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socialist OUTLOOK

Tories in crisis

Don't wait for Kinnock!



PHOTO: John Harris (IFL)

Just seven months after the Tories got rid of Thatcher, just a couple of months after saying the Poll Tax will go, the Tories are in deep crisis again.

Not only are Labour 10 points ahead in the opinion polls, but the Tories are beset by a deep recession, rocketing unemployment and a new faction-fight with Thatcher and Ridley over Europe.

Unlike the early 1980s unemployment is hitting deep in the Tories' southern heartlands. NHS cuts are deeply unpopular. Even small businesses are complaining about the exorbitant interest rates being charged by the banks. Many Tory MPs are beginning to confess that the game is up, and they will probably lose the next election.

The Tories never had majority support from the electorate in all their 13 years in office. Their difficulties will be greeted with glee by millions. But, faced with the new attack of unemployment, wage restraint, huge

cuts in the NHS and local government, the answer is not to sit back and wait for action from an increasingly complacent Kinnock.

Though he is basking in the reflected glory of a new anti-Tory mood in the electorate, it is quite clear that if Kinnock is elected he will do nothing to reverse the Tories' worst measures – including privatisation or the cuts in public services. The 'new model' Labour Party offers nothing new. Its leaders have learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the failures and betrayal of the Wilson governments of the 1960s and 1970s. Resistance has to be built *now*.

The lessons of the early 1980s, when the unions did little to resist unemployment, have to be learnt. The labour movement must raise the demands for work sharing with no loss of pay, for a shorter working week, and occupations to resist closures. Waiting for Kinnock will not stop the effects of the recession pushing unemployment up to 3.5 million, and making deep inroads in living standards.

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Fighting mood at NALGO conference

By Eve Turner (Ealing NALGO) and Doug Thorpe (Islington)

Last week's NALGO conference showed a rising anger at attacks on public services and a growing recognition of the need for national campaigning to defeat them. On several important issues, for example defiance of the trade union laws, the 2000 delegates inflicted defeats on the National Executive (NEC). But the NEC held the line against the left on the crucial issue of national strike action to defend local government and the NHS.

After five years of job losses among local government manual workers, white collar workers face massive cutbacks. Already thousands of jobs have been lost, mainly through voluntary redundancy and redeployment. In the next five years up to 30 per cent of NALGO's 500,000 local government workers face the sack.

On the first day of conference a resolution from Ealing local government branch calling for national strike action to defeat the cuts was defeated by about 3:2. The NEC were able to caricature this resolution as calling for one 'big bang' strike to defeat the cuts. After years of no lead from the NEC, and branches having to fight in isolation, many delegates

doubted their ability to deliver strike action.

But the disquiet of delegates was reflected in the adoption of the call for a recall meeting of local government delegates in September, when the national strategy for fighting the cuts will be reviewed. A national demonstration against cuts was also decided.

During the conference the government announced plans to privatise the majority of local government services run by NALGO members. The complacency of the NEC was shown by its failure to mention this fact until Islington branch demanded a statement. Whether or not NALGO's leadership really intends to fight this attack remains to be seen.

Resolutions for national strike action against NHS cuts also fell, but a day of national solidarity with the sacked 34 Oldham hospital records clerks was agreed for 5 July, as well as a national demonstration against attacks on the NHS.

Most time at the conference was spent on the proposed merger with NUPE and COHSE. Many delegates, supported by the left, expressed concern at whether the new union would retain NALGO's relatively open and democratic structures, including branch autonomy and financing. Twenty eight amendments to the NEC's document were passed to ensure democracy in the new union.

The NEC got a shock when the final debate of conference revealed a huge majority to censure them for bending to the Tory anti-union laws in Liverpool. NALGO's executive instructed the Liverpool branch not to go on a one-day strike after the council got an injunction against branch secretary Judy Cotter. Although the NEC instruction was ignored by Liverpool workers, the conference went out of its way to condemn the NEC for its action. The implication of the vote is that NALGO will conduct 'business as usual' by defying the anti-union laws in such

cases. This is the most radical position on the anti-union laws adopted by any union.

The strength of radicalism in NALGO was also shown by the resolution passed on Palestine, calling for economic sanctions against Israel for ignoring UN resolutions on Palestinian rights. Throughout the conference strong support was shown for the struggle of council workers in Liverpool and for workers like those in Oldham defying attacks on the NHS.

This summer NALGO faces a tough battle on local government pay. The employers have offered 6.1 per cent, way below the 12 per cent or £9333 minimum demanded by NALGO. Negotiations on 10 July are unlikely to see much movement from the employers. If national strike action on pay becomes necessary it will be a hard fight. The NEC will do everything they can to negotiate a compromise of about 7 per cent to head it off.

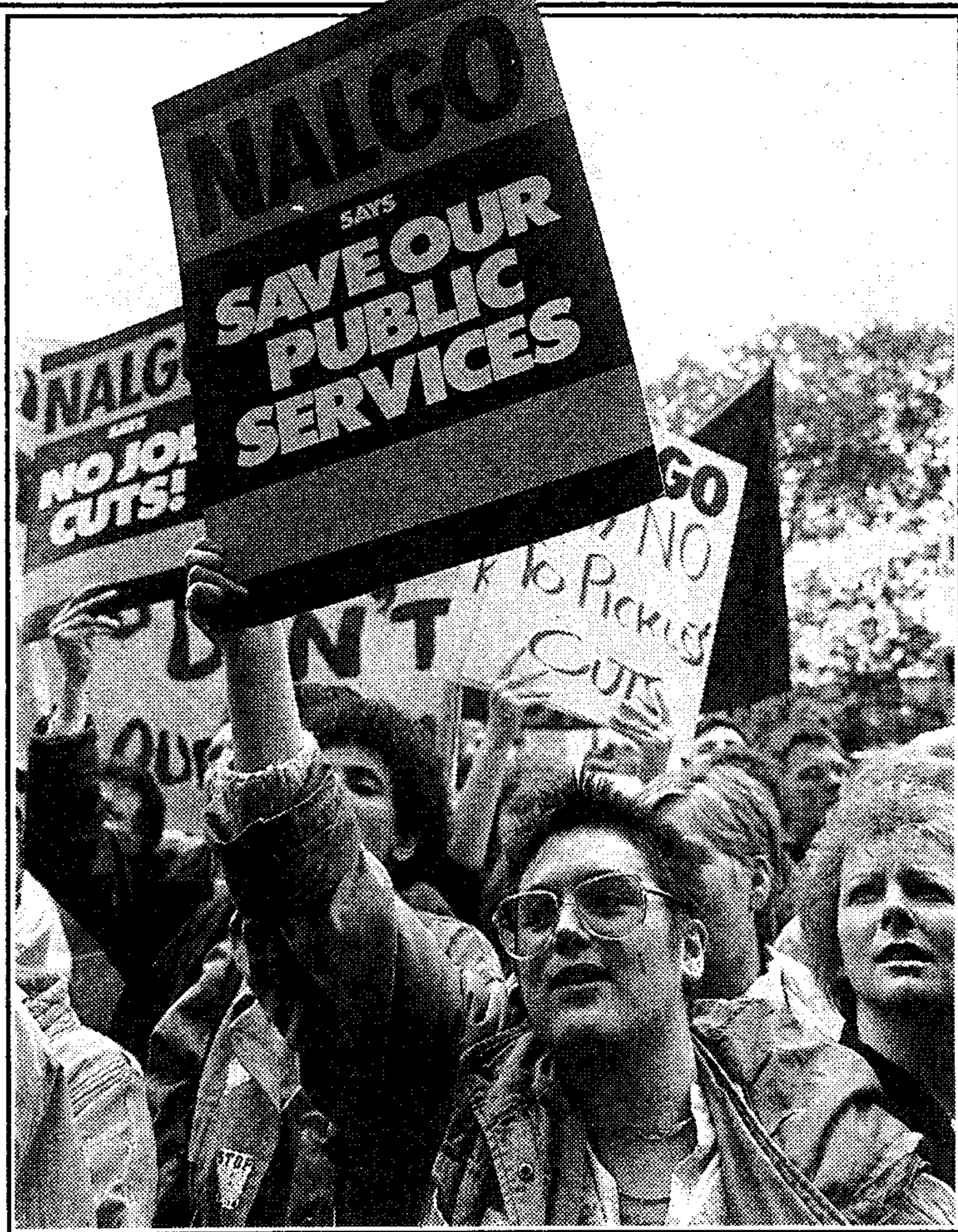
On many social and international issues NALGO is way to the left of other unions; and much of the union takes a militant stand on issues of pay,

cuts and redundancies. But NALGO's powerful left has yet to translate this radicalism into an effective fight for leadership of the union, or into the kind of action which would really defend jobs and services.

For that, the left needs to build a fighting unity. Currently this is prevented by the frontist antics of the SWP which controls the laughably named 'Broad Left'. The main Broad Left meeting of the conference was turned into a forum for denouncing people for being in the Labour Party. The SWP's November *putsch* to seize control of the Broad Left followed several years of battles with Militant, who also used it as a front organisation. It remains to be seen whether Militant have really learnt the lessons of this type of front politics.

NALGO needs a democratic fighting left which really organises against the right wing, and fights to win leadership. Strathclyde branch has called a national meeting of branches to debate a fightback against cuts, and this should be supported. But NALGO needs a more permanent democratic left organisation.

During the conference 100 copies of *Socialist Outlook* were sold and 70 people attended a fringe meeting organised by the paper. 50 supporters helped to organise successful fringe meetings on the campaign against third world debt, and against anti-union laws.



John Harris (FL)

Trades Councils organise against TUC bureaucracy

by Sam Stacey

After last year's TUC Congress, the General Council pushed through a cost-cutting package which included an attack on Trades Councils, that was a political rather than financial measure.

They wound up the annual conference of Trades Councils, the County Associations, and the committee which brought together their representatives with the TUC General Council (the TCJCC). So great has been the groundswell against their action, that the campaign to reinstate these bodies is close to winning a majority of unions. This year's 'illegal' conference took place in Manchester, bringing together more than 150 delegates. From the discussions it was clear that while they may be struggling to survive, most have been active in opposing the Poll tax and the Gulf war.

It was an important and democratic conference. The central debate focussed on the question of how to reverse the decisions of the TUC and restore the bodies which they had dissolved, but without the bureaucratic control that the TUC had long exercised.

In his closing remarks, chair

Alan Duxbury stated that they were not prepared to allow the 'dead hand' of the TUC to prevent a democratic conference in the future. The significance of this was evident from the debate on policies - virtually every resolution carried conflicted with TUC policy.

Resolutions on the Poll Tax, Ireland, the anti-union laws and the Gulf war reflected the fact that where Trades Councils act as a campaigning force, they are overwhelmingly outside the legal remit which the TUC 'allows' them.

The co-ordinating committee of Trades Councils, the TCJCC, are confident of winning the vote at the TUC Congress. However, they pledged to continue to organise even if the vote were to be lost. Whatever the manoeuvres of the TUC, it is clear that the Trades Council movement will continue, with or without their blessing.

There is now a need for a clear perspective for breaking the TUC's stranglehold. The aim should be autonomy within the TUC, whereby an annual conference could elect its own executive, set its own agenda, and elect its own delegates to the TUC congress and General Council.

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Building workers fight bosses' union

by Alan Thornett

BATTLES continue in the construction industry following the exposure of ballot rigging by the right wing in UCATT, the building workers union, and a swing to the left in the elections for the union executive.

Following the victory of the left, a dozen UCATT full time officials, including several national officials, have left the union. They are now attempting to take a section of the membership with them.

Initial moves to take them into the General and Municipal workers union, the GMB, came to nothing

after right wing defectors joined Eric Hammond's EETPU. Hammond announced that the union intended to create a construction section and begin to recruit in the industry.

The prospect of a business union intervening in the industry, in which it is traditionally hard to organise, has galvanised the UCATT leadership. The danger of Hammond striking deals with employers of the type now notorious from the engineering and printing industries is all too clear.

The construction union's leaders have now set out to build a 'unity alliance' with other building industry

unions to counter the threat of the EETPU. UCATT chairperson Peter Lenahan said 'We are trying to bring all construction unions together...to protect our agreements and the rights of building workers everywhere'.

The alliance, backed by a number of unions including the TGWU and the furniture and timber workers (FTATU), notched up a first victory when a poaching attempt by the EETPU at the Sellafield nuclear plant was thwarted. Both the company, BNFL, and plant unions refused to recognise the breakaway.

Confronting Kinnockism in Liverpool

After a lot of soul-searching the Militant-backed Liverpool Broad Left is standing its own candidate, Lesley Mahmood, against Kinnockite Peter Kilfoyle in Walton. The responsibility for there being two 'Labour' candidates in Walton lies entirely with the Kinnock camp nationally and locally.

Liverpool has been the city which has put up the biggest fight against the destruction of local government jobs and services. Kilfoyle is the local witch-finder general, hand-in-hand with the Harry Rimmer council leadership in devastating local services and driving socialists out of the Labour Party. Large sections of the local community and workforce see it as an insult that a person like Kilfoyle is the 'official' Labour candidate in Eric Heffer's seat.

Socialist Outlook did not condemn the Broad Left for standing local council candidate against imposed Labour candidates. But we warned that standing in the by-election would be full of risks and dangers for the left.

In the local elections the Broad Left was trying to change the balance of forces on the council against Rimmer and his mafia. But this by-election is a national political event. The Tories are in deep crisis; millions of people want the earliest opportunity to drive them out. Many workers, even those who hate Kinnockism and all its works, will vote for the 'official' Labour candidate to ensure that the Liberals don't win the seat. Standing Lesley Mahmood risks splitting the Labour vote and allowing the Liberals in.

There are other risks. The Mahmood candidacy has made it certain that a gigantic witch-hunt will be unleashed in Liverpool and elsewhere. Should the Liberals win, it will be incredibly difficult to resist this witch hunt.

The Broad Left has a significant base in Liverpool, but not nationally - they are *not* a credible national political alternative. Standing in the by-election, a national political event, gives a signal that they regard themselves as a national political alternative.

Despite our reservations about the Mahmood candidacy, we place the blame for there being two candidates on Kinnock and the right wing. We will defend Lesley Mahmood and her supporters against the right-wing witch hunters. But we think this candidacy is a mistake; if it blows up in the Broad Left's face, then the whole of the Labour left will pay the price.

Unlike some others on the left, we do not regard it as a matter of principle to always support 'official' Labour candidates. It is a question of tactics.

Kilfoyle is a vicious witch-hunter; but that makes him no better or worse than hundreds of Labour candidates in other constituencies who are routinely given (critical) support by marxists in elections.

In these case it is seen that a Labour vote is a class vote. By backing the Party against the Tories, we create better conditions to take the fight for a socialist alternative into the official labour movement by putting a Labour government into office and focussing workers' demands upon it.

The same logic applies to Liverpool Walton. The key task is to push the fight against the witch hunt deep into the trade unions and Labour Party, not to evade this fight by engaging in a diversionary candidacy.



PHOTO: John Harris (JFL)

Despite the passive line of Labour and the TUC, Kinnock is ahead in the polls - on anti Tory sentiment

Socialists for Labour

IT LOOKS as if the election will now be in 1992, but the campaign is well under way. Major calculates the Tories have no chance of winning this year and is hoping against hope that the economy will turn round by next June. It is probably a forlorn hope. Despite getting rid of the poll tax and Margaret Thatcher, Labour's lead in the polls is building.

If ever there was an opinion poll lead built by default, this is it. The official leadership of the Labour Party and the labour movement in general have put up nil fight against the Tory

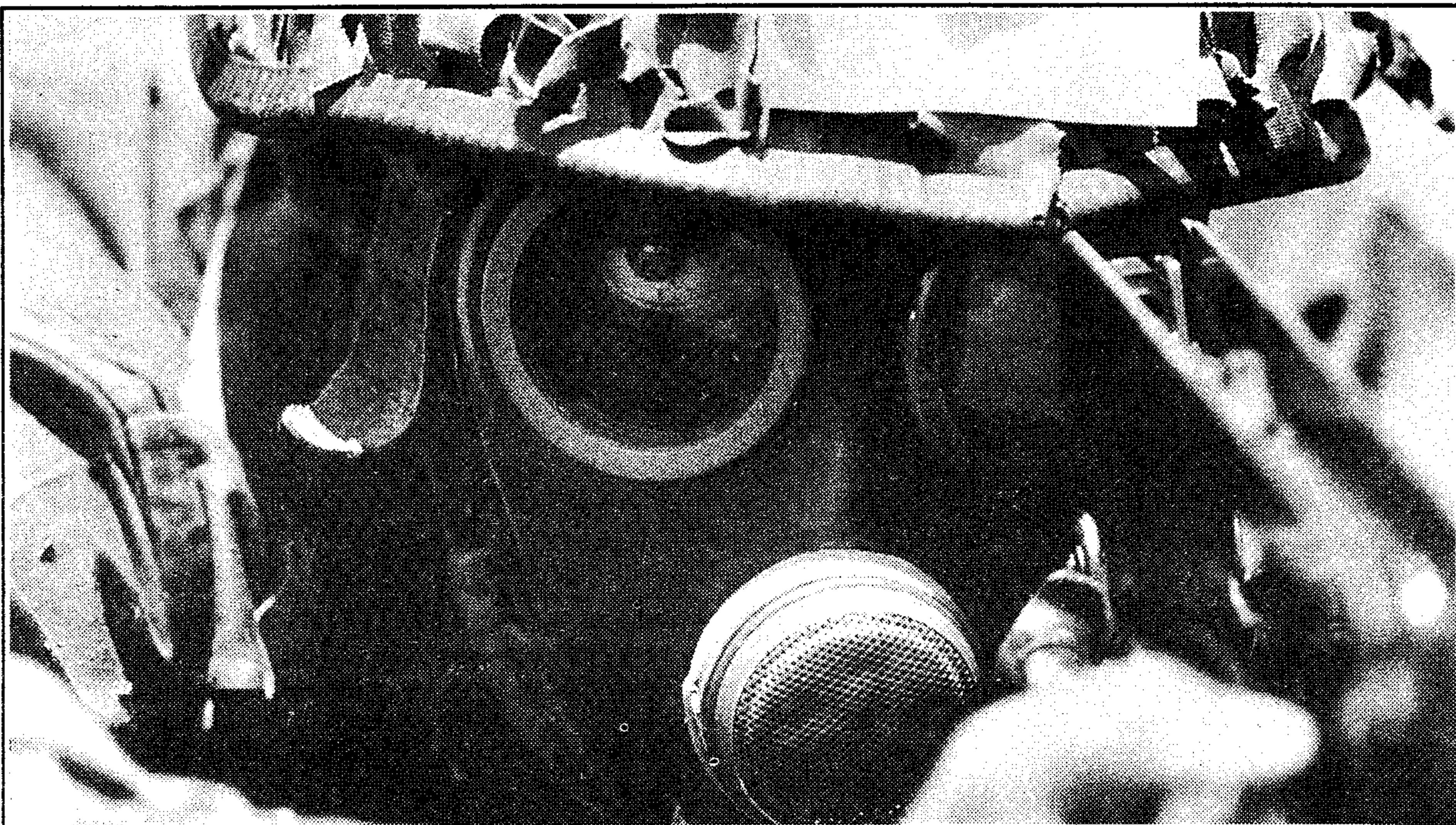
attacks. They promise no significant reforms if they come to power, with the sole exception of a national minimum wage. They do not intend to reverse the 'Thatcher revolution' of privatisation and cuts in benefits and services to workers. A Kinnock government will be the most right wing Labour government ever.

For all that Kinnock offers nothing to the working class, a Labour victory in the next election is vital. Three terms of Tory rule have done grave damage to the labour movement and its ability to defend working class interests.

While a Kinnock victory won't automatically mean an immediate working class fightback, it will create a completely new mood of expectation and self-confidence. Conflict between a Kinnock government and the base of the labour movement would break out in short order.

Socialists have to do what they can to ensure a Labour victory, and prepare, here and now, to maximise on the new mood of combativity it would create. Socialists have to use the long election campaign to put forward their own policies and proposals, to maximise the opposition to Kinnockism in the unions and the Labour Party. For this reason Labour Party Socialists has launched *Socialists for Labour* as a socialist campaign for a Labour victory. *Socialist Outlook* encourages its readers to build this campaign as broadly as possible.

*Copies of the 'Socialists for Labour' statement and sponsorship forms can be obtained from 1 Gorefield House, Canterbury Rd., London NW6 5TA.



The grisly face of imperialism at war in the Gulf

Whose victory?

AFTER the grotesque chest-beating 'victory' parades in Washington and New York, London is being treated, this weekend, to its own dose of imperial flag-waving. The whole affair is sick. The aftermath of the Gulf war can only be regarded as a victory by a political system devoid of civilised values.

What exactly is the balance-sheet of the Gulf war? Iraq is devastated, and its people facing hunger and disease. Saddam Hussein is still in power, ready to unleash a new murderous onslaught on the Kurds and Shi'as, as Western troops pull out. Hundreds of thousands have died in is an obscene spectacle of high-tech butchery. That is a victory only for those steeped in racist imperial ideology, for people who give thanks for the safety of Western multinational

corporations and the poverty and suffering of millions.

At the end of the Gulf war, the US military entertained itself by slaughtering tens of thousands of Iraqi conscripts as they fled Kuwait. Cluster-bombed, napalmed, fuel-air bombed, they - like tens of thousands of others in the war - suffered terrifying, cruel deaths to demonstrate America's might. The Kurds, the Iraqis and Palestinians in Kuwait are still suffering.

So when you see this sick celebration on TV, remember what is being glorified. Not just war, but the morality of the big stick, the morality of racism, the morality of those who want to keep the third world in bondage.

*Details of events protesting the victory parade are on page 14.

Tory reform threat to colleges

John Major recently announced the Tories' plans for the most far-reaching changes in post-school education for many years. Starting in 1993 the distinction between polytechnics, colleges of higher education and universities is to go. Colleges of further education will, like polytechnics were in 1989, be removed from local authority control and funded centrally.

Polytechnics are clearly seen by the Tories as the model for the whole post-school sector. CLIVE ANDREWS looks at how this massive restructuring has affected the poly sector, particularly since 1989, and shows what the Tories' latest plans will really mean for college education as a whole.

The most obvious feature of the last decade has been the escalating attack on staff and student conditions. Student to staff ratios rose on average from 8.4 to 1 in 1979/80 to 12.4 to 1 in 1986/87. Now they are much higher and getting worse.

Brighton Poly claims that its ratio will have to rise from the current 15 to 1 to over 20 to 1 in the mid 1990s in order to balance the books. It could face a £17 million deficit by 1995 unless staffing levels are cut by a third. It is already cutting part-time staff and lecturers on fixed-term contracts.

The cause of the crisis? The system of competitive bidding for funds introduced in the Education Reform Act (1989). Polys are allocated funds for courses on the basis of running them cheaply. At Oxford Poly

some lecture courses now have over 400 students.

Employers have responded by trying to impose new contracts on poly lecturing staff. This led to two industrial disputes last year. While the resulting new contract is marginally better than the first, it still allows for significant increases in teaching loads. Meanwhile the threat of competitive tendering is constantly used against cleaning, caretaking and catering staff.

Polys are being privatised from the inside. The shortfall in government funding is made up increasingly from students being accepted on a fee-paying basis, from Britain and abroad.

Staff who recruit these students are in effect running private educational businesses within polys. They obtain large fees for themselves and negotiate deals with the college

for use of facilities and for having the college's name on qualifications. Ability to bring in external funds is often a factor in new staff appraisal schemes.

The door is open for polys to become diversified businesses. Property dealing is becoming increasingly popular. One of the highest paid staff at Thames Poly is the Property Manager. As the college merges with 'less competitive' institutions in London it sells off the latter's buildings. This was attempted with South West London College but stopped by the Polytechnic and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC). Instead the PCFC closed the college leaving 200 staff facing redundancy.

Predictably outside activities that are critical of corporate interests are not favoured highly. Researchers at Sunderland Poly were pressurised into stopping an investigation into working conditions at Nissan's North-East plant. Peter Wickens, Director of Nissan, is a member of the poly's board of governors.

Any fightback in the polys will have to take on not just the cuts, but also the insidious change in the nature of polytechnics. Institutions have been forced to 'opt out' and compete against one another. In this way they present a picture of what the Tories plan for the health service and for the rest of the education system and it is not a pretty one.



Clowning around with colleges - Education Secretary Kenneth Clarke

Hypocrisy of 'equal opportunites'

Like all aspects of post-compulsory education, Return-to-Study (RTS) and Access courses are under financial and ideological attack from the Tories. DEE VOLIN, explains what this means in practice - particularly for women who make up the majority of RTS/Access students.

ACCESS courses enable mature students, without academic qualifications, to gain the skills, confidence and understanding to embark on a degree course. In the late 1980s they were hailed as the 'ultimate in equal opportunities'. The reality of such claims has melted quickly in the heat of the Tory onslaught.

Centralisation of all adult courses is now underway. The London Open College Federation (LOCF), part of the National Open College Network, has been set up to certify courses ranging from basic literacy and numeracy to A-level equivalents.

This process of centralisation parallels with the National Curriculum in schools. It operates to control and restrict subject matter. It also occupies teachers with administrative paper work, and so leaves little time to develop course content and teaching methods that can challenge traditional assumptions on race, gender and class.

Transferable credits from the LOCF mean that students can move from one college to another in the region. With the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) many hundreds of courses have applied for certification with the LOCF. Administrators and course directors realise that money follows students. To be uncertified by the LOCF will soon mean certain course closure.

Because Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are not legally mandated to provide post-compulsory education, this sector has already been subjected to devastating cuts. Nursery and creche provision has also been cut massively. As many of the women who attend RTS/Access courses also have children, this only serves to further restrict their 'access'. Many women with young children are now forced to postpone their Access/degree places until the children are in school.

Further restrictions are made through the rising cost of such courses. Since 1989 costs have risen from £2 to £20 (1000 per cent) for unwaged people. Changes in DSS regulations regarding what constitutes 'actively seeking work' have also restricted the number of people able to study. An increasing number of students struggle to find part-time work to get them through courses. Many now have to postpone their degree courses, hoping that after a period of full-time work they will have enough money to study. With rising unemployment many will be disappointed.

The hypocrisy of 'equal opportunity' Access courses is stark. It masks the exploitation of part-time women staff, the closure of outreach, education and advice centres, and falling enrolment figures. It hides the slashing of childcare provision, escalating fees, and the centralisation of adult education that results in a myriad of direct and indirect cuts.

The left has to move beyond the rhetoric of 'widening access to education'. What is needed is a coherent national campaigning policy. This has to take up the issue of student financial support. But fundamentally it has to recognise that students, teaching staff and their communities need effective control over course funding and curriculum, and not centralised elites.

Lecturers launch campaign against Tories' White Paper

by Gordon Gibson

The Tories' new white paper on post-school education is described by the Socialist Lecturers' Alliance (SLA) as being 'launched on the back of the Poll Tax and conceived on the back of a postage stamp'. It will, they say, 'sound the death knell of general education for tens of thousands of over sixteens'.

Two years ago the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) predicted 14,000 job losses in further and higher education. Along with course closures, the redundancies are now coming thick and fast.

First to go are part-time jobs. These are usually associated with adult education, special needs provisions, and traditional 'night classes'. None of

these fit in with the new philosophy of post-school education. In future, courses will only be funded if there is a job at the end.

The response of the NATHFE executive? A press statement from the General Secretary beginning with a cautious welcome to the proposals! It then laid out the NEC's strategy of amending the white paper by parliamentary lobbying. This response is 'new realist' in the extreme.

The Labour Party's attitude is an equal betrayal. If elected, they will not proceed with the legislation if it fails to reach the statute books in the next parliament. But, if it does become law, they will not repeal it!

Delegates to NATFHE's recent conference were rightly angry at this pathetic charade. Two emergency motions from the floor, condemning the

NEC's response and calling for a national campaign of action to defeat the plans, were carried with an overwhelming majority.

By winning the political debate, the SLA placed the fight against redundancies firmly in the context of the new proposals. Union branches in Sheffield and London have shown that strike action is the key tactic in fighting redundancies.

The SLA established itself at the conference as the main left opposition in the union. It immediately initiated a campaign organisation to coordinate action in the colleges. This has now evolved into the Save Adult and Further Education (SAFE) Campaign. National actions are being planned around the first reading of the bill in parliament - rumoured to be around January.

The left in NATFHE were also instrumental in making other gains at conference. The Northern Ireland Region won a change in rules to permit industrial action on a majority vote of members in branches (as opposed to a majority of the constituency). Reserved places on the National Council were won for black members. The left also won the debates over strategy for forming a single teaching union and over fighting redundancies.

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8 Milk Street,
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B5 5TS.
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- 021 554 0056 (eve.)

Morris wins top TGWU post: A victory for black workers

by Martin Anthony

The election of Bill Morris as the first black leader of a major trade union in Britain is a development of enormous importance.

Right winger George Wright was heavily defeated in a postal ballot conducted by the Electoral Reform Society. Morris won with a clear 14% lead, taking nearly half the vote. Bob Harrison and Pat Reilly, the other candidates, took less than 20% of the votes between them.

History of racism

The result is a big boost for black people, particularly in a union with a huge black membership, a history of racism in various sections, and a poor record of integrating black people into its structures. But

although I could not find evidence of the use of racism by other candidates, there were rumours that suggested otherwise.

Morris, supported by the Broad Left, fought the election as a 'Stop Wright' battle. Wright's politics were clearly revealed in his professed desire to do a deal with the non-TUC Union of Democratic Mineworkers. The result is a devastating blow to his machine, which is centred on the appointed Regional Secretaries. It is likely to stem the hard right for some time.

Right wing manoeuvres

Manoeuvres by the right-wing failed to swing the vote – even though some branches were persuaded to spend huge

sums, sending additional propaganda for the Wright campaign to members' homes.

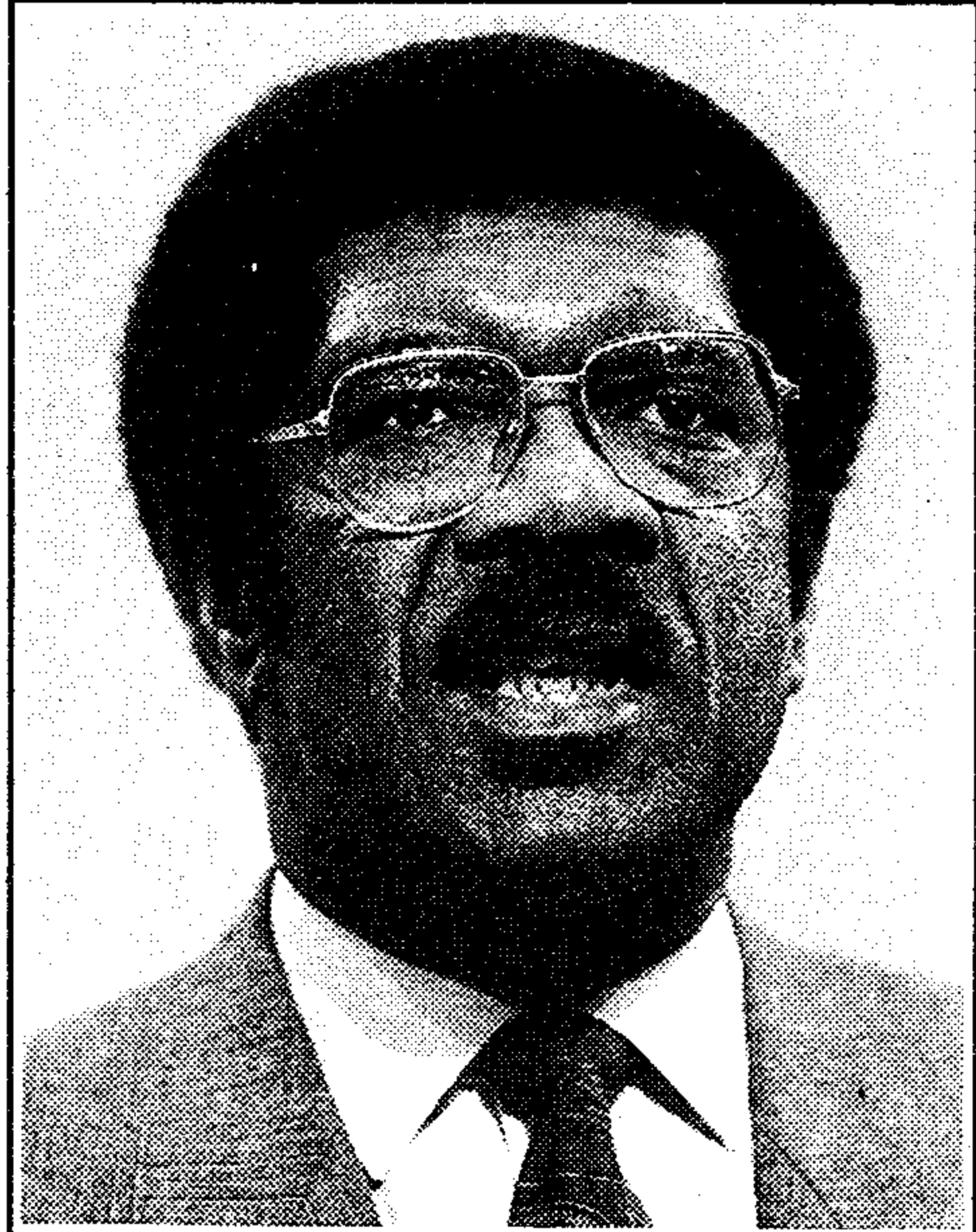
Morris, on the other hand, had the advantage of formal support from the majority of the union's national officers. His campaign was an effective one, but the key factor was rank and file hostility to the EETPU-type business unionism that Wright so clearly represented.

But despite the importance of Morris' victory, his record leaves much to be desired. This includes proposing to drop union policy of fighting 'quality circles' at the last TGWU conference, as well as backing Ron Todd's sell out of the dockers. His first statement following the election victory concentrated on future co-operation with Kinnock – hardly an encouraging sign.

Though the defeat of the right is certainly cause for celebration, Morris' policies will now have to be fought. Given the TGWU's enormous influence in the TUC and Labour Party, the politics of its General Secretary are of importance to all workers.

No left swing

Morris' victory does not swing the TGWU to the left, but rather leaves it more or less where it has been for some time – a union with a soft left leadership, within the general framework of new realism, but which challenges new realist projects on occasion.



Bill Morris

It does, however, provide the potential for a stronger development of the left in the union. This would have been considerably more difficult had George Wright won the election.

Preparing for battle on health rationing

By Harry Sloan

'We have to accept that the NHS cannot cope with demands for health care ...

'A realistic assessment of the world as it is shows that people with varicose veins stay on the waiting list for ever in London at the moment. Is it ethical to promise them a service which will never be delivered? ...

'The question is not whether we ration services and choose priorities in the health service, but who does it ...'

Who is it spelling out this version of the age-old right wing claim that health care is a 'bottomless pit' which can never be properly resourced? Is it Health Secretary William Waldegrave? A heartless NHS manager?

No, it is the lead article in the April issue of the Socialist Health Association's journal *Socialism and Health*, written by trendy 'freelance health policy researcher' Christine Hogg.

Thatcherism

It shows how far the nostrums of the Thatcherite right have penetrated the outer reaches of the labour movement.

Many SHA members will have been unpleasantly surprised by the article, after spending years combatting the 'bottomless pit' argument.

How many times have socialists had to argue against Tories and the right wing that demand for health care is measurable – and capable of being met by increased resources? A finite number of people suffer from a finite range of ailments which require a measurable amount of appropriate treatment. The problem is not that demand is infinite, but the refusal of the Tory government – and Labour governments – to allocate the necessary resources.

Most of Europe shows that where health spending is given

a greater share of GNP than Britain, it is not necessary to have a waiting list: they have bridged the 'bottomless pit', and their economies have certainly not collapsed as a result!

New realism

Ms Hogg, however, is part of a 'new realist' movement among health academics. Her article followed on the controversial decision of North East Thames Regional Health Authority (NETRHA) (which covers 3.3m people) that a list of five 'minor' operations would no longer be provided under the NHS.

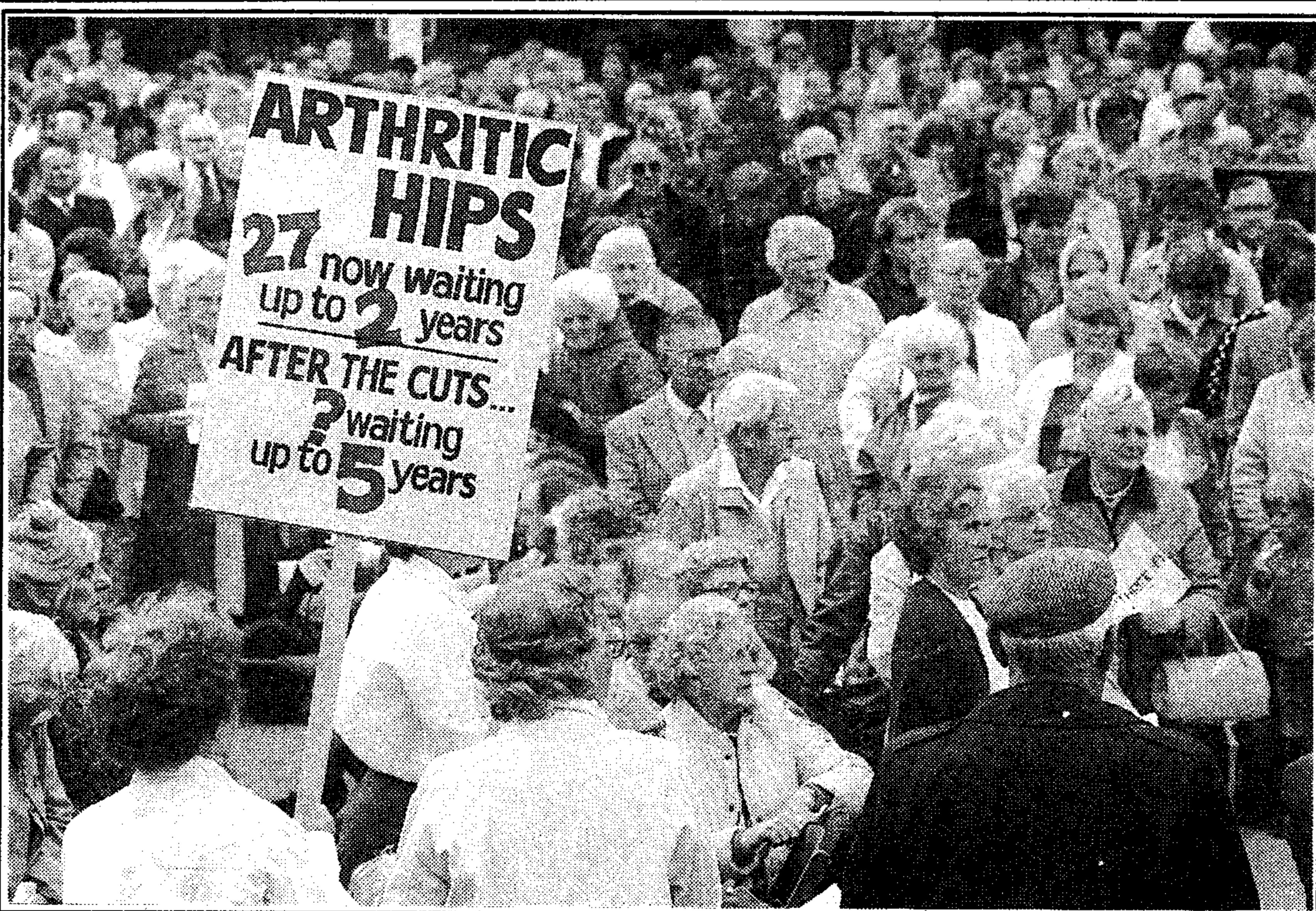
The NETRHA announcement provoked a storm of outrage. Even the *Guardian*



which broke the news editorialised in protest. The threat of a two-tier health service – with a comprehensive and up-to-date service available only to the wealthy, with a skid row service for the rest of us – was obviously beginning to become a reality.

The message was clear: if you live in NE Thames and suffer from varicose veins, need wisdom teeth extracted, suffer from 'non-malignant' lumps, want IVF fertility treatment or need tattoos removed you would have only two choices: go private, or go without.

How did Ms Hogg respond?



Protestors target hospital waiting lists: will Labour tackle the problem, or plead poverty and the need to choose 'priorities'?

'The North East Thames RHA made an attempt to be honest to the public, which is to be admired ... The debate about priorities and rationing is at last becoming public.'

Her position starts out by accepting the inadequacy of the NHS, accepting that rationing of health care 'must' take place, and winds up effectively echoing the government's own logic in imposing arbitrary restrictions on health spending – to the lowest of any advanced economy.

By making her 'realistic assessment' that varicose vein operations are not going to be available on the NHS, she is virtually urging people who need treatment to go private.

Trendy

By suggesting trendy, 'right-on' ways of public 'consultation' on which services should be axed and which resourced within a rationed budget, Ms Hogg dresses up cash limits in new clothes – but also opens the door to some extremely unpleasant possibilities.

Community and mental health services enjoy little or no positive public or media profile, and attract little of the active support that has been so frequently tapped by fundraising charities in appeals for premature baby units, scanners and cancer research.

There is no reason to believe that in any public 'debate' on rationing of health care, these services will not again lose out.

A pilot project in Oregon, USA along these lines, urging the general public to vote on health 'priorities' produced some frightening results.

Privatisation

For *Socialism and Health* to allow itself to slide into debates on how best to ration health care, rather than how to plan the development of services to meet demand, will offer comfort and delight only to the theorists of the extreme right – whose real interests lie in reducing the NHS to a skid row supplement to a privatised American-style system.

What is more worrying is that these concessions take place even as the likelihood of a Labour government increases. Socialists could well wind up fighting these arguments for rationing under Labour as some of us did in the 1970s. Already we can see Kinnock adamant that increased public spending will come only from economic growth, while Shadow Chancellor John Smith insists there will be 'no dash for growth' once they take office.

Focal point

The NHS could well be an early focal point of conflict between an expectant electorate and the timid conservatism of a Kinnock government.

Instead of cutting back the aspirations of the labour movement and restricting the debate

to ways in which we share our inadequate resources for health care, the left must elaborate and win support for a comprehensive package of demands to be made of a Labour government.

This should begin with a £6 billion cash injection to reverse ten years of cuts and closures, with the reopening of closed wards and services in acute hospitals and a major investment in community care services for the elderly and people with mental illness.

It should lead on to a planned expansion and democratisation of the NHS. The 57 opted-out Trusts must be disbanded and returned to NHS management, GP fund-holding should be scrapped (with GPs given back the right to refer patients to whichever hospital they think best), and William Waldegrave's unelected, unrepresentative health authorities abolished.

Elected authorities

As an interim measure towards an elected structure to plan and run all health services, local councils should take over responsibility for the purchasing of health care.

The public commitment to the NHS has been made unmistakably clear in the last few years: a fighting policy outlined by the Labour movement could turn this into electoral defeat for the Tories and a real rallying point for pressure on a Kinnock government.

PHOTO: Jez Coulson (IFL)

**World
Order**

Yeltsin Boost

BORIS Yeltsin's campaign to become the joint President of the Soviet Union received a powerful boost with his victory in the June 12 elections for the Presidency of Russia.

Despite sour grapes from Pravda and other Communist Party newspapers, Yeltsin's victory was a convincing one. Conservative candidates won less than a third of his vote. A popular mandate in the USSR's strongest republic will now put Yeltsin in a powerful position in the approaching negotiations over the new union treaty.

Mikhail Gorbachev will now have to concede a considerable margin of power to his rival. As he tries to persuade the West to provide a new programme of Marshall Aid in return for marketisation, Yeltsin is a dangerous competitor.

With a far more consistent record of support for radical marketisation, as well as control over a large slice of the USSR's resources, Boris Yeltsin may prove to be an attractive leader with whom to negotiate.

But the Russian premier is likely to regret his prediction that the state of the Soviet economy will begin to improve by the end of next year.

Pope greeted by strikes

THE RECENT visit of the Pope to his native Poland saw numerous papal masses, as well as attacks by the Pope on abortion rights. 'thou shalt not kill' he said - with a sense of irony, perhaps, given the record of catholicism over the centuries.

However, the Pope's celebrations were far from the only 'mass action' taking place in Poland. During his visit, reports of papal statements were interspersed with frequent strike reports.

As elsewhere in eastern Europe, consciousness of the dangers of privatisation is spreading.

Solidarnosc leaders in Bydgoszcz declared a strike alert...and urged the union to 'extend the action to the whole of Poland'. In Slupsk, workers went on strike demanding full compensation for price increases.

Strikes have increasingly taken up political demands - in Tarnow, union leaders warned that they 'would not allow the union to be ignored', while in Jaslo workers walked out in protest at the government's 'arrogant attitude'. Air traffic controllers threatened action, calling for wage parity with their western counterparts - a rise of over 1,000%.

Premier Lech Walesa's response was swift: a threat to put the air traffic controllers under military rule, and an appeal to union leaders to stop all 'illegal strikes'.

GIs face death penalty

AMERICAN GIs who refused to serve in the Gulf war continue to face repression, and in some cases, the death penalty. Eighteen of the war resisters are now incarcerated in US military prisons for up to two years.

But corporal Tahan Jones - one of the most prominent in the campaign against the war - has now been threatened with the death penalty. After turning himself in on May 15, Jones was charged with 'desertion in time of war' without warning.

Jones is one of three faced with this threat - out of an estimated 2,500 GIs who resisted participation in Operation Desert Storm. It is now quite clear that those singled out for the heaviest repression are those that were most vocal in their opposition to the US war-drive. The penalties are entirely unrelated to the 'gravity' of the offence.

Anti-war activists in the USA have been mobilising a campaign in defence of the resisters, in an attempt to counter the persistent denial of the GI's rights by the military authorities. Recent protests have included a letter signed by 33 catholic bishops, supporting not only 'religious' conscientious objectors, but all those opposed to 'unjust' wars.



Students' rally during Tiananmen event

**Two years after
Tiananmen - the
fight goes on**

by Zhang Kai

Two years after the 1989 democracy movement, repression from the Chinese authorities continues to meet underground resistance.

According to official sources, more than 750 people have now been tried for their participation in the Democracy Movement. 72 were charged with plot-

ting to destabilise the government. But claims that the trials 'have basically finished' - a part of the regime's attempt to consign the whole movement to the history books - are not true.

Pro-democracy activists continue to face harassment. In Beijing, where anti-government posters and leaflets have appeared frequently, students have

set up underground organisations on campus. Liu Yanbin, a student at the People's University, has recently been arrested for publishing the reformist journal *Democratic Discussions*.

In addition, students from four colleges in Beijing have signed a statement pledging continued resistance. And in Shanghai, China's first human rights organisation has been established. But two of the organisers, Gu Bin and Yang Zhou, have been detained as a result.

The continued repression has not led to the stability predicted by Chinese ruler Li Peng. Even China's Finance Minister was forced to admit that the economy had deteriorated to 'a very grave situation', with a real budget deficit in 1990 of nearly \$10 billion.

Passive resistance from workers has contributed to a decline in business - indebtedness increased by over 120% in 1990. Crime has also increased.

Government austerity has led to a huge increase in unemployment, prompting appeals for action from the usually docile All China Federation of Trade Unions, and reports of workers' resistance have emerged. *Zheng Ming*, a Hong Kong-based journal,

reports over 42,000 cases of sabotage and resistance in industrial and mining enterprises in 1990. In addition, a number of autonomous workers' organisations were discovered and strikes were reported.

Such reports, along with the unprecedented actions of the official trade unions, suggest a much greater level of resistance to the regime than had been previously suspected. In this context, Li Peng's protestations of social and economic stability look like a bid to hold onto power. Some have suggested that the premier may soon face a factional struggle for power.

Li Peng's recent appointment of two supporters as Prime Ministers look like an attempt to bolster his position. He justified his choice on the grounds that 'they were firm and unequivocal in their position during the struggle to quell the counter-revolutionary riot in 1989'. Informed sources suspect that dissent within the party continues.

Social and economic crises are accumulating in China. The Democracy Movement, far from being crushed by repression, has been reorganising as cracks appear in the facade of Li Peng's regime.



Fascism is once more on the upsurge in eastern Europe

Czechoslovakia - increase in nazi violence

by Slavyna and Adam Novak

POLICE recently attacked a demonstration against the General Exhibition in Czechoslovakia, and arrested two young anarchists after an argument. Many of the young demonstrators were injured.

The police were called to the scene by the organisers of the exhibition, keen to get rid of these 'troublesome demonstrators'.

The demonstrators saw the exhibition as an expensive shop-window display of the new Czechoslovakia - but the emperor has no clothes.

This demonstration of around a hundred school students and young

workers was called by Prague anarchist groups. They reject propaganda in favour of the restoration of capitalism, as well as the current, pathetic attempt to attract foreign capital.

A further demonstration, protesting against police violence as well as the Exhibition, was called a week later. The protestors also demanded the withdrawal of all charges against those arrested a week earlier.

The vast majority had respected the organisers' advice: don't come armed, don't give the cops any excuses! But any hope of a peaceful rally disappeared after a few minutes: 150 skinheads armed with beer bottles and batons charged at the demonstrators in what was clearly an organised assault. They dis-

persed in panic. Large numbers were injured.

The police, normally always in evidence on anarchist demonstrations, were late in turning out this time. When they did, they aimed straight for the anarchists, arresting quite a number.

Even Jiri Exner, deputy mayor of Prague, said 'If I'd seen such a thing two years ago, I'd have concluded that the skinheads were paid by the police'.

This role of the police confirms a tendency that has become increasingly clear over the last few months.

This involves ignoring racist, anti-gay and anti-left attacks by skinheads, while victimising anarchist groups.

Allowing the skinheads to attack these largely inexperienced young people is intended to give a clear

message to the left - that any such group going beyond small discussion meetings will be stopped.

The young skinheads were wearing fascist insignia and military uniforms, and carried the German flag with the slogan 'Deutschland über alles'.

They speak of 'cleaning' the streets of Prague of 'all this vermin' - travellers, the unemployed, the left, lesbians and gay men, anarchists.

The young anarchists need to draw the conclusions from these attacks and adopt a policy of self-defence.

But the left also needs to defend the anarchists' right, and by extension their own right, to demonstrate their views in the face of a rise in the far right and police brutality.

"We are trying to organise a workers' party throughout Kurdistan"

The Kurdish national struggle has achieved considerable prominence in recent months. But as the refugee crisis gradually fades from the public eye, the Kurds remain a dispossessed people.

Patrick Baker of *Socialist Outlook* asked SEYFI CENGIZ of the Kurdistan Communist Movement how the struggle for national liberation could be resolved.

Patrick Baker: Imperialism allowed Saddam's regime to beat back the Kurdish uprising, though the peshmergas still control some of that area. What effect has this had on the Kurdish struggle in Iraq?

Seyfi Cengiz: Let me explain imperialism's attitude towards the Kurdish question and the latest uprising. In the past it tried to use the Kurds against Iraq, a country that was friendly with the Soviet Union, unlike the Shah's Iran or Turkey.

They only supported the Kurds with the aim of weakening Saddam, and bringing him closer to the West. Neither Turkey nor Syria want any kind of 'Kurdish solution' - whether a federation or autonomy - because they're frightened it would be an example to the Kurds in their country.

During the war, the US tried to use the Kurds as a threat, to get the Ba'ath regime and the army to oust Saddam. They wanted a movement from above, not below. But the Kurds took Bush at his word. The US then let them be defeated - when no military coup occurred, they preferred Saddam to the Kurds.

PB: So Saddam has re-established his regime. Are the Kurds more or less confident after the rising?

SC: The Iraqi Kurds have gained nothing from this defeat. Their level of organisation has not improved, and their morale is low. The situation is now completely under western imperialist control. The fate of the Kurds is in their hands.

Both the KDP and the PUK, the main components of the Iraqi Kurdish Front, are bourgeois parties; they do not rely on the masses of Kurdistan or the surrounding area. They always try to use one government

against another - whether it's Iran against Iraq or the US against Saddam. This is why they supported the West in the Gulf war.

PB: So what is the significance of the talks between Barzani and Saddam?

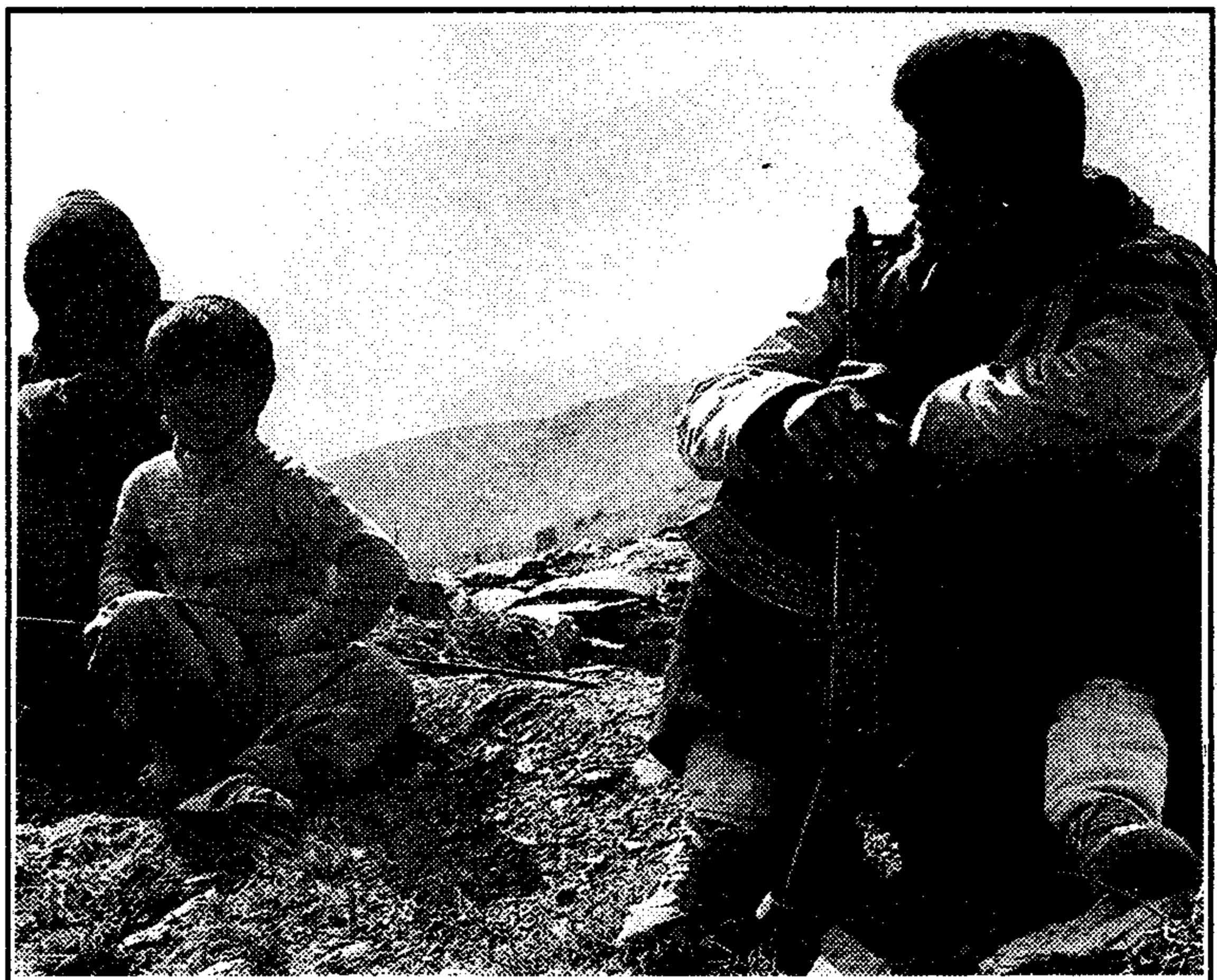
SC: Saddam has said that he has recognised Kurdish autonomy since 1970 - and he still does! The only point of disagreement appears to be oil - whether Kirkuk is to be included in the autonomous region or not.

The talks will not lead to any real autonomy. Saddam is only negotiating because he is still in a relatively weak position. There have been many promises of autonomy before - when they are weak, they promise something.

PB: What effect did the defeat of the rising have on the struggle in Turkey, after Ozal's reforms and the recent struggles against his regime?

SC: An uprising began spontaneously in Turkish Kurdistan before the beginning of the civil war in Iraq, independently of the plans of the PKK or anyone else. This rising continued and spread until the Newroz festival on 21 March.

The effect was considerable. Commercial traffic through the area ceased - small businesses and shops had to close down.



Kurds forced to guard their mountain territory

PHOTO: David Stewart-Smith (Insight)

But the rising died away when the Iraqi rebellion was defeated, and was put down by Turkish troops. The last town to fall to the troops was Suleymanyeh, on April 4. The Kurds in Turkey were left with a deep hatred for imperialism, after the US sat back and allowed Saddam to massacre the Kurds in Iraq.

PB: How do the Kurds go forward from here? Do the reforms offered by Ozal and Saddam offer a solution?

SC: The problem is that the perspective of both the PUK and the KDP is always limited to the current state boundaries. Thus Talebani appealed to Ozal for support for autonomy in Iraq, while Ozal was suppressing the Kurdish uprising in Turkey.

But this method - always appealing for agreement on a reform of the status quo through autonomy or federations - gets nowhere. Each state will always play off one group of Kurds against another.

The only possibility of a solution lies in independence and unification, and this requires a strategy which aims at the overthrow of the whole order throughout the region.

The Kurdistan Communist Movement is the first Kurdish marxist organisation which aims to organise across the whole of the nation, though it is currently based mainly in Turkey.

We came out of a split in 1990 of the nationalist organisation *The Struggle*, which waged the first guerilla struggle against the Turkish state in the early 1980s.

We are trying to organise a workers party throughout Kurdistan, to prevent the 'divide and rule' which has blocked our struggle in the past.

For more information about the KCM contact: Seyfi Cengiz, 10 Stoke Newington Common, London N16.

The unknown intifadah

by Pinar Selinay

SINCE THE GULF WAR the plight of the Kurds has become internationally known. But for over a year before the war the Kurds in Turkey had been in revolt against president Turgut Ozal's government in their own 'scrhildan' - uprising.

This explains why Ozal's government was so brutal in its treatment of the Iraqi Kurds seeking refuge from Saddam, refusing to let them down from the freezing mountains and interrupting supplies destined for them.

It is fundamental to the ideology of the Turkish state that the Kurds in Turkey are 'mountain Turks', who speak a Turkish 'dialect' - and thus do not officially exist. In response to decades of repression, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) began armed struggle against the Turkish state in 1984.

Independence

Their aim was to 'liberate Kurdistan from imperialism and colonialism'. They called for a united and independent Kurdistan.

The government then tried to isolate the PKK through a system of 'village guards', whereby villagers were paid to act as informers against the PKK and those who helped them.

In villages where no-one would do this, people were tortured and murdered and deaths blamed on 'PKK separatists'. As the PKK continued to grow, the government responded with special counter-insurgency squads, who murdered, raped, and intimidated the villagers.

When it went on growing, villagers were forced out of their homes altogether, and made to face the harsh winters in makeshift tents.

March 1990 marked the turning point - the struggle was brought from the mountains to the towns.

Thousands marched in defiance of police blockades. Shops and businesses closed in protest. The government response was the 'Censorship and Exile' law, aimed at isolating the Kurds by preventing news from seeping out.

By 1991 the government could no longer keep the lid on. The constant round of protest and repression reached its climax with the open celebrations of the Newroz, the Kurdish new year, on March 21. Tens of



PHOTO: David Stewart-Smith (Insight)

Peshmerga guerrilla

thousands openly celebrated this banned festival. Then suddenly Ozal made an about-face and decided to open negotiations with the Kurds.

His motive is clear. He is keen to promote Turkey in the 'new world order' as a 'second Israel', promoting US interests. But he has also decided to act as 'protector' of the 'helpless' Kurds.

Consternation

This break with tradition caused consternation among both the government party, ANAP, and the opposition. But in meeting Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Barzani's Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (IKDP), Ozal had a purpose. He wanted to marginalise the PKK and to cover

his back, should the Kurds' struggle prove successful.

Another important step in the 'new order' was the promise of linguistic and cultural freedom, provoking a storm of opposition from Turkish politicians, and a wave of excitement among the Kurdish people. But though the most extreme law repressing use of the Kurdish language has been repealed, others remain. Ozal clearly has further tricks up his sleeve.

The future of these reforms will be dictated by two factors: the struggle in North and South Kurdistan and the needs of US imperialism. But the primary aim remains the crushing of the PKK.

But the latter's politics must be questioned. Abdullah Ocalan, party founder and leader, publicly stated in March that independence had been postponed indefinitely.

As to the present, he has stated that the PKK is open to dialogue and that the demand for independence is not an insistence on an independent state, but could be realised within the framework of the existing Turkish state.

Ocalan has rightly criticised the PUK and the IKDP for their reliance on the governments of the region. But it is clear that the PKK leadership does not understand that the solution for the workers and peasants of Kurdistan lies in the struggles of other oppressed nations, rather than regional or Western governments.

As for the 'democratic' reforms, Ozal has come up with a shrewd package. The reforms lift restric-

tions on producing communist propaganda and forming political organisations, only to replace them with *still tighter restrictions!*

So there will be a margin for reformist organisations to operate, but 'organised action against the state by use of force, weapons or pressure' will provoke severe penalties. The loose wording means that this could be applied to any organised labour action or press.

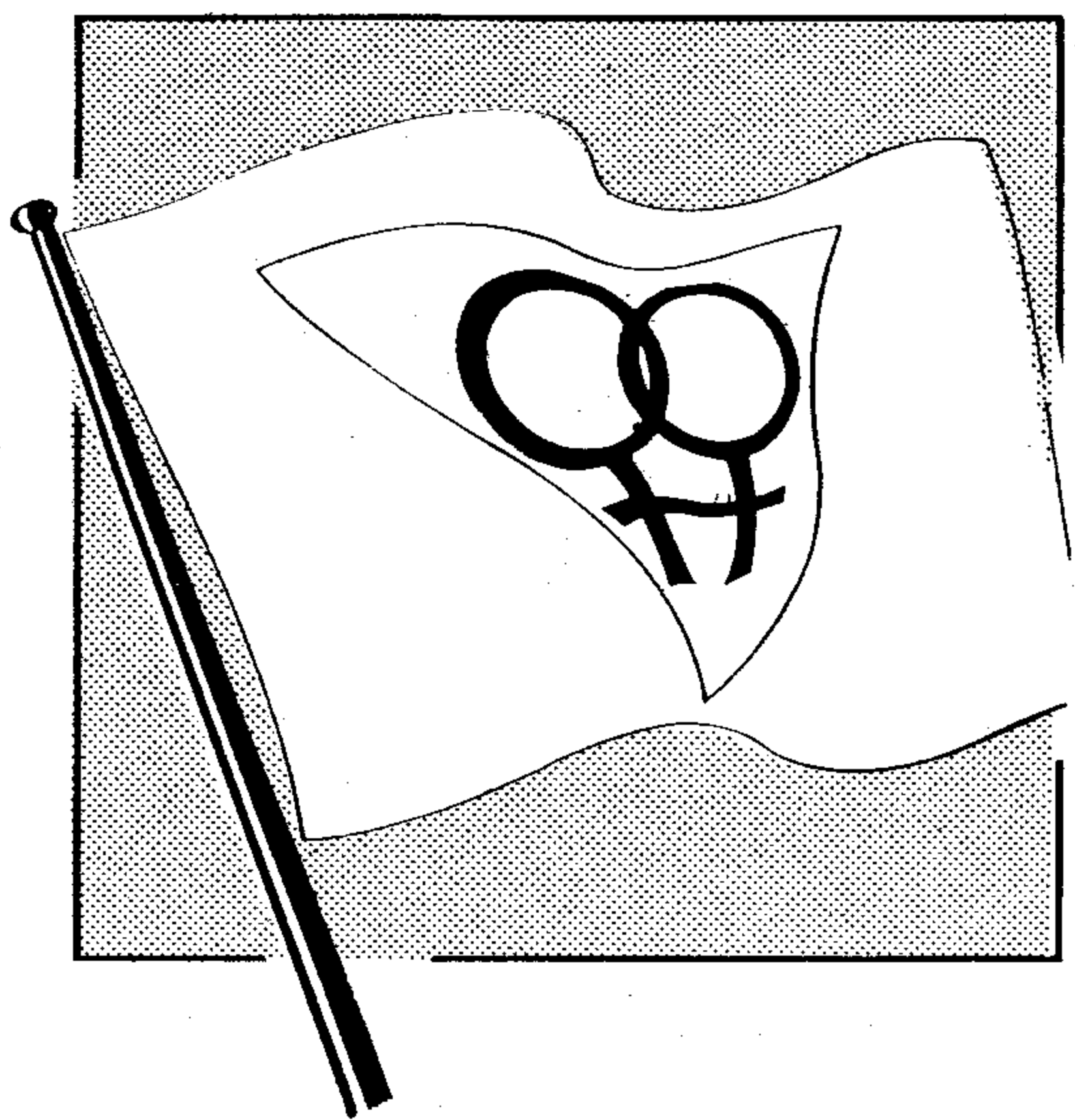
Torturers

Time allowed for interrogation without access to defence or trial has been extended, giving free reign to torturers, who are immune from the law. Another aspect of the reforms is the release of thousands of prisoners - 3,000 of whom were sentenced on political charges. But PKK members, among others, are excluded.

The Gulf war was convenient for the Turkish bourgeoisie, providing an excuse for a clampdown. A ban on strikes was declared, and miners were forced back to work. Thousands of workers were sacked, including strike leaders, and replaced by newly-hired workers at lower wages.

But no sooner did the war end than action began, with airline and petrochemical workers leading the way. Miners also threatened action. The massive mobilisations in January in the Zonguldak region are fresh in their minds as a symbol not of defeat, but potential power.

Ozal's rhetoric may have changed, but for Turkish and Kurdish workers, the 'new order' is the same as the old. Villagers continue to be thrown off their land, torture remains rampant, and police still beat strikers.



Lesbians, gay men and the law



PHOTOS by Abigail Dornby

Out and proud in Brighton May '91

'Will we be legal?'

Twenty years after the first Lesbian and Gay Pride march in Britain and the beginning of the lesbian and gay liberation movement, full legal equality for lesbians and gay men is a distinct possibility. This would be the first positive change in the law since the 1967 Act partially decriminalised male homosexuality.

PETER PURTON, *Socialist Outlook* supporter and activist in the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR), explains both the possibilities opened up by and the limitations of legal reform.

IF LABOUR forms the next government it is likely, thanks to the work of LCLGR, that we will at least see the outlawing of discrimination on grounds of homosexuality, the repeal of Section 28, and a free vote on the age

of consent, with government backing for full equality.

While this will represent a victory for those who have fought long and lonely battles on this issue, it will not in itself bring about the end of oppression. Those who believe that the law is the source of lesbian and gay oppression and, conversely, those on the left who argue that changing the law will alter nothing, are both wrong. An effective fight for lesbian and gay liberation needs to understand that fighting for law reform is very important – but it is not sufficient.

Laws which oppress lesbians and gay men serve a number of functions. Behaviour that is legal for heterosexuals, is criminalised. Lesbians and gay men are discriminated against in services, rights as parents, rights as partners, and in many other ways. But oppressive laws also serve to maintain the ideology that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality – heterosexism.

1967 Act

The 1967 Act helped create the possibility for campaigning publicly and openly for our rights. But it left intact the public policy of the state that homosexuality was still inferior and in many cases illegal. If one positive result was a partial lifting of the hideous consequences of total illegality, one negative result was that many more people have been dragged before the courts under the remaining provisions of the Sexual Offences Acts. This happened again when the Tories finally extended the '67 Act to Scotland and the North of Ireland.

Section 28 is a classic example of how the law functions. Whilst not all of the worst fears of sections of the Stop the Clause campaign have been realised, it is wrong to conclude that Section 28 didn't matter, or that its repeal is irrelevant.

As LCLGR repeatedly pointed out at the time, there are two disastrous effects. Local authorities have abandoned equality initiatives, censoring themselves for fear of challenging the law. The deliberate reaffirmation by the Section that lesbian and gay relationships are 'pretended' was part of a concerted ideological offensive by the

Tories to re-assert their social values.

In the same process they legitimised the targeting of lesbians and gay men for prejudice, ridicule, discrimination and violent assault. The renewed spate of murderous attacks in 1989 bears witness to that. So does the continuing popular prejudice against lesbians and, particularly, gay men as the cause of the 'AIDS plague'.

The repeal of these discriminatory laws will have dramatic benefits. First will be the immediate material gains. Gay men will no longer risk imprisonment for having sexual relationships. Lesbians and gay men will be able to take employers to tribunals for harassment or discriminatory sacking. Homosexual couples will obtain the same rights as heterosexuals. Lesbian mothers will not be denied their children on grounds of sexuality. Local authorities will be able to pursue equality policies.

Equality

In order to implement such changes, a government must publicly assert that there is no basis for discrimination – that lesbians and gay men are equal citizens. This will undermine the belief that we are not, and remove one of the central props of prejudice. Full legal equality creates a precondition for full social equality. But only as a possibility.

The state has removed legal discrimination in France, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. But there still remains massive social discrimination, negative portrayal, and violent attacks. Laws in Britain supposedly outlaw discrimination on grounds of race or sex. This doesn't stop the fact that racism is rampant and sexism still runs deep. However, this does not mean that these are merely questions of the inevitable length of time it takes to change popular consciousness.

Heterosexism is not just a fable of some lawmaker. It is not a hangover from some historical accident. Nor is it merely ignorant prejudice which could be resolved by a little rational discussion. Heterosexism is the expression of the way society is organised around a family structure, essentially to capitalism, and consequently a society of compulsory heterosexuality.

Oppression is deeply rooted and the ruling class will defend it vigorously. To change it means changing society. The privileged

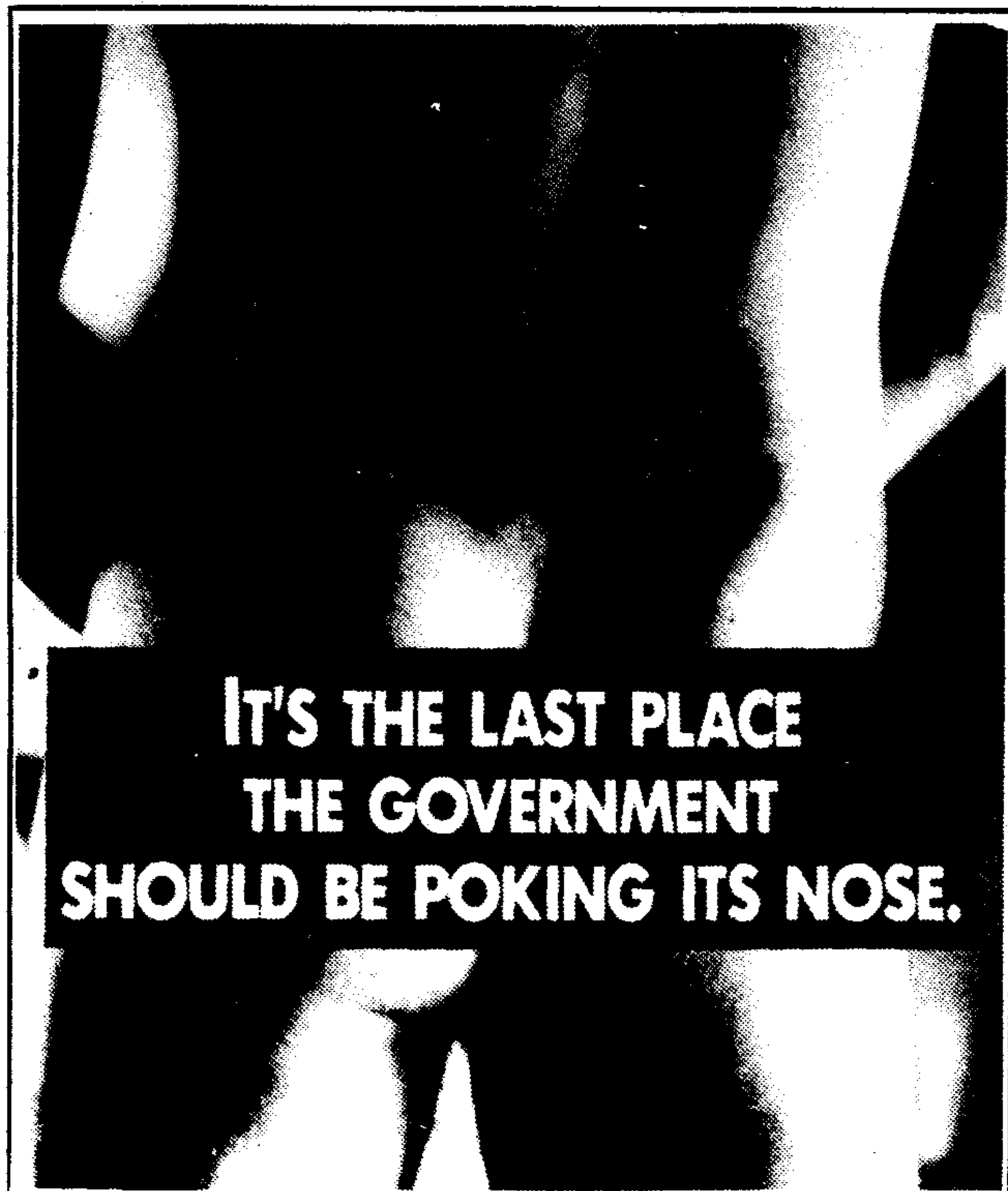
status of the family and the inferior status of lesbian and gay relations have to be ended. The human capacity for genuine sexual choice has to be freed.

Such changes – by no means an overnight transformation – are part of a socialist revolution. Neither parliamentary enactment nor bolshevik decree will end the oppression of lesbians and gay men. However, while legal reform improves our chances of fighting oppression, the revolutionary victory of socialism will create the conditions for eliminating it.

Labour Must Deliver!

What needs to be done now in the fight for lesbian and gay liberation is clear. We have to organise the biggest possible pressure for legal reform on an incoming Labour government. In practice this means getting wide support for LCLGR's 'Labour Must Deliver!' campaign.

Three things have to go hand in hand with this. Firstly, it is vital that a fighting resistance to all attacks is organised. Secondly, we have to continually counter-attack with demands for lesbian and gay equality. But finally, lesbians and gay men have to participate, in alliance with the working class and other oppressed groups in struggles to end the rule of capital.



Campaign poster from Hong Kong





'We're here, we're queer, so get used to it!'

Out but not down in the old Empire

ONE LITTLE MENTIONED legacy of the British Empire is the imposition of repressive legislation on homosexuality across the world. Nowhere is this more apparent than in South and South East Asia, where all ex-British colonies include harsh measures in their penal codes prohibiting 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature', frequently punishable by life imprisonment and/or flogging. A secondary offence of 'gross indecency between men', in the words of the infamous Labouchere amendment of 1885, is usually included too. REBECCA FLEMMING investigates.

THE DRACONIAN LAWS in both the ex-colonies and the still-British colony of Hong Kong contrast with the lack of legal sanctions against homosexual activity in neighbouring states. Countries which were ruled by Holland, Spain and the US such as Indonesia and the Philippines, have no specific legislation.

The precise contents of the penal code do not, of course, determine the overall status of lesbians and gay men in a particular state. There is fierce police repression in Indonesia against the flourishing lesbian bar culture in Djakarta and the gay community, and general 'public morality' laws are utilised in the Philippines. In contrast, there has effectively been a liberalisation of the law in India. Fledgling gay groups are developing in the major cities, particularly Bombay. Lesbians, active in the feminist movement for some time, are now also establishing their own organisation.

Failure

The failure of some imperialist powers to legislate on the matter does not mean they had an enlightened view on sexuality. Rather it is the British insistence on outlawing homosexual activity, wherever they planted the Union Jack, which must be explained.

In many cultures outside the industrialised West, the category of homosexual or lesbian had no meaning. Same-sex sexual activity was ever present, but occurred in the context of, and never excluded, a 'normal family life'.

Sexual relationships between samurai and geishas had been celebrated in verse and prose in medieval Japan and homosexual love in China had been well known. But there was no concept of the homosexual or lesbian as a category distinct from heterosexual person.

Thus the argument that homosexuality or lesbianism is a 'foreign' or 'white problem', has a grain of truth within it, despite its reactionary intent. The development of lesbian and gay communities in South and South East Asia has been inextricably bound up with the intervention of Western powers. But the processes of economic change, urbanisation, the establishment of a sex industry, all played a central role in the development of lesbian and gay communities in big cities.

The key factor propelling the embryonic gay movement forward in countries such as Malaysia and Thailand (where 'sex tourism', including by gay men is particularly prevalent) is HIV and AIDS. The spread of the disease has spurred the communities into action.

Wider issues

Groups have been established in Thailand, Singapore and in Malaysia. The Malaysian Ministry of Health quietly supports the Pink Triangle group in the country, despite the complete illegality of all homosexual activity. The groups are now beginning to address wider issues of legal and social reform.

It is the issue of legal reform which has created controversy and campaigning in Hong Kong over recent years. Both the island's Humanist Association and the gay 10% Club have been working for a change in Hong Kong's vicious laws on homosexuality.

A Bill proposing 'the removal of criminal penalties relating to homosexual acts committed in private by consenting adult males' and a gay age of consent at 21 is to be put to the Legislative Council later this month, and is expected to be passed. The death penalty would remain however for cases involving men under 21, though the Bill adds that 'in "normal" circumstances, it is unlikely that proceedings would be taken'. It is unclear what the future of Hong Kong's substantial lesbian and gay community will be after the

Chinese Government takes control in 1997.

The vast majority of these organisations are male, dealing with issues of central concern to gay men. A pattern generally found when lesbian and gay organisations are born, it changes as the groups grow and develop.

It is largely men who have the economic freedom to make sexual choices, and the social and political freedom to organise and campaign. The existence of a feminist movement, such as in India, makes a key difference to women's ability to come out and be active as lesbians.

Internationalism

All of this underlines the necessity for internationalism in the lesbian and gay movement in Britain, for solidarity with lesbians and gay men throughout the world. It is vital that this solidarity reaches outside the safe and well-trodden boundaries of Western Europe and North America. Equally importantly the West should not impose its own preconceptions on these developing movements. The key to this is understanding their histories and struggles.



Taking positive images on to the streets

This is Section 28...

THE NOTORIOUS clause of the 1988 Local Government Act, prohibiting the 'intentional promotion of homosexuality', continues to affect the provision of a wide range of services in many parts of the country.

Often its effects are hidden and unnoticed, taking the form of self-censorship by local government officers, teachers, social workers and others. Often Section 28 is not directly cited. It is clear though that it has influenced the general atmosphere in which lesbian and gay issues are discussed.

One case in point is that of the 1 in 10 youth group in Skelmersdale, Lancashire. The group is part of a network of youth groups which provide a much needed service for young lesbians and gay men. It has been under sustained attack from Lancashire County Council since last October, with Section 28 used as justification.

The Council has forbidden 1 in 10 and other lesbian and gay groups from publicising their activities. As well as stopping research projects, youth magazines and a visit by a German lesbian and gay youth group have been banned.

This is a story that is repeated all over the country and closely mirrored in the education system. In most cases those under attack don't feel safe enough to appeal for public support, so the suppression continues in secret.

1 in 10 have had enough. They are preparing to fight back, in the courts if necessary. If they get legal representation this could be an historic test case for Section 28. It is vital they get financial help and solidarity not just from lesbian and gay groups and individuals, but from all over the labour movement. Already they have solid support from the recent conference of the Community and Youth Workers' Union. Other trade union and Labour Party bodies should do the same.

Dani Ahrens

● Send protest letters to: Mrs Louise Ellman, Leader of the Council, County Council Offices, County Hall, Preston, Lancs. For information, model resolutions, etc., contact 1 in 10, Yewdale Centre, 300 Yewdale, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancs. Tel: 0695 25665. Please send them copies of protest letters.

KEN LOACH is one of Britain's foremost film directors. His career spans such work as *Kes* and *Cathy Come Home*, onto the more recent *Hidden Agenda*. What links all his work is unwavering commitment to socialism. With the release of *Hidden Agenda* on video, Sean Tunney and John Lister talked to him about his work and the ideas that lie behind them.

SO: *Cathy Come Home* was an agitational film wasn't it, widely credited for helping to launch Shelter?

Loach: It was there to make people angry rather than just upset. I did try to say that campaigning against homelessness did matter.

With Shelter, the two things were going side by side. There was a campaign, which Jeremy Sandford who wrote it was part of, and they both fed off each other.

It was very instructive as an illustration of what TV could do at the time. If there was a really popular programme the whole nation would watch. You were certainly speaking to twenty, maybe thirty million people. Also, TV was very innocent. We hadn't been saturated with images.

SO: Were there any attacks from the right when you made *Cathy Come Home* about the use of the drama-documentary style?

Loach: Yes, the whole development of the *Wednesday Play* was to make films which did confuse people as to whether they were fact or fiction.

So they would take it as seriously as if it had been documentary.

That whole debate always arises when there is a disagreement about content. On *Hidden Agenda* when it all surfaced again, there was a leader in the *Times*, no less, attacking it as 'faction.'

On the same week, the Claus Von Bulow film was released which was clearly a factual event recreated in fiction, and it even shared the *Times* film review. Yet of course, the leader didn't see the irony of this. Clearly, it is entirely politically motivated.

SO: Is there any correlation between the amount of left wing work that gets shown and the level of class struggle?

Loach: Yes, the time when you saw the correlation most clearly was in the early eighties.

When there was a great potential for fightback and when TV was most in the grip of the idea that what was progressive was on the right. That was why it was very difficult to get commissions.

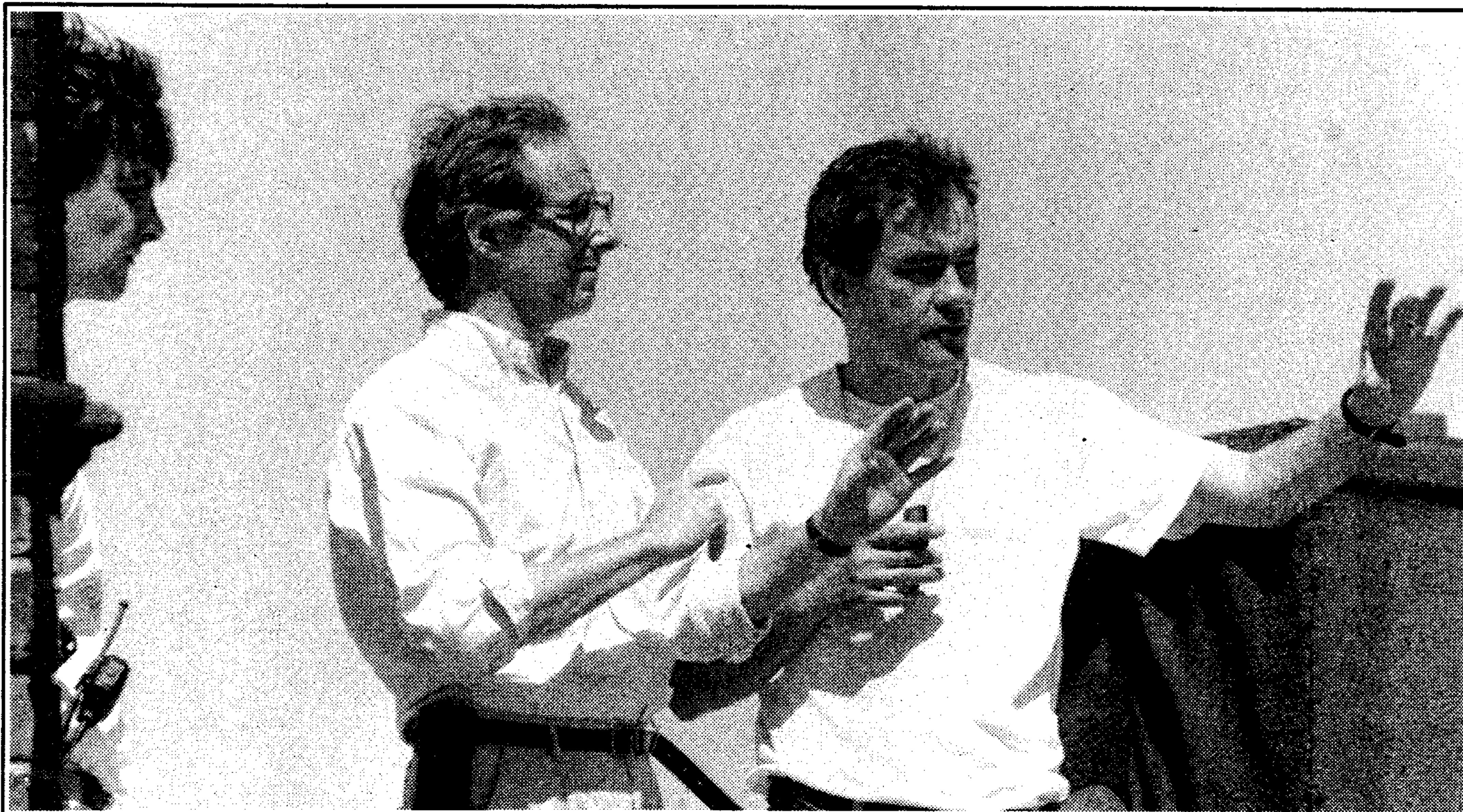
There were three or four wasted years. I was involved in making a documentary called *Questions of Leadership* which was about the Thatcher government and the opportunity for resistance to it. And how the leaders of the trade union movement had failed to organise that resistance.

However, it would have been much more effective to do one or two substantial pieces of fiction which had a political purpose, but wouldn't have been quite so upfront politically, because the TV heads don't expect fiction to be balanced in quite the same mechanical way.

That's what screwed us. If I had been perceptive enough I should have realised that the documentaries would never have been shown.

SO: Could you say more about the banning of *Questions of Leadership*?

Loach: I subjected the role of the trade union leaders to some criticism, and also tried to provide a coherent analysis in opposition to theirs. This is when the TV bureaucrats have a field day.



Ken Loach (centre) and crew on the set of his recent film *Riff Raff*

Loach On Loach

Added to which, when you criticise someone like Chapple, for instance, you find the Chair of the IBA is a long-time political mate. So you have a group who are both criticised by the programme and have the power to stop them going out.

SO: After *Questions of Leadership* you returned to fiction with *Fatherland*. The text for *Fatherland* by Trevor Griffiths was based on Milan Kundera. Both are very non-literal, whereas your work has a very straightforward approach.

Loach: Yes, the film just didn't work. Trevor Griffiths' way of working and mine are very different.

Also, we had the problem of doing half of it in German. Struggling to understand what people are saying when you are directing a film is a problem.

In addition Trevor's literary style meant that when his work was translated, we had the Germans saying to me that it didn't read right. I tried to get the language to emerge through their experience of the plot. But this does inevitably drag it towards what people call naturalism, or what you try and just make authentic and real.

Overall, the narrative was too convoluted and long. And too much had to be revealed at the end. It was too much to try and pull off, in retrospect. People didn't go to see it, which in the end is the ultimate test.

SO: The original text of *Fatherland* was based around three sexual relationships. You cut all the sex scenes which formed the basis of the original and so made a very different film.

Loach: I always find those sort of scenes just embarrassing when you're shooting

them because it's very intimate, and you are rather intrusive.

I guess it just needs someone who doesn't have that difficulty shooting it. And the man playing it didn't respond. I found it all rather mechanical. I'm sure it was my fault.

Heavy breathing scenes are not something I think I would do again. There is something tacky about it. There is something rather curious about doing that sort of thing at 8 in the morning. That's not to say I necessarily object to it in others' work, if it is done with confidence.

SO: You have been involved in the production, and therefore financing, of some of your films. Does it feel difficult having to change the scripts for financial reasons?

Loach: Well, I'm hopeless at it, and that is why I can't get many films made.

Also I'm not taken seriously when I go into an office to try to raise some money. They don't recognise one of their own.

Also, part of the problem of raising money from different countries is that they always have to have an input. The original script of *Hidden Agenda* had a German female lead. But to get American money, she had to be American.

However, this means that the person that says the most right-on things is American, and this certainly did change the film. Being German in the original, for instance, gives her saying, 'That's how fascism starts' much more resonance.

SO: Most people really enjoyed *Hidden Agenda*, but some have said that there's so much narrative that you almost swamp the thriller aspect.

Loach: Yes, I think there is something in that. I think there are a couple of structural faults in it, that I had a sense of beforehand, but I couldn't see a solution.

For instance, the long dialogue scenes, such as that one in the Republican Club. The narrative is too dense. With another long scene following it, it is too much for a popular audience.

SO: Towards the end where it's clear that the state is closing in, don't you think there is an excessive touch of naivety of these people?

Loach: Obviously, I met one or two people who had done the same job for groups like Amnesty International and a lot of these people are not political. People do just close their eyes. Although, maybe your right.

SO: One of the most impressive things about *Hidden Agenda* is the scene where they break in - since it suggests all of the violence without depicting it. Is that something you would strive for?

Loach: Yes, absolutely, I think that most films that claim they are against violence end up in indulging in it.

It is one thing if it's in language, you see the image of it more. But in film, which is a very concrete medium, you tend not to see the image of it but the actual thing itself. It is very hard to see it as a serious work.

SO: What has been the film's impact?

Loach: Oddly enough, I think its impact has been much stronger abroad than here.

I'm still being called about it. It would never had that international impact if it had been, as originally planned, for TV. It was backed by TV money but everyone turned it down. Channel 4 flirted with it but they never were serious.

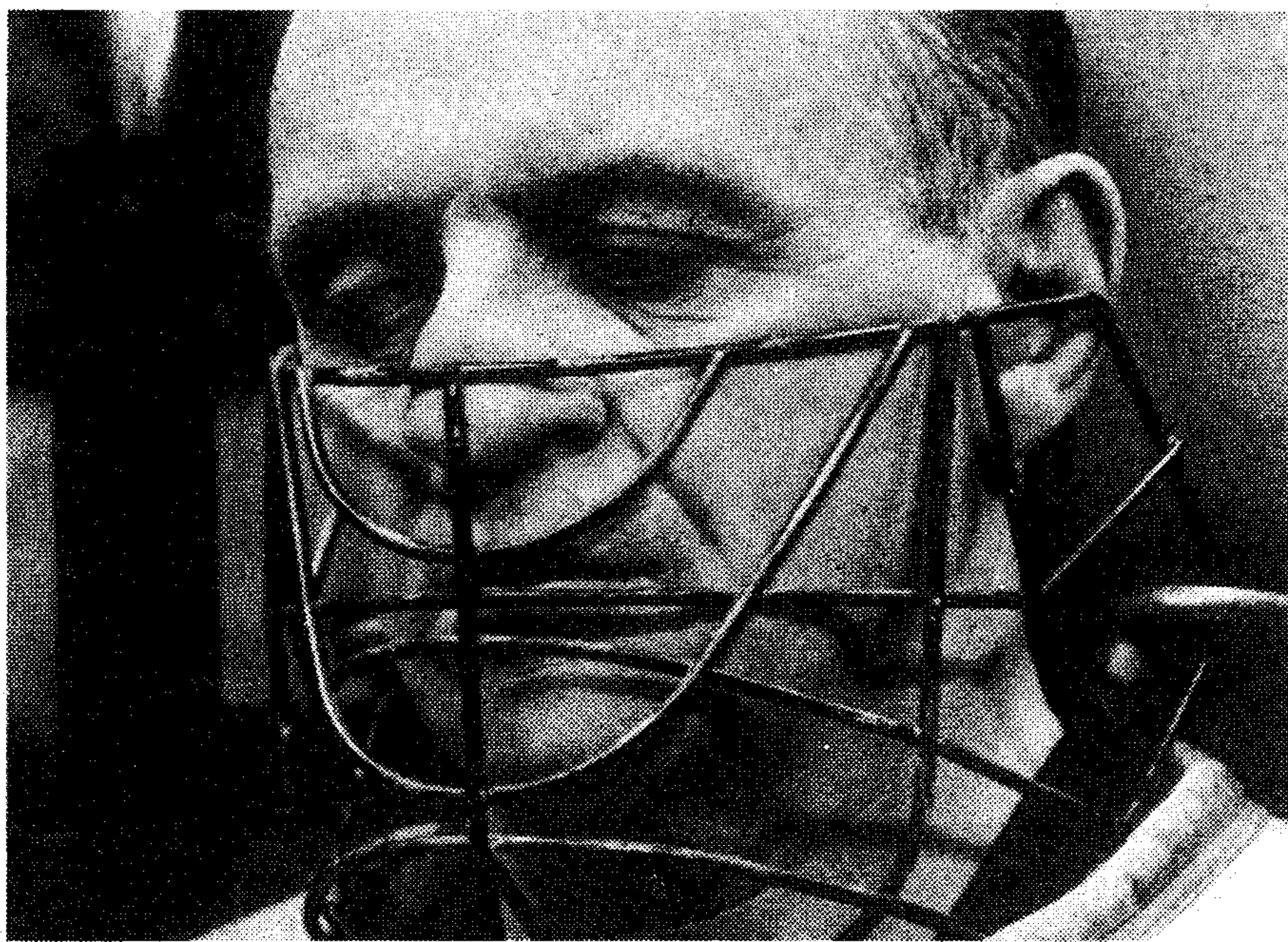
SO: Finally, in order to reach a wider audience, have you any interest, say, in doing a left wing soap?

Loach: There are forms which do become self-defeating.

I think the problem is that after a time, all the soap operas become about the actors in them. However, I do think narrative is almost as a form because it reaches a lot of people - people like stories.

They always want to know what happens next. But I think it is dangerous if you wrap everything up. You have to leave it in the audiences lap in some way. And you have to leave the audience feeling the possibility of their own strength, which is difficult to do.

"In *Questions of Leadership* I subjected the role of the trade union leaders to some criticism, and also tried to provide a coherent analysis in opposition to theirs. This is when the TV bureaucrats have a field day ..."



Jodie Foster as Clarice and Anthony Hopkins as the muzzled cannibal in *Silence of the Lambs*

Method axing

The Silence of the Lambs

Book: Written by Thomas Harris (Mandarin) £4.99
Film: Directed by Jonathan Demme
American Psycho

Written by Bret Easton Ellis (Picador) £6.99

Reviewed by Jodley Paton

Silence of the Lambs and *American Psycho* form part of the most controversial trend in American literature and film of recent years, that of the slasher-killer thriller.

Silence of the Lambs is a battle of wits between Hannibal 'the Cannibal' Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), a 'sociopathic' psychiatrist locked up in an insane asylum, and Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) an FBI trainee. She needs the information he can give her to catch another serial killer 'Buffalo Bill', before Bill kills again.

Not violent

Therefore it is the relationship between the two central characters which gives the film its tension and pace, rather than resorting to the high speed car chases that usually dominate 'cop thrillers'.

The film is not violent, the three killings that we see are functional rather than sadistic, and filmed to show the minimum of gore.

Also, the acting of the main players is brilliant, the script well written and beautifully filmed, from the wide landscape shots to the close ups. All this would make *Silence of the Lambs* a film well worth seeing, but what takes it beyond that is the social questions woven into the main plot.

Sympathetic

Both book and film deal intelligently with the problems of women working in traditionally male environments. Starling challenges her boss, Crawford

(Scott Glen) over his sexist behaviour saying

'It matters... Cops look at you to see how to act'.

Equally, the portrayal of Buffalo Bill's previous victims, using photographs and an autopsy scene, is sensitively handled, never gratuitous and never allowing the audience to treat them as anonymous.

Catherine Martin (Brooke Smith), Buffalo Bill's sixth victim, isn't a passive Hollywood stereotype either, overcoming fear and using her wits to try to save her own life. However, Clarice's compassion for, and anger on behalf of the victims is more clearly expressed in Thomas Harris's book.

In addition, the book deals with the hypocrisy of a 'system' which cares little if working class women are killed, but jumps to attention when the woman in danger is a senator's daughter. Unfortunately, the film hardly touches on this aspect of the plot. Similarly, although the FBI and SWAT teams come out of the film with little credibility, the critique of their bureaucracy, made in the book, is not translated onto the screen.

Transvestites

Despite many positive aspects, anyone concerned about the presentation of oppressed and minority groups will be uncomfortable with the portrayal of Buffalo Bill as a gay, transvestite, pseudo-transsexual.

The book puts forward a number of theories for Bill's behaviour, but never allows the reader to presume that it is connected with his sexuality. Unfortunately, the film reduces Bill's psyche to one scene in which the application of lipstick takes on chilling connotations and equating male sexuality outside of 'the norm' as dangerous. Transsexuals are very weakly defended by Starling's assertion that 'Transsexuals are passive types'!

Because psychopaths are outside society, beyond explanation or understanding, they are fascinating. Whereas more

common violence is disturbing because its roots are more obviously within society, psychopathy is comforting because it can be reduced to nature, god or innate evil.

Even when looking at domestic violence, Hollywood portrays the violent husband as some kind of madman, as in *Sleeping with the Enemy*, rather than admit that violence in the home is normality for large numbers of people.

Films about psychopaths tend not to throw up these contradictions and provide a scapegoat for everyone's fears and fantasies of violence.

What is interesting about *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis is that the position of the psychopath is used to analyse some of these contradictions.

Therefore, it caused a huge controversy when it came out in the US, with the scenes of

violence, especially towards women being called pornographic.

Certainly, if those scenes alone were published they would be read by some for sexual gratification. This is not, though, the form in which they appear.

American Psycho is narrated by a yuppie (Patrick Baseman), giving a detailed description of his life, where he eats, what he wears and how he kills. It would make no sense for the horrific killings to be glossed over when we are treated to everything else in such detail.

The horror of *American Psycho* is that as long as Baseman kills prostitutes and tramps nobody cares. The closest he comes to being caught is when he kills someone of his own social status. But he avoids detection, showing that with charm, manners, and

class (as long as it's the right class) you can literally get away with murder.

This book has no hero. Baseman is not caught, and the author's voice doesn't intervene to explain Baseman's actions. But by putting Baseman in a real environment, Ellis forces the reader to examine society's values - a rare thing in a book about a psychopath.

For instance, has yuppie hedonism led Baseman to believe that killing is acceptable because he enjoys it? Are his killings of the destitute only an extreme version of the hatred his friends have for beggars who encroach on their 'perfect' consumerist lifestyle?

American Psycho asks more questions than it answers, but at least it asks the questions that other books and films don't touch.

Putting the boot into the left?

G.B.H

Written by Alan Bleasdale
Starring Robert Lindsay, Michael Palin and Julie Walters

Reviewed by Julia Stevens

GIVEN Alan Bleasdale's past form, one would have expected *G.B.H.* to be yet again a savage indictment of the establishment as we saw in *Boys from the Blackstuff*.

Instead, in the first two episodes, we have been 'treated' to a gross distortion of the left. A lot of the time, Bleasdale's supposedly trotskyst activists indulge in acts of thuggery that even the state would think twice about.

After all the hype and trumpeting surrounding this new seven part drama, I found it very disappointing. Although the acting, direction and script were very professional, the whole premise of the story is an outrageous fabrication of the truth about the real organised left, so that it totally overshadows any subtler points that may conceivably be found in the plot.

In the battle of wits between the central characters, it is always the left that comes off looking like unscrupulous bastards, while the new realist right appear to be the reasonable, sensible people - the ones who really want the best for everyone.

Jim Nelson (Michael Palin) gets a good deal of strong political dialogue:

'Don't you ever dare suggest that what you're doing has anything to do with socialism!' springs to mind as a statement, I for one would love to have the opportunity to throw at Kinnock (although it must be said that he rarely does suggest that these days). And Robert Lindsay as Michael Murray (the charismatic council leader) captures beautifully the not-very-veiled threat:

'There was a time, when you impressed me' is a line I can well imagine Thatcher murmuring as she dispatched one of her many victims back to the backbenches.

But Murray, it appears is the one with the people on his side, the one really fighting for new council housing, the one supporting the non-payment campaign, the one pushing for action against the Tory government. And Nelson is the inactive Labour Party member, who goes to work on a general day of action.

Even worse, we now meet Mervyn Sloan, the leader of a 'trotskyst' sect who have claimed Murray as their own. But they are pushing Murray into attacking the black and asian community in the city in order to provoke a fightback.

'I would hate to be... dark-skinned myself in this racist society' says Sloan when Murray, to his credit, protests. But the ace up the sleeve for Sloan's group is their connections high up in the Labour

Party apparatus, who know of Murray's sinister indiscretion as a child and it seems they have no compunction in using this knowledge to force Murray into agreeing with their plans.

Before the first episode was screened, Bleasdale vigorously defended his left credentials, and claimed that *G.B.H.* was not intended to portray the left in general in a bad light. But that is clearly what it does!

Regardless of whether there are examples of thuggery on the left, as Bleasdale well knows, that is neither the main message, nor even a significant part of the British left scene.

It's hard enough to gain space for left views in this country, without people ostensibly on our side portraying the left as thugs who can attack a class of young children without a qualm.

As a piece of drama, *G.B.H.* has some merit. As a commentary on a segment of society, it has an incredibly dangerous, reactionary message, and distorts reality in the extreme.

From the writer of *Boys from the Blackstuff* - in my view one of the best pieces of social commentary for many years - *G.B.H.* is a sad and worrying disappointment. I hope Bleasdale soon returns to the form he showed he could produce with *Blackstuff* and can reclaim his position as one of Britain's great left writers.

A person

Kate Ahrens
A captive audience

My school days were not very long ago. And yet, according to all the best information, at the tender age of 19 I have already been through the 'best years of my life'. Well, perhaps that is true, but if it is, I can see now that I'm going to have a pretty depressing future ahead of me. I'm going to let you in on a secret - I hated school and I hated being a kid.

Well, no, it isn't much of a secret is it? Everybody knows really that childhood is miserable for most of the time. And everyone really knows that school is one of the major factors for most people in making their childhood miserable. But no-one ever seems to give any thought to why school is such a depressing experience or what to do to change it.

When I first became involved in politics, I was still at school. And I spent a lot of time going to meetings about education - and at those meetings, I spent a lot of time listening to discussions about teachers' pay and conditions, loss of job security, parental involvement and many other interesting and important debates that were and are at the centre of the activity around education.

I never found any discussion that talked about student involvement, except at higher education level, or about fundamentally altering the concept of schooling to incorporate some of the ideas that school students express every day about the way they want to be taught.

So I stopped just listening and started saying some of the things that I and my school friends thought about the education system. And everyone listened carefully and sagely nodded their heads, or (according to my audience) puffed out their disapproval in little snorts. And after each discussion someone in the group would come up to me and say 'That was a very interesting point you made. Which school do you teach at?'

Ultimately, I believe that the biggest problem with the education system is that students have no rights at all. Teachers and parents can determine so much about a child's life that it feels sometimes as though you are not a person at all.

There is no other place or time (except prison, which fortunately, not everyone has to suffer) when other people have so much control over what you can do.

At school, the word of the teacher is Law - no-one can leave the classroom without permission, no-one can protest at an unfair (or apparently unfair) demand, no-one can ask for an explanation of a rule or a decision, there is no recourse to action if students feel they have been unfairly treated. Children are regularly forced to stay outside in almost all weather at breaktimes. Everyone knows about the legendary standard of school dinners, but despite often quite reasonable requests children are almost never permitted to leave a portion of their dinner uneaten (that is supposing they have the option of a hot meal at all).

Now all of these assertions have their exceptions, but the exceptions are only there because of the decisions of teachers, heads, and parents. Students have never had the right to make any choices about the regime in school, and nor do they have any organised way of even presenting their requests, let alone getting them put into action.

We can at least begin the process of enabling children and young people to have a say in their own lives, by listening to their comments about one of the most influential institutions that all of us go through, and beginning to incorporate some of those comments into our thinking about a truly socialist, and democratic education system. Maybe that can be the opening for school students to gain sufficient confidence in their own opinions to raise some demands of their own.



The Bolsheviks' break from reformist parliamentarianism was the key to the overthrow of capitalism in 1917

Reformism's century of failure and betrayals

by Dave Packer

The coming general election and the possibility of a Labour government raise questions about 'democracy'. What are the differences between marxists and reformists over the nature of the capitalist state? Is gradual progress towards socialism possible?

The basic premise of reformism was explained by Konrad Schmidt in the early 1900s. He wrote that 'the trade union struggle for hours and wages and the political struggle for reforms will lead to a progressively more extensive control over the conditions of production'.

And so 'as the rights of the capitalist proprietor will be diminished through legislation, he will be reduced in time to the role of simple administrator'. The result? 'the direction and administration of exploitation will be taken away from him entirely'.

Monopolies

After nearly a century of reformism in western Europe, the opposite has happened. Capital has centralised into powerful and unaccountable monopolies and multinationals which determine policy far more than the electorate.

The Labour Party has always been a liberal reformist (ie bourgeois) party which bases itself on the working class. This bureaucracy has always been servile towards the capitalist class and loyal to its institutions.

They extol parliament as progressive and democratic, and see it as the instrument of social reform. Because of this timidity, the labour bureaucracy is recognised by the bourgeoisie as an acceptable, even useful, player in parliament and the bourgeois democratic state.

Kinnock's idea of 'democratic socialism' is nothing more than an embellishment of bourgeois

democracy, designed to cover up its hypocrisy and limitations. Marxists maintain that behind this facade of democracy lies the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Every bourgeois democratic state limits - constitutionally, legally, or in practice - the rights of assembly, strike and the freedom of press. It has mechanisms of repression, using police and troops, to use against the working class in cases of 'violation of public order'.

Machine

'In reality' explained Frederick Engels, 'the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy.' Bourgeois ideologues have understood this too. In the famous book 'The Wealth of Nations', Adam Smith wrote 'Civil government...is in reality instituted for the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have not at all.'

But, argue the reformists, things have changed since then, society is more democratic. Unfortunately, present day 'democracy' is still a class society controlled by the rich. The 1984 miners' strike showed how the state is not impartial, but defends one class against another.

Universal suffrage does not alter this. For most people, 'democracy' lasts five minutes every five years - the time it takes to get in and out of the voting booth! None of the representatives we elect are accountable, and voters have no way of ensuring that policies will be implemented. Both the Tories and Labour frequently flout their mandate.

Conditions of crisis and war can move the majority of the working class to launch a determined fight for radical change. But upheaval and revolution are not in the reformist model. Under these conditions, the ruling class will always defend itself with every means available: state repression and fas-

cism are two examples.

Do we urge workers to accept the 'rule of law', return to work, and put its faith in parliament, the civil service and the army? Revolutionaries urge the working class to create its own instruments of struggle and government and fight for power. The reformist project has always led to bloody defeat.

Parliamentary elections cannot be the road to socialism. In reality they are used, by the Labour Party and others, to integrate the working class into bourgeois politics - and away from the struggle for workers' power. In times of revolutionary upsurge and general strikes, such as in France in 1968, elections have been called in order to demobilise and break the momentum of the revolutionary movement.

Objectives

However, revolutionaries do not reject parliamentary activity, nor do we reject reforms which improve the situation of the workers and oppressed. We call on left governments to implement anti-capitalist measures. Our disagreement with the reformists is over the objectives of parliamentary activity and the relationship between this and the struggle outside parliament.

The aim of the reformists is to tinker with the existing system, and improve the conditions of the working masses - finances permitting. This is called 'realism'! Even for left reformists, the activity of the masses fighting for their interests is subordinate to parliament, or at best, it is seen as a support to their work in parliament.

But for revolutionaries, parliamentary activity is undertaken to support the struggle of the working class and oppressed - as a platform to spread revolutionary ideas, help the organisation of their struggle and expose the limits of parliament itself.

agenda

The momentous political events of the last year have raised many new issues. This school will provide an opportunity to discuss these issues in a relaxed and open atmosphere.

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- * Destalinisation and political revolution
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- * State Capitalism
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Single rooms with self-catering facilities. Children will be catered for, let us know their ages in advance.

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£60 for waged, £30 for unwaged and students. (£12 and £6 for bookings on a daily basis)
The school is open to supporters of Socialist Outlook and those interested in our political ideas.

Feedback

Nothing to fear

HARRY SLOAN'S article 'Don't blame Lenin for Stalinism' (SO 2) over-simplifies the question of the relationship between Leninism and Stalinism.

I think Sloan secretly posits the fiction that the actions of Lenin and 'other defenders of Leninist principles', prior to the rise of Stalinism, always embodied (except when they made the odd mistake like banning internal factions) *fundamental tenets of socialist democracy*.

But the idea of a small unit of revolutionary marxists unswayed by alien class pressures or, for that matter, Sloan's 'shortages and queues', in a largely peasant society is, I think, an idealistic one.

Marx called for a ruthless critique of everything existing. Sloan urges us not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. If 'angry intellectuals and workers' in Eastern Europe are subjected all of the decisions of the Leninists to the same ruthless critique that Trotskyists traditionally

reserve for the decisions of Stalinists, what have revolutionary marxists to fear?

Sloan says 'In consolidating his grip on the Party and state apparatus, and transforming Lenin's party into a monolithic parody of itself, [Stalin] was forced to wipe out every vestige of Leninist tradition, even while he erected a facade of statues'. But the history of the real state of emergency, that is the 20th century, shows that human beings have as deep a desire to tear down the existing statues as they have to erect them.

Lenin erected statues of dead revolutionaries to raise the cultural level of the Soviet masses. Now that cultural levels have been raised, those same masses seem intent on tearing down all the statues of Lenin.

The lesson for revolutionary marxists is a simple one. The fate, not of Lenin, but of *statues* is not yet decided by history.

Terry Murphy
Oxford

Misleading on students?

Your coverage of NUS Conference (April 9/May 1) was misleading either by inaccuracy or omission.

First, you accuse *Socialist Organiser* of supporting the ban on *Return*, the anti-Israeli magazine. This is **untrue**. At the Easter 1990 NUS Conference, the Union of Jewish Students circulated a petition calling for *Return* to be banned.

Two Left Unity (LU) supporters signed it. Neither LU nor *Socialist Organiser* backed the ban. Since then, LU has campaigned for the ban to be lifted. You should withdraw the accusation.

Second, your coverage of policy debates was wrong. Palestine was not up for debate, except in the Gulf war debate. And GUPS, the Palestinian student group, does not argue for a democratic, secular state, but a 'two state' solution. You also failed to address such issues as the restructuring of the NUS executive.

Third, you took the wrong position on the NUS elections.

Welcome

I'd like to say how much I welcome the appearance of a paper on the left which appears to have a genuine commitment to lesbian and gay equality. The regular appearance of articles about lesbian and gay issues is excellent in this respect - keep it up!

On a minor point, the way in which my article for the 'In Person' column was edited led to a factual error creeping in. I did not speak at Labour Party conference four years ago (but I did come out very publicly).

If my memory serves me correctly, it was Sarah Roelofs who spoke. I actually proposed a resolution at conference in 1989.

Debbie Epstein
Birmingham

Your May 1 article describes the campaign to re-open nominations (RON) as an 'undemocratic manoeuvre'. It wasn't perfect, and NOLS discredited themselves, but other options were worse.

When the conference did vote to re-open nominations, there was a choice between holding elections in June, when most students have exams; electing from the present executive by co-option, or holding the elections straight away. The latter was most democratic.

In the executive elections, your slogan was 'vote left, transfer to RON'. This involved voting for the SWP before LU and Labour Party Socialists supporter, Mark Sandell, for Treasurer, but vice versa in the FE Vice President election. There was a poor attempt to justify this - LU supports equality for part-time students in NUS, but has a bad position on Palestine!

This nonsense shows that you have no grasp of what is important in NUS, and a sectarian attitude to building an activist student left. The SWP has no strategy for NUS - their sole aim is recruitment. To support them is to fail to take NUS seriously.

Left Unity combines fighting for socialist ideas with addressing the issues that concern students. This is why all the major debates were around LU motions, and why we increased our representation on the NEC. You failed to register this.

By abstractly talking about organising 'rank and file students', you face the question 'how?'. In 1989 you were part of LU, you walked out. Before that you were in Socialist Students in NOLS, and walked out. All this makes your claim of being in favour of building 'the broadest united front of forces for socialism' seem vacuous.

Paul McGarry
for Socialist Organiser
Students.



What should the left do?

Your editorial (SO 3) asked what attitude socialists in the Labour Party should take to the decision of the Liverpool Broad Left to stand candidates against Kinnockites in the local elections and in the Walton by-election. The question was not answered and the lack of a clear and direct answer to a question like this is a big problem.

The editorial was trying to say that it was correct to stand candidates for council but not for parliament. But it does not give readers and supporters of the paper, who may be voters or activists in the area, any indication of what they should do.

Providing political leadership and direction for the left should be the primary task for this paper. Unless we are prepared to state boldly what our view is on the important questions facing our class, we will win neither respect nor authority within it.

Now that the Broad Left has decided to stand against Kilfoyle, supporters of Socialist Outlook should be active in the campaign, since that is where the most class-conscious socialists in Liverpool will be found. Yet the decision to stand was wrong.

I have no special access to

the debates that took place among Militant supporters, but that is the key to this question.

Militant and the left are now marginal in the Labour Party. What is different for Militant supporters is that they have convinced themselves that their leadership of the Anti-Poll Tax campaign defeated the tax and brought down Thatcher. The rest of the world knows that this is some way short of the full story, but the point is that Militant supporters are intoxicated with success.

Their intoxication has befuddled their judgement to such an extent that unless they correct their line, very soon they could be marching out of the Labour Party to become a more strident version of the SWP, but born on a wrong analysis and, after ten years of major defeats for the working class, without even any notion of attempting to regroup the revolutionary left. The consequences for the left in the Labour Party and for Militant itself could be catastrophic.

These issues are too extensive to be covered in a single letter. I hope, for the political level of the paper, that they generate as much passion as Madonna and Jim Morrison.

Liam Mac Uaid
London E13

Get into the groove

Ironically I find myself very much in agreement with Rachel Wingfield's concern about male-dominated organisations. In no way was it our intention to trivialise feminist politics. We meant precisely the opposite.

It has to be said though, it did cross my mind that 'Sex, morality & Madonna' (SO 1) would stir up a hornets' nest. Both Sarah Pickett and myself were fully aware that such an article would lay us open to the charge of political heresy. For my part, if I have sinned at all, maybe it is because I have a tendency to political masochism. But then don't we all...?

Call me paranoid, but I sense from the tone of Rachel's, Kathy's (SO 2) and Ann's (SO 3) letters, an atmosphere of despairing disapproval. How can socialist feminists even consider that Madonna may be anything other than a gender-traitor?

There are many different ways in which this debate could continue. What has certainly been shown is that there is more than one way on the left of looking at sexual politics. For that reason the discussion should go on. Socialist feminists have not all undergone identical processes of politicisation. Everyone can learn at least something from the discussion about our differences. This has obviously

got to go hand in hand with working together to build a strong and vibrant socialist feminist movement.

Going back to the 'Madonna debate'. I think it's wrong to argue that bourgeois individualism, sexual liberalism and sexually assertive women have **nothing** in common with feminism. It is obviously true to say that not every bourgeois individual, sexual liberal or sexually assertive woman is a feminist. That fact though cannot be used to argue the reverse. The truth is that not all feminists are right-on.

Given the fragmentation of the women's movement today and the marginalisation of socialist feminism, this is not surprising. The fact remains that feminism today is a term that means all things to all people. Yet at the same time we are faced with the post-feminist offensive. How can this be fought successfully?

Madonna does consider herself a feminist. We can all agree that her brand of feminism will not in itself result in the ending of women's oppression. That is true for all brands of bourgeois feminism.

But as the deepening crisis of capitalism unfolds it is accompanied by a deepening alienation experienced by individuals in the working class. This is particularly true for young work-

Madonna - just standing up for herself

I FIND much of the 'Madonna' debate perplexing.

She has done nothing more than modernise a form of 'free female' sexual imagery first developed in the 1930s by film stars like Mae West and Marlene Dietrich.

No-one would have been misguided enough to call these women feminists - although they explored sexual and gender roles in a provocative way.

These film-stars flaunted their sexuality and reflected changing attitudes to women in a post-suffragette era, very much as Madonna has done in the 1980s. They reflected changes at the level of culture but they did not campaign for real changes in women's lives.

To be even a bourgeois feminist you have to campaign for women's rights. Madonna stands up for herself no doubt, but she has never campaigned for women as a group.

It's a shame that *Socialist Outlook* didn't get its definitions of feminism clearer before it became entangled in this debate. If 'feminist' simply meant strong or independent women (or women with lots of money) then we'd have to include Margaret Thatcher on the list.

Nor can I agree that Madonna's 'sexual radicalism' is a particular challenge to men or a role model for women. Far from subverting male fantasies of women I would suggest she actually reinforces them.

Can't we move on to some more interesting female performers like French and Saunders, and Annie Lennox? At least they have the merit of some artistic originality.

Valerie Coultas
London

ing class women. What Madonna's brand of feminism, that she **consciously** expresses through her art, says to young women is that it's OK to assert your sexuality, rebel against your parents, express your individuality.

It would be manifestly absurd to say that this, on its own, is what women's liberation is all about. But we should also be clear that the last decade has led to a massive pressure on young people to **conform** to traditional notions of female and male sexuality (amongst other things). Traditionally male sexuality has always been more public and female sexuality more private. In this context the importance of small victories, in this period now, is magnified.

Regardless of whether socialist feminists like or dislike Madonna playing with gender roles (what I think she does in her art), she has to be defended against the right-wing bigots who want to see all expression of women's sexuality reduced to the private sphere.

I don't believe that a socialist, feminist or proletarian culture can exist in the epoch of capitalism. All culture is bourgeois in nature. That doesn't mean it is necessarily bad. On questions of culture then I think it's wise to be an anarchist...

Sam Inman
London, N1



Committee for a Just Peace
in the Middle East

The Gulf war: no peace no victory

Rally • Thursday 20th June • 7pm • Friends Meeting House

Debt action

French conference against Debt.

Several hundred people heard Bernie Grant MP, on behalf of the British Cancel the Debt campaign, and a number of other international speakers, address a conference in Paris on June 8 called by the French campaign against the Debt. The campaign, along with militants from Belgium and Germany, will be sending sizeable delegations to London for the July 13 protest.

Accommodation needed

International visitors to the Cancel the Debt demonstration will need places to stay - most only for one night, a few possibly for longer. If you can help, please write to Cancel the Debt, IFAA, 23 Bevendon St, London N1

Nalگو conference fringe

Over 50 people took part in an extremely productive discussion at the Cancel the Debt fringe meeting on June 12 at NALGO conference in Glasgow. It had been hoped that NALGO conference would debate - and undoubtedly pass - a resolution in support of the campaign and demonstration, but unfortunately despite lobbying by those at the meeting, the item was not reached. Pressure will be needed through

Resolution

The debt burden in the Third World is deepening with every passing day. In 1991, the lives of millions of men, women and children in the third world will be devastated because their countries are forced to neglect the basic human needs of their people - such as health and education - because of debt repayments and IMF and World Bank policies.

Debt is a product of an unequal world economic system and not the responsibility of those in the developing world who live with its consequences.

This branch therefore calls for the cancellation of the debt, whether bank debt, government debt or IMF or World Bank Debt, without conditions.

Further we resolve to campaign in solidarity with those women and men in the developing countries who are struggling for the cancellation of the debt.

We therefore undertake to:

- Sponsor the Cancel the Debt Campaign and make a donation of £.....
- Publicise the demonstration on July 13 and the other activities of the campaign
- Make links with local activists from the campaign to discuss holding local meetings to build the demonstration and to organise transport for it.

branches to ensure that it is discussed at the next NEC at the end of this month, but in the meantime work must be done at branch level to ensure the maximum possible turnout for July 13 from Nalگو members.

Debt discussed in Parliament.

A number of MPs are pledged to ensure that the scandal of Britain's continuing theft of resources from the poorest countries through debt repayment is raised at Westminster before the summit takes place. The Campaign will be holding a press conference at the same time which will include some of its most prominent sponsors and representatives from debtor countries, and will be accompanied by an exhibition on the causes and effects of debt.

A public meeting, jointly organised by the Campaign Group of MPs and the Cancel the Debt Campaign will be held in the Grand Committee Room on July 3. This will be the main focus in London in the lead up to the demonstration itself and needs to be well supported.

For details of transport to the demonstration in London:

Manchester: Chris 061 434 8969, Birmingham: Marian 021 554 5442, Nottingham: Stuart 0602 706654, Oxford: John 0865 251441, Leeds: Sue 0532 784632, Sheffield: Phil 0742 445708, Brighton: Dani 0273 506377, Southampton: Paul 0703 774333, S Wales: Sarah 0792 466570.

The recent Victory Parades in the USA bear witness to the racist triumphalism whipped up to mask the deepening economic, social and political crisis in the world's leading imperialist country.

In Britain, talk around the Victory Parade on 21 June has been much more low-key. After Major's near political fiasco with the 'remembrance service' in Scotland, the last thing the Tories need is to mess about with popular support for 'our boys' back from the Gulf.

The huge demonstrations in the run up to, and during, the war showed the potential of the anti-war movement. This was why it was absolutely necessary for Bush and Major to, in the words of one Iraqi woman, 'bomb Iraq back to the twelfth century' and achieve a rapid military victory.

Although any action rapidly dissipated after the ceasefire,

the need for a strong anti-imperialist international solidarity movement grew all the more necessary. On the whole, the left has failed to recognise the importance of this. This is shown by the tired response of the left to calls for solidarity action with the Kurdish and Palestinian people.

The Victory Parade provides an excellent focus to reverse this trend. There has to be a demonstration of opposition to the imperialist war-mongers. Even those who reluctantly supported the war have been extremely uneasy about an event to celebrate it.

Ever since the ceasefire, anti-war activists have been discussing what counter-action is needed around the Victory Parade in Britain. This has been frustrated all the more by the bureaucratic nature of the Committee for a Just Peace in the Middle East (ex-Stop the War), led by supporters of *Socialist Ac-*

tion. In fact one SA supporter actually said that 'it would be maniacal to try organising anything'.

Women Against War in the Gulf, along with broad sections of the anti-war movement inside and outside of the Committee, have organised a 'Nothing to Celebrate' candlelit vigil in Trafalgar Square on the eve of the parade.

Socialist Outlook supporters in London should actively support both the vigil and also the rally organised by the Committee earlier in the evening. Many people will attend both and will not see them as counterposed.

In the current climate there is always the possibility that one, or even both, events may be a focus for fascist mobilisation. It is irresponsible in the extreme for anyone on the left to let petty sectarianism stand in the way of unity in action.

Alex Feeney

Haringey blames cuts on Kurds

Haringey's cash crisis has been blamed, by the Labour group leading the council, on the influx of Turkish Kurds into the borough in the last two years.

This comes at the time when Haringey is making sweeping cuts in services, riding roughshod over thousands of council workers in the process. The most serious cuts have come in the education sector. The council is spending £11 million less than the figure recommended by the Tories for 1991/92.

The practice of Haringey council is more akin to an employer in the nineteenth century or Rolls Royce than what people might expect of a so-called socialist borough. One Sunday last month, letters were hand-delivered to hundreds of school cleaners telling them to do 30 per cent more work for no extra money. Those who refused to cooperate were promptly sacked.

Secondary schools have been worst hit in the latest round of cuts. Four schools are to lose 30 to 40 teachers. In one school almost ten per cent of the staff will be lost. These job losses cause a further deterioration in working conditions and in the school curriculum.

As if this wasn't enough, almost the entire team of education advisors and inspectors has been cut. The education office has lost so many staff that it will be hard-pushed to

even implement the cuts!

Haringey's school meals - once the council's pride and joy - are to be reduced to sandwiches and frozen hamburgers. Eighty dinner ladies have already lost their jobs, and 30 lunchtime supervisors are about to lose theirs' without any redundancy pay. The lunchtime supervisors have just started an indefinite strike with backing from NUPE.

Despite summer-term demoralisation, the mood of Haringey teachers is increasingly militant. In a recent ballot NUT members voted 7 to 1 in favour of a three-day strike. Under this threat, subsequent negotiations pushed the council into

withdrawing compulsory redundancies and promising to safeguard local class sizes and cover agreements.

Haringey council has made no protest to central government over the current cash crisis caused by the Poll Tax. In blaming Kurdish people the council's Labour leadership is giving a green light to any fascist in the borough. Instead of fighting the Tories on the cuts and the Poll Tax, all they are saying is that their anti-racist policy is also a dispensable 'luxury' along with jobs and services in the borough.

Helen Collinson
member Haringey NUT

Teachers strike against cuts

Lewisham teachers, parents and school-students are involved in a wave of protest over swingeing education cuts. Lewisham NUT and NAS/UWT called a day of strike action on 13 June. Most schools in the borough were either closed or seriously disrupted.

Teachers were joined by school-students and parents in a march through Lewisham and in a picket of the Town Hall. Attempting to intimidate teachers, the council asked headteachers to inform them if there were more than ten pickets outside schools. They also threatened members of other unions with disciplinary action if they refused to cross picket lines.

On the eve of the strike, the education committee had to abandon its meeting after 500 angry teachers, parents and school-students found that the council chamber doors had been locked to them.

Lewisham had already announced massive cuts in education for 1991/92. Going over the unions' heads, the council had

implemented a redeployment package that amounted to compulsory redundancy.

Having discovered it had 'overspent' £5 million on education last year, Lewisham is now implementing panic cuts to try and recoup the money. Their plans will result in support staff being cut by 50 per cent, 1000 hourly-paid teachers being sacked, and money for books and equipment being slashed by a third. Job losses and increased class sizes will follow cuts in supply staff.

Lewisham's problems are caused by Tory cuts and the unwillingness of Labour authorities to collectively fight the break up of ILEA and the implementation of the Poll Tax. Having accepted the Poll Tax Lewisham, like other Labour boroughs, now has to make cuts or raise the tax. Having chosen not to fight, the council is doing the Tories' dirty work for them - by cutting education and threatening workers who fight to defend their jobs and working conditions.

Gill Lee
member Lewisham NUT

Support WOSA!

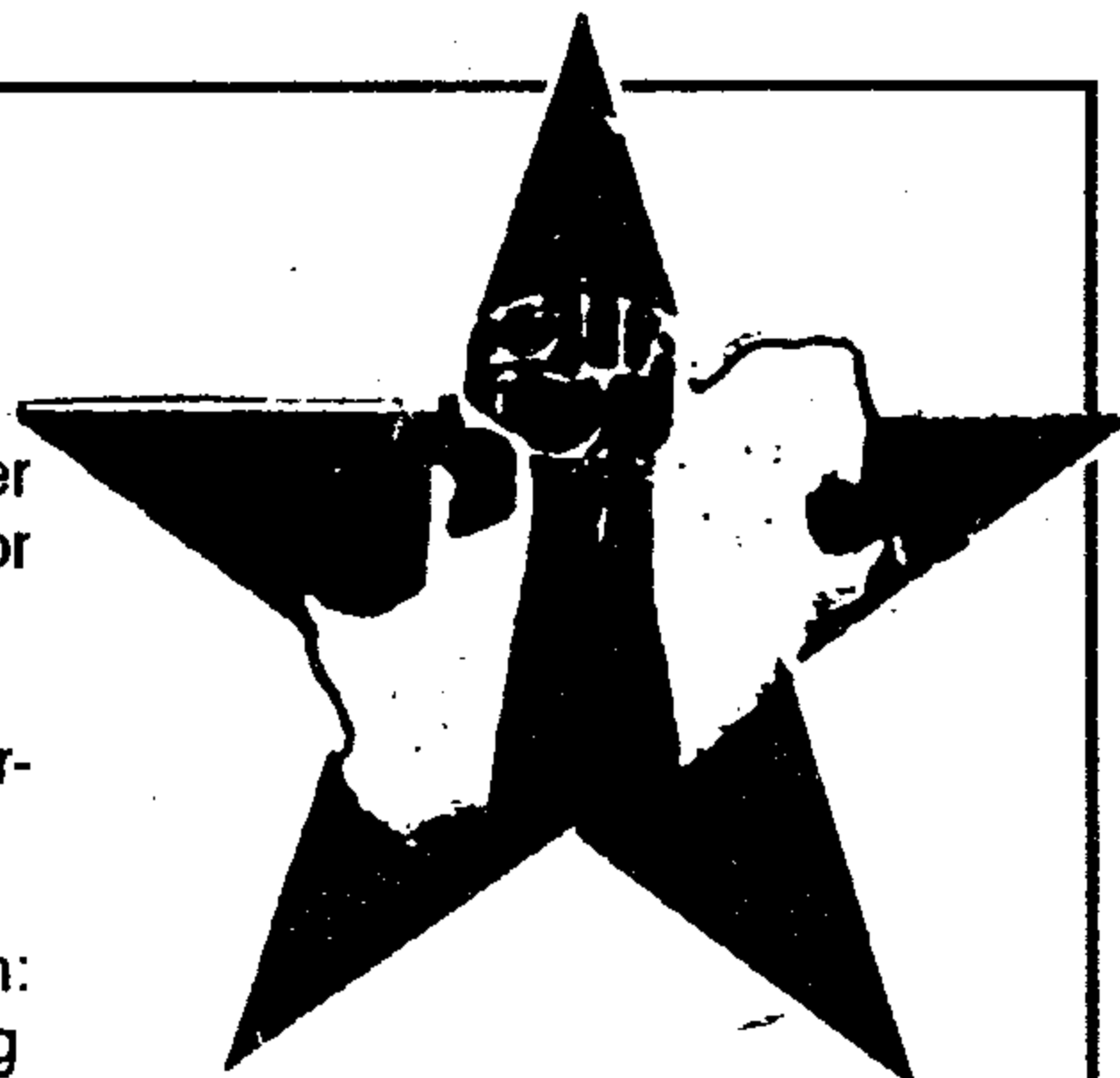
SOCIALISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA NEED YOUR SUPPORT. The Workers Organisation for Socialist Action, WOSA, was founded after the unbanning of political organisations in 1990. It is trying to organise a current committed to class struggle within the liberation movement.

As a young organisation in a large country, WOSA needs your support to continue to put the arguments for working class political organisation.

You can make a donation either directly to WOSA's bank account, or by sending your cheque to:

WOSA, PO Box 905, Pietermaritzburg 3200, South Africa.

Bank: Standard Bank. Branch: Longmarket Street, Pietermaritzburg
Account name: Pietermaritzburg Education Collective
Account Number: 052138232



Pergamon Press dispute - Labour Party conference resolution

'LABOUR PARTY conference notes the independent inquiry into the Pergamon Press dispute initiated with the assistance of the Labour Party General Secretary.

Conference notes, in particular, the findings that the notices of dismissal served on the Pergamon 23 on May 24 1989 should be withdrawn and that the principle of re-employment should be conceded by the Company.

Conference deplores the fact that in the two years between the sacking of the 23 and the sale of Pergamon to Elsevier. Mr Robert Maxwell refused to re-employ the 23 despite the findings of the Christopher inquiry and in the face of appeals from the TUC, the Labour Party conference 1990 and from the International Federation of Jour-

nalists and the International Organisation of Journalists' and from many journalists' and other unions around the world.

Conference believes that at the very least, Mr Robert Maxwell must recognise the error of the sackings and the justice of conceding the principle of re-employment by paying the 23's salaries in full for the two year period.

Conference recognises the damage that would be done to the credibility of the Labour Party's stated commitment to trade unions, were one of its members to fail to make such reparation.

Conference believes Elsevier must take full responsibility for the dispute and meet the demands of the NUJ for re-employment of all the strikers and full recognition for the union.

Breakthrough in Hull strike

THERE ARE signs of a breakthrough in the six week strike at the Parsons plant in Hull. The strike is in support of the AEU, led campaign for a reduction in the working week in the engineering industry.

The plant management have now offered a half hour reduction from July, a further half hour in October and an hour in early 1992. But the offer has been linked to concessions on conditions.

Morale among strikers has increased following a successful mass picket on June 7. The picket, organised

jointly by the strikers and the local Trades Council, attracted support from a number of local workplaces.

The new offer clearly demonstrates that the strike is having an impact inside the factory, though production has been maintained. Now the key issue is that of the strings attached to the management offer.

Though the desire for a speedy settlement is understandable, the real dangers in giving up hard-won conditions must not be obscured.

If a settlement is not reached, immediate steps must be taken to increase support inside the factory, as well as others in the area.

Tube strike undermined

The calling off of strike action on the London Underground has been the subject of debate among readers of *Socialist Outlook*. Here two RMT members offer their views.

THE PROBLEM with ASLEF during the recent London Underground dispute was not confined to its leadership.

It may be unpalatable for some readers, but many rank and file ASLEF representatives were deliberately collaborating with management to undermine the strike.

Their elitism and hostility to the RMT and other grades of workers has led them to develop an unwritten, but acknowledged arrangement with management. ASLEF tries to ensure that the train drivers don't strike during attacks on other workers, in return for a better deal for drivers. The main problem with this is that half the train drivers are organised by the RMT.

The recent dispute was seen as an occasion to recruit, to openly duplicate the management line that there was no reason for train drivers to strike, to tell RMT members that they would be sacked and to put up notices asking members to picket picket lines. The compromise of an ASLEF member of the ASLEF Socialist group was formed and agreed to in the situation.

The other issue is that of democracy in the RMT. Alan Nettle has not grasped the issue. Certainly the original article was wrong or misleading -

there is a bureaucratic set-up in the RMT, even for the hard left dominated LUL side. However, we haven't talked to anyone who wanted the strike to go ahead.

Complying with ballot legislation meant that the strike would have been to defeat proposals that had already been in force for a month. Perhaps Alan thinks that a one day strike should have been called to 'test the water' before the dispute was ended. Apart from the demoralising effect of what would undoubtedly have been a badly supported strike, the union would then have had to call off the dispute using the same procedure.

The idea that the strike would have been a success is just wrong - the mood had changed and many workers would not have followed the ballot result. The problem is not so much that strikes can be called off by a couple of (elected) officials using their own system of consultation, but that *everything* works in a similar way, including the framework for the ballot and the strike.

Although a mass meeting was called, it was to rally the troops at the eleventh hour, not to make decisions.



RMT leader Jimmy Knapp



OVER 500 demonstrators from all over the country (and a delegation from the French print unions) joined a noisy march through Oxford on June 8 to mark the Second Anniversary of the Pergamon Press strike. Platform speakers at the Town Hall rally included the new NUJ General Secretary Steve Turner, who responded to the confident mood of the event by publicly pledging to hold out for reinstatement of all the strikers. Other speakers included union leaders as well as Mike Grindley from the GCHQ workers, and Tony Benn.

PHOTO: John Harris (IFL)

Rail leaders block chance of unity

TWO YEARS AGO the main rail union, the RMT, balloted for industrial action and organised six one-day strikes in defence of their negotiating machinery. They brought the rail network to a halt.

The extent of support for the action surprised British Rail management, which was forced to retreat as a result of the action. But the management did not give up, but changed tactics.

In preparation for privatisation, it wanted increased 'flexibility', continental rostering, to break the power of the Local Departmental Committees, and to separate the network into 'business sectors'. The aim was clear - to break the potential unity of the workforce.

Instead of taking on the union frontally, a tactic which had failed, they chose to break up the negotiating machinery and conditions via 'restructuring', negotiating sector by sector.

The advantage of this was that it enabled the management to use Tory anti-union laws - since to ballot in one sector for action against management proposals in another would be illegal.

Even after action had forced the Board to retreat, the RMT leadership let them regain the initiative, allowing them to pick off one section of the workforce at a time. They chose the Signals and Telecoms section first - one of the least organised sectors.

Instead of preparing and campaigning for action, the RMT leadership balloted section members not for action, but a 'referendum', to see if they accepted the package. Though the vote showed opposition to the plans, the fact that there was no ballot for action was seen by the BR as a sign of weakness. Intimidation was stepped up, with individuals pressed to sign a document accepting BR's plans.

The package included a 25% rise in basic pay - a sweetener for those that did not rely on overtime. But for those that worked long hours to earn a decent wage, it meant a cut in take-home pay of as much as £50 a week. More importantly, it scrapped existing working conditions.

Overtime rates for weekends were ended; eight hours obligatory overtime was required, at normal rates; a flexible working day was introduced; and 'performance pay' in banded scales, creating pressure for conformity, was begun.

Following the introduction of the package, management sought to isolate those who rejected it. For British Rail this makes good economic sense - those who signed the deal are now being booked in for Sunday working.

Alongside this, British Rail has refused to negotiate using the previous, higher levels. The RMT leadership response was to instruct District Councils to organise mass meetings. This was to be a part of a campaign, ending in a ballot of all BR

members for industrial action against the management 'abrogation' of the negotiating machinery.

At those meetings, insofar as wages were discussed, wages were secondary. It was thus with some amazement that activists learned that the ballot was on wages alone. There was no explanation from RMT leaders as to why the question of the negotiating machinery was dropped.

It was this vacillation that led to the eleventh hour decision to call off strike action over wages.

The explanation will, no doubt, be that there was no support for action amongst the membership. Activists were concerned at the danger of losing - but felt that linking the issues offered the best chance of victory.

It has since emerged, from a management circular, that all rail unions have agreed to an ACAS proposal for a 'working party' to look at new negotiating machinery, 'taking into account' changes in the business structure. This appears to be half way to accepting an end to national pay bargaining.

The RMT's ability to achieve unity of its membership across grades and businesses was the source of its strength in the 1989 strikes.

Throughout the union it is necessary to fight against concessions on national pay bargaining and the need for common conditions, irrespective of the business sector that workers are in.

by Sam Stacey

Put the 'social' back into socialism!

AFTER FOUR issues now the new *Socialist Outlook* is steaming ahead. Even those who were most cynical about going fortnightly now admit that the newspaper works better than the former monthly magazine.

Access to it is easier, easier to read and less boring than other papers we could mention.

Written by a newspaperer, it breaks completely with tradition and its main typeface - *Socialist Outlook* uses Palatino instead of the traditional Times Roman - even the *Times* is changing after 55 years!

True - there is still room for improvement. But we're learning as we move ahead. What we do need is money: to buy further necessary equipment, buy more photos, and so on.

Increased sales do help, and more people are now taking *Socialist Outlook* to self. But what we really need is guaranteed income every month. Everyone who can should take out a standing order to the *Socialist Outlook* Fund pending what they can afford on a monthly basis. Standing order forms are available on request. Cheques/postal orders made out to

Socialist Outlook are always welcome too.

Some supporters are already raising money in other ways. House parties can be a great way of raising money with little spending at the outset.

People are more willing to spend money if they are enjoying themselves as well! Let us know what you're planning and we'll try and let others know too.

Send cheques to *Socialist Outlook*, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

socialist OUTLOOK



13 July - march against Debt!

In a couple of weeks time the leaders of the world's seven richest nations are coming to London. George Bush, Helmut Kohl, Francois Mitterrand and the rest will arrive with their finance ministers for their annual review of the world's economy.

Part of their meeting, as usual, will be a cynical discussion about the price the people of the third world have to pay for the debt crisis.

The Cancel the Debt campaign is using the opportunity provided by the summit to mount demonstrations in London and Scotland calling for the cancellation of the debt. It will be a crucial opportunity, at a time of massive international publicity, to strike a blow for the millions of hungry and oppressed in the third world.

The debt originates from the 1970s, when the western banks, bloated with 'petro-dollars', urged bigger and bigger loans on poor third world countries. But as economic recession hit the ability of the third world to pay the huge interest on the debt diminished.

The result has been the famous IMF austerity programmes. Dozens of countries now have their economies policed

by the IMF and the World Bank, which impose savage cut backs in state spending, wage freezes and anti-inflation programmes which have thrown millions into unemployment, hunger and despair.

The irony is that many third world countries have already paid back the debt in interest payments, several times over. Cancellation of the debt would have a minimal effect on Western banks and governments. But still the West continues to pump billions of dollars out of the third world and into the coffers of western banks each year.

In Africa, Asia and especially Latin America the debt is a fundamental political concern. But it is very difficult to break out of debt bondage. The debt could only be repudiated if a number of large third world countries acted together. But most governments in the South are reactionary and tied to imperialism. They have no interest in confronting their western masters.

Those fighting back against the effects of the debt need the solidarity of the workers movement in the advanced capitalist countries.

But although the issue of the debt is well-known in the West,

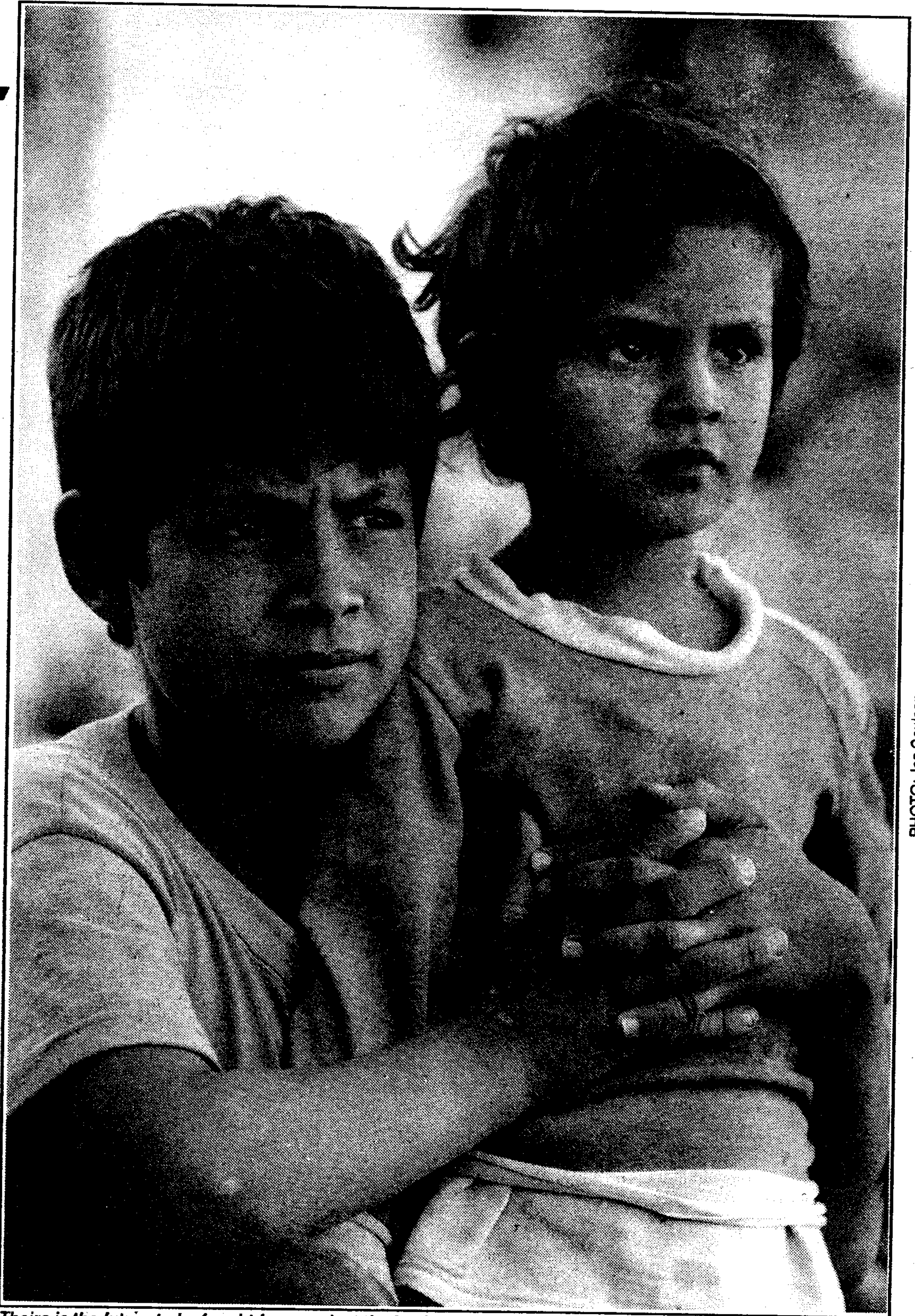


PHOTO: Jez Coulson

Theirs is the future to be fought for - against the banks and multinationals!

little has been done to combat it politically. What action there has been has usually been undertaken by third world charity and campaigning organisations. With the exception of the mass demonstration at the 1989

'G7' summit in Paris, the left has done little.

The London summit in July is an opportunity to turn this around. Campaigns are getting off the ground in several European countries. Already plans are being made to demonstrate at next year's G7 summit in Germany; but unless there is a big demonstration in London, next year's plans will be set back.

The Cancel the Debt campaign has widespread sponsor-

ship from labour movement and campaigning organisations. But that support has to be turned into action. There has to be the maximum possible turnout at the 13 July demonstrations. Strike a blow for the people of the third world - make sure that the world's media and political bosses know that the British labour movement stands with the people of the third world!

*See page 14 for further details.

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International Demonstration and Carnival

Support third world struggle
against the debt

Saturday 13 July

Assemble: 12 noon, Harmsworth
Park, Imperial War Museum

Rally at Trafalgar Square 2.30pm