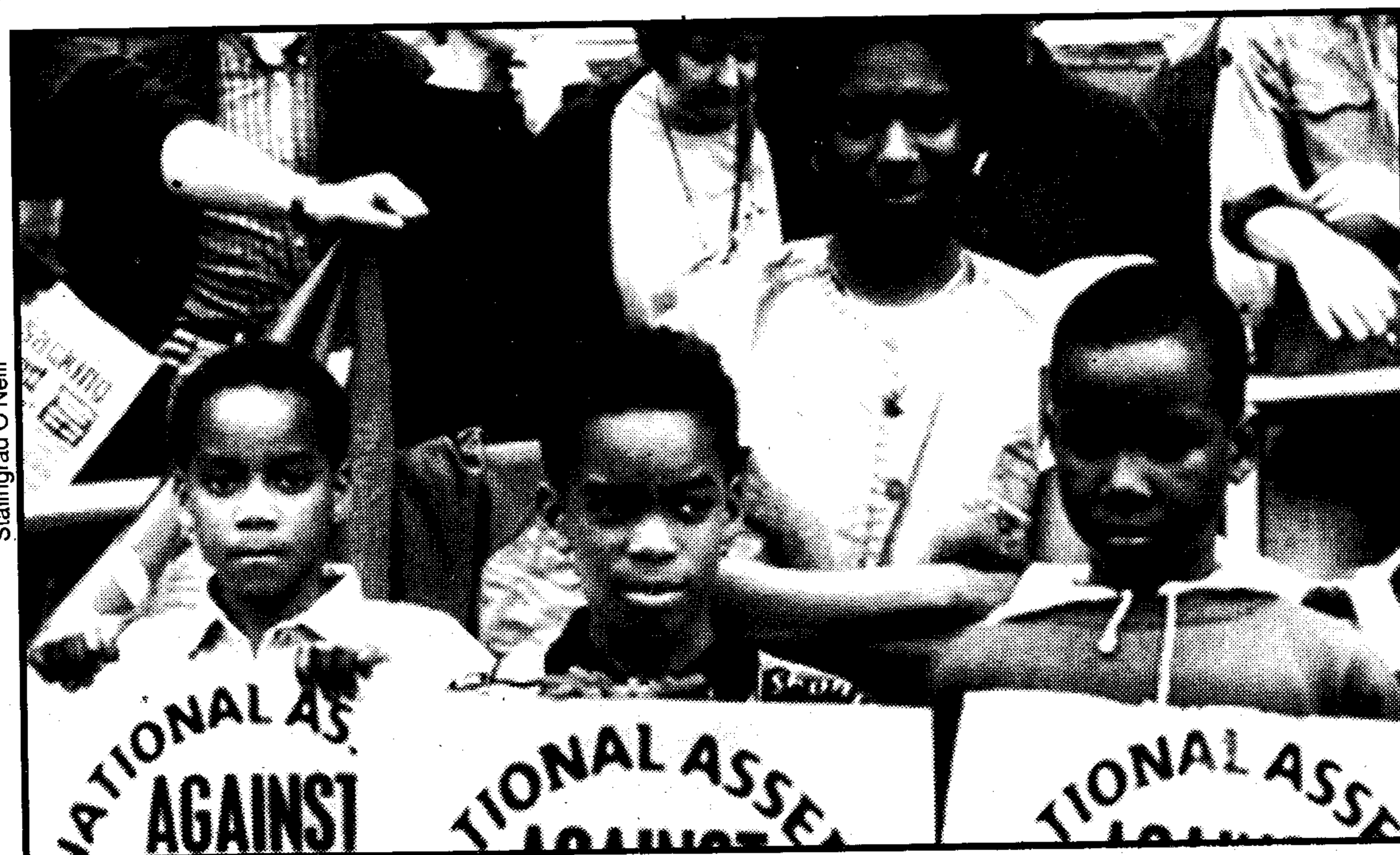
The 1967 Act was a massive improvement on what went before – but it doesn't give us that right. The National Abortion campaign

is pushing for new legislation that will really give women rights – although probably only in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

The response to Lynne Kelly's story will hopefully strengthen that campaign, and ensure that legislation is drafted in a way that makes clear no man and no court can interfere with a woman's choice.

Such a change would of course massively reduce the number of later abortions – abortions that no one, especially the woman having them – wants to be late.

It is vital that a massive campaign is built up to push Labour into supporting such a change: it would be a huge step forward. At the same time no concessions must be made into making later abortions harder than they than they currently are.



Campaigners have welcomed Jack Straw's decision to scrap the "primary purpose" rule, one of the battery of racist laws and restrictions introduced by the Tories. But the fight for the repeal of the Asylum and Immigration Act goes on, with many still detained in British jails and camps for the "crime" of seeking asylum. Among them are 12 detainees at Birmingham's Winson Green Prison, who have not taken food since May 5. A solidarity picket outside the prison on May 17 showed that the fight goes on.

Does New Labour mean vouchers for college?

MORE "unthinkable" thoughts are being dragged out of the monetarist closet as New Labour goes to town on what the Tories have left of the welfare state.

Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett had reportedly told Sir Ron Dearing to ensure that his inquiry into the funding of higher education "thinks the unthinkable", with the probable result of proposals for a voucher scheme.

In well-trailed leaks to the Blairite *Guardian* newspaper we read that Labour is looking towards Frank Field's old idea of "individual learning accounts", where a minimal state contribution of a voucher towards tuition fees would be added to

savings built up by wealthy parents while their children were at school.

Students from less than wealthy families would face the prospect of debts as high as £20,000 hanging round their necks on graduation. Nothing could more clearly define a two-tier education service.

Having abandoned the principle of free higher education funded collectively through taxation, New Labour is reverting to the brutal old system in which the rich enjoy easy access and many working class youth are deterred by the heavy costs and the uncertainty of finding a job paying enough to be able to repay the debt.

Field: the unspeakable in pursuit of the unthinkable

Harry Sloan

MARGARET Thatcher may have come for tea and a chat with Tony Blair – to give him an extra chance to annoy the left and insult the unions – but Labour's most dogged Tory is now a fixture in the new political establishment, and much more dangerous.

Frank Field is now ensconced as Minister for Welfare Reform in the new Labour government – perhaps the only appointment that might make his immediate superior, Harriet Harman, appear liberal, even left wing by comparison.

Harman, after all, correctly denounced the proposals of then Social Security Secretary Peter Lilley for compulsory privatised pensions as a "chilling prospect". What will chill many Labour voters is that Field, now her junior minister, welcomed the Lilley plan, and is best known for advocating similar policies, based on the measures introduced by Chile's brutal military dictatorship.

Favourite

Field has repeatedly been praised by top Tories including Thatcher herself, former Chancellor Nigel Lawson, and arch-Thatcherite David "Two Brains" Willetts who describes him as "many Conservatives' favourite Labour politician."

Three weeks after the May 1 election, the extreme right wing Social Market Foundation published a pamphlet *Beyond the Welfare State*, which calls for the dismantling of the welfare state and the introduction of fee paying into education and health care – a pamphlet carrying acknowledgements to Field and fellow Blairite Baroness Hollis.

We are told that both of them – as well as Peter Lilley – read the draft and made comments. Its author praises Field as a man who "discusses the effects of our social security system on character more deeply than any other British politician – except Peter Lilley".

Tory "reforms"

Field has eagerly repaid each compliment, offering fulsome praise of Thatcher, support to the Tory market-style "reforms" of the NHS, encouragement to the Tory sell-off of council housing, and enthusiastic backing to privatisation as the road to what he sees as a "people's capitalism".

Blair announced that Field's qualification for government office was that he is "capable of

thinking the unthinkable": so too of course was Adolf Hitler.

Behind the rat-like features, Field is a vicious witch-hunter, and a right wing religious zealot with no shred of respect or compassion for working class people or the labour movement.

Leave school at 14?

Among the "unthinkable" notions he has served up – eagerly purveyed by the Tory press – have been the introduction of a "flexible school leaving age", on the grounds that schools are failing many working class youth who "at 14 are ready for work". This scarcely coincides with new Labour's mantra of "education, education, education".

Field has also suggested that married mothers should be allowed to cash in their child benefit, using the "new found wealth" to buy training or set up small businesses!

Ten years ago Field suggested that young people and the unemployed should be given "training accounts", with which they could buy their own training package.

This was too radical even for

Thatcher's government to implement. Now he proposes to privatise student grants.

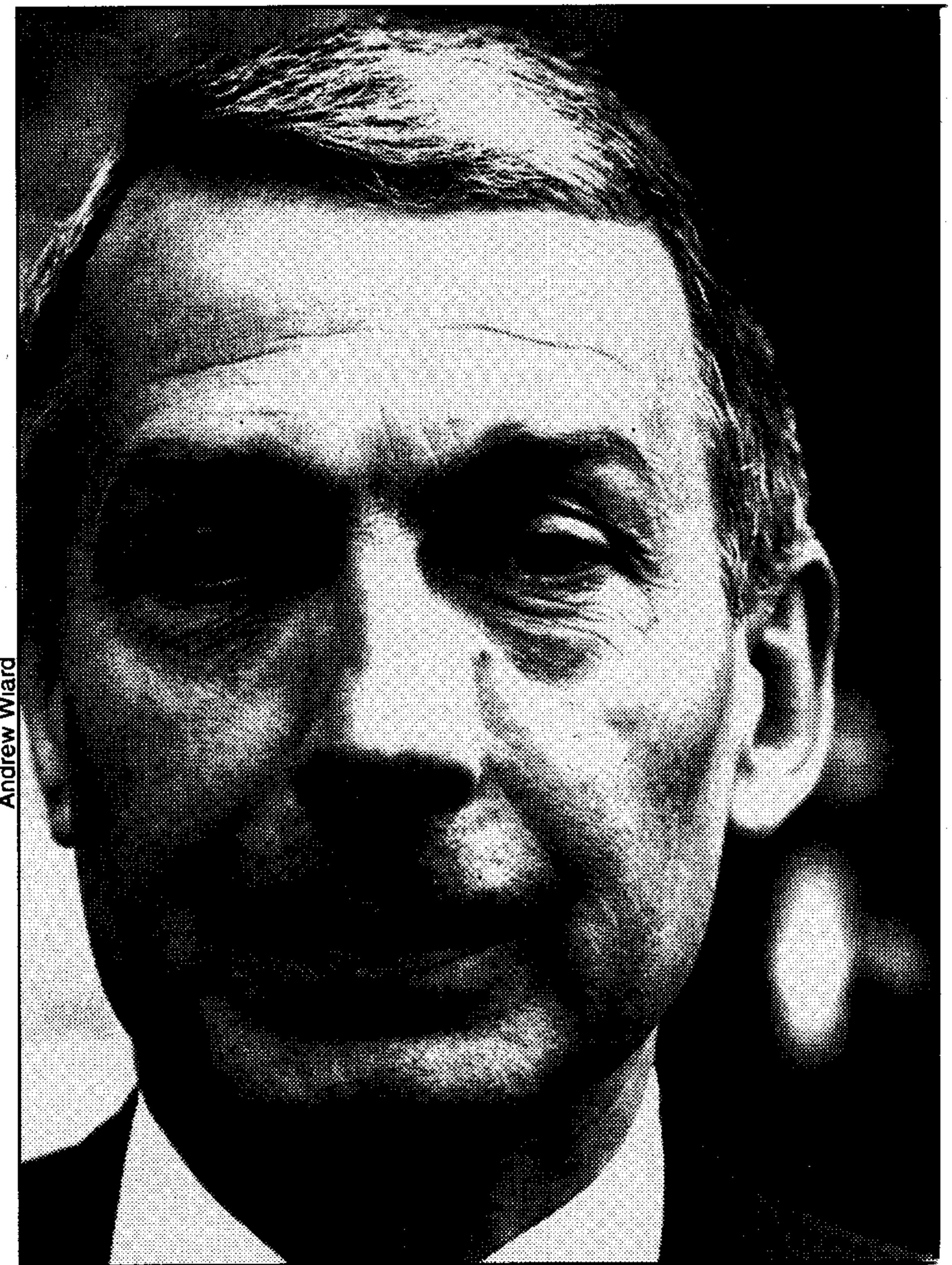
But the common factor is that the radicalism is always directed not against capitalism, for which Field has a fawning respect verging on adulation, but against the victims of capitalism, the working class people exploited by business and attacked by 18 years of Tory government.

Field's immediate target is to carry through Peter Lilley's plan to scrap the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS), and funnel contributions into private pension schemes.

But his influence as a dogged proponent of privatisation and the "tough love" notion of press ganging the unemployed from the dole into low-paid jobs will permeate beyond his own department.

Far from being a "maverick" as the press still label him, Field represents the brutal essence of New Labour drawn out to its logical conclusion.

He is, to borrow Oscar Wilde's famous phrase on fox-hunting, the unspeakable in pursuit of the unthinkable.



Andrew Ward

In a field of his own: Frank admires handiwork of Pinochet's dictatorship. Unfortunately he is no maverick.

Bloody horrors behind Chile's pensions fiasco

John Lister

Frank Field's book *How to Pay for the Future: Building a Stakeholder's Welfare* draws heavily on the model of the Chilean economy. The architect of Chile's pension reforms, Dr José Pinera, is one of his heroes.

But what really happened in Chile?

The reforms were introduced in 1981, after the Chilean trade union and labour movement and all political opposition had been ruthlessly crushed by General Pinochet's military dictatorship.

Pinochet's troops seized power in September 1973, determined from the outset to implement the most ruthless and comprehensive experiment in monetarist policy.

To clear the path for this the constitution was suspended, congress was dissolved and the electoral register destroyed. All political and trade union organisations were declared illegal, political activity was banned, civil liberties suspended;

strict censorship and a curfew were imposed.

Hundreds of thousands of people who were suspected of membership of left wing political organisations or linked with the previous regime were killed, imprisoned, tortured or driven into exile.

At least 30,000 were killed in the first four years, with another 2,500 "disappeared", and tens of thousands passing through prisons and concentration camps.

The architects of the economic policies ushered in on the bones of a devastated workers' movement were dubbed the "Chicago boys" after the Chicago school of monetarist economics headed by Milton Friedman, who visited Chile in 1975 to give personal supervision and support to the "shock treatment" being meted out.

Until mid 1982 when the economy plunged into chaos and recession, the Chicago boys had Pinochet's complete support, and he boasted in 1981 that "In this country not a leaf moves unless I move it."

The Chicago boys worked ruthlessly to a rigid ideology: the free market was to be the means through which all relations had to be mediated: Chile had to be forced into the world market, regardless of the cost in jobs and living standards. The currency had to be stabilised, and the public sector deficit slashed.

Privatisation was at the centre of the agenda from the outset. At the time of the coup there were 464 firms under state control: by June 1980 all but a few had been sold off at bargain basement prices. Unemployment doubled in a year.

Public welfare was virtually wiped out. School spending was slashed by 44% in five years, and



"There's no question, it's easier to invade your own country than a neighbour's"

charges were introduced for primary and secondary school education, with the result that 30% of young Chileans were receiving no education at all in 1978. Higher education, too, was devastated, and the expected growth of private universities never materialised.

Those who benefited were of course the super-rich. By 1981 even the US Embassy in Santiago reported that Chile's private sector was "an oligopolistic market dominated by six major conglomerates", two of which controlled over 50% of the country's private capital.

This was the Chile in which Frank Field's hero, a chosen Chicago boy protégé of Pinochet, introduced his pension reforms. Individual workers were left to contribute themselves to a private scheme, replacing the old system in which the state and the employers had contributed. Workers were offered the right to switch their accumulated savings in the old state scheme into a private alternative.

Eight years later, inequality was

greater than ever in Chile. 44% of the population was living in poverty.

By 1991 a United Nations review found that only 52% of the Chilean workforce were paying in to Pinera's scheme. Many of these would end up with "acquired benefits less than the guaranteed minimum". But the private pension schemes were coining in profits and levying extensive fees and commission.

Among the heaviest losers had been workers forced into casual and part-time employment and the self-employed.

Predictably, a pensions policy born out of monetarist dogma and imposed by a ruthless dictatorship has served further to exploit and impoverish those on the lowest wages, and to deepen social inequality.

The question is why a Labour politician should look with such affection on this excrescence of the Pinochet regime, and whether Tony Blair will try to implement the same thing here.

War on single mothers

800,000 jobless single parents will be summoned to interviews at Job Centres in a new Labour offensive aimed at dragooning them into low-paid jobs.

Under the new plans, each woman will be given a "tailor-made back to work plan", drawn up by Job Centre staff.

But in the absence of sufficient jobs paying decent rates, the entire exercise seems to be another effort to intimidate women into accepting insecure, part-time and low-paid employment, in order to cut welfare spending.

Tony Blair has insisted that Labour does not yet plan to change the rules which prevent single parents with children under 16 being compelled to take jobs by threat of losing benefit.

However Downing Street has admitted that Frank Field is examining "new ideas". The future looks bleak.

Post-election syndrome grips Labour left

Pete Firmin

The Conference held by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups on 'A Socialist Strategy for Labour' on Saturday 31st May was only attended by about 80 people, most of them probably supporters of one formation or another.

This is an indication of the disarray of the Labour Left about the way forward.

Nevertheless, important issues facing the Left both inside and outside the Labour Party were discussed. Key among these was the question of economic policy and the European single currency.

In the opening plenary both Alan Simpson, secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, and Gill Lee, fresh from the British leg of the Euromarch, spoke of the importance of the Euromarch in shifting the debate on Maastricht and the single currency in the labour movement.

A well-attended workshop on Labour, Europe and economic policy not only allowed for fuller analysis, but also for discussion of an internationalist, socialist alternative and whether we should only oppose the convergence criteria or the single currency as such.

Links with other struggles were also highlighted, with speakers from the Liverpool dockers and the Southwark college strike, both of whom also spoke of the need for a campaign around the repeal of the anti-union laws.

Issues

Workshops on a variety of other issues such as local government, racism, women, lesbian and gay rights and the unions, showed both the range of issues which the left need to take up within the Party and the campaigns around which they need to be involved.

The plenary on Defending Party Democracy produced a lively discussion on the tactics involved in fighting the 'Labour into Power'

proposals which would effectively abolish the right of CLPs and trade unions to influence party policy.

Pam Tatlow from the Labour Women's Action Committee pointed out how the Labour women's conference was being carved out of any input into the discussion, and Maria Exall from 'Keep the Link' pointed to some of the lessons of the way in which the 'Labour into Power' proposals were overwhelmingly defeated at CWU conference.

While Ann Black from Labour Reform argued the need to submit amendments to the final 'Action Plan', and others saw some positive aspects of the proposals, the majority felt they should be rejected altogether.

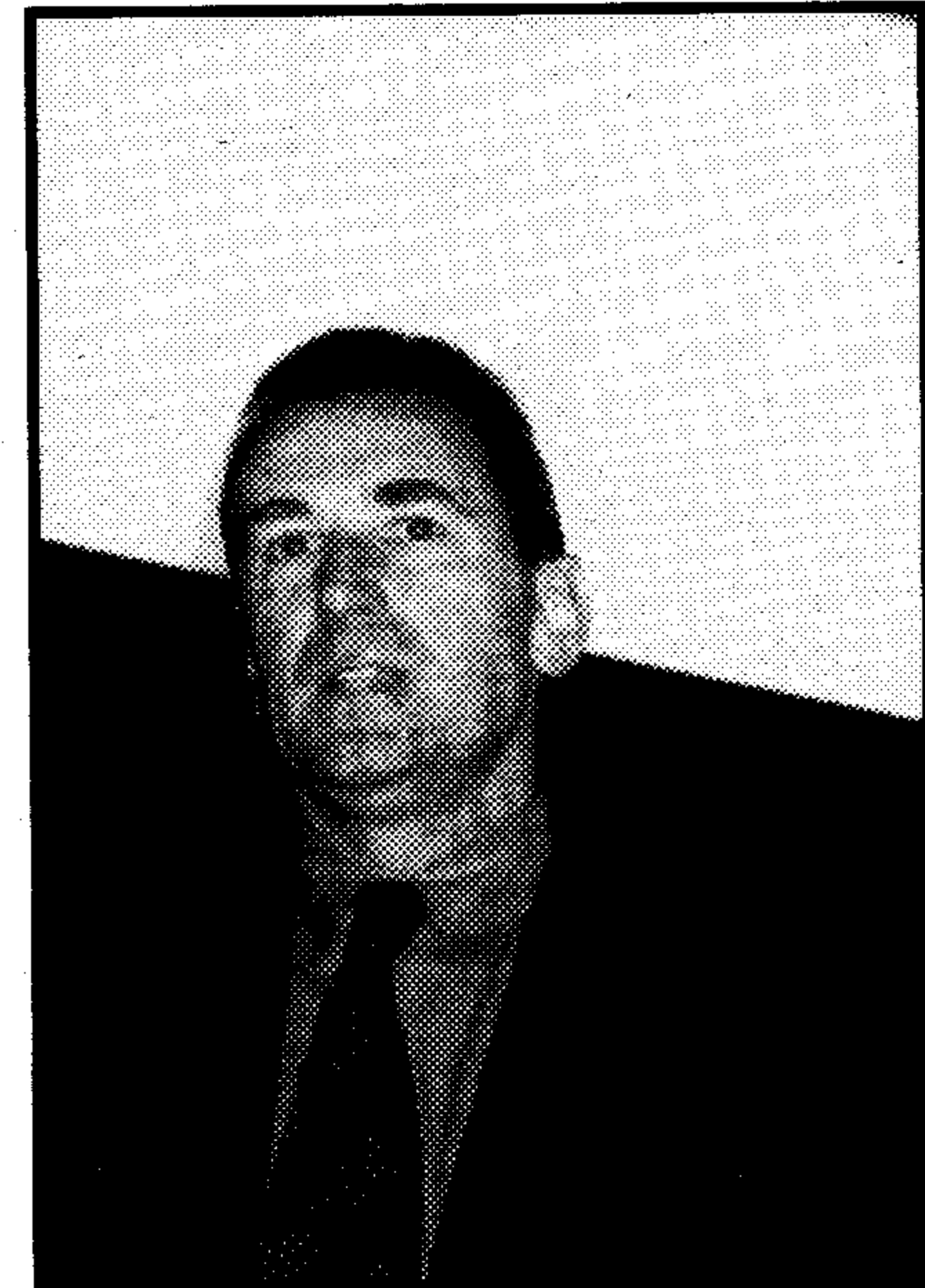
A more nuanced debate took place around the issue of whether the Left should go for outright defeat of the proposals at conference or attempt to get a decision deferred for a year.

Many speakers felt that while we should argue for rejection, delay

was a useful fallback where this could not yet be won.

Alan Simpson and Ken Livingstone in the opening plenary, and Greg Tucker and Tony Benn in closing the conference spoke of the wider issues facing the Left following the election victory, particularly how to campaign around key issues without cutting ourselves off from those who think Blair will deliver given time.

Ken Livingstone made clear that the Campaign Group of MPs has no intention of dissolving into a looser formation, and Tony Benn talked of the need for the refounding of the Labour Party, incorporating environmental groups, pensioners, peace



Stressing Euromarch: Alan Simpson

campaigners as well as the trade unions.

However, this was left rather abstract rather than spell out a strategy for the Left.

Labour hands over to bankers New dogs revert to old tricks

Duncan Chapple

New Labour is copying the economic policies of right wing 1980's US President Ronald Reagan. Giving control over interest rates to the Bank of England encourages high rates. But New Labour's sloppy attempts at encouraging demand will lead the bank to increase interest rates.

The Labour government is wrong to give up control of fiscal policy. Even in today's global economy, national governments have a significant room for manoeuvre. The former Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, kept interest rates lower than the bank of England wanted.

Under capitalism lower interest rates help people to spend and invest. Higher interest rates encourage saving and gambling on currencies and shares. They put up housing costs and slow down the economy.

The Bank of England is even less likely to keep interest rates down than the Tories. Physically and politically, the bank is part of the speculative casino economy of the City of London. Economically it is cautious even by capitalist standards. That's why there has been a real questioning of labour's granting of bank independence by Clarke and many economists.

New Labour is adapting the eco-

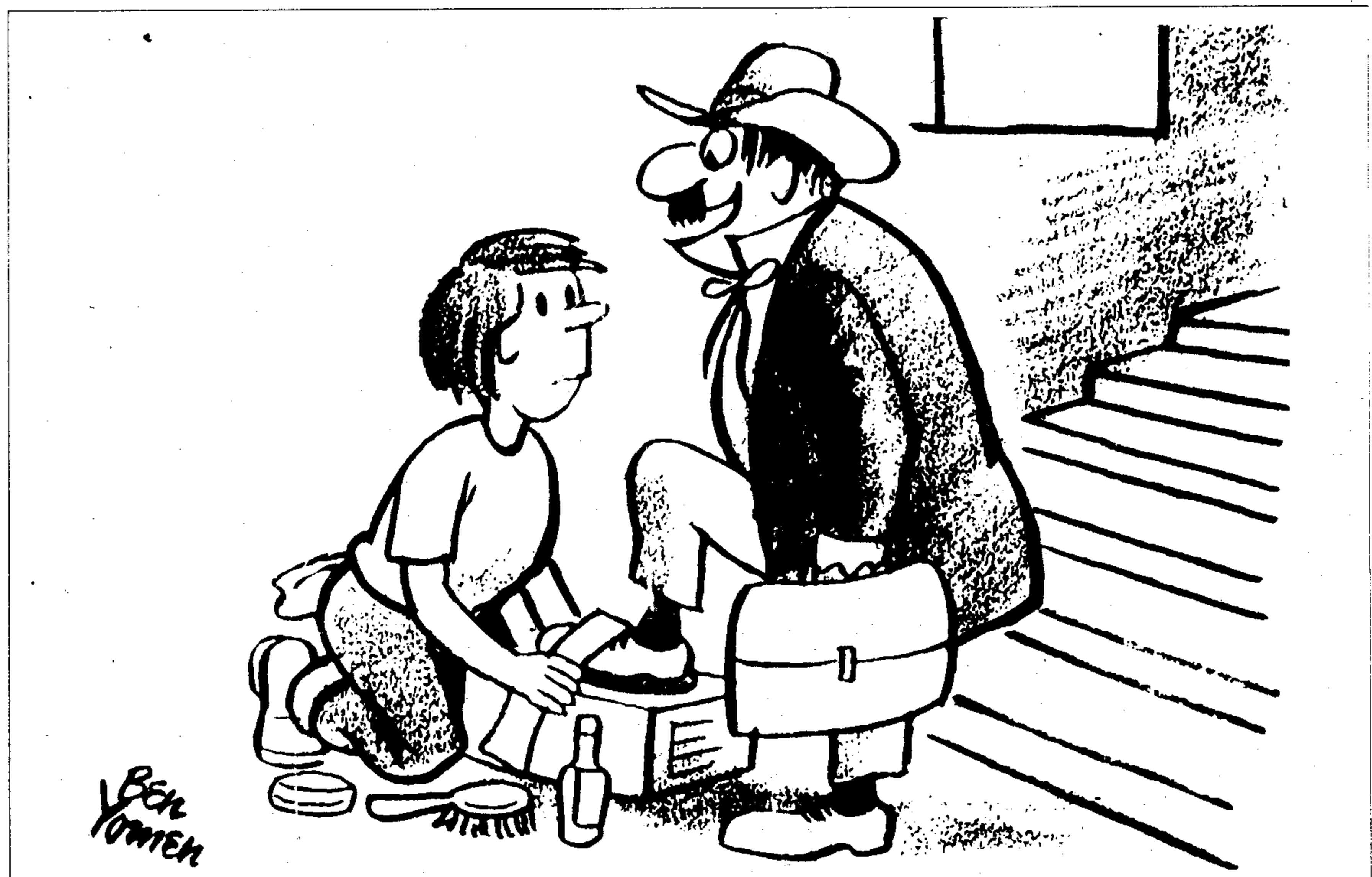
nomie policy known as monetarism. Monetarism grew up in the late 1960s and 1970s when prices inflated rapidly.

The economic recession that started then cut down the profits of capitalists. In response, bosses put up their prices in order to defend their profits. Price rises led to higher wage claims and to more militant trade unions. The bosses needed a way forward.

Monetarist

Monetarism was their answer. Monetarists argued that inflation was caused by too much money chasing too few goods.

Bringing down the supply of money would reduce inflation and stabilise the economy. There are two ways to do that: to reduce the amount of money in existence, and to take money out of circulation by using high interest rates to discourage inflation, imports, spending and investment. They led to



"See how much better you can do without going to college? You've got a job, you're working in the great outdoors ... What more could you ask?"

less demand and the deep recession of the early 1980s in Britain and the US.

New Labour's policy uses the monetarist idea that high interest rates keep down inflation by forcing money out of circulation. Labour's top priority is low inflation - not high

New Labour thinks the Tories have let the economy grow too much. Labour's upcoming budget will add a new twist to their neoliberal policies. It is possible that tax allowances will be reduced, excise on fuel increased, mortgage relief cut, and BT included in the upcoming windfall tax.

These tax increases could give

the government an extra £6 billion. Unlike the classical monetarism of Margaret Thatcher, Labour is pledged to using much of this money to slightly inflate the economy, by putting an extra 250,000 into cheap labour schemes.

Reagonomics

Labour faces the same problem as Ronald Reagan's inconsistent experiment with monetarism. Reagan aimed to cut both taxes and the government deficit and bring down inflation.

But the deficit could not be cut. Income from taxes continued to rise. The increases in government spending provoked increases in interest rates from 1982.

It led to serious pressures on borrowers and forced companies into bankruptcy. It made central banks much more powerful in forming state policy, to the extent where the heads of the German and US central banks are presented as having more control over the economy than their governments!

It is quite possible that Labour will face the same dilemmas. Labour must increase taxes if it fails

to cut state spending. Higher taxes will mean less saving and more money in circulation.

The Bank of England will raise interest rates in order to prevent inflation. High interest rates will contract the economy, increasing the budget deficit still further.

The cycle can be temporarily avoided by a basic attack on state spending much more profound than that considered by the Conservative government.

Socialists argue for all banks, not just the Bank of England, to be nationalised and put under fully democratic control. Parliament's Treasury Select Committee could be expanded to include delegates elected by trades unions, women's organisations, consumer groups, the unemployed groups combating homelessness, environmental bodies and every other part of society.

These elected representatives should ensure banking works for full employment, invests in community projects, develops fair trade with countries in the East and the South and serves the interests of working people in this country and abroad.

The 1945 Labour government nationalised the Bank of England - as part of its effort to restore British capitalism. From 1964 onwards Harold Wilson's government, which had denounced the "Gnomes of Zurich", bowed to the British and international bankers, scrapped his election promises and devalued the pound. In 1976 Labour Chancellor Denis Healey caved in to the International Monetary Fund and imposed swingeing cuts on public spending. Gordon Brown's collapse is the quickest yet.

TNCs rule OK?

B. Skanthakumar

The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) which is being prepared by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will increase even further the power and privileges of trans-national corporations (TNCs) by undermining national regulations.

The Ecologist magazine (January/February 1997) quotes World Trade Organisation Director-General Renato Ruggiero boasting, "We are writing the constitution of a single global economy." The MAI would compel countries to treat TNCs as favourably as domestic companies without being subject to commitments that had previously bound them including the employment of local managers and compulsory purchase of domestically provided goods and services.

Many TNCs are attracted to countries through public subsidies, tax holidays and the waiving of customs duties.

In return some countries imposed performance requirements on them which included an obligation to meet employment goals such as equal opportunities for women and minorities, pay a living wage and re-invest in the community.

These would be banned under the MAI as anti-competitive.

Capital flight

Obligations to retain investments within a country for a certain period would also be barred allowing corporations to use even the threat of corporate flight to low wage areas to undermine the bargaining power of unions.

Standards to protect workers and consumers are absent from the MAI even the customary token mention they receive in other trade and investment agreements like NAFTA and GATT.

George Monbiot, writing in The Guardian points out that the far-reaching nature of these provisions reduce national parliaments to rubber stamp bodies and the status of elected representatives to that of filing clerks.

So this is living in a democracy? The decisions that matter are taken by unknown, unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats and company directors.

French left hook floors flagging EMU

By Geoff Lowe
THINGS are not going entirely to plan for Europe's bourgeoisie. After welcoming the victory of Tony Blair as Britain's man most likely to enter the European single currency, the wheels have come off the wagon with the shock electoral victory of Lionel Jospin's Socialist Party in France.

French President Jacques Chirac's gamble on calling elections a year early back-fired spectacularly.

The first round of voting brought a foretaste of the disaster pending for the right wing alliance, and triggered the resignation of Prime Minister Alain Juppé.

Chirac now faces five years as President with the government controlled by a leftwing alliance of the Socialist Party, Communist Party, Greens and smaller left organisations.

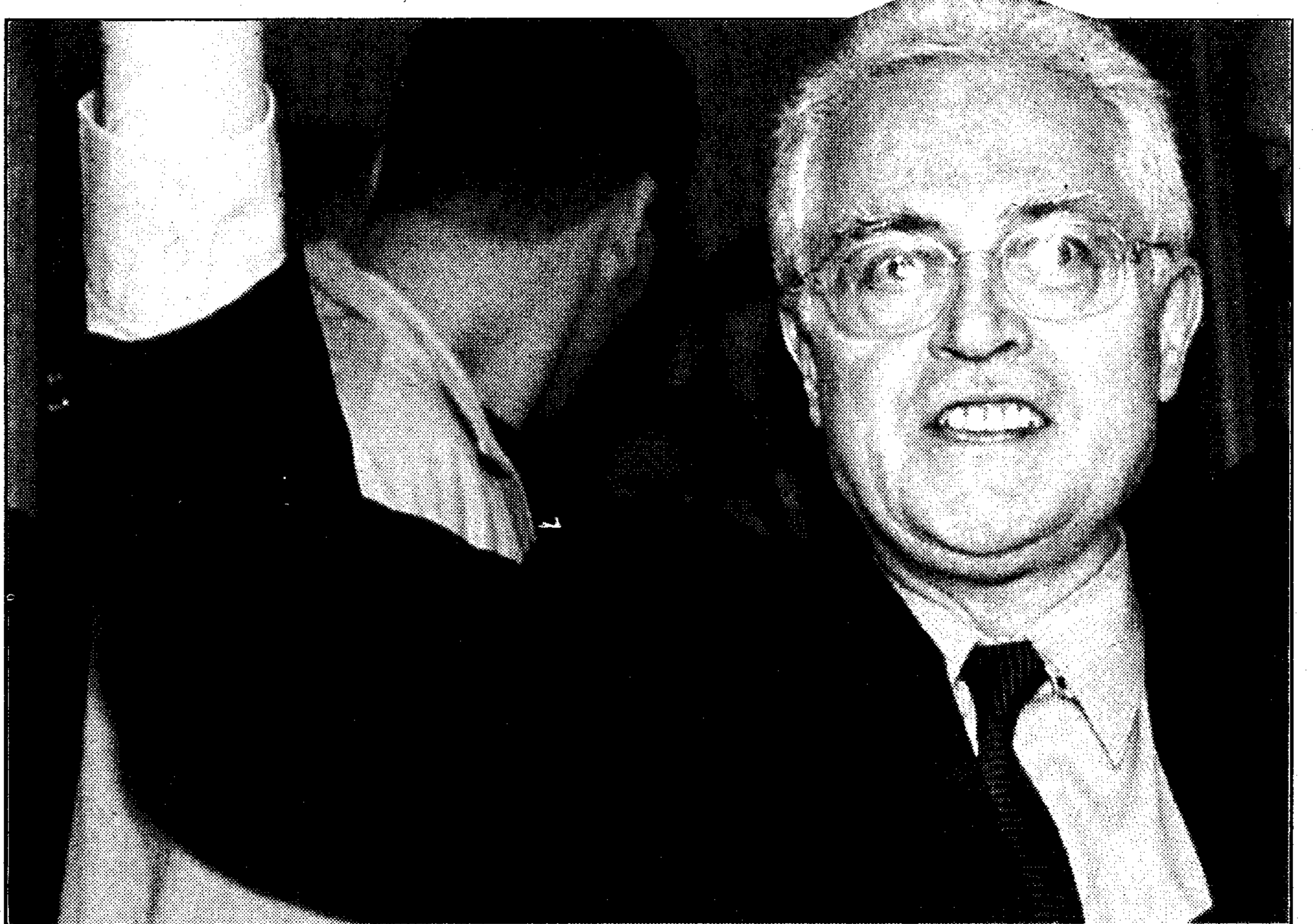
French capitalists certainly seemed convinced that the left could win: panic selling on the stock-exchange with the inevitable drop in the price of shares and bonds was the response to the likely formation of a Socialist Party-led government elected on a platform of cutting unemployment and seeking a reinterpretation or renegotiation of the Maastricht Treaty.

A victory for the right depended on them winning votes from the far-right Front National, which won 15 percent in the first round. But that failed to materialise, not least because the FN was itself divided over election tactics.

FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen favoured contesting the second round where it is eligible to stand. This will split the right wing vote and gave extra seats to the left, which has overturned the right wing's 200-seat majority.

However Le Pen was not without his critics. Former Gaullist Bruno Megret, who scored 35 percent in the first round, wanted the FN to step down in favour of the traditional right-wing parties. But even where the FN was not standing many of their supporters abstained: some even voted for the left.

The elections are a clear rejection of Juppé's government's attempts to meet the Maastricht



A wave of opposition to Maastricht austerity brings a wave of triumph from the gray man with red support

criteria for monetary union.

They reflect, at a Parliamentary level, the massive campaigns by French workers over the last few years against attacks on living standards and the welfare state.

Despite the undoubted commitment to Maastricht by Juppé and President Chirac the right-wing government has been unable to impose its policies. It has frequently had to retreat in the face of determined opposition.

The Socialist Party coalition has had to partly reflect that hostility. SP leader Lionel Jospin has been pushed into calling for a change in the Maastricht criteria so that monetary union is accompanied by measures to reduce unemployment. The 'social Europe' envisaged by both the Socialists and the Communist Party (which is openly opposed to a single currency) is profoundly at odds with the Europe of the Maastricht Treaty.

Indeed the left majority in the National Assembly now depends upon the backing of Communist deputies, suggesting that Jospin could be forced even further into

opposition to the EMU process.

If the left attempt to put their policies into practice there would be no chance whatsoever of France being able to meet the criteria for monetary union.

Indeed, French opposition combined with Chancellor Kohl's current problems in Germany could now call the possibility of European monetary union into question. Hence the hostility of the stock-exchange to even the prospect of a government of the left.

If the left are the winners of the election the second biggest winners were undoubtedly the Front National. Their average score of 15 percent was their best ever - and in a number of seats their poll was much higher.

The FN was the only clearly anti-Maastricht party, which explains some of their support. They also attract support because of their racism, which has been legitimised by the government's adoption of ever harsher measures against im-

migrants.

But the FN also attract support because in some towns where they have influence they do try to provide solutions to the problems faced by workers and small business people (so long as they are white, of course).

Some of their highest scores, in fact, were in areas with few immigrants where the main issues were unemployment and the effects of the government's attempts to meet the Maastricht criteria, rather than immigration.

An incoming left government has to face up to the problem of the FN.

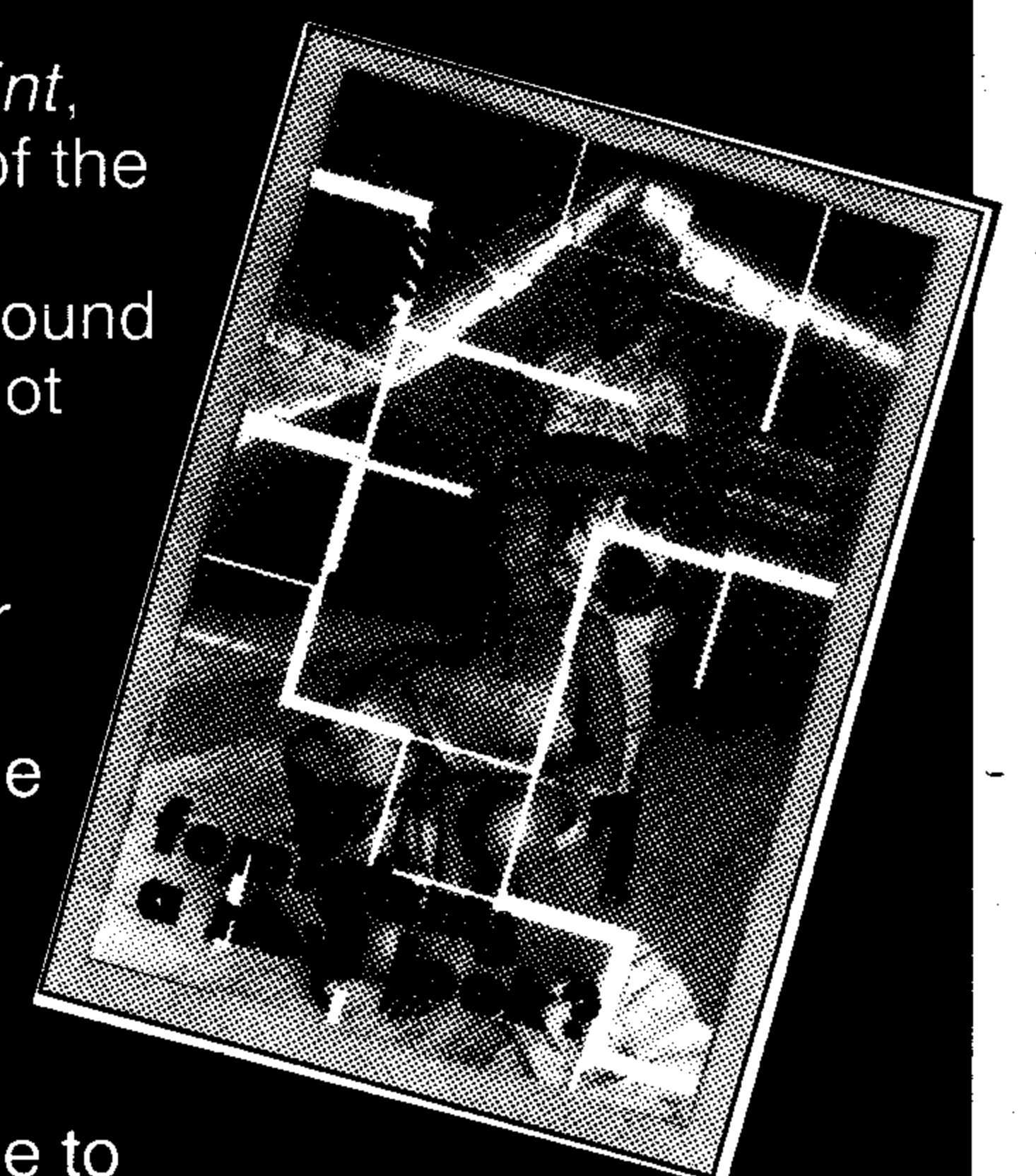
It has to learn that there must be no compromise with the FN on racism and immigration controls. Concessions to le Pen only strengthen him.

However, the left has to take note that many people vote FN as a protest against government attacks on their living standards and deteriorating conditions of life.

The left has to tackle these economic and social issues if it is to halt the rise of the FN.

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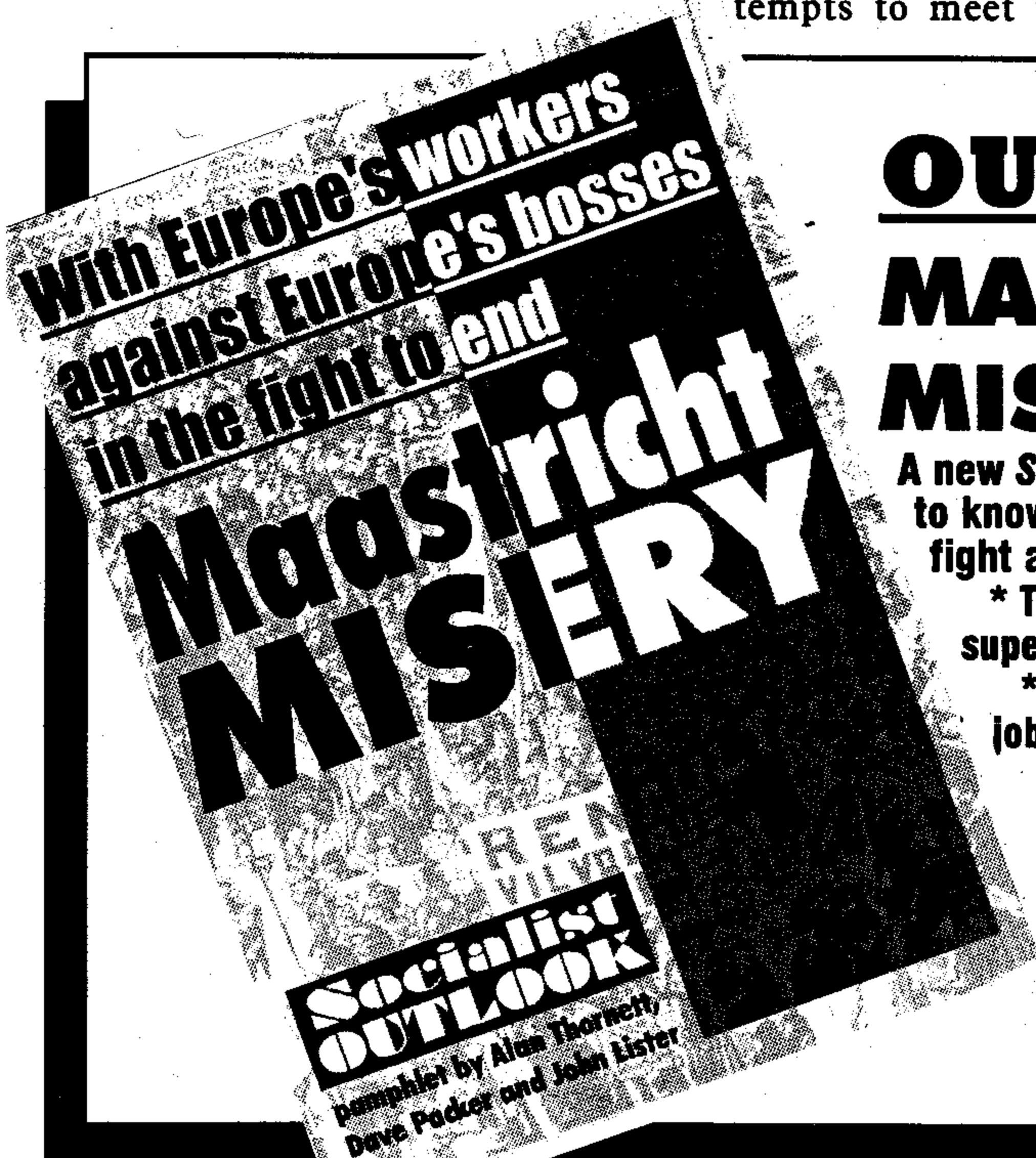


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Blair's Europe... and ours

Geoff Ryan

ACCORDING to the World Economic Forum Britain now has the strongest performing economy in the European Union.

It attributes this to sweeping privatisation, deregulation and labour flexibility. Other European economies are condemned for failing to tackle a "growing welfare burden and inflexible rules on hiring and firing staff".

These conclusions were rapidly endorsed by Tony Blair. This was hardly surprising since Labour's pre-election Business Manifesto had said much the same thing.

Blair's vision of European unity involves fundamental attacks on workers throughout Europe. A stiff dose of British 'flexibility' is Blair's recipe for European workers.

European capitalists need to get tougher on their workforce if a single currency is ever to become a reality. For Blair the main problem with the other European leaders is that they have not yet been able to inflict the sort of crushing defeat on the working class that the Tories managed to do in Britain.

No doubt he will be able to pass on plenty of tips on how to do this - tips he has picked up during his cosy chats with Margaret Thatcher.

He can also get plenty of advice from his newly appointed Minister

for European Competition, Sir David Simon. As former head of BP Simon knows all about how to deal with Labour governments: during the Wilson government in the 1960s BP continued to export oil to Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) despite it being illegal.

The new head of Gordon Brown's welfare "reform" task-force is Martin Taylor, chief executive at Barclays Bank. He can also chip in a few ideas: Barclays was one of the main props of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and is busy making its own workforce more "flexible" by axing up to 20,000 jobs..

Labour's vision of Europe involves more than a massive attack on living standards and work-

spite the supposed liberalisation of the 'primary purpose' rule, will remain thoroughly racist. Defence matters will continue to be decided where they always have been - in Washington.

Blair has made it very clear what sort of Europe he wants: we have to be equally clear in our policies.

As socialists we are opposed to the Maastricht single currency criteria, but for totally opposite reasons to Blair.

Blair wants a Europe in which workers' living standards and rights are reduced to the lowest pos-

For Blair the main problem with the other European leaders is that they have not yet been able to inflict the sort of crushing defeat on the working class that the Tories managed to do in Britain.

ers' rights throughout Europe. Labour is as equally determined as the Tories to maintain a British veto over immigration and defence.

Under Blair Britain will remain an island fortress within Fortress Europe. Immigration policy, de-

sible common denominator. We argue the exact opposite.

We are not opposed, in the abstract, to a common currency - the question is in whose interest does it operate?

But we need to take the argument

with Chancellor Helmut Kohl gives a foretaste of the likely role of the European Bank.

Kohl, the most eager proponent of the single currency among the major economies, was keen to cut Germany's burgeoning public sector deficit without further austerity measures: his finance minister obediently suggested revaluing the German gold reserves, and using the extra cash as a one-off boost to the budget.

The Bundesbank denounced the manoeuvre, throwing a spanner in the works of the convergence process, and triggering a crisis in Kohl's fragile governing coalition.

If Germany's right wing government can be caught in such a crisis, what hope would there be for a socialist government seeking to implement progressive policies if a single currency is ever introduced?

rates and vetting the various policies implemented by governments.

Its powers are reinforced by sweeping powers for the EU to levy massive fines on member states which exceed agreed limits on public sector spending and the level of

national debt.

The political crisis unleashed in Germany by the Bundesbank's clash



Europe's bankers flex muscles

GORDON Brown's "courageous" decision to hand control of interest rates over to a quango headed by the Bank of England is a crucial preparatory step along the road to European monetary union.

The rules of admission to EMU include the establishment in each member state of an independent central bank, which can then be made subordinate to a Euro-quango, the European Central Bank.

In Britain, the Bank of England has been controlled by the government since Labour nationalised it in 1947. Brown's effort to step back from control is a prelude to legislation which would be required to establish its complete independence if Labour goes for entry to the single currency.

The European Bank will effectively control the economies of member states by dictating interest



much further. After all, why should we stop at a common currency? Why not common rates of pay, common holiday entitlement, common welfare benefits etc.?

This is an argument that is going to become ever more important after the Euromarches are over. The campaign against Maastricht cannot stop there. We are totally opposed to a single currency without:

- * common rates of pay for the same job
- * the same holiday entitlement
- * common social security benefits
- * common pensions
- * a common retirement age for men and women
- * the same trade union rights throughout the EU.

All of these should be at the highest existing levels.

This is a programme that not only provides an alternative to the pro-Maastricht position of the TUC and Blair's desire to reduce European workers to the level of those in Britain.

It also provides a clear alternative to the xenophobes of the Tory Party, and helps expose the motives of the other European governments who have seen the single currency as a way to level down, not level up workers' rights and living standards.

It will allow us to build on the success of the Euromarches in bringing workers throughout Europe together in common actions.

Chapter of evasions

DURING the harsh years of Tory rule, many union leaders effectively gave up any hope of fighting or winning demands from British employers.

A growing school of thought emerged within the TUC and union bureaucracy which pinned the future hopes of the British trade union movement on developments in Europe.

This was, we hasten to explain, nothing to do with linking up with the continued militancy of the working classes across Europe, or borrowing from the fighting spirit of the French lorry drivers and others who have repeatedly flouted the law and defied governments to win their demands: no the TUC focus was on the bureaucratic intrigues of the European Parliament as the saviour of working class interests.

This was intensified when first Thatcher and then Major refused to sign the so-called "Social Chapter", which gives the EU a wafer-thin veneer of concern for "social" issues while driving forward towards a single market and single

currency designed to increase competition and facilitate the free movement of capital.

The same mythology has been perpetuated with Labour's immediate announcement that it will now sign up for the Social Chapter, which offers a package of employment protection measures including a ceiling on working

hours, minimum holidays and equal rights for part-timers, along with improvements in health & safety legislation and the right of an employee

to join a trade union.

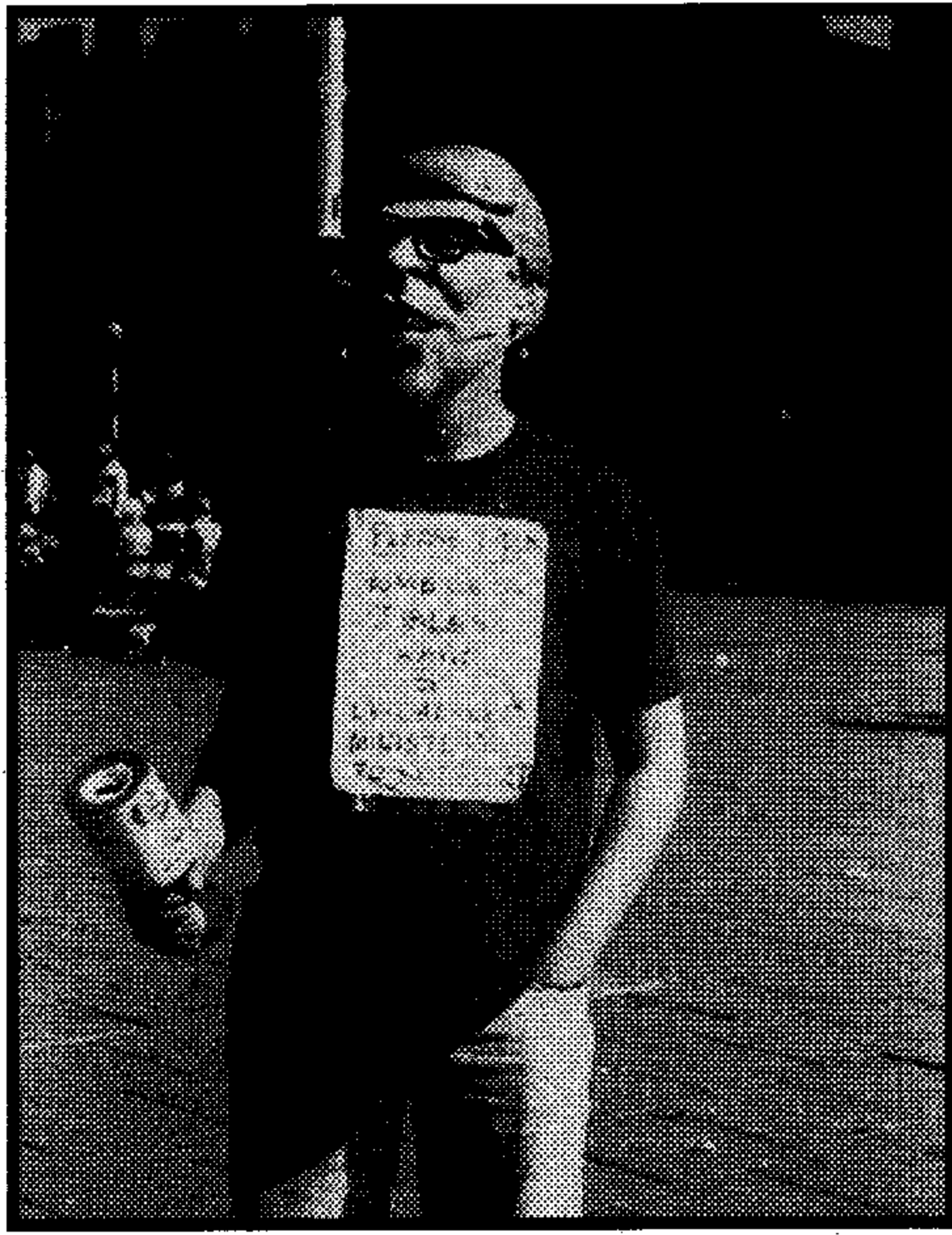
Obviously we in support of these reforms. But with its prior commitment to retain the Tory anti-union laws, which place no requirement on employers to recognise or negotiate with unions, this is, like so many New Labour policies, a hollow gesture.

As the Renault workers have found out, EU legislation does not guarantee job protection: and as the German miners showed, only class action can beat back the offensive of the employers and EU governments.





(Left) Jamie Stewart, an expert collector in action. (Right) Unemployment can strike in the least expected sectors.



From the heart

JAMIE Stewart is nineteen and the march is the first thing he's been involved in outside Blyth, where he lives.

He's brilliant at rattling the collecting tins - and he's getting to be a dab hand at public speaking too. This is what he said at the rally in Darlington...

"If the words come out a bit slow it's because the words are from the heart - I haven't revised any of this speech.

The trouble with unemployment is that it isn't getting enough coverage. People are forgetting there's unemployment; they're forgetting about us.

Way back in 1986 there was a local pit where I live and it closed down. I was about eight at the time and I took part in that march even then.

We walked all the way from Blyth where I live to Bedlington and the miners' picnic, and then we saw Arthur Scargill speak. I still remember the speech, and I still remember somebody holding a child up and the child shouting "Please give us me Daddy's job back".

I remember that, it's stuck with me for years.

We had no food during the miners' strike, we had no coal to keep warm. We used to buy off people selling it round the doors or we used to go to an opencast mine - we all used to club in no matter what age and dig the coal to keep warm.

Local schools used to hand sandwiches and apples out every day to eat because it was really bad at the time - and it's just as bad now if not worse...."

North West Passage

(Preston to Birmingham)
Gill Lee, Alan Thornett and Pete Firmin

The north west leg started from Preston on Saturday May 17. The marchers came together the previous evening and was addressed by Mike Hindley, MEP. The marchers were a determined group of people with 4 weeks on the road in front of them.

Some had marched before. Most, however, were unemployed people, committed to fighting unemployment and to defence of the welfare state, but with no previous experience of such a campaign.

No one knew what 4 weeks on the road would mean. In a church

hall that night with rain battering on the roof, it was hard to imagine.

Preston Trades Council organised the send-off next morning from the spot in the centre of Preston where four Chartists were shot in 1842.

The marchers were addressed by the Trades Council and Audrey Wise, MP for Preston, then they formed up with several local banners and delegations for a march through the town. It was a modest start, and the slogans were not yet coming together, but we were on the road.

There were three towns that day - Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley. By the time we reached Burnley, the slogans were in place:

"Jobs for all, that's our call

"JSA - No Way!

"Low Pay - No Way!

Fighting social exclusion

Pete Burnett, one of the marchers on the North East leg, explained to the public meeting in Middlesbrough some of the ways in which social exclusion affects people's lives in Britain and across Europe today.

Across Europe there are 20 million out of work, 50 million are living in poverty. We've seen the reemergence of poverty on a mass scale. That's what this march is about.

For every job that's lost a new job is created but these are jobs without rights. We have part time jobs, jobs empty of any content. They're jobs where people can be expelled can be made unemployed with no notice at all.

A good example is banking: 15000 jobs have been lost in the last five years. 19000 jobs are going to be lost between now and the end of the century.

But jobs in banking have actually increased - they're part time jobs

- they're zero hour jobs - they're jobs which specify a certain number of hours a month where you can be called at an hour's notice to do these things so the person that phones you about your overdraft or your account - usually a woman - is on performance related pay - she's got to get money in or else she loses her job.

More and more jobs in the civil service have become jobs of this nature where they have to achieve certain results.

They're on six monthly contracts and their contracts will end unless they achieve these results their not re-employed. This is a new world of labour - it's very different from the world of our fathers and grandfathers of our mothers and grandmothers.

So amongst the people most sorely affected by these developments are women because most of the new developments in the labour market affect women's jobs - the most insecure short term jobs, after hours, usually sold on the grounds that they are suitable

"Asylum seekers here to stay, Fortress Europe no way!

"Single parents have their rights, we won't give up without a fight!

"No more workfare, no more schemes, we won't pay for the bosses' dreams!"

Local activists marched with us through the town centres and in some cases between the towns.

The Lancashire Association of Trades Councils did a fantastic job organising this part of the route. Everywhere there was a welcome and a meeting or a social, varying in scale depending on the size of the town or even village.

Our principal themes were unemployment across Europe, the effects of the single currency, and opposition to the Job Seekers Allowance. We occupied Job Centres in Bury and Oldham, and made protests about the JSA, the treatment of claimants, the pressures on the staff and the rates of pay for jobs on offer.

In Greater Manchester, activists from Groundswell joined the marches for 2

days, accompanied by their goat, sporting placards: "Don't scapegoat the unemployed" and "You must be kidding!" This mascot was far from popular with Job Centre managers.

In Manchester, local activists joined us for a lunchtime demo through the city centre, and in the evening we held a meeting and discussion with 50 supporters.

In Liverpool, several hundred people marched, many of them sacked Liverpool dockers who have supported the march from the start.

After a day in Birkenhead, with a music festival in support of the march in the afternoon, the march moved on to Deeside where it occupied a Magnet showroom protesting at the sacking of the Magnet workers.

In Chester on May 28, the marchers tried to support the TUC day of action (or more accurately, inaction) for the unemployed, but were obstructed by officers from the city council.

In Wrexham, the march was welcomed warmly by Labour Party members, before demonstrating through the town in defiance of a 500 year old by-law prohibiting such protests. Our new slogan for the march was "Freedom of speech for Wrexham".

Next were Crewe, the Potteries, Stone, Stafford, and Cannock. In Wolverhampton, we were welcomed at the Lucas factory by shop stewards, members of the Trades Council and the Indian Workers Association, before a march through the town to a civic reception.



The Wolverhampton Unemployed Centre did us proud with hot food and karaoke, while the council held the public baths open late for the marchers' all-important shower.

From Wolverhampton, we headed into Greater Birmingham for marches through local town centres including a rally with the Sandwell NUT and Trades Council, then back into Dudley for another civic reception.

By the time the two marches converged in Birmingham on May 31 the north west leg had over 20 marchers, whilst another 10 or so had been with us at various times during the route.

Marchers included a member of the National Executive of the Bakers' Union and 2 international marchers.

We had taken the message about unemployment, the welfare state and Europe into over 30 towns and several major cities and we were looking forward to the march down to London and across to Amsterdam.

for busy women with children - shelving in supermarkets and so on.

And of course women are the first ones that suffer from cuts in benefits.

Across Europe immigrant workers - since 1985 we've had the Schengen agreement which basically was an outline plan for immigration policy to keep out immigrants from Europe. Its real intent and its real effect has been to cast a shadow over the lives of immigrants in Europe.

One in every seven workers in Europe is a migrant, from Morocco, from Mali, from North Africa, from various parts of Asia, from Surinam and various parts of Latin America.

Some of them have got papers - some of them think they've got papers but haven't got adequate papers, some of them have no papers at all - some of them had papers that have been confiscated by unscrupulous employers.

Racism and immigration laws cast a shadow across the lives of

these millions of workers when they can't actually take action, they can't go on strike they can't fight for their rights without drawing attention to themselves and inviting the question "where are your papers". Another case of what we mean by social exclusion.

Young people in Britain now have virtually no rights at all. They are being forced onto government schemes, they are being deprived of benefits.

In many ways when you look at the practice of the Tory government and some of the statements coming from Labour politicians a whole generation has become criminalised.

There's a watch on young people now - there's talk of imposing curfews in certain areas to get people off the streets.

Young people can be stopped in the same way as migrants can be stopped in Europe, asked where they live, what their doing there.

It's the rise of a law and order society.



A marcher's diary

Legacy of Jarrow March still strong



Terry Conway

FOUR DAYS can be a long time in politics. Certainly I may only have been on the Jarrow to Amsterdam march for its first four days – but it seemed like at least four years.

Nothing exists outside the world of the march, and the comradeship we developed on the road means that I now have a whole bunch of new friends I will treasure in the months and years ahead.

The financial support and welcome we've had in the various places we've marched through has been strengthened by the fact that we're another march from Jarrow. Unemployment has always been a burning issue in the North East - I grew up with it and that's why I was determined to be on this leg....

My blisters may have healed but the memories remain strong – enhanced by the fact that I got through 3 rolls of film in four days. I'm looking forward to rejoining the march in the next week as it approaches London, and deeply regretting the fact that I will miss the Amsterdam demonstration because I'm a delegate to my union conference which starts the same day.

Monday May 19

Assembled at 9am outside Jarrow Town Hall. Jimmy McAuley, one of the original Jarrow marchers was there to see us off. Speakers at the rally included Shirley Winter of Magnet Support Group, Stephen Hepburn MP for Jarrow and Andy Robertson speaking for the marchers. Set off with contingents from Magnet and South Tyneside Trades Council and some supporters from Jarrow as well as the permanent marchers.

The rally and beginning of the march are filmed by the BBC for their local news programme "Look North" and local paper "The Journal" also give us coverage.

The positive mood continued all day despite the toll on everyone's feet of sixteen miles on tarmac - give me a country stroll any day. Collecting went well – "Spare some change for the Jarrow marchers" seemed to work well as a line.

Tuesday May 20

Sleeping on a floor seems more uncomfortable now I'm in my forties than it did in my exuberant youth. Maybe not going to the pub last night was a mistake and I would have slept better after a few drinks. Today's challenge – other than getting the joints moving – is that we are going to be in Blair's constituency of Sedgefield for a good part of the day.

We are all a little apprehensive



Ready to march out of Middlesbrough

that the reception here might be less friendly. In fact we are wrong – we get a lot of support going through places like Sacriston, Whitton Gilbert and Spennymoor and the collecting tins are pleasantly full. Maurice on the loud-hailer explaining why we're marching in French, Spanish and Arabic also gets us noticed!

A warm reception, filling lunch and lots of march posters at Bearpark Artists Co-op. On to Durham where we spent some time in Market Square petitioning, collecting etc. Much less friendly reception but some support never the less.

Then to Bishop Auckland where we are met by local Trades Council and Labour party activists who marched with us to the community centre where we are staying. Dinner, then social they had organised at Crook Cricket Club.

Wednesday May 21

Breakfast at a different Community Centre. Most marchers went back into Bishop Auckland to collect, a few stayed behind to talk with users.

Late morning marched from Bishop to Shildon for our first Civic reception. Welcomed by the Deputy mayor as the Mayor was out of town. Shildon was devastated by the closure of the Railway workshops a few years ago – unemployment is high.

Onto outskirts of Darlington where met by Magnet strikers for march to picket line. Arrived at picket line in time to 'greet' scabs leaving on the day shift. Maurice, our Moroccan camera man tried to interview one of the scabs about why he was a strike breaker.

The man grabbed him – and the police responded by threatening to arrest Maurice for swearing!

We are impressed by the strikers' camp with its portacabins, brazier and home built structures – and



Jimmy McAuley: veteran of original Jarrow march, lent his support.

even more by their determination to win this battle against the bosses and scabs.

Joined on the picket line by Harry Clarke. Harry had been a 13 year old schoolboy in Jarrow in 1936. He had left school that afternoon and walked with the marchers as far as Hebburn – getting into trouble at school the next day. He's been a political activist every since. On Monday he saw our march on the TV and determined to come and join us! So here he is and will march with us tomorrow. What a boost....

Went into Darlington for rally in Market square, chaired by Jean Buckle from the local Socialist Campaign group. Speakers included the local UCATT official, Magnet striker Ian Crammond, Lynne Fawcett from the Magnet support group, with Andy Robertson and Jamie Stewart on behalf of the marchers.

By now its bitterly cold and despite the rousing speeches we are all relieved to get off to a local church hall for supper. Even better, we are staying at the Darlington Arts centre which has beds, baths and showers. What luxury! But the day is far

from over and we're off again - this time to a social at the Navy Club organised by the strikers, with a good sing song and dancing.

Thursday May 22

Up at 6am for mass picket at 7am. Scabs even more arrogant than previous night but we give them a vocal reception and remind them that

"Magnet's going down and you're going down with them". Delicious breakfast on picket line – I can't remember when crumpets last tasted so good.

We're sorry to leave – and determined to do more to support Magnet both on the march and when we got home. Strikers marched down the road with us several miles on our way to Stockton. Met by activists from the Welfare State Network. Civic reception at Stockton Town Hall, collected in town centre.

On the way out of Stockton the police tried to arrest Maurice! First they came up with a story that there was an escaped Group 4 prisoner (yes another one!) answering to his description – then it transpires woman had been annoyed by him asking for money, so maybe that's why they came!

Policeman eventually backed down and put 50p in collection! Marched into Middlesbrough – occupied the Job Centre, but were a

little disconcerted by the fact that the manager shook one of the marcher's hands!

Started collecting in Town Centre but then Conor was taken ill and we had to call an ambulance. He's taken to hospital and John goes with him. Concern about him – he'd been carrying the banner a good deal of the day and it had been pretty hot – put the dampeners on things a bit.

Then to Town Hall for Civic reception, met by more activists including a student whose grandfather had been one of the original Jarrow marchers. She and Harry Clarke had a lot to talk about.

Marched to unemployed centre where we are staying. Public Meeting there with speakers included Harry Clarke, Shirley Winter from Magnet, Cathy Nugent from Welfare State Network and Pete Burnett representing the marchers. Good meeting, though audience smaller than we'd hoped. Hear that Conor has been kept in overnight.

Friday May 23

A group of marchers go off to visit Conor before breakfast. Not sure when he'll be out or whether he'll be able to come back on the march.

Today I'm leaving to visit family and then back to work after the weekend. I don't want to go – although the fact that I'll get the train to Newcastle with Harry who's also going home makes it easier.

He says he'll be back, and I'm looking forward to seeing everybody again when they get to London... Manage to take lots of photos of every one together first. Wave the march off on its trek out of town... This has certainly been a week to remember...

Help keep campaign on the road!

A HUGE job of work has been done already to get the marchers this far. But when you're on the road for days you don't need the worry of wondering whether there will be enough money to fill the minibus with petrol or to buy the next meal that isn't being provided – let alone to pay for the transport to Amsterdam.

We need to strain every last muscle to ensure that the march gets to the Intergovernmental Conference on June 14 - and that the work of the campaign against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion can continue beyond this point.

We need donations however large or small you can manage. Sponsor a marcher for a week – or for the whole thing. Organise a collection in your work place. Set up a stall in your area and collect signatures for the petition and money...

Make cheques payable to *European Marches 1997* and send to Glen Voris, c/o St Helens TUC Resource Centre, 21-31 Barrow St, St Helens WA10 1RD.

On the March

Simple reasons to back Euro-march

Ian Crammond, sacked Magnet worker

I'm often asked why I support this march to Europe and why the Magnet workers support it.

Well, I haven't got a job and it's a march for the unemployed.

I'm struggling with benefits and it's a march in favour of decent welfare provision.

I have a home, but there's a lot of people in this country don't have a home, and there's a lot of people across Europe don't have a home and they need to be helped and supported and some of them can't fight for themselves.

It's not just in the North of England that people are being deskilled - there are people in Germany, France and Italy being deskilled, too. They are fighting against the same things as we are - poor working conditions, poor pay, attacks on benefits, and so on.

I'd like to welcome all the marchers here today. I think they must be very brave.

They've got to have a lot of stamina and I hope that at the end of the march they're still there, strong, happy, smiling....

I hope everyone is coming to the social tonight and bringing lots of money - because we need lots of money both for the marchers and for the Magnet strikers..

The marchers need money to keep marching and get across to Amsterdam and attend the Inter-governmental Summit on June 14.

"We won't wait thirteen years for justice"

Lynne Fawcett from the Magnet Support Group spoke at the rally to welcome the Euromarchers in Darlington. She had a clear message for Tony Blair...

"I WAS extremely proud to be in Jarrow on Monday. My grandfather actually walked from Jarrow 100 years ago with his family. He was about 9 or 10, and there were ten of them who walked down from Jarrow to Darlington to live.

My great-grandfather had been made a police sergeant here. It took them a week to get here and they were quite a lucky family because he had a secure job and somewhere to go and live and a roof over his head.

A hundred years later nothing much has changed, has it? People are still having to walk miles for jobs, and they're lucky if they can find one....

The men of Magnet were sacked for principles, and you people are marching for principles, and I can only support you totally.

I have three children of my own in their 20s and I'm extremely lucky they are all working. What Magnet have done - I'm terrified the same thing could be done to my son and my two daughters.

I'm extremely grateful that my last child is female - not because the hormonal monster is easier to handle than bolshie boys - but be-

cause at least she stands some chance of getting some sort of work. I'm ashamed to say that a sixteen year old lad today in Darlington doesn't have a cat in hell's chance.

Then they wonder why the lads are all absolutely demented. If you give people prospects and jobs they usually turn round and look after their own. All we want is security.

Why are quarter of a million just wasting? These kids aren't bad, there are very few bad kids around. OK so they drink and they're up to all sorts - we've all been up to all sorts when we were younger. They're no more vicious than we were.

It's just that when you were fifteen or sixteen you got a kick up the backside, and you went out to work and you earned the money - and you went home proud and you gave your mum some housekeeping, and then you went out and spent your money.

You became self-sufficient and proud of yourself and got some self respect and self esteem.

And they wonder why these kids between fifteen and sixteen have nothing except drink, drugs, misery, poverty and absolutely no hope. It's because we have actually failed them. We really have.

And now we've got rid of the To-



Raising the banner of solidarity: Lynne Fawcett (right)

ries, Tony Blair is not going to fail us is he? I understood that he had something like a 180 majority - now if my sums are right that means he can push through anything that he has a mind to do - anything at all.

GCHQ - he's sorted them out after thirteen years, Well I'm not waiting thirteen years for him to sort Magnet out. We all deserve self-esteem.

When you take men's jobs away their whole self esteem and self worth collapses. Your motivation goes out of your family life, you lose your security and the knock-on effect for the whole town is less money, less prospects and more poverty.

There's enough poverty in Darlington - we don't need any more.

They say there's at least ten per cent unemployed - well we know the figures are massaged so much you might as well just make a figure

up. So shall I just say there's 35 per cent unemployed in Darlington - that's as good a guess as their 10 per cent, I'm sure.

We're not going to take much more of this ... Everybody in this town deserves the chance of a job.

Whether you've got a million pounds in your pocket or only got one pound you've only got one life, twenty four hours in every day. Everybody deserves the chance to do something.

While it might be the case that full employment is my ideal and the dream is just utopian but it's got to be better to aim for than mass unemployment, no rights, no welfare state, the health service crumbling and just poverty spreading right across the town...

During the election I read that Alan Sugar was prepared to vote Labour because Labour was prepared not to put up taxes. Now as far as I'm concerned he's got millions so why should he bother?

I haven't got millions but I'm quite prepared to pay a little bit more if it's spread more evenly so that everybody gets a fair share instead of the top lot keeping so much for themselves.

So I support you very much on your principle of walking from Jarrow all the way to Amsterdam - and I hope you all enjoy the night tonight when we have a social....

Magnet strike attracts fresh scab violence

Terry Conway

The nine-month strike at Magnet in Darlington has seen a level of intimidation which is fortunately unusual in industrial disputes in Britain.

The latest and most vicious incident took place at 11.20 pm on Sunday May 25 when a taxi-minibus pulled up at the picket line and seven hooded men carrying iron bars attacked the pickets.

The six men in their fifties who were on picket duty at the time approached Magnet security to call police. It seems as if they may well have delayed doing so, as the police took 15 minutes to arrive when their normal response time is five minutes.

In the meantime the thugs smashed up much of the impressive camp that the strikers had constructed to make the long hours challenging the scabs more bearable.

They smashed up the portaloos and overturned the brazier so that it burnt down the portacabin. One tried to pick up a gas canister and throw it into the brazier to spread the blaze further but was unable to do so. They were then able to escape in the waiting taxi before the police arrived, leaving several strikers



Magnet strikers have been generous in their solidarity with Euro Marches: now they need extra support.

needing hospital treatment.

The workers recognised some of their assailants as scabs. However the Magnet security cameras had been tampered with so that the film of the incident is too blurred to be any use as evidence. The police do seem to be taking this outrage seriously; a pleasant change from the last time the picket was attacked.

A few months ago one of scabs threw petrol at one of the cabins on the site. In order to avert the

danger of fire this was carefully washed away with water. As a result the man involved was only charged with causing an affray and got away with being fined for an offence which had it been carried out by the strikers would doubtless have resulted in a far more serious charge and sentence.

340 workers at Magnet were originally sacked in September 1996 for going on strike for a modest pay rise. Since the dis-

pute started, support committees have been set up in many areas of the country and regular actions called outside Magnet showrooms.

The determination of the strikers and the solidarity they have received has put the company under increasing pressure. In the days before the attack on the picket line the strikers had heard that the scabs were having their hours reduced and benefits cuts. Some even had the audacity to

ask for union help - which fortunately was not offered.

It is a scandal that the local Labour MPs have been silent in the face of the disgusting treatment the strikers have faced both from management and scabs.

Neither Alan Milburn, in whose constituency the factory is, nor Tony Blair, in whose Sedgefield constituency several of the strikers live, has even bothered to visit the picket line.

Magnet strikers and their supporters are determined they should not have to wait thirteen years like workers at GCHQ.

Since the recent attack the numbers on picket duty have been increased, and a mass solidarity action called for Saturday May 31 in Darlington.

A picket of Beresford's (the owners of Magnet is being planned for July at their Baker Street Headquarters in London. Actions at Magnet showrooms throughout the country need to be organised as well as speakers and collections at Labour movement meetings. This dispute can be won - lets organise one last push.

International youth camp: undermining fortress Europe



ON JULY 19-26, revolutionary groups from 15 countries will organise the 14th youth camp in solidarity with the Fourth International.

This year's camp focuses on the European integration process governed by the Maastricht and Schengen accords. The development of the "bosses' and cops' Europe" involves the looting of the public sector, privatisation of universities, attacks on women's rights, restricting entry across Europe's external frontiers, massive waves of redundancies, and the replacement of full time jobs with part time and short term contracts.

This camp is an occasion to share our experiences of these struggles, to co-ordinate our activities, and to come together in opposition to the bosses and cops Europe of Maastricht and Schengen.

This camp is about preparing the social and political movements which are the only way to impose another kind of Europe: open, social, ecological and democratic.

For most of the organising groups, European capitalist integration is an important theme.

"Belgium is in the centre of Europe," says Ataulfo Riera of the Belgian Young Socialist Guard (JGS/SJW). "Most of the EU institutions are based in Brussels. The country is also a cross-roads for European struggles. Protests against the closure of the Renault-Vilvorde plant has demonstrated the need for another Europe, an alternative to that proposed by the European bourgeoisie."

"The Italian government is using European integration and the Maastricht convergence criteria to justify a series of neo-liberal and austerity measures, which are destroying the social security system, and worsening living and working conditions," says Angelica Lepori, a member of the Bandiera Rossa current in Italy's Communist Youth (GC).

"Women are particularly hit by these blows to the 'welfare state', and increasingly forced to take on caring tasks previous guaranteed by the state.

"Most of Italy's three million unemployed are women and youth," says Lepori, a politics student at Bologna University. "In some parts of the south, half those under 26 are out of work. The Italian government proposes to "fight" unemployment by "improving flexibility of the labour market", with greater use of "apprenticeship" and "temporary" contracts, and a wider use of low-paid "socially useful" workers."

In Denmark and Sweden, large parts of the labour and radical movements are strongly opposed to the European Union, and plans for closer integration.

"We find that it is very easy to get in contact with left-wing youth on these questions", says Anders Lange of the Socialist Workers Party (SAP).

"After all, many young people get radicalised on questions with an international dimension, like imperialism, refugees, police powers and international police co-operation, and so on. Also, the EU as such is still a very important question in Denmark. For many young people, internationalism is a credible alter-

native to the EU."

According to Christine, a 19 year-old SAP member and high school student, "the politicians say that the EU is necessary for social progress. As far as I can see, it brings about the opposite. The situation for women has worsened in many countries.

"Abortion rights are under attack, and our position on the labour market is in danger. I think it is necessary to work together in Europe, but without the European Union."

Portugal's Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR) is also campaigning on Maastricht, and the need for a referendum on a common currency. But as Sergio Vitorino admits, "many young people, including those who join the PSR, are indifferent to this theme.

"They are neither informed nor aware of the effects that this new Europe will have on the lives of Portuguese and European workers, on immigrants here in Portugal, or even on their own lives."

Nevertheless, "participation in the Fourth International camp is very important for the formation of an internationalist consciousness among younger militants."

Whatever the difficulties in campaigning on European themes, the choice of focus for this 14th Fourth International youth camp is unlikely to deter prospective participants.

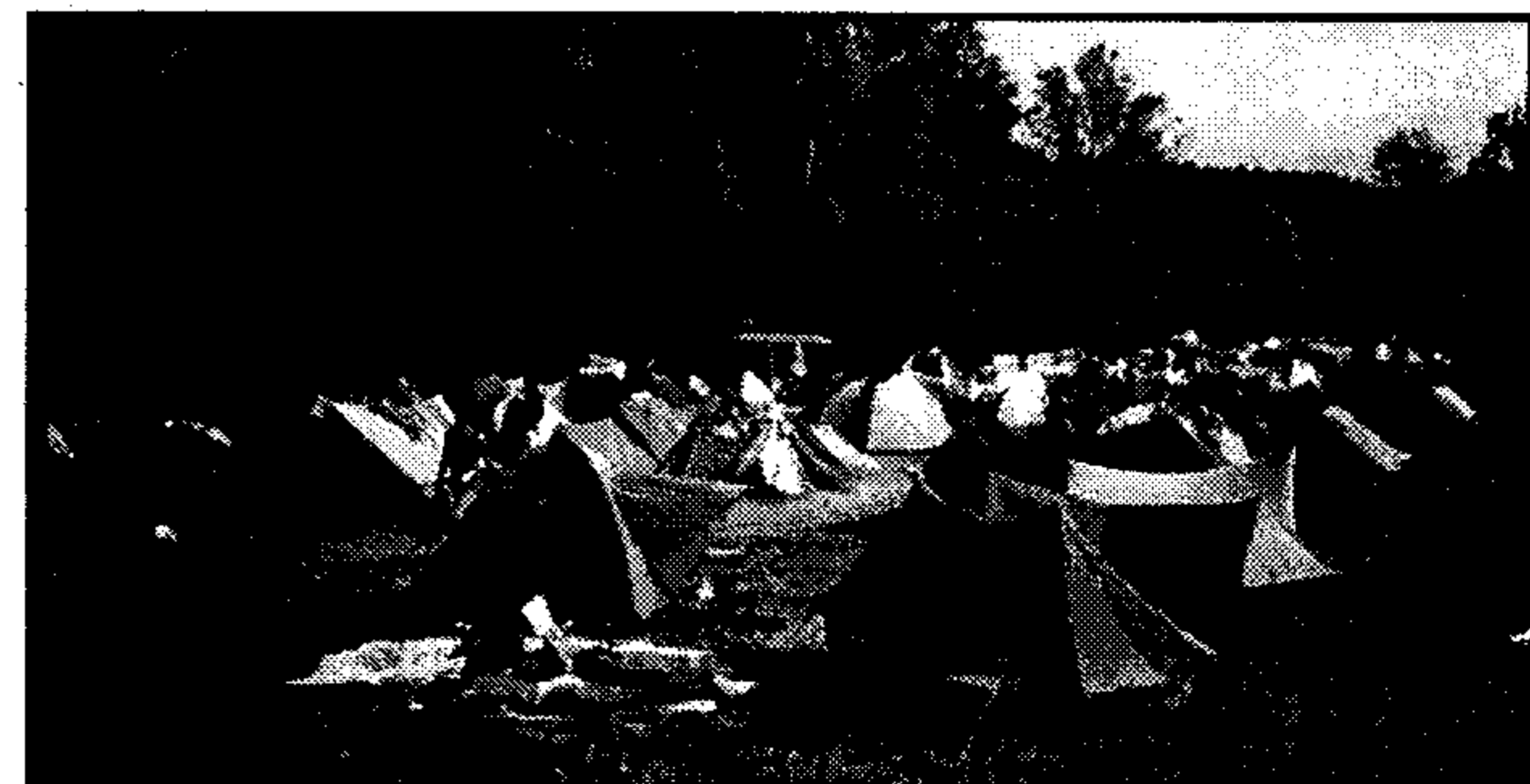
"Participation in the camp would be a central priority for us, whatever the theme," stresses Ataulfo Riera of Belgium's SJW/JGS.

"It is a unique chance to live a week of political debate in the company of young militants from all corners of Europe and the world, in a self-managed, alternative context."

Vive la revolution!



The youth camp is a real breath of fresh air. Along with the debates and discussions come nightly discos, revolutionary beer, and good times.



Come to Brioude, France, 19-26 July for a real revolutionary party!

This year's Fourth International youth camp is hosted by the French JCR-RED, and will take place in Brioude, in Haute-Loire, near the Mediterranean coast.

Over 600 young people from all over Europe will come together to exchange their experiences, discuss the developments in their countries, and identify the possibilities for co-ordinated international struggle against the capitalist system.

As well as current struggles, we will also discuss our project for a better society, the need to be a revolutionary today, and how to organise so as to bring about the changes we want.

But this camp is more than all that. For one short week, we will try to unite leisure, politics, and celebration. At this event, doing politics is also experimenting with a new way of life. Trying to put our ideas into practice.

This is why the camp is self-managed (participants elect country representatives, who together form the camp co-ordination group). We want to create a whole self-managed society, in which everyone can take part in decision making.

The other aspect of our 'community' is the rejection of all forms of exploitation and expression present in the wider society. The aim is to make the camp a place free of

sexism, homophobia, and economic inequality.

Each day will have two parts: a morning forum on a general theme, and a choice of afternoon workshops. As in previous years, dedicated women's and lesbian and gay 'spaces' will be a focus for ongoing discussions and activities.

The evening cultural programme includes videos, a nightly discotheque, and a special meeting on Che Guevara. A Fourth International meeting will be held on the final evening. Register now, for Europe's largest international revolutionary festival!

A full menu of events for a liberating week

Saturday 19 July

Opening forum.

* The political situation in France (Alain Krivine, LCR). * Why Europe as a central theme? (JCR) * The Fourth International: the Europe we're fighting for

Sunday 20

"Against the Europe of injustice, the Europe of resistance"

* Maastricht Europe against young people. * Fighting against unemployment * Student struggles in Portugal

Workshops * Educational policies in Europe * Cutting the working week * The struggle in Renault Belgium * Information, new technology and the reorganisation of the labour market * AIDS and health policies * "Pro-capitalist" changes in the Eastern European countries * Albania

Monday 21

"Racism, fascism, moral order, no pasaran!"

* Advance of the far right and the moral order * Schengen agreement and racist policies in Europe * The "sans-papiers" in France

Workshops * Local government by the far right * Fascism in Germany. * Far right in the student movement * Racism against gypsies * Drugs and repressive policies in Europe * Struggles of lesbians and gays.

Tuesday 22

"Women in the eye of the storm"

* Attacks on women's rights * Women and public life * The Hearings for women's rights in France.

Workshops * The right to choose * Situation of women's rights in Poland since 1989 * Situation of women in Algeria * Sexual exploitation, symptom of the capitalist crisis * Men and feminism * Cultural relativism and imperialism

Wednesday 23

No morning forum - inter-delegation meetings)

Workshops * May 1968, re-foundation of the Fourth International - Alain Krivine * Experiences of youth movement re-composition * Mass consumption and the creation of new needs * Genetics, biotechnology

and bio industries * The "white crisis" in Belgium * Repression against Kurds in Germany.

Thursday 24

"Do away with this society"

* The crisis of capitalism - the need for revolution. * Ecological crisis * The society we want (Daniel Bensaid)

Friday 25

"How to be a revolutionary today?"

* What type of organisation? * Internationalism * Educational meetings * Fascism, today and yesterday * The Russian Revolution of October 1917. (Daniel Bensaid) * Exploitation of the

Third World, the African example

* Che Guevara. (Janette Habel)

* Current struggles in Latin America, particularly Chiapas

Women's assemblies:

Sexualities; Violence against women

Video space

Two videos on the dockers in Liverpool. *Breaking the waves.*

"The promise" (La promesse)

French/Belgian film on immigrant workers. "Michael Collins".

"Wild Reeds". (Les Roseaux Sauvages) lesbian/gay. *Land and Freedom.*

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We condemn Lima embassy massacre

Statement of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, 13 May 1997

THE UNITED Secretariat of the Fourth International shares the indignation of all revolutionaries and democrats at the savage operation which the Peruvian government launched against the MRTA militants inside the Japanese embassy in Lima.

The guerrilla commando had killed no-one, injured no-one, and made no ultimatum. But President Fujimori decided on a massacre, using the combined forces of the army, air force and marines, with the aid of the USA, Britain and Israel, and with the complicity of the Japanese government.

He wanted no prisoners. His goal was to exterminate all the militants inside the embassy.

The bourgeois media all over the world didn't hesitate to express their satisfaction, and join in with the congratulations which their governments addressed to Alberto Fujimori. This sinister individual has succeeded in polishing his tyrant's badge - which the MRTA action had tarnished.

Fujimori and his gang have sent the Peruvian people a clear message: the state has a monopoly on force of whatever kind, and the "state interest" has priority, at any price.

Those who challenge these "principles" will be punished mercilessly.

The framework of the capitalist system must be respected.

Particularly in Latin America, those who are not disposed to accept this should know that they are not protected by any law or democratic guarantee.

The "low intensity war" against them, which has already caused so much damage in Central America and elsewhere will continue. This is the other message which Fujimori and his imperialist allies wanted to send to the oppressed and exploited of the continent.

Each revolutionary organisation has the right to choose whether or not it adopts the same choices as the MRTA. To ask itself whether or



Murdered: MRTA leader Nestor Cerpa

not the methods used by its militants are useful. Whether they contribute effectively to the legitimate combat against "national" and foreign oppressors.

But at a moment when the dominant classes in Latin America and their imperialist patrons are crying "victory!", it is our duty to express our full solidarity with the MRTA in their mourning.

At the same time, we demand an end to the scandalous detention of political prisoners in Peru in unacceptable and inhuman conditions. International solidarity with all these prisoners is a must.



Everyone wanted to jump on the Mandela bandwagon as apartheid collapsed: how many will be willing to write off debts?

South African activists pose challenge for Labour

Charlie van Gelderen

A CAMPAIGN has been launched by the Cape Town based Alternative Information and development Centre (AIDC) for the abolition of the foreign debt built up by the Apartheid regime.

Although this campaign is specifically aimed at the legacy of apartheid it has far broader political ramifications as nearly all the so-called developing countries are crippled by these debts. The approach being adopted here may give a new boost to existing campaigns against debt and help stimulate new ones.

Post apartheid South Africa has inherited a foreign debt of \$18.7 billion. The interest payable on this vast sum - between \$1.5 billion and \$2.6 billion annually - could be put to much better use funding the housing, jobs health and social services that South Africa so badly needs.

It is estimated that \$18.7 billion (90 million rand) could go a long way to achieving:

- * 300,000 new homes (R10bn)
- * Water and sanitation for 21 million people (R36-56bn over 5 years)
- * Electrification of 2.5 million homes (R11 bn over 5 years)
- * 1060 new health clinics (R1.2 bn)
- * The upgrading of 50,000 classrooms by the year 2000 and the provision of textbooks to schools (R15-17 bn)
- * Employment of all those unemployed (R82.8 bn per annum)

In their brochure *Challenging Apartheid's foreign debt* AIDC stresses that they have both moral and international law on their

side in waging this battle. They base much of their argumentation on the *Doctrine of Odious Debt*, a doctrine of jurisprudence the United States government and the US Chief Justice helped to develop.

"The US government, in the aftermath of the American-Spanish War of 100 years ago, used the doctrine to repudiate Cuba's debt to Spain, arguing that the debt was "odious" and unenforceable since it had been incurred without the consent of the Cuban people and by means of force of arms".

At the end of 1990, 87% of South Africa's outstanding debt was owed to banks of five countries ...

This judgement was further reinforced in 1923 when the Royal Bank of Canada sought to recover debt from the recently established democratic government of Costa Rica.

"In the Costa Rica judgement the debt was illegitimate. The new government argued that the debt has been incurred by a dictator not the people of Costa Rica... at the time the loans were made, the people had been engaged in a political and military struggle to bring democracy to their country.

The case was heard by Chief Justice Taft of the US supreme Court who fully upheld the repudiation of the debt".

The doctrine of odious debt was codified by Alexander Sack, a professor of law in France, who argued

that governments who invoked the doctrine would have to prove that the debt ill-served the public interest and that the creditors were well aware of this.

Few countries suffering under the yoke of debts imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or commercial banks would have much difficulty proving such a case. Certainly post-Mobutu Congo and today's South Africa would qualify.

Using Sack's principles, the AIDC report argued that all debts incurred during the Apartheid regime are illegitimate. "The United Nations and the International Court of Justice were the most authoritative of international bodies that proclaimed apartheid to be a crime against humanity".

At the end of 1990, 87 per cent of South Africa's outstanding debt was owed to the banks of five countries, with Britain heading the list. British banks accounted for 28 per cent of these loans.

Will the Labour government in Britain rise to the golden opportunity that this issue presents to demonstrate its real concern for the poor of the world - or are Robin Cook and Clare Short's sound bites on a new climate of international relations not meant to be taken seriously?

Pressure must be exerted on the British government to head the international campaign for the repudiation of these obnoxious debts.

The campaign for the cancellation of Apartheid's debt is an urgent task for the international labour movement, as is supporting the battle against debt and the structural adjustment policies which accompany it.

Troops out of Albania!

Declaration of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, May 13 1997.

IN RECENT years, Albania was presented by the international institutions and imperialist propaganda as a country which served as an example to its neighbours, because of its economic growth, and its spectacular progress in the construction of a "market economy."

In just a few days, a powerful popular movement swept away this myth, exposing the perverse mechanisms, the savage exploitation, and the financial fraud by which these alleged results were obtained and against which wide sections of the Albanian population had revolted.

They also rose up against the political regime symbolised by President Sali Berisha - a regime which hid its profoundly anti-democratic, police-state nature behind the fa-

cade of largely fraudulent election victories.

Spokesmen for the imperialist countries and the media at their service presented the protagonists of the Albanian mass movement as (at best) inspired by clan allegiance, or (at worst) criminal or mafia gangs.

Insurrection

In fact, the insurrection covered the whole country, thanks to massive, active popular participation.

The criminal gangs, which exist in Albania like in all other countries, only exploited the conditions created by the rotting Berisha regime: consolidating their links with the mass of international traffickers, and shamelessly exploiting

all those who saw a passage across the Adriatic sea to Italy as their (illusory) salvation. By crude mystification, these bandits have been falsely presented as the main actors of the Albanian drama.

In fact, the mass movement put forward completely legitimate demands: the restitution of the money stolen through "pyramid" financial operations authorised by the government, Berisha's resignation, the dissolution of the secret police, and fair elections.

The democratic revolutionary character of this movement was expressed in the formation of popular committees, in open session, coordinated in a national public salvation committee.

These committees did not be-

come organs of a real dual power, challenging the regime. They demanded Berisha's departure, but limited themselves to playing the role of pressure-group on the new Fino government.

The committees also accepted the deployment of the "Alba" multinational armed force. This is largely due to their lack of experience, the widespread illusions in the existing political parties, and the absence of political kernels with a general overview of the situation.

Solidarity

The Fourth International expresses its militant solidarity with the insurrectional movement which has shaken Albania.

It calls for mobilisations in sup-

port of the following demands, particularly in those countries which have launched the military intervention.

Immediate and unconditional resignation of President Berisha.

Dissolution of the secret police.

Reimbursement of the money stolen in the financial scandals

Recognition of the popular committees.

Withdrawal of the "Alba" multi-national force, the main goal of which is the reconstruction of a repressive, anti-democratic state structure, and the maintenance of Albania's "market economy."

And it's not over yet!

McLibel - Burger Culture on Trial, by John Vidal (Macmillan £15.99), reviewed by BRIAN GARDNER

MCDONALD'S food is not nutritious, and can kill you.

Although the multi-national corporation deny this, there is an overwhelming weight of scientific evidence that foods such as those produced by McDonald's which are high in fat, sodium and sugar can cause cancers of the breast and bowel as well as heart disease.

And if you draw the conclusion that the company has little respect for human life, then it will hardly shock you to learn that they also condone the inhumane factory farming and slaughter of animals.

To add to their sins, in order to facilitate the mass breeding of livestock for their products, they are complicit in the mass destruction of tropical rainforests in order to provide grazing land.

If that isn't enough, the packaging produced for their produce necessitates the cutting down of even more areas of forestation.

So, you may ask, if they have so little respect for both animals and humans, how then do they treat the vast majority of their employees, the brainwashed drones who work for them in their millions of outlets throughout the world, the vast numbers of "crews" who, according to the company are dedicated to keeping their ships afloat and providing the customers with Big Macs, Fries, Double Cheeseburgers, Chicken McNuggets (Yumm!...we could go on)?

No unions

The answer is, in two words - LIKE SHIT. McDonald's crew members receive piss-poor wages - in the UK - £3.10 per hour in 1994. What's more, throughout the world, McDonald's employees are prohibited from joining unions. If they try to, there is firstly persuasion not to, secondly coercion and finally the sack.

Before I go on, I wouldn't like you to think that these are my allegations. After all, this publication could also be sued. Although I may have added some additional hyperbole, they are essentially the same allegations as were contained in a factsheet first disseminated by the London Greenpeace group (no relation to the international environmental organisation) in 1986. In 1990, McDonald's began legal proceedings against five activists who they believed were key to its distribution.

And in writing his book about the McLibel trial, the Environmental Editor of the Guardian, John Vidal, is at pains to point out that he does not necessarily share the view of the defendants.

You can hardly blame him. McDonald's method of silencing its critics is often that of the SLAPP - a phrase first used by two American academics and meaning Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation.

Of the five people who were originally in the frame, three eventually gave McDonald's what they



Two people against the multi-millions of the McDonald's machine: Helen Steel and Dave Morris

wanted - an apology. The other two, Helen Steel and Dave Morris stuck it out and so began the trial that was to become at 313 days the longest of any kind in English history.

This does not take into account the numerous preliminary hearings and various appeals which took place before the actual trial commenced.

And it's not over yet. On December 13 last year, after he had heard the closing speeches, Mr. Justice Bell said: 'I will say now that I propose to reserve my judgement...I don't mean to be difficult when I say I don't know when I will deliver it because I don't know.' Not surprising really, given that he has to review some 58,000 pages of documentary evidence and transcript testimony.

During the preliminary stages, the plaintiff's barrister persuaded the judge that on the basis that much of the scientific evidence would be too complex for a jury to understand, the trial should take place without one. The judge would be arbiter of both fact and the law.

In late 1990 the McLibel Support Campaign was established. From small beginnings it mushroomed into an organisation with significant support from people in many different countries. In February 1996, it established its own McSpotlight website on the Internet.

Vidal: 'The act of taking two people to court was having the exact opposite of the desired effect...it was exacerbating the situation...By April 1994, the McLibel Support Campaign was claiming that more than half a million "What's Wrong With McDonald's" leaflets had been handed out since the writs were served.'

To counter this McDonald's started distributing a "Why McDonald's is going to court" leaflet from its restaurant outlets. This effectively branded Steel and Morris as 'liars', and in a deft move they counter-claimed for libel against McDonald's.

Now there were to be two trials taking place at the same time. Effectively McDonald's was on trial, and Mr. Justice Bell would have a doubly hard task, eventu-

ally having to rule not on sixteen but thirty-two charges.

As might be expected, by far the greater part of Vidal's book is given over to trying to encapsulate the long tortuous process of the trial. McDonald's executives were paraded before the court in order to defend every aspect of corporate policy. Both sides called large numbers of expert witnesses and their evidence was often contradictory if not confusing.

For McDonald's the crucial part of the allegations was whether or not their food was nutritious and the allegations of a link between it and the development of cancers, heart disease and strokes.

The defendants had scored an early victory when they trapped a McDonald's witness on nutrition into admitting that just such a link existed. The corporation were then allowed to move the goal posts by amending their claim in such a way that Morris and Steel had to prove that the consumption of McDonald's food actually caused the ailments which had been cited.

Out of court

Although this was much harder, McDonald's were still worried. Late in August, 1994 they made an offer to settle the case out of court. There was to be no payment of compensation or costs to either of the parties but a substantial sum of money would be paid to a mutually agreeable third party.

So far so good but the agreement foundered when McDonald's refused to accede to Steel and Morris's demand that they apologise to those who had 'been wrongly forced to apologise to the company in the past'.

Furthermore they refused to accept the stipulation that in the future, they undertake not to make any public statements about McDonald's in 'any form of communications other than private communications'.

And so the case went on with separate sections of the trial addressing all of the issues which had been contained in the factsheet.

One of the most bizarre revelations was that McDonald's had hired two private investigation

companies to infiltrate the London Greenpeace group and spy on its members. As neither company were aware that the other had also been retained, sometimes the investigators were unknowingly gathering information on each other.

In order to establish their credibility with the genuine members of the group, many of the agents assisted with the production and distribution of anti-McDonald's material. Part of Steel and Morris's defence was that the company had thus actually colluded in the dissemination of the literature they claimed had defamed it!

The testimonies of McDonald's executives were often ludicrous. More so than in this book, this was plainly apparent in a dramatic reconstruction of parts of the trial, recently shown on Channel 4. Robert Beavers, a senior vice president of the corporation broke down in tears while describing how a teenager who previously had never achieved anything, won a crew member of the year award.

When another executive was asked if he knew what a typical tree in the rainforest might look like, his reply was that they were tall and slender, somewhat like himself.

It would be wrong to see the trial merely as an amusing circus. Vidal locates the actions of

McDonald's within a strategy pursued by many other multi-nationals, some of it much more sinister than the pursuit of two anarchists through the vast labyrinth of the English legal system.

He cites as example the complicity of the Shell corporation in the Nigerian regime's persecution of the Orgoni people and its execution on trumped-up charges of fierce critics such as the writer and political activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa.

He points out how, because of their crossing of national boundaries, the multi-nationals are now beyond regulation by national governments and even emergent supra-states such as the EC.

While we have not been looking, global capitalism has been re-inventing itself. It works now not only through nation states but through the World Bank, the IMF and the GATT, now transmuted into the World Trade Organisation.

Grass roots

What, however, can be done about these shadowy and unaccountable organisations? Vidal seems to see the answer in what he terms 'civil society' - a loose grouping together of oppositionists who range from the likes of Saro-Wiwa to those in the West who set up grassroots systems of barter and credit unions.

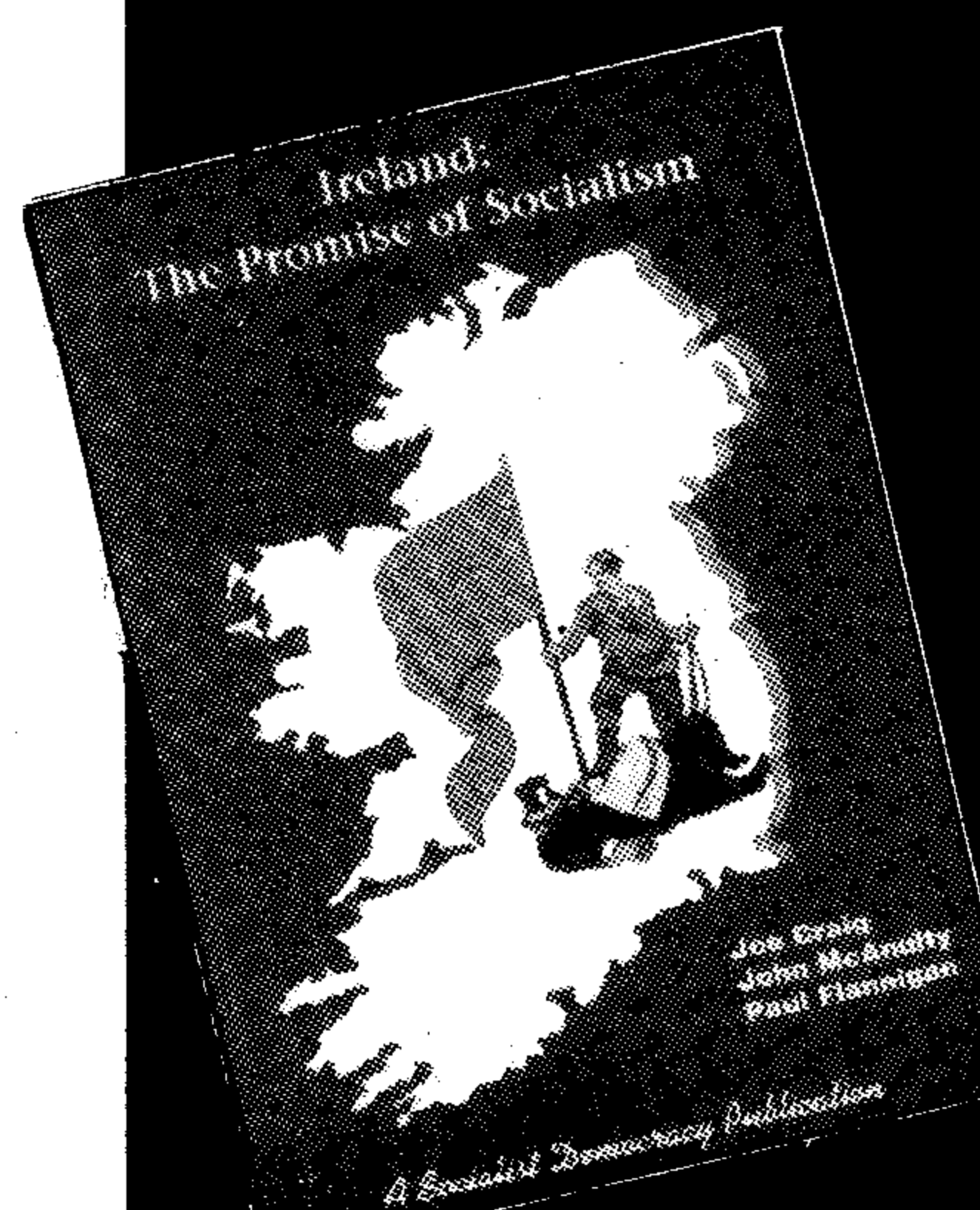
Into this he also inserts Steel and Morris.

It is true that many of these groups and initiatives challenge the increasing hegemony of global capitalism, Vidal fails to answer the vexed problem of how these disparate groupings can be brought together.

He claims the politics of both the left and right have failed but fails to define terms which are after all somewhat vague. It's true that some on the left have been dismissive of the fight to save the planet and of those activists working for this new beginning.

But a real socialism for the future must contain an analysis of capitalism's latest global phase, and must be able to involve all those who fight it and its accompanying destruction of the environment.

Ireland: The Promise of Socialism



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Saving Our Countryside: Dave Bangs reports a victory Brighton Downland defended

BRIGHTON-based environmental activists are seeing considerable success in their campaigns to halt further damage to the South Downs landscape and to secure their permanent protection as a National Park.

Though the South Downs were on the original list of landscapes drawn up by the Attlee government for National Park status in 1949, they were dropped 7 years later, ostensibly because damage to their ancient, open pastures by modern farming had gone too far.

The South Downs was long famous both for the freedom to roam which its open landscape provided and for the richness of its prehistoric heritage and wildlife. Rare species abound and up to 60 species of plant can be found within a square metre of its turf.

Yet modern farming has in the last 60 years destroyed 80 per cent of these pastures and their ancient monuments, and many species have become desperately rare or locally extinct.

This picture of damage and threat to historic landscape and wildlife resources is one that can be replicated nationwide. From the Cotswolds to the East Anglian coast, and from the Welsh borders to the Chilterns, ancient heaths and downs, woods, marshes and meadows have been ploughed, bulldozed and drained.

Feeble Protection

Yet since 1957 only one new quasi-National Park, the Norfolk Broads, has been declared, and the National Parks system has been largely ghettoised in upland areas where land values, biodiversity and development opportunities are low.

Protection for particularly rich centres of biodiversity and cultural heritage has been minimal, and government recreational strategies have sought to channel and confine access to existing paths and "honeypot" sites and to ignore demands for a broad "right to roam".

The movement for the protection of nature and for public access has historically been held back by many factors. Working class people have been socially and politically marginalised in the countryside itself, and farmers and landowners have legitimised themselves by a clever use of archaic cultural notions of stewardship and continuity.

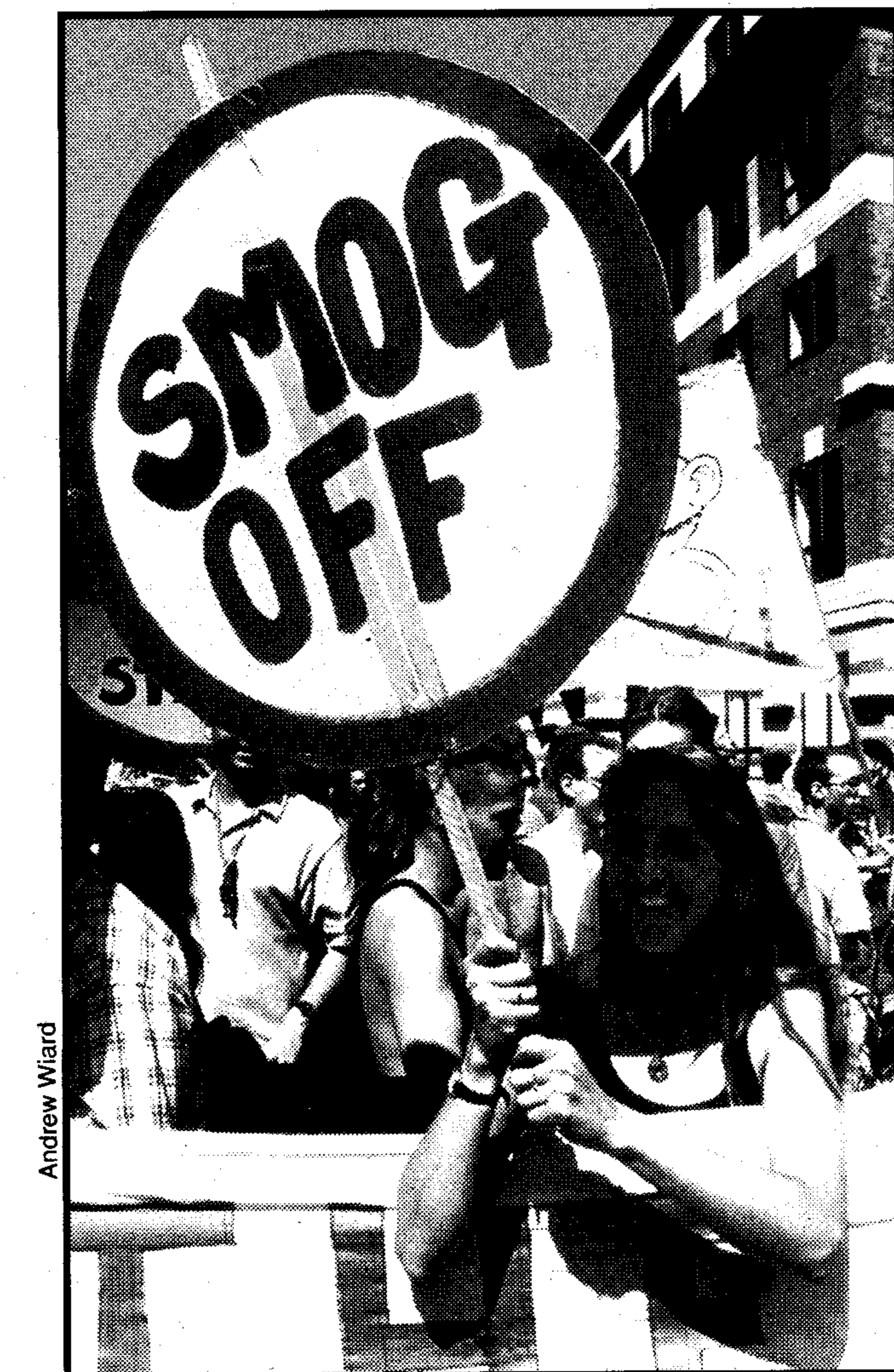
In the cities and towns where 80 per cent of us live, people have lacked the means, knowledge and confidence to organise around these issues.

A New Movement

Yet in recent years the influences of mass re-migration of city people into the countryside, the paradoxical effects of increased mobility brought by the car economy, raised cultural levels and the persistent public exposure of farming's destructive role have all combined to power new urban-based demands for access to nature and for its conservation.

In Brighton the movement has reached a considerable level of organisation.

Two years ago a broad coalition of wildlife activists, Labour, Green Party and Friends of the Earth succeeded in halting plans for the pri-



The fight to save the countryside must be built on alliance with urban campaigns

vatiation of Brighton Council's 13,000 acre Downland estate. Against the conservatism and passivity of older rural-oriented access and conservation organisations, "Keep Our Downs Public" petitioned, lobbied and campaigned until the ruling Labour Group shelved their sell-off proposals.

The coalition was able to take advantage of a large network of local urban conservation groups based on a range of middle class and working class communities. The movement's focus of activity was in the central Brighton area rather than the edge of town, however, and in the central St Peter's ward a Green Party candidate was able to win a Council seat against the unpopular architect of the privatisation proposal.

Brighton's huge Downland estate had been built up in the inter-war years to provide strict control of urban development, conservation of pure water resources and public open spaces, in the absence of proper planning legislation.

Yet conservative and productivist management of the estate in the post-war half century had caused levels of destruction of the wild habitats which matched those in private ownership.

In the 8 years since they gained control of Brighton Council in 1987, the Labour Party had demonstrated the positive potential of social ownership with a series of recreational and conservation initiatives.

When the right wing of the party developed the proposal to sell off the Downland farms to their existing tenants, it was thus easy to demonstrate the anti-social and destructive management practices of these farmers, and the positive benefits of public management.

The KODP campaign was also successful in highlighting the nega-

tive role of the National Trust, who sought to purchase parts of the dismembered estate. Activists argued that if the Trust was able to "cherry pick" off the best portions of the estate, then all other local authority landholding would be increasingly laid open to privatisation pressures.

The combined nationwide local authority estate in agricultural and conservation grade land is the "sleeping giant" of the conservation movement. Their combined holdings equal in scale the total landholdings of the conservation sector (which includes such organisations as the RSPB and the National Trust).

Already County Council smallholding estates have been seriously eroded, and there are now serious

moves towards the privatisation of the National Nature Reserves system.

Our victory was a significant step in "holding the line".

National Park

Using the energy generated by this success, environmental activists have now launched a new campaign for National Park status for the Downs. The material basis for this project is very strong. The empty Downland landscape is bounded by large coastal conurbations and 10 million people live within 90 minutes drive of the Downs.

Two thirds of central Downland are already in social or quasi-social ownership. A serious project of landscape and habitat restoration would thus be able to call on the support of large numbers of people who would have no natural sympathy with farmers who put their private profits before public need.

Activists have found that demands for National Park status – on a par with Dartmoor, the Peak District or Snowdonia – have a ready appeal, particularly in urban areas. A 12,000 strong position has been built up. All the major conservation and amenity organisations – including the National Trust – support the demand, and the ruling Labour Party in Brighton, as well as in neighbouring towns, has been won over.

The Labour Party's environment policy document "In Trust for Tomorrow" speaks of the need for new National Parks. And the Party has proposed a new "freedom to roam" law on "open land" – heath, moor, down, wood, riverside and coast.

Rural opposition

Activists face, however, the near-united opposition of rural-based District Councils, Parish Councils and farming oriented organisations.

Whereas these rural networks are quick to respond to any proposals which imply access improvements or planning constraints on farming, environmental activists have to construct their support slowly and laboriously amongst urban commu-

nities which are not familiar with the countryside or confident in asserting their rights.

A further measure, though, of the resonance of Downland conservation issues locally was given in the recent successful campaign against the destruction of a chalk grassland "site of special scientific interest" near Lewes.

Campaigners physically blocked the ploughing of the site, set up camp on the endangered ground, and in a highly creative piece of direct action, set about systematically "unploughing" the grassland by turning back the turfs.

Their furious national campaign of lobbying forced Gummer, in one of his last acts as Environment Minister, to slap a Nature Conservation Order on the rogue farmer.

Land Reform

It is now 50 years since the issue of rural land reform has been seriously debated in this country. Till that time land reformers clearly linked rural land reform with the urban problems of rack renting, congestion and slum landlordism. The marginalisation of working class people in the countryside has destroyed the possibility of such alliances in the present.

Yet the need for social ownership and democratic management of the countryside is as great now as it was then, though the issues have changed. Our demands now must link questions of social equality and democracy with environmental imperatives.

Only with social ownership of land have we the tools to sustain the biological richness of our countryside, to produce food sustainably and healthily, and to satisfy people's deep recreational and cultural needs. And the social alliances we need to construct to reclaim our countryside will this time have to be firmly urban in their focus.

We can learn from the modest successes of Brighton activists. Only the broadest, most vociferous campaigning, linked firmly to urban needs, will stand a chance of holding the Labour government to even its small manifesto commitments for countryside reform.

Underground revolt wins grassroots support

THE RESISTANCE of the protesters at Manchester Airport, dug deep in their tunnels has not only had sympathetic media coverage but tapped into a deep and growing vein of support for environmental campaigning amongst ordinary people.

In Manchester many who have not been in a position to join those activists in the tunnels have never the less protested in support of their aims.

The April fool's joke was that Swampy was to stand against the hated Graham Stringer in the General Election: had he done so he would have undoubtedly won a wide swathe of support. Not only is ex-Council leader Stringer one of the prime advocates of the second runway, but he has gained further contempt by his vicious attacks on the campaigners.

The Coalition against Runway 2 (CAR2) points out that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says we must reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the UK by over 90 per cent "to avoid potentially catastrophic consequences from climate change".

Aircraft emit 35-65 per cent more carbon dioxide than even cars per passenger kilometre. Seven

eighths of current business passenger flights from Manchester Airport are within the UK. A second runway with the projected extra passengers is estimated to increase local road traffic by more than 100 per cent.

Stringer pledges that "£1 million a week will be spent between now and 2005 on tarmac and terminals". It is estimated that the eviction of Swampy and his friends from the A30 widening scheme at Fairmile in Devon cost £200 per minute. There was only one occupied tunnel there, and the evictions were over in a week.

The assault on the camps at Manchester has already taken far longer than that as the protesters have learnt from previous battles. The money spent both on the runway and the evictions could be much better spent on services like health care and education that people really need.

Contact CAR2, Manchester Friends of the Earth office, One World Centre, 6 Mount St, Manchester M2 5NS tel: 0161-834-8221 fax: 0161-834-8187.

Five years after the fine promises of Rio summit

More hype than hope?



B.Skanthakumar

FIVE years ago this month a gigantic jamboree popularly known as the "Earth Summit" assembled in Rio de Janeiro. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development as it is properly called was surrounded by all manner of hopes and all kind of hype.

It was hailed as the event to save our planet.

Certainly well before the official summit assembled none of the grey suits in attendance were in any doubt as to the expectations placed in them. Ecological consciousness and concern was not the preserve of alternative life-style "cranks" or alienated youth but was generalised across and within divided societies.

Non-governmental organisations proselytised and mobilised in force believing that with good and the majority on their side their arguments for stronger, speedier, more radical measures would carry the day.

However governments and big business had in the run up to the Conference weeded out anything that might in George Bush's telling phrase, "endanger the American way of life". Then US President Bush made this comment in response to demands for a redistribution of wealth and resource use away from rich countries.

In addition to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Climate Change Convention and the Bio-Diversity Convention, a framework for environmental policy within countries known as Agenda 21 was hammered out.

All these documents contain important and serious contributions which were weakened by the absence of timetables for implementation, targets for achievement and sufficient funds.

Progressive rhetoric was undermined by capitulation to free market nostrums and the unrestricted reach of transnational capital which reduces nature to commodities and trades in plant and animal genes.

The Climate Change Convention and its fate is a case in point. What scientists have proved and millions of others know is that global warming is taking place.

But no-one really knows what the long term consequences could be if this is not halted. Already many storms, floods, drought, avalanches and heat waves are blamed on climate change.

We certainly know that the polar ice-caps will melt and that sea levels will rise. This could easily flood entire countries like the Maldives, low-lying parts of Bangladesh and other vast areas - mainly in the poorest parts of the world.

The increase in emission of gases like carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide largely through the burning of fossil fuels like oil and gas in industrial processes is the cause of the problem.

Twenty five per cent of the global population living in rich countries account for 75 per cent of all carbon emissions.

In a 1990 survey showed the United States as the largest single source of emissions followed by the European Union and then Eastern



Empty Shell promises mask Peru pollution

Amid great publicity Royal Dutch Shell recently incorporated a commitment to human rights and sustainable development in its statement of business principles though at its recent shareholders meeting it rejected transparency through external audits.

However Shell has recently come under attack for its activities in Peru.

Here they are preparing to drill for natural gas but are accused of disrupting the lives and livelihoods of the inhabitants.

While Shell claims to have drawn up an eco and community friendly strategy for their drilling operations (which will include a 500 kms long pipeline built to the capital Lima) locals believe that they are less than sincere in its im-

plementation.

For a start it doesn't appear to have fully informed and consulted with those affected about its plans. The compensation that has been offered for the occupation of hunting lands is pitifully small. Some agreements have been signed in their English language original without translation. When drilling starts in July the problems will really begin.

The burning of excess natural gas into the atmosphere (gas flaring) will become as common a sight as it is in Ogoniland, Nigeria.

Waste substances brought to the surface will apparently be re-injected into the earth below the water table. There is no guarantee that it won't leak into the water supply.

Shell's fine words have yet to be matched by its deeds in Peru.

Europe. In recent years carbon emissions have declined in Eastern Europe because of the deindustrialisation and ravaging of their economies.

The major "commitment" made by advanced capitalist countries at Rio was to restore carbon emissions to their 1990 level by the year 2000. They promised to stabilise but not significantly reduce their emissions.

This failure was to be the key point of contention at the follow-up conference in Berlin in 1995. There, small island states pressed for timetables and targets beyond 2000. In particular they asked rich countries to achieve a 20 per cent reduction on 1990 levels by 2005.

No action was taken on this and further negotiation postponed to the December 1997 conference in Tokyo.

There is a desperate need to re-think the way production and consumption is organised and to switch from reliance on fossil fuels to renewable and cleaner sources of energy.

But this was precisely the sort of

thing George Bush was so desperate to avoid. After all, he did make his fortune in the oil business. What rich countries are doing is shifting the burden onto poor countries using "global cost-benefit analysis" and arguing that climate change should be managed and not reversed.

They say that the "right" for countries to emit carbon gases should be in proportion to the contribution to global wealth of national income as measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The larger the GDP, the larger the allowance made for carbon emissions. Poor countries with smaller GDPs obviously lose out here.

Meanwhile under a scheme or perhaps scam known as "joint implementation" a country which finances another's environmental project, leading to a reduction in the recipient's carbon emissions, can credit that amount and maintain or increase its own carbon emissions accordingly!

One of the working groups of the Panel on Climate Change recently

presented another illustration of the extension of cost-benefit analysis. The harm of global warming including the loss of human life, they suggested, could also be calculated through valuing the contribution of humans as a proportion of their contribution to GDP.

An individual in western Europe - a resident of a rich country - earning a real income many times larger than a person in a poor country makes a greater contribution to global prosperity and through premature loss of life would have a more adverse impact on the global economy!

The economists on the working group (could it have been anyone else?) proceeded in an obscene exercise to value a human life in the west at one million pounds and a human life in say China at one hundred thousand pounds.

Ten to one That is where things are at the moment. All this and much more will be rehearsed again in Tokyo.

No decisive action is being taken by offending countries because it is simply not in the interests of the rich and powerful there. Neither scientific advice nor rational briefing papers and cocktail parties will shake them.

The environmental movement in Britain used to have a slogan, "Neither Red nor Blue but Green". That was not an intellectual breakthrough but an evasion. It is not the ignorance or intransigence of a few but the logic of capitalism that is hurtling humanity to ruin.

It is not only the lobbying of non-governmental organisation but the organisation and movement of the majority that will alter that course.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the environmental movement which reminded us of nature and the ambivalences towards technology and "progress" in our nineteenth century forebears like William Morris.

Will the environmental movement remember the question of class - and support the right one?

Ecuador fightback

INDIGENOUS peoples in Ecuador have been at the forefront of popular mobilisations in recent years. Their grievances are common ones ranging from fair wages to bilingual education.

Land ownership is extremely unequal. In the highlands 1.6 per cent of farms occupy 43 per cent of the land and on the coast 3.9 per cent of the farms occupy 55 per cent of the land.

In 1994 the Ecuadorian Congress passed a bill called the Agrarian Development Law which sought to reform land-holdings by eroding communal ownership in favour of private property. This would have accelerated the concentration of land.

Indigenous groups and peasant farmers led mass protests against the new law forcing the government to make some significant concessions.

In the Amazonian region of Oriente, indigenous groups have been protesting for dec-

ades about the invasion and despoliation of their lands by oil companies.

At the end of the 1980s it was estimated that 450,000 barrels of crude oil had been spilled or leaked on the soil and into waterways.

While the main culprit was the US company Texaco, the state owned PetroEcuador is no better.

The oil industry has deforested one million hectares of forest, introduced disease and eroded indigenous culture.

It is now being confronted about this within Ecuador and abroad, in the forests, on the streets and in courts of law.

The invisibility of the indigenous is being challenged and Ecuador is faced with demands for ethnic and cultural diversity and a pluralistic state.

These communities have become political actors in a system which has historically excluded them.

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 faces widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

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

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

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence. Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

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

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

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

By simultaneously building 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.



Political thriller with no politics: Eastwood in *Absolute Power*

Absolute Hokum

Absolute Power, the new film by Clint Eastwood - reviewed by Brian Gardner

COINCIDENTALLY, Clint Eastwood's new film as producer, director and star is released here in the same week that has seen Paula Jones win the right for her claim of sexual harassment against Bill Clinton to be heard.

Absolute Power takes as its starting point the adultery of Alan Richmond (a fictional president of the United States played by Gene Hackmann) with the young wife of his octogenarian friend and financial backer, Walter Sullivan.

Eastwood plays Luther Whitney, decorated hero of the Korean war and veteran cat burglar, who while breaking into Sullivan's mansion, accidentally witnesses the President's seduction of Christy Sullivan, from behind a two-way mirror. When the President's advances become too rough, Christy stabs him with a letter opener and in the resulting commotion, two secret service agents enter the room and shoot her dead.

Enter now, White House Chief of Staff - Gloria Russell - who tells the agents, Burton and Collin to sanitise the scene and make it appear that a thief has committed the murder. The three however bungle the cover-up and leave behind the bloody opener which Whitney now steals.

Whitney contacts his estranged daughter, Kate - now a successful state prosecutor - and intimates to

her that something has happened which may necessitate his re-locating on a permanent basis.

We sense that it is partly her indifference which helps him make up his mind to flee but just as he is about to do so, he witnesses a press conference given by the President in which the latter vows that he will do everything in his power to help bring his killers of the billionaire's wife to justice.

Whitney is disgusted by this and now sets out to trap the President and his accomplices.

If you think that so far the plot sounds pretty preposterous, you'd be right - and it doesn't become any more plausible.

Classic

The film is largely a vehicle for its star, with Whitney as yet another variation on a classic Eastwood type - the morally ambiguous outsider who is forced to make a choice between good and evil.

It's a character type with a long lineage - through Sergio Leone's and Eastwood's own Westerns and the Dirty Harry movies of the seventies.

Eastwood the performer doesn't need dialogue to act and sometimes a mere quizzical look or the raising of an eyebrow says something more eloquently than can a hundred words.

It seems however in this instance that Eastwood has paid less attention to the other performances and indeed, to the overall style of the piece.

Hackmann, whose own abilities are not inconsiderable, is allowed to sleepwalk through the entire film and most of the characters

seem like insubstantial entities merely revolving around the star.

We sense that in reality Eastwood knows that the plot is ridiculous and so attempts to inject some satire into the process.

To some extent the bungling threesome of Russell and the two secret service agents (Judy Davis, Scott Glenn and Dennis Haysbert) play it for laughs but mostly the comedy is insipid and doesn't go far enough.

Another problem is that while we might think we have come to see a political thriller, there is no real political context. Its not simply a matter of knowing whether President Richmond is a Democrat or a Republican.

Without in fact injecting a large dose of satire, you simply can't get away with portraying one of the most powerful figures in the world and his Chief of Staff as weak cartoon villains.

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AEEU engineers sell-out for six-county strikers

WE ARE writing to you about the bitter industrial dispute currently taking place between 270 production workers and the management of French-owned multinational car components plant Montupet.

The Montupet plant opened here in Dunmurry, Northern Ireland, amid considerable fanfare in 1989, attracted the outskirts of the West Belfast unemployment blackspot by the lure of large government subsidies.

The government-financed Industrial Development Board is believed to have provided the Montupet project with around £140 million.

Today the company is locked in an abrasive conflict with its workforce. The seeds of the dispute lie in a pay claim lodged last November for an approximate 4 per cent pay rise. When this was refused by the management, the workers balloted for limited industrial action.

Work to rule

By March the overwhelming majority of the production workers were supporting a general work to rule and occasional half day strikes. On 13 April two fitters were suspended for refusing to service machines taken over by supervisors who were breaching the terms of the work to rule. The next day the workforce walked out and began their all out action.

Management reacted to the strike action by demanding that the union (AEEU) make it clear to the workers that their strike action was wholly illegal. The Union officials immediately disowned the strikers - on the grounds that a secret postal ballot of the workforce had not been taken to authorise increased strike action.

The strikers ignored the directive from the union because the union had already fouled up in its attempt to stay within the law over the first ballot. The company used changes in its staff to say that the first ballot was null and void.

The AEEU told the strikers to return to work and promised a properly run ballot in three or four weeks time. The strikers voted to stay out because they had so little respect for the word of the AEEU official involved. A week into the strike, the same senior union official led 17 scab workers through the picket line.

Beckoning scabs

He went well beyond keeping the union on the side of the law when he made an unambiguous gesture of support for the Montupet company by standing shoulder to shoulder with the senior plant manager at the factory gate, and beckoned scabs to come forward, all in full view of the incensed strikers.

The following morning the Union issued a public statement disassociating itself from the strikers. The strikers reciprocated by tearing up their union cards. After a mass meeting the vast majority of the 270 workforce decided to continue with the strike.

On 22 April, Montupet sent out a letter offering a two year pay

deal to the strikers but this was below the original company offer that the strikers had long since rejected. The letter reminded the strikers that their dispute was illegal and that the company had the legal right to sack the entire collection of strikers. To reinforce its threat, on the very morning that the offer was made, the company sacked 20 strikers and told them they would never get their jobs back.

Hurriedly, the local SDLP MP, Joe Hendron, who had lobbied for the plant to be brought to Dunmurry, stepped in to try and bring the two sides together. A meeting was set up at the Labour Relation Association to which the strikers sent their representatives. The meeting was to be chaired by Joe Hendron, and helped along by the professional negotiators of the LRA.

The Montupet management never turned up to the meeting. While the strikers' delegates sat twiddling their thumbs at the LRA, the Montupet lawyers were busy issuing 26 writs against the strike leaders. The company lodged a legal suit alleging £4 million in damages against the strike leaders and obtained an injunction preventing 26 workers from approaching the picket line.

Joe Hendron felt humiliated by the Montupet management and accused them of an "outrageous" breach of faith with him.

On Thursday 8 May, the strikers were told that they were being given one final chance to return to work or face the sack. About 30 workers took fright and went back to work the next morning but the majority refused to be intimidated.

New deal

That afternoon, the AEEU announced that it had agreed a new pay deal with the company on behalf of the scab workers and made another call for the strikers to return to work. The workers refused to abandon the 20 sacked workers despite the coaxing of the union.

It was then discovered how the Montupet company was managing to stay in reduced production. It was secretly using a skeleton crew from one or other of its European plants, probably from France but maybe from Spain.

The company shows no inclination to reinstate the sacked workers and in fact is threatening to replace the entire workforce. It is recruiting a new workforce through a private agency.

The company is proceeding with its court action. On 15 May it issued a public statement boasting that seven strike leaders who the company said have infringed the court injunction would be in prison by next week.

Although the strikers are up against it, they are sticking by their sacked comrades. They realise the company is out to break them. They feel bitterly betrayed by the AEEU and have all sworn to have nothing to do with the union ever again.

The strikers are receiving no union strike pay and are in need of donations. But what they also need is contacts with and solidarity from the workers in other Montupet plants and solidarity from workers generally.

* Rush messages and cheques, payable to Montupet Strike Committee, to Jeff McClay, 41 Queens Rd, Parkhall, Antrim, BT41 1AL.



FEEDBACK

Send us your letters on any topic, to PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU. Letters over 400 words may have to be edited for length.

Work: time to rethink?

KEITH Sinclair's review of Anne Grey's pamphlet "The Rights of the Unemployed" touches on the validity of the demand for full employment.

It is time for the left to reassess the validity of this demand, both as a means of envisioning an alternative society and as a tool for mobilising unemployed and employed in a common struggle against poverty and social exclusion.

Firstly, the call for full employment ignores the quality and pur-

pose of work. It will hardly inspire those who have only experienced dead-end, low-paid work.

Secondly, it attaches a positive connotation to work which is at odds with most people's experience under capitalism.

Thirdly, it is sometimes taken to imply an element of conscription. Fourthly, it implies a definition of employment which excludes unpaid domestic work and constructive social activity outside the labour market.

Work offers two things under

capitalism, an income and social contact. In some cases it offers limited scope for personal development and job fulfilment, but this is constrained by the work lack of control over her/his work process and product.

Socialists need to popularise a set of demands which respond to the needs of both the unemployed (for economic security, social contact and meaningful work) and over-employed (for greater leisure time without financial loss), for example:

* A guaranteed basic income for everybody.

* Work sharing without loss of pay.

* Redefinition of employment to include housework, childcare and voluntary work, and proper pay and conditions for this work.

* Shifting responsibility for work out of the home into the social sphere.

* The abolition of socially destructive work and its replacement with socially useful work, under worker and community control.

Adam Hartman
Manches

Tory collapse, not Labour landslide

Socialist Outlook seems to be swallowing New Labour's victory much too easily. Three important features of the results have been overlooked.

First, the biggest electoral shift was not more Labour votes but a dramatic collapse in Tory votes. Compared to the 1992 general election, the Tories won five million fewer votes: one and a half times the number of votes won over by Labour. Labour's share of the vote is still less than it averaged in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Conservatives usually governed.

Secondly, Labour failed to win a majority of votes yet won two-thirds of the seats. This is entirely a product of our undemocratic electoral system.

Roughly speaking the Tories got

2 votes for every 3 Labour votes yet won only 1 MP for every 3 Labour MPs. The scale of Labour's victory was certainly down to New Labour's "Operation Victory".

Labour targeted the 70,000 people in marginal seats who actually decide which party rules.

Thirdly, the vote for socialist candidates who ran against Labour was actually quite good. Socialist candidates stood in one in seven constituencies, winning 75,683 votes. On average, Socialist Labour won 1.85 per cent, the Scottish Socialist Alliance won 1.83 per cent and even the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) won 1.21 per cent.

For first attempts, these results compare well with long established left parties elsewhere in Europe. The SLP and SSA fared better than

many of the north European communist, Green and New Left parties during the 1980s, prior to the Berlin Wall.

Far from weakening the ability of social democracy to defeat right parties, socialist election campaigns actually increase and sustain the force of centre vote.

In terms of European election one-party monopoly on left of centre votes aids the right, because disunionism in that single party pressed in elections as support for the right.

Elsewhere, a range of parties on the working class and progressive movements means that voters turn away from one party tend to within the same camp, rather swinging over to the right.

Duncan Chaffin

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Specialist OUTLOOK

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Tough on services: tough on the users of services

New Labour – new cutbacks!

THE HONEYMOON was over before it even started. It took just three weeks of a Labour government to achieve the seemingly impossible: in Oxfordshire the *Tory* Party has produced car window stickers (on blue paper) demanding "STOP THE CUTS"!

The Tories have jumped aboard a bandwagon that unites all of the main political parties in Oxfordshire against John Prescott and the new Labour government, after Prescott opted to uphold the Tory "cap" on council spending for the three counties which had asked permission to spend more.

It's a case of New Labour No Difference for those campaigning in defence of vital public services. While David Blunkett and his colleagues prate on about standards in schools, Oxfordshire children face even larger classes in a fifth successive year of education cuts.

"Reasonable" cuts

Blair's deputy prime minister pronounced the Tory cash limits to be "reasonable", despite the fact that they mean additional cuts of £6m in Oxfordshire – on top of a £14m cuts package already being forced through, axing almost every area of council services from school budgets, social services and road repairs to the already decimated arts and leisure budget.

The councils were not asking for any more money from central government, only for Labour to carry out its promise to end the capping of council spending, and allow democratically elected councillors to decide the level of council tax.



Stainrad O'Neill

Fighting council cuts: New Labour is now committed to uphold Tory spending cap, threatening jobs and services

But thanks to John Prescott, the county council could be required to refund the princely sum of 54p per week to each Oxfordshire Band D council tax payer, in exchange for sacking more teachers, and closing the school meals service (axing almost 1,000 jobs), closing up to 15 libraries, and closing old people's homes. Smaller, similar cuts will be im-

posed on the other two counties, Somerset and Warwickshire.

Campaigners are pressing Oxfordshire councillors to push the issue to the limits, by appealing against Prescott's ruling, forcing the final decision to a vote in Parliament. But few of Labour's new MPs seem likely to stick their necks out and vote to defy the deputy prime minister's Tory policy.

The continued clamp on council spending is just one glaring example of New Labour's indifference to the defence of public services and the welfare state. The apparent "radicalism" of the first 30 days in office has been strictly confined to window-dressing and gestures rather than the bread and butter concerns of working people, pensioners and

the unemployed.

Blunkett has set out to antagonise teaching unions, promoting the hated OFSTED boss, Tory appointee Chris Woodhead [the subject of a unanimous vote of no confidence by the National Association of Head Teachers conference] to the forefront of his crusade for educational standards, while offering not a penny extra to enable "failing" schools

to retrain teachers, reduce class sizes or improve conditions.

Frank Dobson, Health Secretary, won a standing ovation from the servile Royal College of Nursing for boasting that Labour will be as tough as the Tories on NHS pay. Labour's pre-election promises to sweep away the internal market and GP fund-holding have been postponed to the dis-

tant future: the promised halt to hospital closures in London has been dropped. The only legislation on the NHS will be a Bill to encourage more private firms to invest in lucrative NHS development projects.

Meanwhile health authorities and Trusts, squeezed by last November's spending freeze, are contemplating massive cash deficits and draconian cuts, making a

nonsense of Labour's claims that they will cut waiting lists..

Oxfordshire health authority, £8m in the red this year, has cut back on all non-urgent operations and is warning that local Trusts could run out of money to pay wages.

Millions of pensioners struggle on in poverty, the unemployed face increased harassment under the Jobseekers Allowance, and higher education is convulsed an another round of cuts, triggering disputes like the 5-week strike at Southwark College.

Disaster

One month of New Labour is already enough to show that it threatens disaster for working people.

It doesn't have to be like this. A Labour government with a 179-seat majority could easily find the money to rescue and improve the welfare state.

Instead of a government tough on services, tough on the users of services, Labour should be looking to implement some of the many ways they can raise money for welfare spending without taxing individual workers.

A tax on the turnover of multinationals, or on the speculative dealings in the City of London, could deliver billions to fund the services we need and deserve.

This summer's union conferences and Labour conference must break free from the mindless euphoria of the election victory and focus on the fight to make the new Labour government deliver a real break from the old Tory policies.

Fight Labour's Tory policies!