

NS 55

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

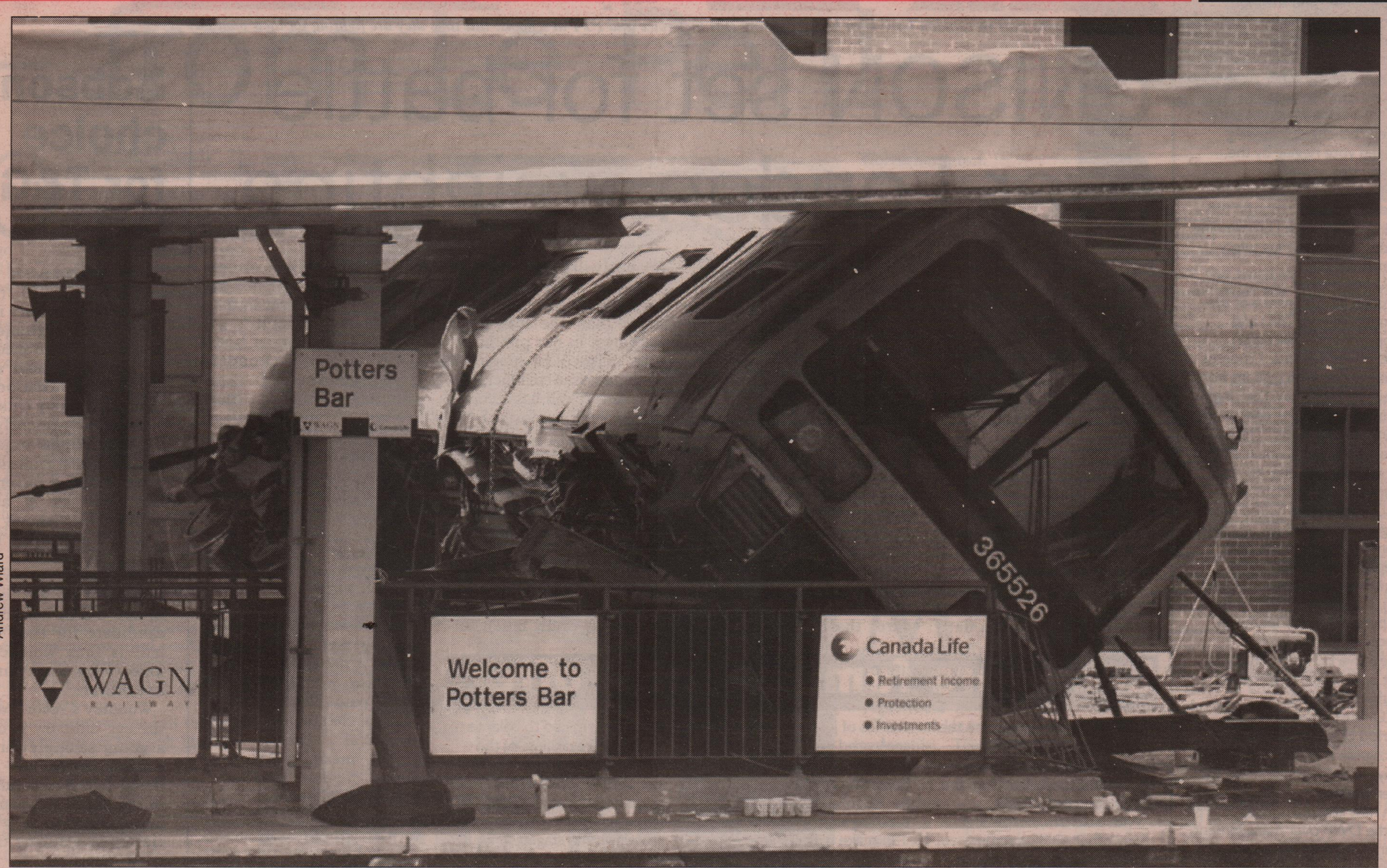
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Andrew Wliard

Railtrack: how many more have to die?

The Potters' Bar derailment has added its seven dead and list of casualties to the toll of death and misery on Britain's chaotic, privatised railways.

Debate still rages on how the vital nute were removed from the points which had allegedly been "inspected" the day before they triggered the 100-mph tragedy. But almost all impartial analysts and experts agree that the privatisation of the rail network has made it almost impossible to

restore safty standards that were swept aside in the pursuit of profit.

Amid the shock and anger, only Labour ministers seem determined to leave Railtrack mired in the private sector, gambling with people's lives.

New Labour - the friend of big business - has set its face against the 78% of people who still call for renationalisation of the rail industry. **How many more need to die before they change their minds?**

Left falls short in PCS

Paul McGowan

Recent elections in the Public and Commercial Services Union were disappointing, with Left Unity (LU) failing to capture control of the National Executive Committee.

Although Janice Godrich, a LU supporter won the Presidency of the Union and the bloc increased its seats from 5 to 12, the Moderates regained a small majority on the Executive at the expense of the other right wing faction Membership First.

These election results are being challenged following alleged vote rigging by the Moderates.

The Moderates tapped into disenchantment amongst the membership with LU's running of the Jobcentre Plus safety campaign.

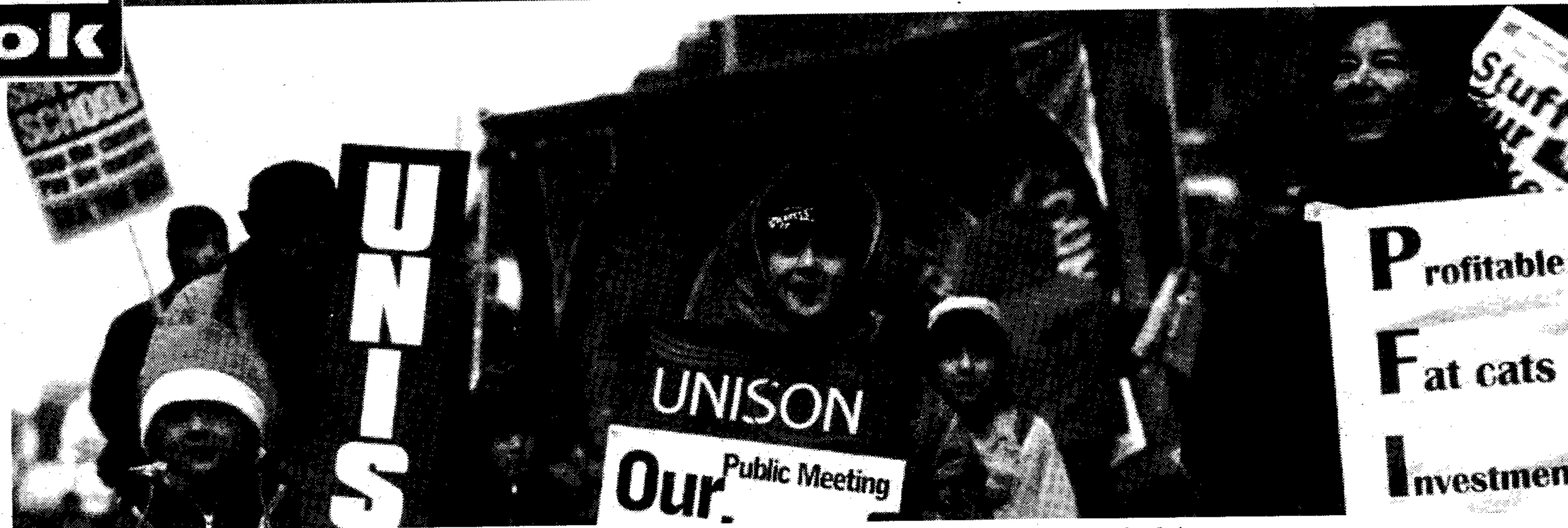
LU had control of the dispute through its dominance of the Benefits Agency (BA) and Employment Service (ES) Executives. Despite 7 months of strike action with millions being spent on strike pay, the Union failed to gain major concessions from the employer. The LU Executives had no clear strategy for winning the dispute, and were slow to escalate it.

LU would have hoped for a large vote in the NEC elections from members in the new Department of Work and Pensions (the merged BA and ES), but their handling of the dispute delivered apathy. In elections for the DWP Executive LU won a majority, but only 12.5% of members bothered to vote.

LU must now undergo a period of self-criticism and recognise it needs to change its ways in order to galvanise the membership.

A new dispute is likely to arise in the DWP over management plans to change the sickness rules. LU must get its act together quick.

It has to address the organisational weaknesses of the Union and ensure the membership is fully involved in its campaigns. To turn around the Union it is not a case of just winning elections.



Local government staff in London have been key to fighting cuts in service and PFI in schools: this time they are fighting for their own pay

UNISON set for battle over London weighting

AS WE GO to press, UNISON's local government members in London are set for a day of strike action and a major demonstration on May 14 as part of their campaign for a decent level of London Weighting, after an overwhelming ballot vote.

The UNISON claim is for a flat rate £4,000 London Weighting to be paid to all local government workers across the capital. The claim seeks to replace the current rates, which range from £1,407 in outer London to £2,674 in inner London.

This claim has been flatly

rejected by the employers, angering tens of thousands of council workers.

Regional Convenor Geoff Martin said:

"Public sector workers across London are growing increasingly angry at the pitiful levels of London Weighting and they are prepared to strike to get a fair deal that really reflects the cost of living and working in the capital.

"The public know that services across London have been ravaged by staff shortages because we can't recruit at current wage levels. I am sure that the people of

London will understand that it's better to have the short term inconvenience of a strike than the long term meltdown in our public services that will be inevitable if the pay issue isn't tackled."

The strike call has received strong support from UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis. He said:

"If councils are serious about delivering world class public services in London they must pay decent wages to their staff. A growing number of public service workers are being forced to leave London because it is so expensive - how much fur-

ther do essential services have to decline before the government is prepared to do something about it?"

UNISON's Chair of Local Government in London, Dave Eggmore said:

"London is the most expensive capital city in Europe and vital public service workers are leaving, resulting in many jobs going unfilled and services on the brink of collapse.

"With the Police now paying up to £6,000 in London allowances and many inner London nurses getting over £4,000, it is about time local government workers caught up. Our members' claim of £4,000 is not excessive and a flat rate would help the poorly paid the most.

"From classroom assistants to social workers, from school meals workers to home helps, UNISON's London members provide the services which are the very fabric of a decent society.

"It is high time they were rewarded and poverty pay was removed from local government in London."

If the employers do not return to the negotiating table, a further two days action are planned for 13/14th June.

Hobson's choice for T&G left

Jack Johnson

PETER BOOTH (who? you may well ask) is the main right wing candidate in the imminent elections for deputy general secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union.

Booth is presently the union's national organiser for the fast-diminishing manufacturing sector. The fact that he is almost unheard of shows how much of a genuine battle he has led.

But there is no easy answer for the genuine left in the T&G, because the candidate for the "broad left" is Tony Woodley, the union's national automotive officer.

Woodley's record within the car industry is one of arguing strongly for concession bargaining - sacrificing jobs and conditions in the hopes of persuading management to keep factories open - during threatened closures at Ford Dagenham and Vauxhall's Luton plant.

Among the concessions embraced by Woodley has been the hated system of "banking hours" which he has pushed through one mass meeting after another - leaving workers to face the consequences.

The T&G broad left takes the view that because Woodley has been repeatedly featured in the media, notably around the decision by BMW to close its plants at Longbridge, people will vote for him.

But for those who have to go on working in the worsened conditions created by Woodley's "concessions are understandably hostile to him.

It is said that because Woodley is seen as a bit of a renegade, Bill Morris and the T&G leadership wants Booth elected as a safe pair of hands to stop any major struggles.

This is also the reason given in the Guardian for Booth being the choice of Tony Blair.

But as far as the genuine left is concerned, there is no real choice on offer.

It's time for urgent steps to ensure we don't face the same wretched Hobson's choice when the General Secretary post comes up.

Lecturers fume at 1.5% offer

FURY and frustration were the mixed reactions of Further Education lecturers to the latest insulting pay offer from the Association of Colleges.

With teachers, nurses and many other public sector workers notching up rises in excess of 3%, the principals have offered a pitiful 1.5% to lecturers - who are already well below school teaching pay scales.

With starting salaries as low as £16,000, and average

salaries of just under £23,000 compared with over £25,000 for classroom teachers, it is becoming increasingly difficult for FE colleges to recruit teaching staff.

To make matters worse, a growing cash squeeze is forcing a wave of cuts in curriculum subjects and redundancies in a number of colleges, which receive only two thirds of the funding per student available to sixth form colleges.

But with hard-faced man-

agers determined to balance the books regardless of the cost to staff and students, the lecturers' union NATFHE must brace itself for more solid and sustained action than the token protests it has staged so far if it is to secure a decent settlement.

In Oxford, CFE bosses facing a £1m-plus deficit have sacked over 30 lecturers - but plan to appoint an extra THREE vice principals in a management revamp.

UNISON throws out PFI deal

Delegates at UNISON's Health Group conference in Brighton delivered a sharp rebuff to their national leaders when they heavily voted down a compromise deal which would have kept most, but not all, non-clinical support staff in NHS employment, but handed others over to PFI contractors.

The deal had been offered more or less as an ultimatum to UNISON negotiators, by ministers keen to defuse this potentially explosive point of conflict over the 45 major PFI schemes still in the pipeline.

After the bruising experience of the long-running Dudley Hospitals strikes on precisely this issue, ministers were keen to seek a tactical retreat that kept the essence of PFI intact, while placating their private sector friends by insisting that non-clinical services in PFI hospitals would still be managed (for profit) by contract companies.

UNISON and ministers claimed that the deal would have ensured that 85% of the support staff in five key "trades" - cleaning, catering, laundry, portering and security - remained in NHS employment, with their pension and other terms and conditions intact.

But the deal made no reference to other groups of non-clinical support staff who may well be included in the plans of a PFI consortium, notably admin and clerical staff (involved with IT projects, telephonists, recep-

tionists, etc): and since the protection applied solely to the five named trades, this could mean large numbers were specifically excluded from protection.

Also excluded were any staff regarded by the contractors as 'management'; they would have to choose between demotion or a compulsory transfer to the private company, and works and maintenance staff, all of whom would be privatised.

The private companies would not only pick and choose the staff to be transferred, but would also take over the implementation of the Trust's grievance and disciplinary procedures. They would fix staffing levels - and have the right to employ staff on their own terms and conditions to fill gaps in the workforce.

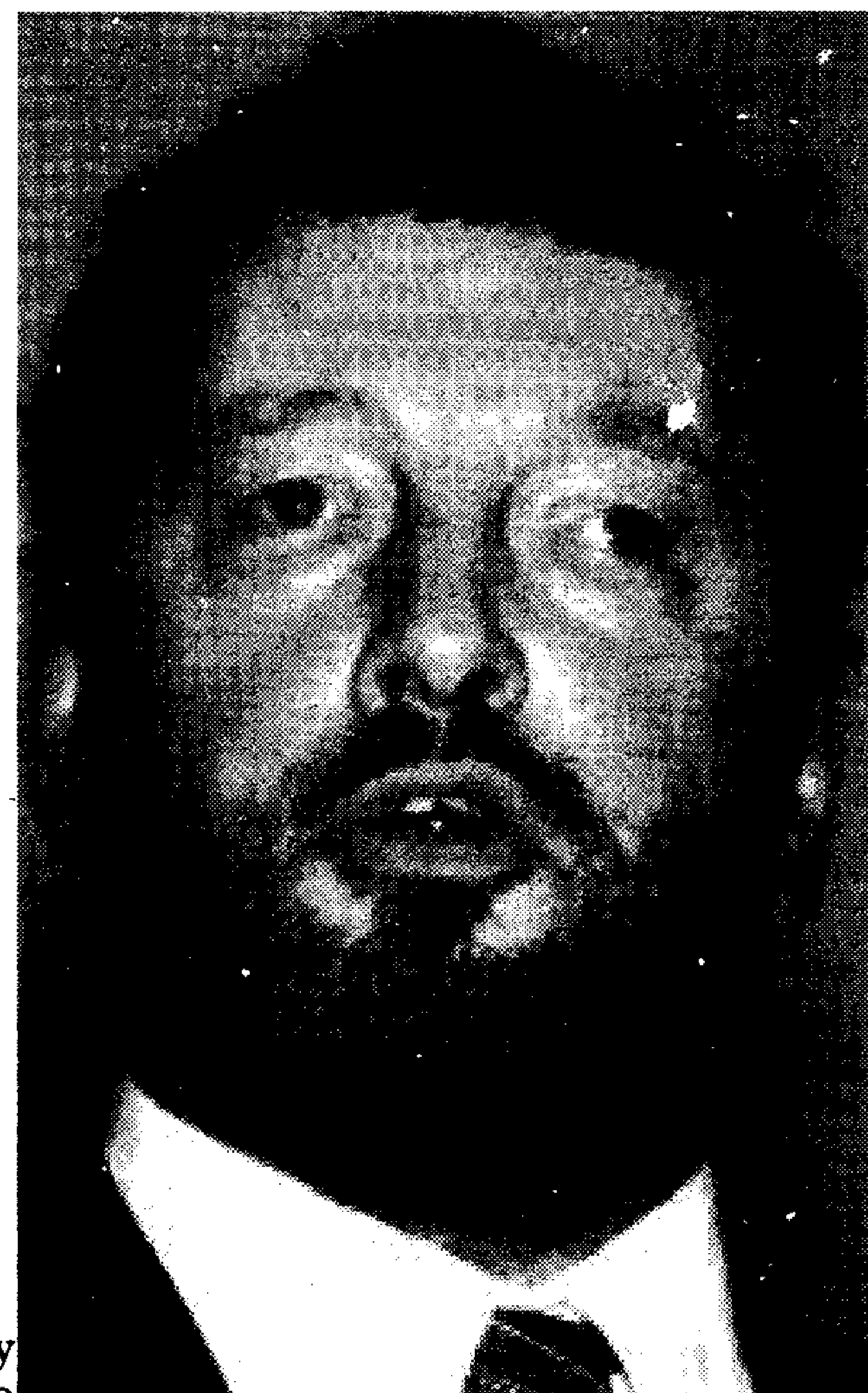
The deal was presented by UNISON as the best that could possibly be obtained, and its defenders argued that in the three "pilot"

schemes where it is being proposed first up to 93% of UNISON members would be protected or (in the case of Havering Hospitals) brought back into NHS employment: but there was a widespread feeling among delegates that the union should not sign up to endorse the privatisation of up to 15% of support staff, and that with government on the run, more could have been achieved.

The very different approach of Welsh Health Minister



Blunkett learns lessons of France – from Le Pen!



Andrew Wield

On Sunday April 21 France – and the whole of Europe – went into shock as Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Lionel Jospin, to go through to the second round of the French Presidential elections. The response of Jospin's fellow Social Democrats in France, Britain and every other country was to blame everyone but themselves for creating both the conditions that allow the far-right to flourish and the pernicious ideology which scapegoats asylum seekers and racial minorities.

On Wednesday 24 April, before the French results had even sunk in, Home Secretary David Blunkett pitched in to this debate. He argued on Radio 4's "Today" programme that "restoring confidence in the asylum system would be a step towards social cohesion and seeing off the far right in Britain."

The interview took place on the same day as the second reading of the asylum, immigration and nationality bill was to happen in the Commons.

The provisions of the bill include the imposition of English lessons, and an oath of allegiance to the crown, on those immigrants who wish to apply for British citizenship, as well as more detention centres for asylum seekers.

The Bill will also further tighten border controls. The decision to introduce variable fines of up to £4,000 on airlines and ferry companies which carry migrants without proper documents comes after the high court ruled flat-rate £2,000 fines illegal because they failed to take account of individual circumstances.

Blunkett is also proposing that new asylum seekers should be only receive education and health care in asylum centres while they are going through the appeals system.

Detention centres have already segregated asylum seekers from the rest of society to a huge extent – these proposals take that apartheid even further.

The bill proposes that the children of 3,000 new asylum seekers attend special schools at four new pilot "accommodation centres". A shortlist of eight sites are being looked at, nearly all of which are former Ministry of Defence bases and are in rural areas.

The Home Office says the new accommodation centres, which will not be locked, will provide full healthcare and legal and education facilities, including interpreters. But some MPs are sceptical that they will be able to deliver a broad enough range of services.

"Whilst they're going through the process, the children will be educated on the site, which will be open, people will be able to come and go, but importantly not swamping the local school."



intoned the Home Secretary.

He continued by telling his audience that a GP's surgery in his constituency wrote to him a few weeks ago saying it could not cope because a third of its patients required "intensive language interpretation".

His response is not to see how those resources could be found to enable adequate health and education to be delivered to all – and thus really undercut the divide and rule policies of the BNP, but to pander to them.

Asked whether he wanted to see more or fewer foreigners come into Britain in 10 years time, Mr Blunkett said:

"I'd like to see dramatically fewer people coming under the asylum regulations and then failing, because 80% of them fail, and I'd like many more people to feel free to come and work here, to holiday here, to feel welcome here."

Mr Blunkett returned to the airwaves the following day to defend his use of the term "swamped", calling his critics "ridiculous". The defiant home secretary refused to apologise for his remarks and accused the media of "making a mountain out of a molehill".

His original comments prompted an outcry, drawing comparisons with Margaret Thatcher's controversial claim in 1978 that Britain was being "swamped" by immigrants following riots in

Wolverhampton.

Mr Blunkett not only refused to apologise: he also insisted that he had not made a slip of the tongue and insisted that he had chosen the word deliberately, even though he could have picked another expression.

The education secretary, Estelle Morris, said she agreed "101%" with Mr Blunkett's analysis of the problems of educating the children of asylum seekers but refused to endorse his use of the word "swamping".

Former Labour party deputy leader Lord Hattersley however called on him to withdraw his comments. "It was a mistake that he ought to be much more categorical in disclaiming and apologising for," he said.

Mr Blunkett was also criticised by the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Gurbux Singh, who described his use of the word swamping as "regrettable".

"Political leaders need to provide leadership. To create the image, which I think is the danger, that the country is being swamped by asylum seekers and immigrants just leads to a false impression and it doesn't do justice to the debate."

Refugee groups warned that politicians who tried to sound tough on asylum threatened to fuel anti-immigrant feeling.

"Rather than appeasing the views of racists and bigots the main political parties should be clearly distancing themselves from these views and showing leadership by informing the British public as to why it is morally right to welcome refugees," said Nick Hardwick of the Refugee Council.

Tauhid Pahsa, of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, was also critical: "The use of the word swamping actually demonstrates the true intention of government - to keep them out of sight and out of mind, far removed away from mainstream communities."

But Downing Street supported to Mr Blunkett, stressing that asylum had been discussed at cabinet and that Blair had told colleagues that the success of the far right in the French elections would move the issue up the British domestic agenda.

"People in this country are not against people coming in but they want to see a system that is fair," said the prime minister's official spokesman.

New Labour even insists that, far from pandering to the right, Blunkett is addressing a leftwing agenda, designed to raise standards for families seeking asylum and provide a faster process for assessing their claims.

This is the same nonsense they have been parroting since they were elected in 1997.

In those five years the conditions under which asylum seekers are forced to live has become worse, while the administrative system for process claims has become more and more chaotic. Racist violence has increased - and so has support for the BNP.

The response of the left must be to step up our defence of asylum seekers – and build for the biggest possible demonstrations in Scotland and England on June 22.

BNP warning as Labour disappoints poorest

THE LOCAL elections on May 2 saw an alarming display of support for the neo-fascist British National Party – though well short of the scale of success many had been expecting.

The vile undercurrent of racism tapped by the BNP's carefully targeted campaigns, which averaged 12% in just 66 wards, is a serious problem, but the underlying issue – as it was when the National Front was able to grow for a period in the late 1970s – is the failure of Labour in office to deliver radical measures to meet the needs of the poorest sections of the working class.

The mounting crisis in housing, the proliferation of dead-end jobs, the failure to deliver promised improvements in education, and the growing gap between the rich and poor create the social tensions and sense of injustice which can offer fertile ground for fascists.

Labour's 33% share of the vote on May 2 is only slightly above their worst-ever result in recent years, the 32% they got in 2000, and 7% lower than the last time the same seats were contested in 1998.

But in some areas Labour did show more than expected resilience, mounting a strong campaign to regain Oxford from a Lib Dem-Green coalition, and helping to push the level of participation back up by 5% to 35%.

Labour did worst overall in London, where it lost 180 seats, and now retains control of only 15 of the 32 councils.

While Blair heaves a sigh of relief, the problems are only beginning for the Labour councillors elected to face another round of cash limits and privatisation: the Socialist Alliance, running for the first time at this level, has plenty of scope for stronger campaigns in the future.

Busy timetable agreed as Alliance records progress

Alan Thornett and Terry Conway

A well-attended and up-beat Socialist Alliance National Council meeting on May 11 in London took a discussion on the local election results with reports from alliances across the country. The balance sheet was unanimous; it was the best set of results that the SA had had.

The SA after a year and a half of becoming a national organisation was making an important step forward. There was a new enthusiasm and a new mood of optimism that can take the Alliance forward to a new stage.

This was followed by a debate on Palestine, or more precisely the attitude the SA should take to the struggle of the Palestinian people.

There were different strands to this discussion and three resolutions before the meeting.

Swindon Socialist Alliance presented a resolution that focused deliberately on immediate solidarity tasks. In moving it, Martin Wicks, the Swindon delegate argued that it was wrong for the alliance to take a premature position on what should or could be the long term solution in the Middle East - while also making it clear in his presentation that he vigorously opposed a two-state solution.



The Alliance will organise a conference on international issues aimed at young people

Martin Thomas from the AWL proposed a two-state position in a brief resolution, while the SWP's John Rees moved the resolution which was agreed in the end.

Rees opposed an amendment from Margaret Manning for "a democratic secular state" and one from Workers' Power's Mark Hoskisson, for a "socialist, secular Palestine" arguing that the meeting should not adopt a strategic line but should con-

fine itself to solidarity.

Although it was clear from the discussion that those proposing a two-state solution were in a small minority both strategic proposals were voted down and the main resolution on solidarity carried.

Rees' resolution also argued that the two main slogans under which the Socialist Alliance should campaign should be "Freedom for Palestine" and

"Victory to the Intifada".

Another amendment from Oxford SA proposed replacing these with "Solidarity with the Palestinians" and "Israel out of the Occupied Territories" was defeated as was the attempt to argue that we should have three slogans: "Solidarity with the Palestinians", "Israel out of the Occupied Territories" and "Victory to the Intifada".

Whilst the main resolution

would have been strengthened by adding the demand for a democratic secular state the outcome was a good basis for the SA to give solidarity to the Palestinian people in the present conflict.

There is no doubt that the fundamental strategic issues will be debated again at both local and national level.

The other main item dealt with was proposals for conferences and events for the rest of this year, which was a

complicated discussion given the difficulty of fitting everything in.

The outcome was an agreement for a number of important initiatives, even if the time and structure of several of them was controversial. The following was agreed:

■ A trade union activists meeting, soon after the TUC. This would be a working meeting designed to organise and co-ordinate the trade union work of the SA and take forward the decisions of the conference in March.

■ A conference on new Imperialism, new internationalism aimed at young people, to be held between September and the end of the year.

■ A policy making conference, open to all members, on the Euro to be held before the end of the year, in order to adopt policy in advance of a referendum on the issue.

■ An AGM to be held in January.

This busy time-table together with the real enthusiasm generated by the election results, looks set to make sure that the Socialist Alliance becomes a stronger political force over the months ahead - on the streets, in the workplaces and in the colleges, not just at the ballot box.

Socialist Alliance polls well in local elections

Alan Thornett

The Socialist Alliance stood 209 candidates on May 2, by far the largest number on the left. The result was the best set of results it has achieved to date - much better than in last year's general election even when the lower turn out is taken into account.

Within this there was a wide variation of results. Some were clearly breakthrough results others were more modest scores, putting down markers for future contests and getting the name of the Alliance more widely known.

In London the Socialist Alliance scored an average of 7.5% across the 88 seats it contested - nearly double its score in the London Assembly election. The strongest borough was Hackney with an average score of nearly 12% across the 13 seats contested.

The SA beat the Tories in 10 of the 13 wards. This reflected both the crisis which has existed in Hackney council and a strong campaign by the local

Alliance.

Campaigning journalist Paul Foot had the best results in Clissold ward with a score of 20.8%. He was followed by Polly Matcham (Hackney Downs) with 17.5% and Richard Peacock (Leabridge) with 16.3%, both of whom had been particularly active in disability campaigns.

There were strong results in other parts of London as well. In Camden Alan Walters scored 14.2% and in Haringey Simon Hester polled 16.6%.

In Lambeth (Brixton Hill) Julia Hall polled 12.8%. In Newham Paul Philips (Forest Gate North) polled 12.7% and Muhin Haq (Forest Gate South) polled 12.5%.

In Tower Hamlets Mark Weeks polled 17.4% and in Waltham Forest Lee Rock (William Morris) polled

9.2%.

Outside London the best scores were in Wigan, where Barry Conway polled 21.4% and Judith Ford (Whelley) scored 8.3%. In Makerfield Michael Doherty scored 12.7% and Jacqui Pointon 9.9%.

In Swindon Andy Newton scored 10.9%.

These results were won by candidates who stood on a socialist platform which did not just include opposition

to cuts and privatisation, important as that is, but opposition to the war, solidarity with the Palestinians, and in defence of asylum seekers to this country.

These results are an important step forward for the Alliance. We now have an opportunity to build and revitalise the Alliance.

The SA did not go confidently into these local elections, there had been a few poor by-election results and many SA members were uncertain as to our electoral prospects at the present time.

This election has changed all that. It will increase our confidence in electoral work and invigorate future interventions.

The SA is in very good shape. In the course of a few months it has held a trade union conference of over 1,000 activists, and have done well in these elections.

Already there are by-elections in the offing in Tower Hamlets and in Luton. There are now some very good results to be built upon.

Socialist Party shows its disappointment

The Socialist Party stood in 30 seats in the local elections, standing under the Socialist Alternative banner. They retained two of their existing councillors and lost two.

Dave Nellist retained his seat in Coventry with a remarkable 52.8%, winning by a margin of over 300 votes. This was clear testimony to the respect Nellist has built up though the many years he has been active in the city.

Ian Page retained his seat in Lewisham with 1065 votes, again reflecting the long-term work he has done.

Elsewhere Socialist Alternative candidates had some good scores as well, reflecting the fact that the Socialist Party has been intervening in elections for a long time.

Bill Hopwood in Newcastle Byker polled 20%, Paul Malliband in Preston (who lost his seat) polled 19.85, and Pete Glover in Bootle polled 32%.

The rest were in the same bracket as the Socialist Alliance results, which was particularly noteworthy

given that the SP seats were more carefully targeted.

The SP itself, however, had clearly been expecting far better results, and made their disappointment clear. In their assessment published with the results Hannah Sell finds a novel way of counting the votes:

"Nonetheless, our votes did not reflect the enthusiastic support we received from thousands of people on the doorstep. A far better expression of our support is reflected by the increased numbers of papers sold during the election."



Many health workers and health campaigners will have heaved a sigh of relief at the outcome of Gordon Brown's Budget: but they would be well advised to study the small print before revelling in the streets, warns HARRY SLOAN

One factor which nobody, however radical, can question is that Brown has triggered the biggest and most rapid ever increase in spending on the NHS.

Spending next year will rise by a hefty £6.6 billion – a cash increase of over 10 per cent, and more than half as much again than the expected uplift.

This will be followed by successive rises of 10 per cent each year to 2007 – equivalent to 7.4% if allowance is made for the general rate of inflation, reaching an allocation of almost £106 billion by 2007-8 – equivalent to double the level Labour inherited in 1997.

By any standards these are large sums of money, and indeed Gordon Brown's plans would meet Tony Blair's promise to lift British health spending up to and above average levels for other EU countries – from the present level of 7.7% (including private sector spending) to 9.4% in 2008.

This is a bigger increase than most campaigners had even asked for.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn unveiled plans to invest some of this additional cash in recruiting an extra 80,000 professional staff – 15,000 consultants and GPs, 35,000 nurses and 30,000 therapists and scientists.

It all sounds good so far: so where's the catch?

One big problem is that none of the extra cash kicks in until the next financial year (2003/4): this leaves many hospitals and Primary Care Trusts staring down the barrel of deficits carried over from last year, and facing renewed demands to balance their books by next April.

For many Trusts this already means painful and demoralising cuts and economies are under way even as the government promises "jam tomorrow".

This links to a second major snag with Labour's handling of the NHS: this year's spending and all new money will be strictly tied to a series of stringent targets – for which many health authorities are already warn-

Will the private sector pocket Brown's extra billions?



Morale is at rock bottom among NHS staff



Don't worry: there'll be more money for services – next year!

ing there is barely enough money to go round. In South East London, for example, where the new Strategic Health Authority faces pressure to achieve 22 specific nationally defined targets, it has declared that there will be no resources available to meet any additional local priorities.

So if your name is not on the list, there will be no extra cash at all: and among the key services signally omitted from government performance targets are mental health and in particular the treatment of acute mental illness.

There is no relief in sight for city centre mental health wards struggling to cope and contain potential violence and mayhem with beds 100% or more occupied. And none of the long-awaited invest-

ment in 24-hour crisis teams and community-based services to replace long-stay hospital treatment for patients with long-term mental illness seems likely to materialise.

A third, related problem is that the lion's share of the new money being pumped in to health care is being allocated directly to the NHS, but relatively small amounts to social services, many of which are also facing deficits and cuts.

Yet without a major expansion of social service provision, government targets for the more efficient discharge of older patients from front-line hospital beds will be dead in the water: social services need extra cash to finance the expansion of home help and other support for frail older people living alone, and to purchase additional nursing home places – where these are available.

Indeed the problems of finding sufficient nursing home capacity are likely to worsen in the next period.

Even before Brown's budget announcement, nursing home owners, almost all of them operating for profit but confronted with rigid ceilings on the amount local councils will pay for each place, have been pulling out of the market, and converting many of their properties into more lucrative luxury flats.

Initiative.

This means that by 2007 as much as £4.5 billion a year will be flowing straight out of local NHS revenue budgets to pay for the lease of PFI hospitals and fees for support services from private contractors.

But Milburn has also restated his view that short-term shortages of beds and capacity to treat waiting list patients should be tackled by buying in more operations from the private sector through the so-called "Concordat".

After the Budget, Milburn declared that the number of NHS patients receiving private operations will double again this year to over 150,000.

Yet NHS hospital Trusts in London, where this is a major problem, warn that this will cost an average 40% extra for each patient treated privately – slicing even more vital cash, and poaching scarce nursing and medical staff from hospitals already struggling to cope with demand.

This brings us to the fifth problem – one that cannot be evaded much longer: the availability of staff.

The plans to recruit thousands of additional nursing and professional staff each year underline the importance of retaining staff already trained and in post.

Yet the evidence is that all over the country nursing staff are being lured out of the NHS, either to other jobs, or drawn to the higher rates of pay, flexible hours and reduced level of responsibility offered by nursing agencies.

Theatre staff earning £22,500 in the NHS can find themselves working next to agency staff doing the same job for £35,000 plus travel expenses: agency nursing staff can earn rates of up to £30 an hour, with even more over weekends or bank holidays.

The fact that NHS managers are having to pay these rates to agency staff reflects the dire shortages of

qualified staff within the NHS itself. The only way to prevent this haemorrhage of skills (and cash) to the private sector, the NHS itself must increase pay, and improve conditions.

Top NHS managers know they cannot hope to meet demand or government targets unless they manage to recruit and retain the additional qualified staff they require.

This calls for a wholesale reorganisation of the chaotic system of NHS pay. But government ministers recently backed out of the complex "Agenda for Change" negotiations over restructuring NHS pay, apparently because they were alarmed at the extra costs of a fairer system.

Now ministers are trying to placate Tories and other right wing critics, who argue that Gordon Brown's billions would be "wasted" on pay increases – by taking a tough line, and offering little or no concessions on wages.

In fact in a labour intensive, qualitative service, which already spends 70-80 percent of its revenue on pay, there is no other way to expand other than by spending more on staff. And if staff are not paid more, then many will vote with their feet, leaving key services in headline-grabbing crisis.

But there is a sixth, crucial area in which Brown's plans could founder, and where a tough line from government is required.

Costs of pharmaceuticals have been soaring, pushing Primary Care Trusts and front-line services into financial problems: Brown's budget is likely to trigger even more price rises, which could carve a deep hole in the NHS kitty.

As a monopoly purchaser, the NHS should take a tough line against the profiteering drug firms: but this would have been assisted had Brown decided to raise some of the additional funding for the NHS from a turnover tax on the drug firms and other multinationals that have sussed out Britain and New Labour as a soft touch.



The Guardian



It seems certain that the new injection of cash into the health care system will be seen by these profit-hungry proprietors as a green light to rack up their charges, especially now Alan Milburn has decided to impose fines on local authorities which fail to deliver sufficient facilities for patients discharged from local hospital beds.

However Milburn has handed over only a pittance in extra cash to the councils, leaving them caught between a rock and a hard place. Local crises can be expected.

The fourth general problem is the extent to which the new, expanded NHS budget will be siphoned off into the pockets of the private sector. There has been no major increase in the allocation of NHS capital, which is needed to replace the costly option of financing new hospitals and facilities through the Private Finance



YOU REALIZE OF COURSE, THAT THIS OPERATION WILL COST YOU AN ARM AND A LEG.

Scotland:

Campaign for free school meals

The Scottish Socialist Party Bill to provide "a free and nutritious meal to all school pupils" is receiving widespread support across Scotland.

In recent weeks the STUC voted unanimously at its conference to back the bill. Other supporters include the BMA, Child Poverty Action, the Scottish Churches, UNISON and even the Sunday Herald.

The Bill would impose a duty on local authorities to provide a free nutritious meal and a drink to all pupils. It cuts across the rapidly-gaining burger culture in many Scottish schools where meal provision has been privatised, water costs more than a fizzy drink and those children who do take meals are mainly faced with fries and burgers with few healthy options.

Most poverty and health professionals have identified this as the one single action which would have the biggest impact on children's and later adults' health. Although some pupils are eligible for free meals, there is still a stigma attached to this and take up of the provision is very low.

The SSP has been holding meetings across Scotland promoting the Bill. These have been well attended and there is real support for the measure from teachers and parents.

On May 11 a nationwide petition was organised with SSP members setting up stalls in most towns across Scotland. At my local stall we had queues waiting to sign the whole time we were there.

Although most of Scotland supports the Bill, in Parliament there is opposition to the costs. It is estimated the measure would cost £174 million. The only parties committed to its support are the SSP and the Greens although some SNP members back the bill, as well as Labour MSP John McAllion.

Despite this pressure is being brought to bear. The SNP are currently fence sitting, but they will suffer if they publicly oppose the bill and may eventually support it. An alliance very like that which successfully got backing for the abolition of warrant sales is building up.

The key parliamentary votes are expected in June, however, it is conceivable that procedural manoeuvres could delay its presentation.

With this Bill, the SSP has yet again identified a cause - free school meals - where the status quo is immoral, predominately hits the poor, costs the tax payer money through ill health and where our proposal is backed by huge sections of society.

If Labour or the SNP defeat the bill this will be a major plank of the platform on which the SSP stand at the next election.

This also is an issue socialists throughout the UK should take up through the Socialist Alliances.

Warrant Sales - the living dead

In a last petulant act, just as the bill to abolish Warrant Sales was about to pass into law, Labour passed an amendment delaying the implementation for 2 years to allow "alternatives" to warrants and pointings to be set up. Over 18 months passed, and a report was tabled at the end of April 2002, setting out the Executive's proposals.

Surprise, surprise: Warrants and Pointings are back - in a new guise.

The proposals set up a debt referral scheme whereby most debts rather than going straight to a sheriff are referred to debt management services. The Executive claim this will end warrant sales.

Unfortunately, the scheme does not make referral compulsory on the creditor. An obdurate creditor could refuse and go straight to court where the sheriff could well impose compulsory seizure of goods - including from a person's home - pointings by another name.

The measure would also turn all voluntary debt management agencies into legal agents, and this is annoying this sector.

Clearly the Scottish Executive, having opposed the SSP bill down to the wire, attempted to sabotage its introduction and delayed it, thinking the express will of the parliament could be ignored.

The SSP will be seeking the removal of pointings from the proposals and will be seeking the support of all those who voted for the bill to that end.

Since the Act was introduced, the number of pointings has reduced almost to zero as councils found alternative measures and feared the bad publicity of acting against parliament. If these regulations are introduced they could use again

Workers hit back at Blunkett's "swamping" slur

Veronica Fagan

The outrage at David Blunkett's outrageous "swamping" speech has spurred many teachers and health workers to action, to prove how isolated he is in his views and to leech the poison that his words can encourage.

Teachers and health workers in the East London Borough of Tower Hamlets also put together a petition, as have teachers in Brent.

The majority of those involved are people who work with large numbers of asylum seekers, who have heard first hand the situations from which children are fleeing in their countries of birth and are furious at this attack on them.

They are also sure that, far from being a way to undercut support for the far-right, whether in the shape of Nick Griffin or Le Pen, policies like these are the way to give them credence.

The Tower Hamlets petition reads:

"We protest at David Blunkett's recent statement that asylum seekers are "swamping" schools and health services and that "legitimate" concerns over asylum seekers



Blunkett's call for segregated education and health care has angered many

are boosting the vote for nazi organisations.

Our health service and school system are indeed over burdened - by 25 years of underfunding! Asylum seekers are not the reason why there are not enough teachers, nurses and doctors.

Nor are they to blame for crumbling school buildings and the long hospital waiting lists. Indeed refugees make a positive contribution to mainstream services, including

working in schools, colleges and universities and the NHS.

We are appalled that the blame for the failures of dispersal policy is laid on frightened children and sick asylum seekers.

We demand that the human right to live within society - not separated and segregated - be applied to all children. It is not possible to provide rounded education for children in segregated centres. We note the concerns of the cross party MSPs

who recently visited Dungavel centre and reported that children get only a limited education and are being damaged by the conditions in which they are held.

We demand that the policy of detention and separate schooling be immediately dropped."

Newham NUT have circulated the following official petition:

We, the undersigned, are school children, students, teachers and parents.

We condemn the comments made by David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, that educating refugee children in local schools would lead to them being "swamped".

We oppose the Government's plans that asylum - seeking children should receive separate education in accommodation and detention centres.

We say our schools are for ALL children and ALL refugee children are welcome".

Others should follow suit - and also do what Brent campaigners have done in writing to the local paper making clear that there is significant opposition to Blunkett's pernicious racism

Support builds up for asylum week of action

Terry Conway

Plans are being laid to make sure support for the week of action in defence of asylum seekers from June 15- June 22 is raised far and wide.

Activists at the planning meeting on May 7 ensured that every trade union conference between now and then would be leafleted and every General Secretary written to. A letter

supporting the week of action signed by Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn MP is being circulated

The meeting hoped that there would be emergency resolutions at some of them to support the action. Such a resolution has already been submitted to the Amicus-MSF section conference and hopefully others will not be far behind.

Certainly there had already been a warm response to the planned activities at the London May Day March, where thousands of leaflets were distributed to the crowds in Trafalgar Square as they heard speakers such as Dianne Abbot MP attack the Labour government's treatment of asylum seekers.

The subsequent election of three BNP councillors in

Burnley has further strengthened determination to step up the fight to make sure that asylum seekers are welcome here.

Meanwhile the coalition between the Campaign to defend Asylum Seekers, the National Coalition of anti Deportation campaigns, Barbed Wire Britain and the National Civil Right Movement also agreed that we should not let the third reading of Blunkett's Asylum Bill pass without protest.

While new Labour may trumpet the fact that they plan to abolish the hated voucher system, which stigmatised asylum seekers, they don't point out that people will still have to live on only 70 per cent of poverty line income support. At the same time their plans will massively increase the numbers of people confined to immigration prisons - when many of those affected are fleeing torture and imprisonment in their countries of origin.

If you want to get involved in these actions contact CDAS:www.defend-asylum.org, Barbed Wire Britain: www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk, National Civil Rights Movement www.ncrm.org.uk or National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: www.ncadc.org.uk

Roger Sylvester may get some justice at last

Susan Moore

The Guardian of May 4 reported that "Three detectives are to face disciplinary action over their investigation into how a man died shortly after being restrained by police, the independent Police Complaints Authority said yesterday".

Roger Sylvester, 30, died eight days after an incident outside his home in Tottenham, north London, in January 1999. Ever since his family and other campaigners have fought tirelessly for justice. But their demands for a public inquiry have never been met and instead an attempt was made to fob them off with a police inquiry - the results of which the family were never shown

Now a detective superintendent and two detective sergeants who were involved in that inquiry are to face a total of 7 disciplinary charges, the PCA said.

A spokesman for the authority said: "The charges relate to alleged neglect in that investigation and

were recommended by Essex police who, under the supervision of the independent Police Complaints Authority, conducted an investigation into the death of Roger Sylvester. A disciplinary hearing will take place on a date to be arranged."

Maybe now at least that part of the cover up will be exposed.

The Police Complaints authority has also said it would not make a decision on whether there were any disciplinary issues against eight officers who were involved in Mr Sylvester's detention until after the inquest, which is now set to take place in October. This date, over three and a half years since Roger's death has only been recently set, despite the fact that Lord Justice Woolf urged the Met in May 2001 to set an immediate date.

Each of these concessions has been wrung from the Met through tireless campaigning - which will continue until justice is finally done.

United for May Day

Paul Wilcox

In London, May 1 saw 16,000 take to the streets. For the first time, trade unionists and anti-capitalists joined together to demonstrate on May Day. This was also the first time that a May Day march went to Trafalgar Square while Parliament was sitting.

This was a colourful and diverse march with a strong presence of youth. Peace activists, Palestinians, Socialists, Anarchists anti-fascists and environmentalists come together in a colourful and vibrant demonstration against the ravages of the capitalist system.

The media may try to ignore the demonstrations against this vile and corrupt system – but they will never keep us from marching. They will try and convince us all in the so called “free press” that the demonstrators are a small minority.

Yes, we are a minority – but we are growing day on day. Even after September 11, the anti-capitalist movement is growing stronger and on May Day protests from Sydney to Paris saw youth and trade unionists united. As George Monbiot put on Newsnight later that day: “the demonstrators may be small here in the West but they are massive across the world”.

The media don't say anything about what we are fighting but just look around. In Argentina, the bosses system is crumbling with banks closed and millions without work. The Zionist state of Israel killing innocent children in the name of the “War against Terrorism. Poodle Blair and his puppet master George W

Bush are planning to kill thousands of Iraqis. All this is done in the name of global capitalism.

The Socialist Alliance had a high profile on the demonstration, with many placards and banners, particularly when you consider that many Socialist Alliance members marched with the Stop the War Coalition, Globalise Resistance or one of the many other campaigns that we are all active in.

The coming together of the different campaigns on May Day to march together is a vital step in the fight against Global Capitalism.

Many young demonstrators on the march were eager to carry the Socialist Alliance placards and young comrades I spoke to were eager to learn about the Socialist Alliance

As young Socialist Alliance members we have duty not just to fight elections – which are vital – but to campaign on the issues that the youth have been invigorated by. We want to turn the Socialist Alliance into an anti-capitalist workers party.

Many youth have been turned off by “politics” – which they are told means other people making decisions for them. That is why we have to build the Socialist Alliance on the same line as Rifondazione Comunista in Italy or the Scottish Socialist Party.

For these organisations elections are only a part of the struggle and they understand that it is direct action which will bring the workers and the youth side by side in struggle against oppression.

We have seen mass demonstrations in Spain and Italy and France where youth

have been a large and vital part of the process in building the international fight-back that is needed. And with the rise of the far right across Europe we must give the new generation who are coming into struggle the alternative to the fascists – the battle of ideas and the actions of socialists is important in battle against the far right and the capitalist class.

The media say Resistance is futile but we are marching and we are organising. May Day is an important day for the Workers & Anti-capitalist movement – we have come together we have discussed and learnt new ideas.

Many of the older trade unionists were visibly marching with a spring in their step. As they marched along side them, like me they were inspired by the convergence of the young and old.

For the future is in the hands of the youth – but the past struggles can give our young movement a vital and more dynamic feel as we learn the lessons of the comrades who marched before us.

The main if not the most important slogan we use is “Another world is possible”, the idea that this fight is one we can win and must win. May Day shows that a convergence of the Anti-capitalist movement with others fighting against war, poverty and the destruction of our planet is possible.

A united fight against this system is the only way we will rid the planet of the disease of capitalism. That is why the fight to build the European Social Forum due to take place in Italy in November will be a major priority over the months ahead.



Part of the united May Day march through London

200 on march in Tyne & Wear

Paul Wilcox

Over 200 people marched from the Life Centre in Newcastle to Exhibition Park on the Tyne and Wear annual May Day parade. The demonstration was larger and more vibrant than in recent years, with a high percentage of youth on the streets.

With pensioner activists, Trade Unionists, Greens and the revolutionary left, the event brought together a broad spectrum of activists.

May Day has always been a time for the Left to get together. Over the last year the spirit of unity has developed further, with comrades working more closely with each other than in recent years because of the devel-

opment of the Socialist Alliance and the Anti-capitalist movement.

The closing rally was addressed by a number of trade unionists, including Mick Rix from ASLEF as well as speakers from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the local campaign against the Lap Dancing club in Newcastle. All of them spoke about the attacks from the New Labour government on Trade Union Rights and Blair and Bush's thirst for war.

What came out more than anything else was the general consensus from the speakers and the comrades at the rally was that there is a fight back going on.

The workers movement is

on the up – we have suffered defeats but the new determination which comes from the social movements and the Anti-capitalist youth in general has given the Left in the north East a boost.

Some argue that May Day is just some nostalgia trip for tired old trade unionists – but this is fundamentally not true. Comrades in the North East from the Palestine Solidarity campaign, Socialist Alliance and the trade unions are fighting against this system that has decimated much of the North East.

May Day is workers day – we are fighting to make every day Workers Day.

May Day around the world... May Day around the world ...

Susan Moore

Any summary of May Day protests in 2002 would rightly focus on the extraordinary demonstrations across France in protest against Le Pen – which we cover in more detail on Page 12.

But there were other noteworthy moments elsewhere too.

In **SYDNEY**, thousands of activists focused on two questions – opposition to the obscene treatment of asylum seekers by the Australian government and solidarity with the Palestinians

“The Palestinian resistance and freeing the detained illegal immigrants are one and the same cause” said one teenage girl. “It's all about overthrowing the colonialism here and in Palestine” she said, as the police waded in to attack the protesters.

Earlier Victorian Trades Hall Council secretary Leigh Hubbard told 10,000 workers claims that May Day had had its day were false, as workers faced the same issues now as

they did when they first claimed the day as their own 120 years ago.

“Things are as tough as they ever were,” he said. “Bosses are still wanting to screw more and more productivity out of workers.”

In the Philippine capital of **MANILA**, about 500 socialists took to the streets Wednesday in protests against the government and U.S. military exercises.

They focused on claims that thousands of U.S. troops currently in the Philippines are part of a plan by Washington to re-establish a permanent presence in the Southeast Asian country, which was formerly a U.S. colony and site of U.S. military bases.

Left trade union leader Elmer Labog said Wednesday's rally would be the start of a campaign to push for President Arroyo's removal.

“Workers are determined to launch a nationwide campaign to press for her urgent removal” Labog said in a statement. Labog, head of the May 1 Movement, the country's

biggest leftist union, said Arroyo should be removed from office for “her sycophancy to foreign monopoly firms... through her promotion of globalization policies.”

In **ITALY**, where unions are in a bitter fight with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's government, half a million people rallied against proposed reforms they say will make it easier to sack workers.

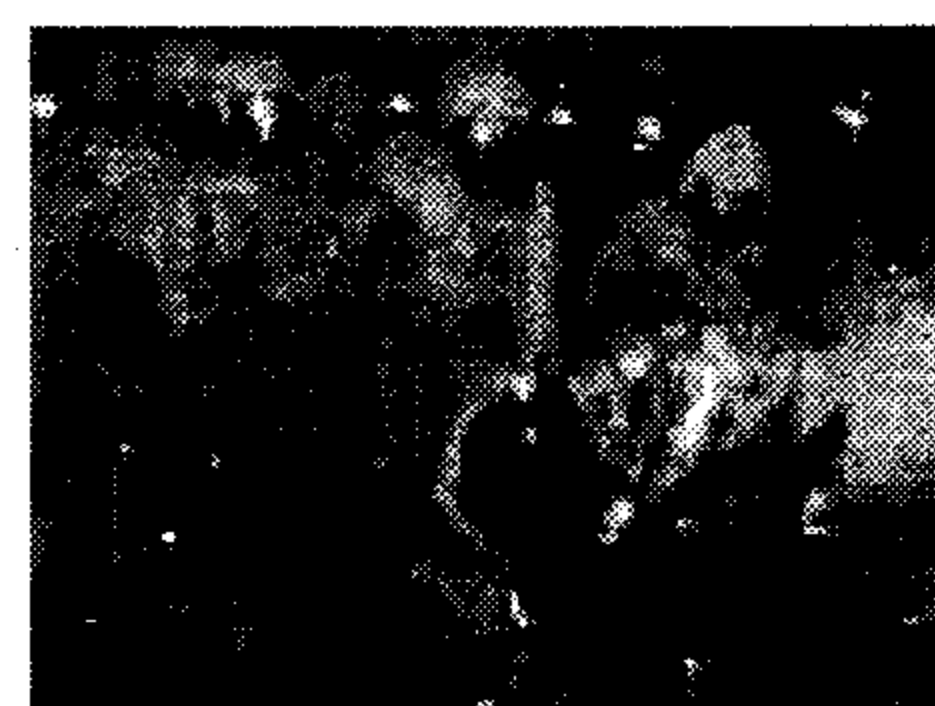
A sea of red flags and banners transformed a medieval piazza in **BOLOGNA**, as some 60,000 labour union members, many clutching red carnations, attended a Labour Day rally with the slogan: “For peace, employment, the defence of rights and against terrorism.”

Both **GREEK** and **TURKISH** protesters used May Day marches to denounce Israel's incursion into the West Bank, burning an effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon outside the U.S. embassy in **ATHENS**.

“Long live international solidarity to Palestine,” read a banner in Syndagma Square in central Athens, where thousands



Above: Australian cops get tough with protestors. Below: May Day in Berlin



of demonstrators had gathered. “A thousand greetings to the Palestinian resistance,” read a slogan at a rally in **ISTANBUL**, Turkey.

Meanwhile, **CUBA's** President Fidel Castro addressed more than a million May Day demonstrators: “We will not lower our flags before the hegemonic superpower that today dictates its orders to lackeys and boot-lickers,” in

Latin America.

“This has been the largest demonstration in Cuba since the triumph of the revolution,” in 1959, Castro told the crowd in Revolution Square, packed with Cubans in red and white T-shirts waving red, white and blue Cuban flags.

Across the 14 provinces, seven million of Cuba's 11.2 million people were reported to have assembled in similar rallies.

Castro particularly focused on those Latin American governments – including Argentina – who had supported the recent US criticism of his regime at the UN.

They are the ones who are plagued by “hunger, unemployment, corruption and social marginalization,” Castro argued, “they are the political symptom of the fact the prevailing political and economic system in Latin America is coming to an end. They are the swan song of neoliberal society.”

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of chanting, flag-waving **VENEZUELAN**s marched for President Hugo

Chavez on Wednesday, the first large demonstrations since bloody street clashes last month sparked a failed coup.

Chavez supporters – many wearing the red berets made fashionable by the army paratrooper-turned president – held banners labeling the president's opponents “fascist dictators.”

“I was in bed crying for two days when they kicked out Chavez. Then when he came back we were so happy,” said Haydee Carriella, 55-year-old woman who came out to support the president.

“The opposition was left like kings without crowns.”

At the pro-Chavez march, many proudly wore red T-shirts reading “Circles of Bolivar” as the neighborhood groups are known, in memory of the legendary Bolivian revolutionary Simon Bolivar.

“The only weapons we have are the lessons we give the poor – to help them fight for their rights,” said Angel Yaraquin, a farmer, joining a stream of people marching toward the presidential palace.

Solidarity with Indonesian workers!

Veronica Fagan

Indonesian trade unionist Ditta Sari recently refused to take a "human rights award" of \$50,000 from the sportswear trans-national, Reebok.

Reebok gives this award, annually, to a number of activists, because it is cheaper than paying the Third World workers who slave in its sweatshop factories a living wage. It makes them look good.

Dita explains that she turned the award down - despite that fact that her organisation could put the money to good use, because, "it would have been hypocritical to accept the money."

"In 1995, I was arrested and tortured by the police, after leading a strike of 5,000 workers of Indoshoes Inti Industry. The workers were demanding a wage increase (they were paid only 70 pence for an eight hour day). They demanded maternity leave too. This company operated in West Java, and produced shoes for Reebok and Adidas. I have seen for myself how the company treats the workers, and used the police to repress the strikers."

"Globalisation is producing neither universal welfare nor global peace. On the contrary, globalisation has

divided the world into two antagonistic parts.

"There are wealthy creditors and bankrupt debtors. There are super-rich countries, and underdeveloped countries, super-wealthy speculators, and impoverished malnourished children. Globalisation intensifies the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

"The low pay and exploitation of the Reebok workers of Indonesia, Mexico and Vietnam are the main reasons why we will not accept this award.

"In Indonesia, there are five Reebok companies. 80% of the workers are women. Since the workers can only get around \$1.5 a day, they then have to live in slum areas, in unhealthy conditions. This is particularly bad for the working-class children. At the same time, Reebok collects millions of dollars in profits, every year, directly contributed by these workers.

"We believe that accepting the award is not a proper thing to do. This is part of the consequences of our work to help workers improve their lives. We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of the Third World countries. And we surely hope that our stand can

make a contribution to help changing the labour conditions in Reebok-producing companies."

Dita Sari is 29 and began her political activism ten years ago. The Indonesian labour movement faced constant repression under the Suharto dictatorship. Dita participated in setting up free trade unions, in leading illegal strikes and rallies to try to improve workers' conditions and agitating for open democracy in Indonesia. Dita Sari was frequently arrested, and she was tortured and imprisoned. In 1996 she was jailed after leading a demonstration of 20,000 workers.

At her trial in 1997 Dita Sari handed flowers to the judge, prosecutor and hundreds of supporters packed into the public gallery. She then began reading a statement, and as she read people sang the popular song of struggle, "Hymn of Blood."

When the sentences were handed down, the crowd shouted: "The court is rigged."

While Dita was in prison she was elected chairperson of the trade union, the National Front for Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNPBI), on whose behalf she turned down the Reebok award. She was



Dita Sari

released from prison in 1999 after the collapse of President Suharto, and after an international labour movement campaign, and publicity from Amnesty International.

In 2000 the FNPBI was recognised by the Indonesian government. Since her release she has continued to organise and agitate for improved conditions for workers in

Indonesia: "We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of Third World countries."

These are just some of the reasons why the British campaign No Sweat has pledged to raise money for the FNPBI. Indonesian trade unionists don't want the blood money of the multinationals - but they do want money sent in solidarity by other trade unionists across

the world.

Send donations to "Indonesian Workers' Solidarity" c/o No Sweat, PO Box 36707, London SW9 8YA

Phone for more details, speakers etc: 07904 431 959. Affiliations to No Sweat are £50, individuals, £1. Send cheques to the PO Box, above, payable to "No Sweat".

International Summer Camp

Calling all young activists



● Are you involved in the anti-globalisation movement, the anti-war movement or other struggles against the rotten capitalist system we live under?

● Would you appreciate the space to talk about how we can work together for a different, a fairer, more sustainable, demilitarised world?

● Do you want the opportunity to meet with hundreds of other young people for a week of political discussion and debate, and have fun as well?

If so, you should come to the Fourth International's Youth Summer Camp - where revolutionary socialists from across Europe get together to do just that.

The camp will take place in Brioude, France from Saturday 27th July to Friday 2nd August inclusive. The theme will be "This globalisation is not ours, let's build another world!" Speakers will include Gilbert Achcar, Daniel Bensaïd, Olivier Besancenot, Penelope Duggan, Michel Husson, Braulio Moro, Catherine Samary, and François Vercammen.

We don't yet know how much it will cost for travel and food - it's likely to be between £150-£200 from London, and we should have firmer costs soon. If you want to find out more, get in touch.

Ring us on 020 8800 7460, email outlook@gn.apc.org or write to Youth Camp c/o Po Box 1109, London N4 2UU



GERMAN metal workers, from the giant IG-Metall union have put up two fingers to globalisation and the employers with a pay strike that has now reached Berlin and the big car manufacturers. The employers have argued that they 'cannot afford' to pay the strikers' demands - but the strike is a challenge to all those multinational employers who aim to "compete" in the global marketplace at workers' expense by driving down pay and conditions to match or go below the lowest common denominator.





The profound shock to the political system in France brought about by Le Pen's elevation to the second round of the presidential election is still unfolding, even after Le Pen's very welcome heavy defeat in the second round.
ALAN THORNETT reports.

Le Pen reaches second round: left vote reaches 3 million

Double shock from French elections

Le Pen was allowed into the second round by the collapse of support for the governmental left of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party (PCF).

And the reasons for this are clear enough. They were a part of a government which fully, even enthusiastically, adopted the neo-liberal agenda and attacked the working class.

The position of the Socialist Party in this is a direct product of the evolution of Social Democracy across Europe. By the mid-1990s Social Democratic parties were in power in 13 of the European Unions' 15 states. Without exception they adopted the neo-liberal agenda, often in order to meet the Maastricht criteria, and are now reaping the whirlwind of their attacks on the working class.

France, of course, was not about to go fascist, as the second round results show. But the rise of the Front National is a very dangerous development, and also reflects a European trend in the emergence and strengthening of far right parties.

Whilst the Front National may not be a classical fascist party, Le Pen is certainly a neo-fascist with a background of violence, and with plenty of thugs around him.

He was a torturer in Algeria. His core supporters go back to Petain. The level of sheer fear that the prospect of a possible Le Pen victory generated amongst

the ethnic minorities in France was understandable.

If the collapse of the governmental left vote to below that of Le Pen was the first big shock of the first round then the rise in the far left vote was the second. This was absolutely astounding and a major step forward for the left in France.

In 1995 Lutte Ouvriere (LO) got 5.3%, which was remarkable enough. Now the far left have doubled that, with a score of 10.4% – or three million votes. What we saw in the first round was a collapse of the centre and a polarisation of the vote.

What was even more astounding was the vote of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR), French section of the Fourth International, given that it fielded a candidate who was standing for the first time. The LCR won 4.2% of the vote, or 1.2 million votes.

The idea that the LCR could poll more than the French Communist Party

would have seemed unbelievable before this election. This achievement was based on having an excellent young candidate who handled the media well, and made a serious appeal to young people radicalising against global capital. The LCR scored 13.9% amongst the 18-24 year olds.

We have to stress that the far left were absolutely right to stand in this election and

reject those such as new Labour (and others) who try to hold them responsible for Le Pen's breakthrough.

The collapse of the PCF vote to 3.7% is another historic development in this election. From the PCF point of view the collapse of its support because it was part of the Government is bad enough – but to be outvoted three to one by the Trotskyists could well be terminal.

Once Le Pen went through to the second round, the key issue was mass mobilisation on the streets. The LCR was the first to call for such mobilisations, immediately after the result was known.

Hundreds of thousands demonstrated over the next few days and then May Day saw two million on the streets – the biggest demonstrations since May-June 1968.

The LCR call, rightly, was to fight Le Pen in the streets and in the ballot box. In other words vote against Le Pen in the second round. This was opposed by LO in France and much of the far left in Britain, who called for abstention or for a blank vote.

Ultimately the issue here was whether you were prepared to see Le Pen elected, since if you call for abstention and enough people heed your call, this would be the result.

This is not resolved by piously arguing, as some did, that Le Pen wouldn't win

anyway so it was safe to call for an abstention. If you call for an abstention you have to be prepared for people to carry out your call, not assume they will ignore it.

In the course of this debate there is a tendency to minimise what the result of a Le Pen presidency would mean. It would have involved a huge attack on the organisations of the working class and on minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers.

Calling for a vote against Le Pen was not a call for a popular front, or an alliance with a section of the ruling class. It was a response to a dangerous situation created by a quirk in the French electoral system, which had handed Le Pen the possibility of a major political advance in France and beyond.

The second round was in effect a plebiscite against Le Pen. In fact the LCR called an anti-Chirac demonstration immediately after the declaration of the results of the second round.

It was crucially important that Le Pen got the worst possible result in the second round. The problem with abstention or blank voting is that it increases the Le Pen vote as a percentage of the Chirac vote – and that is the only result which has a mass impact. The anoraks will look at the abstentions and blank votes, but they will have no political impact.

18-82 was the popular result of the voting. If big abstentions had reduced this to 30-70 Le Pen would have claimed a huge victory and the far right across Europe would have been strengthened. Not to understand this is to misunderstand the dynamic being generated on the streets.

The idea, as some argued, that voting for Chirac (or against Le Pen) sowed illusions in Chirac does not make sense either.

The slogan was "better a crook than a fascist" – it could hardly be clearer. People were having themselves disinfected after coming out of the voting booths. Chirac would have to be mad to think that the 82% who voted for him support him.

In fact a big vote for Chirac weakens him rather than strengthens him, because weakening the far right weakens the whole of the right. The confirmation of this was the jubilation at the 18-82 result, particularly amongst the ethnic minorities.

The political situation has radicalised in France since the first round vote. The potential for the far-left to grow is therefore increased – and is probably greater than any time since 1968.

Whether this will reflect directly in the Parliamentary elections, however, is a more complicated question, since there will be a big pressure

on people not to vote for what they believe, but what they should.

All this raises the future of the far left in France, and places a big responsibility particularly on the LCR and LO. What is posed, particularly if the PCF begins to break up, is a new party of the left on the lines of Rifondazioni Comunista in Italy. And the LCR and LO are by far the best placed to initiate such a development.

LO unfortunately has rejected every appeal for unity from the LCR since the European elections, when they jointly won four seats in the European Parliament.

When this issue was raised in a debate on the French election results recently organised by the CPGB, the LO speaker said that if anyone thought that this would lead to unity between the LCR and LO they are 'living on another planet'.

The unity of the European elections, he stressed, had only been because there had been a 5% threshold to overcome, and that needed a united slate. That situation does not exist in any other election.

In this presidential election the LCR proposed a joint slate behind Arlette (LO's candidate) – and LO turned it down. And they have refused even a non-aggression pact for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. If they continue in this way LO may have to face being side-lined by events.

The LCR are determined that they will not be in that position. Hundreds of people have been rushing to join since the first round result.

The Ligue has been at the forefront of the mobilisations against Le Pen, and is pushing to step up the fight against Chirac.

It has launched a call for a new political force in France, based on the anti-capitalist movement and the working class.

It will continue to put forward these ideas on the streets and at the ballot box in the Parliamentary elections in June.

French youth take to the streets

Paul Wilcox

As I was on the train to Newcastle, a comrade phoned me to tell me the results of the first ballot in the French Presidential elections. When she asked me who I thought had come second, Le Pen was not the first candidate that came to mind. Like many I was shocked at the result – but when I looked at the situation in France things became clearer.

Maybe Le Pen getting through to the second round was not that much of a surprise. Some have called this a defeat to the whole workers' movement – but it was the neo-liberal polices of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party that caused this. They have lost the respect of the workers and the youth.

The Socialist Party and Communist Party coalition government betrayed the French working class. Like Blairism in this country they have moved so far to the right that it is hard to tell the difference anymore.

This allowed the Front National to move in, raise its vote and its profile. The reformist left has abandoned any pretence that it is a movement for the workers and youth. By playing on fears like crime and immigration the FN have tapped into the vacuum that has been left by the reformists.

The French and British

Press are telling us that democracy in France is in danger from the far-right – they tell us that instead of promoting a diverse and multicultural society that the answer is more attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers.

The danger is that asylum rights will be further eroded in France and Britain. For the immigrant population in France the far right pose real and present danger – like we saw on a smaller scale in Burnley and Oldham. The far right will stoke up racial tension by blaming the Asian and black population of those and other towns.

The rise of the far right in France – and most of all the confidence that it has gained through these elections – makes it more important than ever for the left in both France and Britain to fight the puerile arguments from Le Pen and BNP fuhrer Griffin.

The traditional left, in government across the whole of Europe, have attacked the working class. Instead of tackling the real problems that people face, politicians like Blunkett have spoken about the "dangers" of asylum seekers "swamping" our schools.

Along side the collapse of the reformist vote – we saw Trotskyists gaining over 10% (3 million votes). The French Section of the

Fourth International, the Ligue Communiste Revolution-naire gained 4.25% (1.2 million votes), with its first time candidate Olivier Besancenot, a 27-yr old postman.

This was an important step for the LCR. Olivier has spoken up for the workers and youth. The LCR has been paying a leading role in the social movements in France.

With over 13% of the total youth vote and over 1500 enquiries asking about how to join up, the LCR and the Fourth International have put forward a real alternative to anti-capitalist youth in these elections.

This alternative did not just end at the polling booths – it went onto the streets. Within an hour of the first round results being announced, Olivier called on the youth to mobilise against the far right and take to the streets.

There were huge demonstrations across the country from that night onwards, culminating in 2 million on the streets on May Day demonstrating against Le Pen and his racist polices.

This mobilisation of the youth and workers together is a key ingredient in the battle against global capitalism. Le Pen typifies capitalism with its teeth bared.

The French left had a difficult choice to make with the next round of elections – should they vote for Chirac? The reformist left willingly



called on their supporters to do this, though some leading Socialist Party members say they walked backwards into the booths and held their noses while they voted.

The slogan of the LCR is fighting Le Pen on the streets and in the ballot box – this was not a straight-forward call to vote Chirac. The Fourth International believes in fighting the far right on all fronts.

Most of those who argued for abstention did so on the basis that Chirac was going to win anyway. This is rather an opportunist position, and implies a different position (i.e. a vote against Le Pen) if the vote was likely to be close.

Some now argue that Chirac's big vote is a disaster and will strengthen him in the up-coming legislative elections. This shows complacency about what Le Pen represents and also misunderstands the dynamics of the mass movement against him.

How can you argue that Chirac has been strengthened by the size of his vote, when so many who voted for him did so under the slogan "rather a crook than a Fascist"? In essence the sec-

ond round was a plebiscite against Le Pen.

For the French workers and youth this election has raised political consciousness as seen by the high vote for the far-left candidates and the mass demonstrations against the racist and anti-worker policies of the far right.

For many people it was a hard decision to vote Chirac against Le Pen, but this was a tactic position that had to be taken. And the battle is not over – the legislative elections are due in June and the mobilisation against the FN must and will continue.

As a young member of the Fourth International in Britain, I have been inspired by our comrades in France.

The media in this country say that youth are apathetic when it comes to politics – by which they mean elections. We are apathetic to the politics of big business where democracy has been taken out of our hands (If we ever had any in the first place).

But like the youth of France, we too are searching for answers. Some may say we are different from the French – well we face many of the same problems as our brothers and sisters across the Channel.

The elections in France may have seen the rise of the far right vote – but we have also seen the biggest mobilisation in France since 1968 and again the youth are central to this.

And just as in 1968, when the youth of France inspired the young comrades in Britain, today they also inspire us. While the revolutionary left in Britain may not be as big as we would like, we have come a long way from the sectarianism of the past, and a new Left unity has been built.

Over the last ten years the Fourth International has been working in and building the social movement around the globe from the World Social Forum in Brazil, with our comrades in the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) and ATTAC, with our comrades in Europe central to this movement.

In places like France, Spain, Italy, Brazil we are fighting back. The young comrades in the Fourth International are fighting the far right – but most of all we are fighting against the capitalist system which breeds the Le Pens of this world.

All together against Chirac and the bosses

Statement of the LCR 6 May 2002

The road has been blocked to Le Pen. 82% for Chirac, 18% for the leader of the Front National, constitutes a massive rejection of the far right. The election result is first of all the translation of an uprising of the youth, the secondary schools and the universities but also of the inner cities.

But it is also the translation of the resistance of the world of work, and more broadly of society against the rise of the Front National. From this point of view the May Day demonstrations are the most important since the winter of 1995 and more precisely since Paris on 13th May 1968.

Chirac is preparing to strike

Even though it has been possible to use the vote for Chirac as a means to block Le Pen's path, the president of the Gaullist RPR Party and the whole of the right cannot constitute a defence against the Front National.

From Sunday evening onwards, the Gaullist language of Chirac has been preparing peo-

ple for policies which will attempt to win back the Front's voters, by allying with ultra-right-wingers such as Millon, De Villiers and company. Statements by Sarkozy, Raffarin, Juppé and others also clearly reveal their intentions: more privatisations, deregulation, attacks on pensions.

So we should not imagine that the 80% vote for Chirac will modify his neo-liberal anti-worker, anti youth, and anti-immigrant policies.

No starting again with a Jospin Government. For 100% left policies.

All the causes of Le Pen's rise are still there. For twenty years, successive governments have increased inequality, have let social misery grow. Fundamentally you cannot fight the extreme right without attacking the roots of the economic, social and political crisis.

You have to fight against the neo-liberal projects of the right and of the bosses, but also those of a 'united left' which does not

learn anything from the policies pursued for five years by the plural left government.

What is needed is a different set of policies, which prioritise the interests of the population over those of shareholders.

In continuation with Olivier Besancenot's presidential campaign, we propose a social and democratic emergency plan, which breaks with that of the governmental left, policies for a fighting anti-capitalist left, a left which gives new hope to thousands of youth and workers.

This is also what the 100% left Parliamentary deputies would support.

- A law prohibiting sackings
- A law defending public services and halting all privatisations
- A 230 euro increase in levels of wages, benefits, and pensions
- Preserving pensions and rejection of pension funds.
- The provision of grants for youth in education
- Ensuring equality at work between men and women and an end to part-time working borne by women.



Left wingers held their noses to vote Chirac

■ Daring to have policies of equality of rights, legal status for undocumented immigrants, without concessions to Le Pen's racism

■ Supporting ecological policies where our lives are prioritised over profits.

Achieving this new politics implies a challenge to the absolute power of the bosses over the economy.

It must also be accompanied by a democracy where collective interest prevails over the interests of the privileged minority.

On the basis of these proposals and of these principles, we are submitting an anti-capitalist perspective for discussion by all those who identified with Olivier Besancenot's campaign, in order to present the largest possible number of "100% left" candidates.

Parliamentary elections 2002

At the time of the first round of the Presidential election the far left united more than 10% of the vote.

Despite the Le Pen effect and the 20% score of the far right, this unprecedented result is positive in the current relationship of forces as in the struggles to come.

It confirms the rise of a radical vote which punishes the government (plural) left. It shows the readiness of a significant part of the population from the world of work and young people to punish the different components of the Jospin government from the left, while rejecting the right and the far right.

It bestows major responsibilities on the LCR and LO.

During the campaign the LCR declared from the beginning it was for the unity of the far left. Our opinion has not changed after the first round.

Nationally only LO and the LCR have the capacity to present a clear alternative in the political landscape. A multiplication of candidacies and competitive situations will be harmful for everyone.

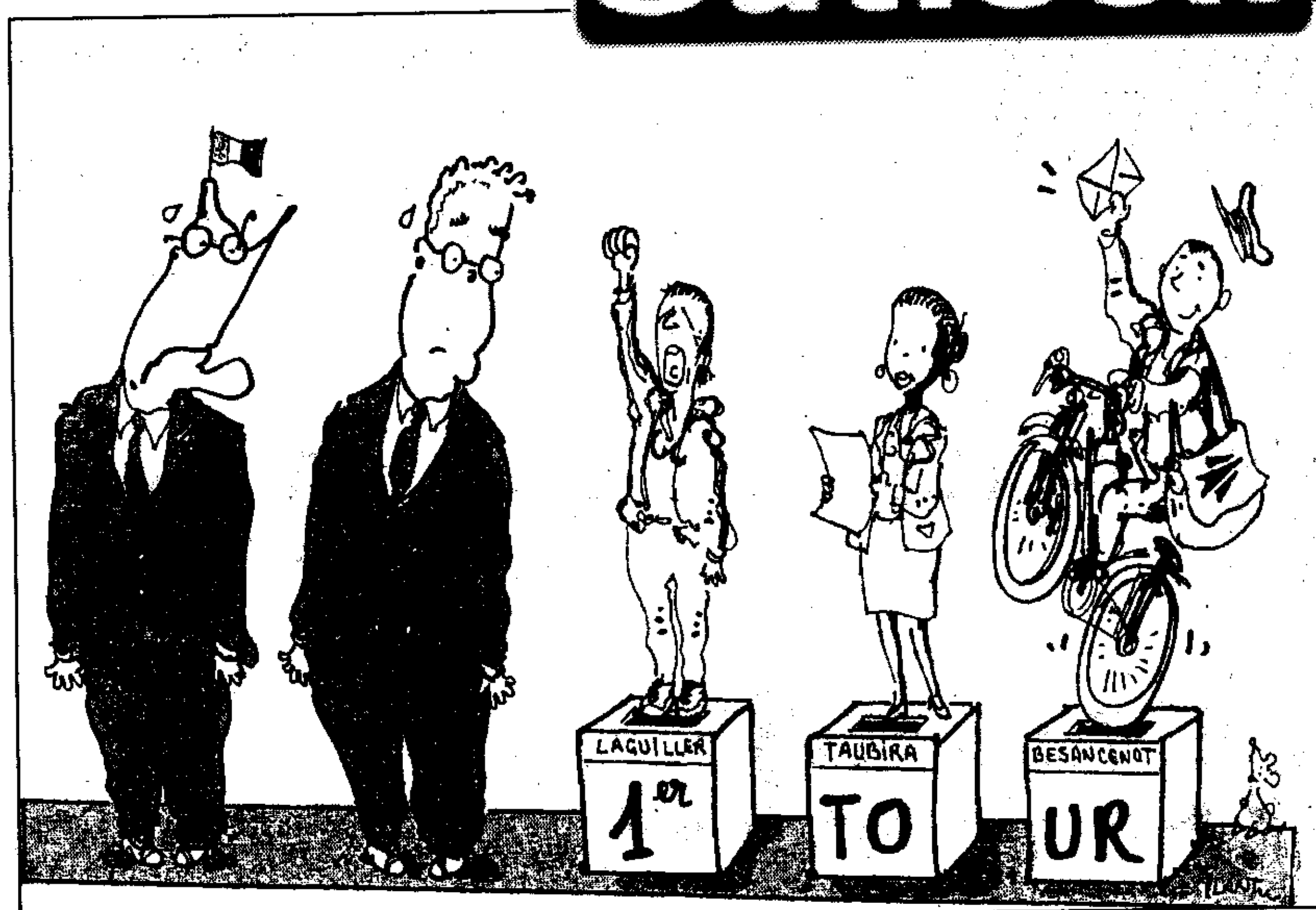
Therefore last week we proposed to Lutte Ouvriere last week that we discuss an agreement to divide up constituencies. This approach was confirmed by our central commit-

tee.

Such a sharing out of constituencies seems to be the most effective way, in view of the very short time we have to work things through and the fact that the two organisations conducted separate campaigns.

This would mean a far left candidate in every mainland constituency on a 50-50 basis with a call for a reciprocal vote on the basis of a common declaration dealing with the main issues in the election.

The LCR has been involved for some years in some departments in local agreements like "Tous



Ensemble a Gauche" (All together on the left) in Finistere (Brittany) or A Gauche Autrement (An Alternative on the Left) in the Rhone. These groupings should be included in this national approach

and be written into the agreement. In its own constituencies, the LCR will pursue its policy of openness toward those who identified with Olivier Besancenot's campaign. (Translated from Rouge)

"No agreement" – LO

A letter from Lutte Ouvriere about the Parliamentary elections.

Following the LCR's proposal for an agreement to divide up seats in the forthcoming 2002 Parliamentary elections, we reprint from Rouge Lutte Ouvriere's response, and the subsequent reply of the LCR.

Dear comrades, Chirac's triumphal plebiscite complements the politics of the government of the plural left in the worst possible manner

While the results of the first round of the Presidential elections showed clearly that Le Pen would be very decisively beaten solely by the votes of the right, the whole of the left set to work pumping up the windbag Le Pen and in the name of a fight against a claimed fascist threat, prostituted itself for free to Chirac.

This was a deliberate choice on the part of the left leaders in order to avoid any discussion about the causes of the loss of 2,488,534 votes for Jospin and 1,672,456 votes for Hue, i.e. a total loss of 4,160,534 votes.

By brandishing the threat of Le Pen's election to the Presidency of the Republic, which it knew perfectly well could not happen in today's context, in evoking a non-existent fascist danger, the left parties have sought, on the one hand, to conceal the reduction in their vote among the popular classes, and on the other have transformed their own retreat into an advance for Le Pen.

But their pressure was enough for you to surrender although you succeeded in not saying Chirac's name! You carried a resolution which took two or three readings in order to satisfy each of your tendencies. Through opportunism by adaptation to the milieu which surrounds you, you joined the holy alliance around Chirac.

Your hypocritical call for a demonstration on the evening of the 5th May in

order to wash your hands of your vote during the day doesn't change anything.

Your contribution to Chirac's election was derisory. Independently of your appeal, a large part of the far left's electorate would have undoubtedly given in to the pressure to vote for Chirac.

But the fact is that in a situation which required telling the truth to the popular classes whether we are listened to or not, you chose to lie to them, at the behest of the Socialist, Communist, and Green Party leaders Hollande, Hue, and Mamere.

You brought your minuscule support for a Chirac vote by presenting it, despite your denials, as a roadblock to Le Pen.

You will understand that in these conditions we will not respond to your proposals which would imply at least a certain political agreement. And we do not wish to endorse an attitude as opportunist as yours.

As for your allies, for the agreement is supposed to extend to others than yourselves, let's not even speak about them. You are not even sure of being able to convince them to participate in an agreement between the LCR and LO.

There is therefore no question of making out that our respective politics are neighbours while they are opposed.

While posing as activists for far left unity, against that

which you call Lutte Ouvriere's "sectarianism" – one word which you haven't stopped repeating during the campaign which in the context created by the calumnies against us which struck a particular chord – your proposal was in any case hypocritical.

In numerous places, indeed, representatives including central representatives of your organisation have already designated the LCR candidates in the legislative elections.

In some cases candidates

have been announced in every constituency in a department, while you were talking to us about dividing up departments between us.

What credibility can we give a proposal for dividing up when all the evidence shows that you have begun to choose.

Therefore each of us must defend their own politics and then the meaning of the votes will be clear!

With our revolutionary greetings.

Georges Kaldy and Francois Duburg.



Our responsibilities – LCR

The response of the LCR to LO

Dear comrades,

Again you respond to a proposal from the LCR for unity by refusing to entertain it. However, we are in a situation which should have made you perceive the necessity for far left unity.

Our two candidates Arlette Laguiller and Olivier Besancenot gathered around 10% of the vote. That gives us a major responsibility in order to respond to the hope this created.

We would have been able to confirm and consolidate the April 21 vote by putting forward a single candidate in each constituency who supports the main points of a programme which breaks with past politics, in front of the youth and the wage-earners.

The right will present united slates of candidates, the governmental left too. With your refusal only the far left will be standing in competition with each other.

The main pretext you give is our position on the May 5 vote. You reproach us for having participated in a "republican front" by calling for a vote for Chirac, but the reality is different.

We called for a fight against the far right in struggle, as well as at the ballot box. We called for a vote against Le Pen. We were present on all the demonstrations.

It is like trying us for



Olivier Besancenot

witchcraft to confuse our position with that of a "republican front". It is an insult to imply that the LCR would be associated with a plebiscite for Chirac.

Young people and workers wanted to resist the far right danger. It was absurd to oppose this movement, as you did.

From April 21 onwards you minimised the danger of Le Pen; you did not immediately call for demonstrations as Olivier Besancenot did.

We think that even in a difficult situation the solution is always found in collective mobilisation. The proof of this was shown on May 1.

The workers shouldn't be

taken for idiots: two million demonstrators on May 1 were not fighting against a "phantom of the operetta", as you wrote in Lutte Ouvriere, but against an ideology which is spreading into neighbourhoods and workplaces and which repels them, more than it does you.

In the street no republican front vice inhabited their consciousness.

We asked you a question about the Parliamentary elections which you have not answered: are you prepared to call for a vote, not for the right, but for a Communist, Socialist, or Green Party candidate against a fascist?

You also raised again the question of our "partners", i.e. those who find themselves within the framework of the "100% left" unity against the right and the policies of the left in government.

Is the very idea that others, who are not members of our organisations, but close to our ideas, should wish to participate in this union so insufferable? With the support of 10% of the electorate, should LO and the LCR only discuss between themselves?

Then one must perhaps find the more boring explanation of

your rejection in Lutte Ouvriere of 26th April, where G. Kaldy writes that:

"In all the elections where there are no other stakes – as there could be for example in certain situations the possibility of electing Parliamentary representatives – the presence of several far left candidates ... is not a disadvantage but a blessing."

Beyond this lies a very specific conception of unity; you only conceive of it when it useful to gain elected positions. In no other case do you understand the necessity.

For our part we think that the political situation is so specific and so grave that the unity of the left of the left is urgent.

We will pursue this policy, at the time of the Parliamentary elections and afterwards, despite your current refusal.

We have never proposed to you a single party. We evidently have differences. But we do not have "opposed orientations" as you write (why not a "class break" between us while you're at it?).

Our two organisations have fought the politics of the plural left. We have proposed to you to take steps forward together, in order to give back hope to millions of young people and wage-earners who look to us.

You have again lost an opportunity. Despite your sectarianism, we will not abandon our desire for unity.

Fraternally

The secretariat of the LCR
Political Bureau



Arlette Laguiller

A new political force in France

Olivier Besancenot

The Presidential elections leave us with a bitter taste in our mouths, with Le Pen at 20% and "super-liar" at 80%. Le Pen was beaten, but he received more than five million votes. Now, Chirac is going to rub our noses in the dirt, by emphasising law and order and economic ultra-liberalism.

Against the far right and the right, a repackaged governmental left will not measure up. The "united left" will fool no-one. It wants to continue the politics of the plural left and of the Jospin government.

In a situation of social and political crisis where tensions are going to build up, vague policies, and broken promises, accommodations with neo-liberalism, concessions to the bosses can only prepare the way for the authoritarians and the far right. This traditional left is not the instrument with which to fight the causes that led to the political earthquake which the country has experienced.

A new political force is needed today, a party which breaks radically with all the policies pursued for the last twenty years by successive governments.

The LCR addresses the millions of electors, socialist activists, ecologists, and communists who wish to draw the balance sheet of the policies pursued by the left in government.

We address everyone active in the social movements and campaigning organisations in order to discuss the programme and the content of this new force.

Right now we call on everyone who wants to commit themselves to defending a real left policy, in the service of the workers to participate in all the activities of the "100% on the left" with the LCR and its partners. We deeply regret that LO has refused to commit itself to a common approach in the coming parliamentary elections.



The British far-left and the French elections

John Bulaitis

I have been on many demonstrations, but never on anything like the 1 May in Paris. It was an exhilarating, exhausting and inspiring experience. The march was called to start from the République but the crowd trying to get into the square stretched back along all the streets and boulevards, as far back as the Gare de l'Est. And people were packed together like sardines. Once it started, one million people seemed to spread out like an octopus winding through every available street to reach the Nation.

Looking at this great ocean of humanity, one noticed two things. Everyone seemed to be turning around, stretching on tiptoes, trying to gauge just how huge the crowd was. And as the numbers grew and grew, so did the confidence and the joy. The second thing was the home-made placards and banners. People had made them on their home computers, cut out montages from newspapers, or just scrawled slogans on paper with felt-tips.

And the slogans more than anything else summed up the mood in relation to the final round of the election. All were variations on the theme, 'Vote for the crook, not the fascist'. Perhaps the best, hung out to great cheers from the crowd on a huge sheet from one of the apartments along the route, was: Chirex - A Jeter après Usage (Chirex (a pun on Durex) dispose of after use).

After these momentous

events, I checked the websites of the British far-left to see what they had to say about them. The sterility and sectarianism was quite staggering.

For example, the *Socialist* (3 May) argued:

"Gauche Revolutionnaire (the CWI section) is mobilising around the slogan 'neither the fascist nor the crook'. We shouldn't underestimate what Chirac would do if he won with 70% or more of the vote and we have to prepare now for the struggles to come."

The only conclusion anyone can draw from this astonishing statement is that it would be best for Chirac to get less than 70% of the vote, which of course means that Le Pen would receive more than 30%! It is a quite incredible position to argue.

It does not take much imagination to see that such a result would have made the balance of forces far more difficult in the 'struggles to come'.

The *Socialist*, like others, justified its abstention position on the basis that 'a strong showing of ballot papers rejecting both Chirac and Le Pen would be a warning of opposition to the capitalist policies which both advocate' (26 April).

Of course, Chirac and Le Pen both represent capitalist policies. But if the contest had been between Jospin and Le Pen, so would they have done. Would *The Socialist* have advocated a spoilt ballot also in that case? I'm willing to wager that they would have not.

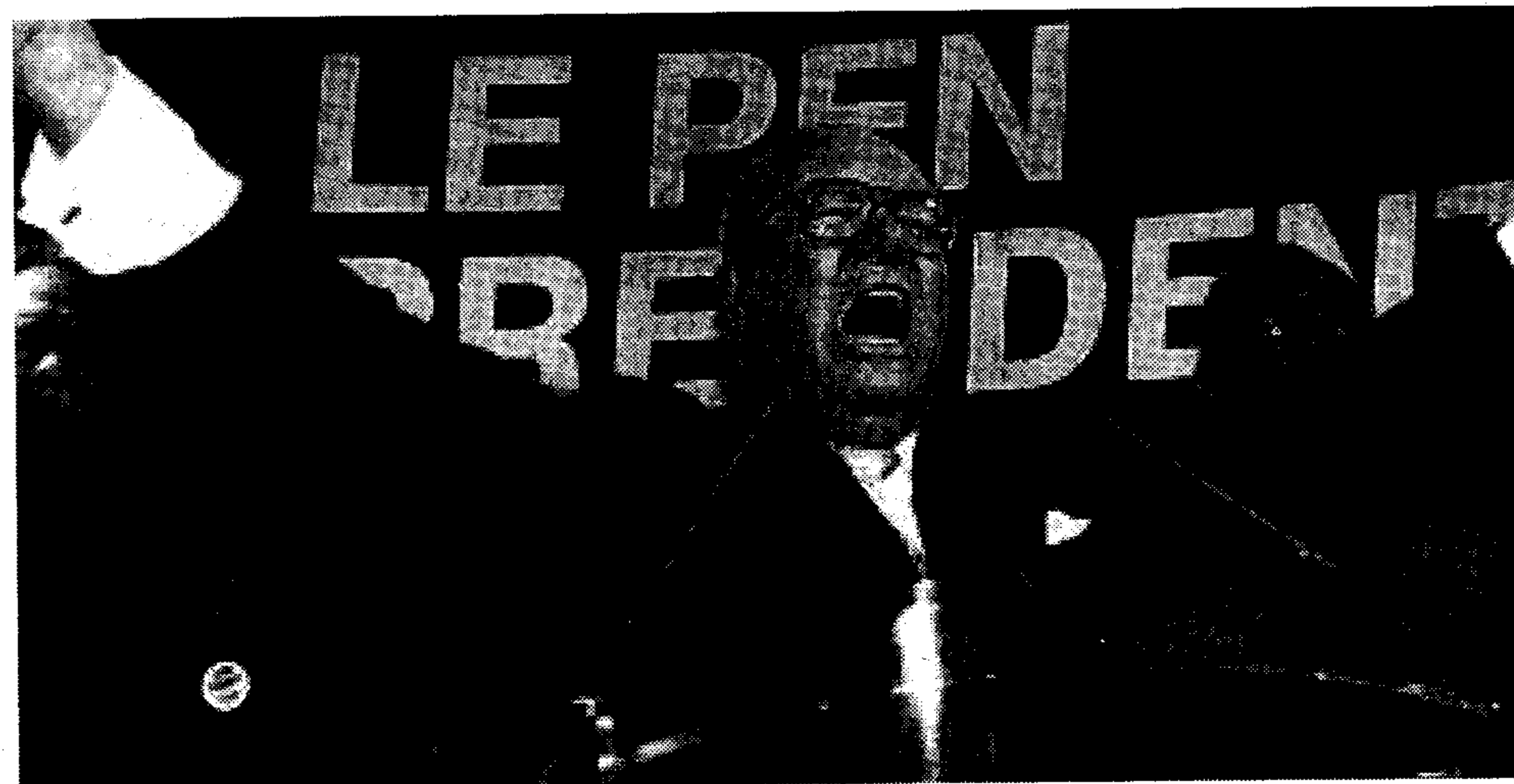
The point is that for the millions who mobilised in France, Le Pen represented much else besides. Think what images his call for 'transit camps' to store immigrants in before they are deported conjures up in a country that saw 'transit camps' set up by the Nazis for the Jews and resistance fighters, before they were deported to the other form of 'camp' - the death camp.

The FN may not be a classical fascist party. But it fought the elections on a classically fascist programme - openly threatening the democratic rights of the workers' movement, the left, the minorities, women and youth in France.

As for *Socialist Worker* (4 May), the paper's line is ambiguous to say the least. But the interview with their French sister organisation strongly implies that an abstention is the best approach. And, it should be remembered that the SWP's French group supported Lutte Ouvrière in the first round of the elections, against the less sectarian LCR campaign which raised centrally the anti-globalisation struggle.

And then there is the CPGB. According to *Weekly Worker* (2 May), the slogan "Votez escro, pas fascho (vote for a crook, not a fascist) ... plays into the hands of the ruling class..." because "a sweeping victory for Chirac" would be claimed as "a vote of confidence in the current order."

(Again, presumably, the



Le Pen: how would left have gained if abstentions had increased his share of the second round vote?

CPGB thinks it would have been better for the gap between Chirac and Le Pen to have been narrower.)

But it is self-evident that the slogan, which was raised spontaneously by the youth, implies no illusions, or support for Chirac.

The very fact that hundreds of thousands took to the streets shows that they understood instinctively that the fascists would be defeated by the mass movement, and not simply at the ballot box. Otherwise, why take to the streets?

By arguing for a boycott, of whatever form, the British far left, like the Lutte Ouvrière in France, were in practice suggesting that the result of the second round did not matter.

But it is only necessary to pose the question as to why this mass movement has developed in the first place? The spark was the electoral success of Le Pen in the election's first round - in other words, the threat of Le Pen winning the second round and becoming President of France.

That is why for those who mobilised the result of the second round was of critical importance. For the youth, who have grown in confidence as the demonstrations developed, who triggered the biggest demonstrations since the Liberation, the result was absolutely vital.

And their instinct was cor-

rect. If the FN had received 25%, 30% or 35%, then inevitably the dynamic behind the party would have been strengthened. Its confidence would have grown. That would have been a defeat. And the youth in France understand that - even if the *Socialist*, *Weekly Worker* and company do not.

The outlook on the demos in Paris and across France was that we are going to vote, not for Chirac, but **AGAINST LE PEN**. In that sense, the LCR's position in France, criticised in *Weekly Worker* is not ambiguous but understood perfectly by all participating in the mass movement.

The idea that Chirac and his reactionary politics would be strengthened by a crushing defeat for Le Pen is an argument that at best completely misunderstands the position in France, and at worst reveals a haughty contempt for the youth and others who have taken to the streets.

The right, of course, have been temporarily strengthened in France, but not because of the vote against Le Pen but as a result of the experience of the Gauche Plurielle government's neo-liberal agenda and Jospin's humiliating defeat in the election's first round.

However, if a campaign along the lines suggested by

British far-left and Lutte Ouvrière in France, had had some success, thus leading to a higher percentage for the NF, that would have strengthened the right even further.

Chirac would have had even more freedom to carry out his right-wing agenda. He would have orientated even further towards the right to appease NF voters. And the pressure would be on the social movement to hold in check, because the argument would be there that if you don't, there is the NF waiting in the wings.

Paradoxically, Chirac, although re-elected with 82% of the vote, is a weakened president. He received a historically low vote for a sitting president in the first round, and won his massive majority with the votes of the left in the second round.

Perhaps the politics of abstention make some individuals feel that they have done their revolutionary duty by not voting for a bourgeois candidate. (Although since when have Marxists been opposed on principle to voting for a bourgeois candidate when tactically it can advance the movement?)

But the British far-left is once again demonstrating a sterile dogmatism, rather than looking to engage with a mass movement.

What's so radical about Sinn Fein?

Joe Craig

In late March, Sinn Fein launched its campaign for the Irish General election with a rally in Dublin's Gresham hotel, at the same time as the Irish Labour Party was holding its conference.

Both conferences focused on the issues immediately facing southern voters. What is the republican programme for working people of the southern state? Hardly different from that of the Labour Party it would seem.

Both promise a new health service and Sinn Fein promises one free at the point of delivery and funded from general taxation. The Irish Labour Party are rather more specific in identifying amounts of money required and funding mechanisms – apparently raiding the national pension fund will do the trick.

Both make promises on housing a big feature of their plans and both are keen to castigate the inequality created by the existing coalition government.

The Labour Party and Sinn Fein both promise to remove the lowest paid from the tax net. Labour promises no new tax cuts for the rich, while Sinn Fein promise only 'A full review of the income tax system, to be completed and implemented within the lifetime of the next government.'

Since they also promise that 'indigenous industries should receive the same aid as foreign companies' it is quite clearly implied that corporation taxes are not to be increased.

In the past Adams has floated the idea that the low corporate taxes in the south should be introduced in the north. How exactly a new health service is to be created without radical increases in taxes on the rich is unexplained. At least the Labour Party acknowledge a problem and propose a once off 'creative accounting' style solution that was used in the last budget to postpone public expenditure cuts until after the election.

What both parties make clear, by omission rather than by open declaration, is their attachment to a policy which sees multinational investment as the dynamic for society. Sinn Fein just makes more noise about helping indigenous capitalists but since these are more and more subordinated and dependent on these multinationals the effect could not help but be much the same.

No mention is made by Sinn Fein of promoting the trade unions to break from the disastrous social partnership deals that have hobbled worker's organisations for the best part of fifteen years.

Indeed their promise, like the Labour Party, to focus public spending on health, education and

infrastructural development, without saying either how it would be financed or what would be cut, would take place in a new 'partnership' with the trade unions and 'other representatives of the wider society.'

Their vision of equality is a utopian one of maximum local self sufficiency – 'a return to a sustainable practice of local quality produce for local markets,' and of 'equality' defined by each of the oppressed having the opportunity to become the oppressor – 'greater assistance and funding for women in business.'

Sinn Fein criticises the EU, but its alternative is to turn the clock back and attempt to strengthen the nation states comprising it. But the centralisation of the EU is taking place in recognition that there is no future for the indigenous national capitals in Europe without unity in competition with the USA and Japan. The Nice Treaty is only criticised for its impact on the 'policy of southern neutrality' not for its neo-liberal agenda.

No mention at all is made of women's reproductive rights despite the recent referendum – and even the Labour Party promises to legislate for the X case. On the other hand, and despite the activities of the armed republicans of the IRA, 'more resources' are promised to the Garda.

In one sense it is unnecessary to look at what Sinn Fein promises for the south because it already sits in 'government' in the north. Indeed the party's experience in the north is held up as reason for support in the south.

Attacking critics, Adams says: "Some of those who are saying we can't be trusted are the same people who are commending our two Ministers in the north – Martin McGuinness Minister for Education and Bairbre de Brun Minister for Health."

Just why right wing politicians in the south would congratulate Sinn Fein's performance in the north is not addressed. So let us do it instead.

Let's take health first. De Brun's first action as minister was to close a maternity hospital and later to set up a review of acute facilities in the rest of the north under Maurice Hayes, a former top civil servant under British direct rule.

As an aside, it is easy to pass over this without noting the irony. Here is a movement that killed the most minor and junior 'collaborator' with the British state, including workmen and caretakers, yet in government appoints to determine the future of hospital services under its responsibility a top 'collaborator,' and no one in Sinn Fein even notices!

The Sinn Fein record in government has been one of failure only postponed by the now notorious

tactic of delaying difficult decisions by farming them out for review by 'experts.'

At the beginning of March it was reported that hospital waiting lists in the north, already the longest in the UK, had increased from under 48,000 a year before to 57,704 at the end of 2001, an increase of 14.5%. This despite a solemn promise from the Sinn Fein minister that they would be reduced.

One in ten people waiting for cardiac surgery will die before they reach the operating table according to research carried out by a nursing lecturer at the University of Ulster. (*Irish News* 08/03/02)

The response of Sinn Fein is to blame the British for insufficient funding, while claiming credit for new developments which are also the result of this funding. All of a sudden Sinn Fein apologists write letters to the press explaining how difficult a job health is, and how no one else wanted the job. Could anyone else be expected to do better?

Inadequate funding from the British state only cruelly exposes how Sinn Fein in government is merely the mechanism for delivering a deteriorating service.

The north of Ireland is not even receiving the same increases in health service spending as England, with a shortfall of £83m in 2000/02 and a forecast shortfall of £214m in 2003/04.

The new found understanding among Sinn Fein supporters for the 'difficulties' of the job also means they are no longer a force campaigning against the poor service but are the standard bearers of excuses for those in charge.

The situation in Education also exposes the radical rhetoric as a sham. On 21 March Martin McGuinness announced spending of £107m on new school buildings, £53m through Public Private Partnerships (PPP), that is privatisation, where private firms design, build, maintain and run 'non-core' services in new schools.

Once again this is an exercise in rationing, but with Sinn Fein making itself responsible for it, £500m is needed (on one estimate) to tackle the problem of schools waiting in the top priority bracket.

The obvious glee with which Martin McGuinness sits behind his new ministerial desk has blinded him to the real problems that PPPs are piling up, and which are the price for the photo-opportunities provided to him in opening new privatised schools.

Trade union research shows that the running costs of such projects, the cost of paying the private sector for building and running the school, will put severe pressure on education budgets.

Allyson Pollock, professor of public policy at University College London, argues of similar schemes in England that "buy-now-pay-

Stalingrad O'Neill



On 21 March Martin McGuinness announced spending of £107m on new school buildings, £53m through Public Private Partnerships (PPP)

later PFI schemes will make serious inroads into school revenue budgets, making it even harder to tackle teacher shortages and oversized classes.

"Education is a hugely labour-intensive service ... The only way these new buildings can be paid for, without significantly raising public spending, is by taking funding away from existing services and distorting local school budget priorities. This means lower not higher standards." (*Public Finance* Feb 8-14 2002)

These schemes aim to reduce government borrowing that might arise from the state building the new schools themselves. But the state has to pay back the costs of the new building to the private sector as if it had taken out a loan, except that the cost will be greater to allow the private companies to make a profit.

This is an attempt at what accountants call 'off-balance sheet' accounting: if the school is not financed by a loan the future cost does not appear in the government's books.

It was precisely such 'off-balance sheet' accounting that was involved in the Enron scandal when America's seventh largest company collapsed. On the day of the announcement of the school-building programme the *Irish News* reported that the Department of Education had spent £750,000 on

consultancy costs for these PPP deals over the previous year.

The other major initiative of the Sinn Fein minister of education is the Burns report on the 11-plus, the means of selecting young children for either grammar school or secondary education.

The effect of this initiative so far has been to present a choice between the existing iniquitous system and a new one, that also fails to guarantee equality.

No wonder right wing politicians in the south, not to mention the British, have no reason to complain about Sinn Fein's performance in government. Who said that they needed to be 'house trained'?

With all this in mind it is simply laughable to hear Gerry Adams say that "the real question is not, and never has been whether they (Fianna Fail etc) will go into government with us. The real question is whether we would go into government with them."

Having gone into coalition government with Ian Paisley's DUP, how could anyone believe that there would be the slightest problem supporting a Fianna Fail government in the south? Only the most blind of Sinn Fein members could possibly be deceived.

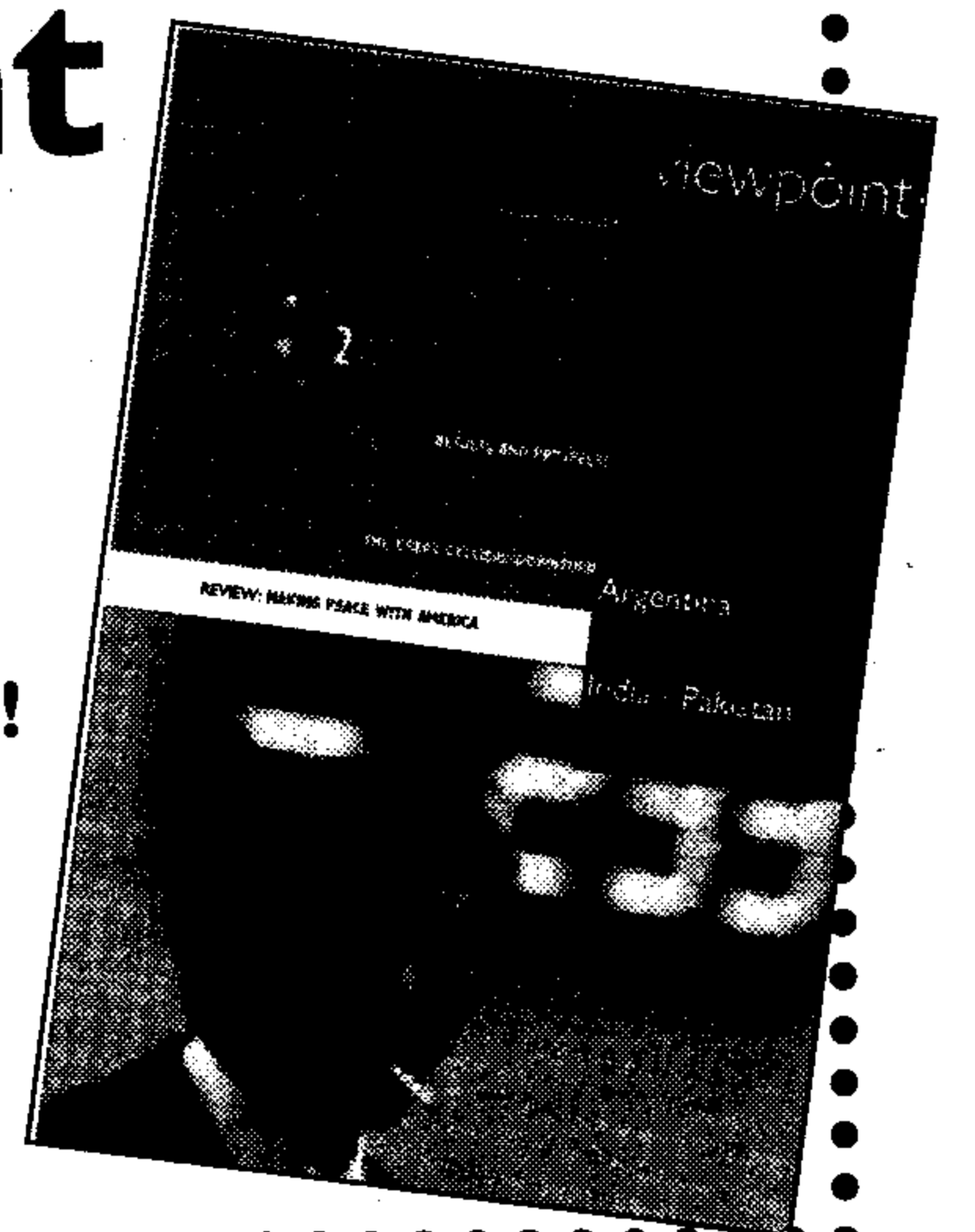
Sinn Fein does not represent any sort of alternative to working people in the south. They represent a dead end for anyone looking for a radical alternative to the corrupt politics of the southern establishment.

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Belfast Socialist Forum – a new socialist discussion group

A non-sectarian socialist discussion group has been set up in Belfast. Initiated by Socialist Democracy and supported by independent left activists and by a new organisation, the International Socialists, it is open to all socialists interested in debate and education in socialist ideas.



Bush's terror debated

standing of socialism in the working class. In its short life the group has discussed:

- The US 'War on terror'
- The 'anti-capitalist' and 'anti-globalisation' movements
- The Communist

Manifesto, and
● Theory and spontaneity in revolutionary politics

The May debate is on the outcome of the abortion referendum.

Decisions on discussions, activities and speakers are taken by open meetings of the forum, which is open to all socialist activists. Further details from the Socialist Democracy contact addresses.

The depressing reality on the Irish left is of small organisations bounded by mindless activism, dogmatic statements of ill-digested political positions and a light-headed dismissal of serious politics, that leads to constant swings of policy that can lead to organisations taking contradictory positions from one week to the next. This discredits not only them, but also the

John McGuffin

Death of an anarchist

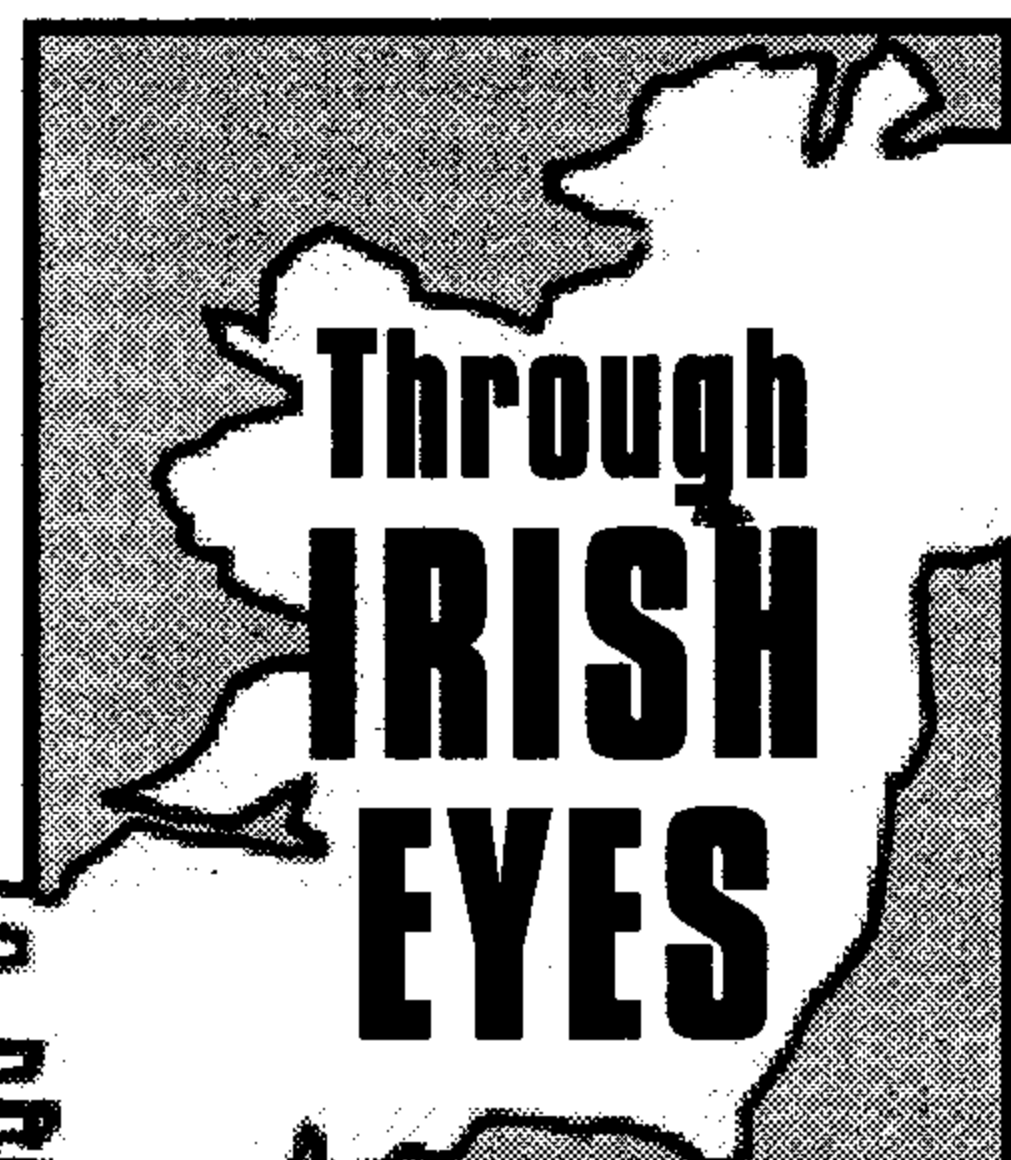
The members of Socialist Democracy would like to note, with sadness, the death of John McGuffin.

A founder member of Peoples Democracy, forerunner of Socialist Democracy, John, the spokesperson for anarchism in the North of Ireland, soon parted company with the organisation of Marxist sympathisers that arose out of the early Left Civil Rights organisation.

However we remained connected through John's unremitting reportage of the hypocrisy and oppression involved in the continuation of the Northern state. He wrote prolifically.

Two of his books, *The Guinea Pigs*, detailing British torture of internees and *Internment*, detailing the history of its use, remain classics (at the time John had been the only Protestant internee).

A man with a wicked sense of humour and a love of



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

practical jokes, John was full of kindness. I remember especially a period in the '70s when I was jailed under a system of 'Internment by remand' and John went to great trouble to get me reading material.

Much more recently I posted my first article on the internet. The first response, after a 20 year

gap, was from John McGuffin, with words of congratulation and praise.

Perhaps the greatest significance of John's life was in its beginnings.

A schoolmate of John Taylor, now Lord Kilcooney, he had the opportunity to become a part of the unionist establishment. He rejected that and turned instead to the purity and honesty of revolution.

John's death reminds us that the beginnings of the troubles in the North of Ireland lay not in Catholic revolt, but in a youth revolt that crossed sectarian boundaries.

For the unionist bigots and their British masters the first priority was not to smash Catholic dissent but to break the young Protestants who had embraced the flag of revolution.

They never succeeded in breaking John.

John McNulty



Palestinians fight on for right to return

Palestinians in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories, over 50 percent of whom are refugees, are preparing to commemorate 54 years of displacement and dispossession – al-Nakba.

At the same time they are beginning to assess the massive physical damage and destruction (estimated at over US \$300 million) left in the wake of Israel's most recent military campaign to crush indigenous resistance to the ongoing illegal military occupation and the denial of the right to self-determination.

Israel continues to deny Palestinian refugees, including internally displaced Palestinians, the right to return to their places of origin and recover their property inside Israel. A total of three-quarters of the indigenous Palestinian population are displaced either outside or inside their homeland.

All Israeli governments have denied displaced Palestinians the right to return, real property restitution and compensation in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (11 December 1948) and numerous recommendations by UN human rights bodies.

Since 1948 Israel has expropriated more than 17 million dunums (17,000 sq. km) of land owned by Palestinian refugees, and nearly 1 million dunums owned by Palestinians inside Israel, including internally displaced Palestinians.

Moreover, Israel has further expropriated and/or controls some 4.7 million dunums in the 1967 occu-

pied West Bank, eastern Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. In 1948 Palestinians owned more than 90 percent of the land in historic Mandate Palestine.

Today, the indigenous Palestinian Arab population owns and controls just over 10 percent of the land within the borders of their historic homeland (i.e., inside Israel and the 1967 occupied territories).

At the same time, Israel has either expropriated or destroyed over 150,000 homes belonging to refugees displaced/expelled in 1948.

The primary reason why Israel refuses to allow the refugees to come home is that they are not Jewish.

For Israel's political and military establishment, the death of hundreds of Israelis and more than a thousand Palestinians since September 2000 – and perhaps thousands more, as well as the mass destruction of Palestinian property is a price that it is willing to exact in order to impose a solution on the Palestinian people that preserves both the post-1967 colonisation program in the occupied territories and the "Jewish character" of the Israeli state (i.e. a Jewish demographic majority and Jewish control of refugee lands).

At the time of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David (July 2000) and Taba (January 2001) numerous Israeli politicians and analysts commented that violent confrontation, including war, was preferable to accepting the right of Palestinian refugees to

return to their places of origin inside Israel.

In March 2002 Israel's Prime Minister Sharon stated, "It won't be possible to reach an agreement with [the Palestinians] before the Palestinians are hit hard. Now they have to be hit. If they aren't badly beaten, there won't be any negotiations. Only after they are beaten will we be able to conduct talks." (Ha'aretz, 5 March 2002)

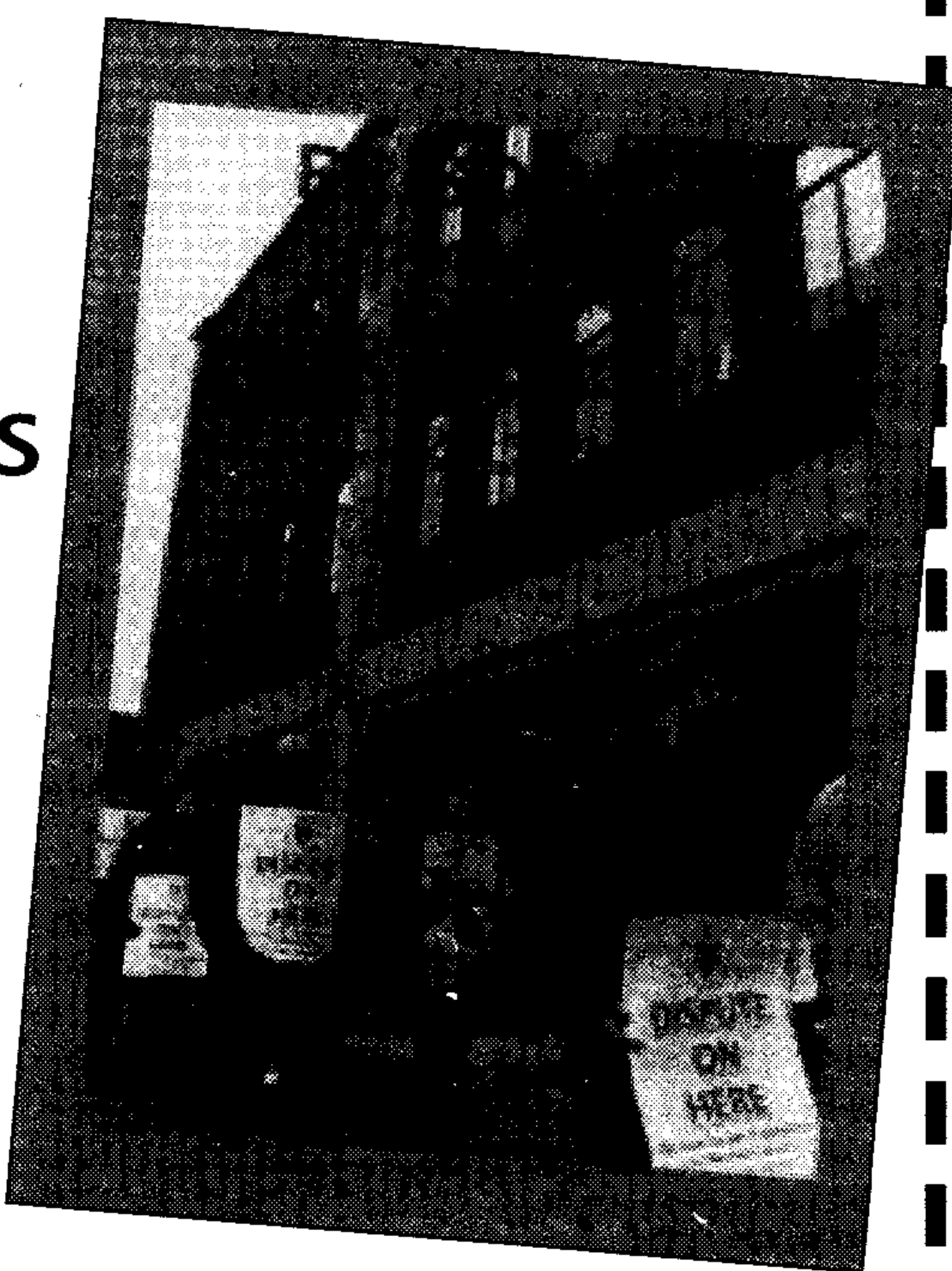
Israel has also argued, however, that because refugee homes have been destroyed or expropriated to house Jewish Israelis (referred to as 'secondary occupation') return is not possible.

In the early 1950s, for example, Israeli officials informed the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), mandated to facilitate a durable solution for the refugees based on General Assembly Resolution 194 (i.e., voluntary return, restitution, compensation), that "the individual return of Arab refugees to their former places of residence is an impossible thing. Their houses have gone, their jobs have gone."

This argument has since become something of a mantra repeated not only by Israeli officials but also by international diplomats, analysts and academicians. Writing in the May issue of Foreign Affairs ("The Last Negotiation: How to End the Middle East Peace Process"), for example, Hussein Agha, a Senior Associate Member of St. Anthony's College, Oxford University, and

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Israel: above the law for 54 years!

Veronica Fagan

"Arafat and Jenin - What Sort of Deal Did Bush Strike?" asked an editorial published in the US press (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 20 April 2002).

The same question is asked in the Jenin refugee camp and by all those in Palestine and elsewhere who know that justice and respect for human rights and international law are the key to the solution of the 54 year-old conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people.

The Israeli government eventually surrendered to pressure exerted by US president Bush and relinquished its request for extradition of the six prisoners allegedly involved in the killing of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Ze'evi and in arms smuggling for the Palestinian Authority.

The six were transferred from President Arafat's Ramallah compound to a Palestinian prison in Jericho and guarded by US and British troops dispatched for this purpose.

Thus, Palestinian president Arafat was finally free to leave the Ramallah compound where he had been held since March 29 by the Israeli army.

Subsequently the six week siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was also ended - but on the basis that 13 Palestinians would be exiled (via Cyprus) to unknown EU states, while a further 26 would face internal exile in Gaza.

Thus US imperialism and the Israeli state forced the Palestinian people to pay a further heavy price to gain Arafat's release. Of course even this price has not silenced the Israeli and Zionist right, who are increasingly calling for Arafat himself to be forced once again into exile.

At the same time the Israeli state is making ready to invade the Gaza strip and to wreak the same murderous vengeance on its people that it has already carried through on the camps, cities and villages throughout the West Bank.

On the other hand the supposed UN Fact-Finding Mission into the events at the Jenin refugee camp was eventually called off by Kofi Annan despite its approval by the UN Security Council (UNSC Resolution 1405, 19 April 2002).

While the fact finding mission is now supposed to be replaced by an investigation which will question wit-



A Zionist tank pulverises Palestinian homes and property

nesses, it is clear that once again the US has backed its friends in Israel, to make sure Sharon does not pay the price of his most recent war crimes.

International scrutiny and investigation into Israel's war crimes - and justice for the victims - a mission impossible?

On 18 April 1996, during a massive Israeli military offensive on Lebanon code-named "Operation Grapes of Wrath," approximately 800 civilians were sheltering in a United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) base in the village of Qana, South Lebanon.

They had assumed - incorrectly - that since international law strictly prohibits the targeting of civilian structures and UN facilities they would be safe under UNIFIL's protection.

Just after 2 PM on April 18, a barrage of proximity-fuse shells crashed directly into the pre-fabricated building. Minutes later 106 people lay dead, many burned and dismembered beyond recognition.

On 25 April 1996 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution (UNGA Res. A/RES/50/22 C) characterising Israel's actions in the "Grapes of Wrath" offensive as "grave violations of international laws relating to the

protection of civilians during war."

Then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali appointed a team to investigate Israel's bombing of the UNIFIL compound. The team was composed of military experts and headed by the Dutch General Franklin Van Kappen.

It conducted an official on-site investigation of the Qana incident, interviewed all available witnesses, including UNIFIL staff and Israeli officials, and obtained maps and ballistic evidence.

According to experts familiar with this UN investigation, the initial report concluded that the shelling and killing of 106 civilians inside the UNIFIL compound by Israel was deliberate, and that there was no possibility of an accident.

When Boutros Ghali wanted to publish the report, he was threatened that this would cost him his job: he was forced to publish a revised report.

This concluded that "while the possibility cannot be ruled out completely, it is unlikely that the shelling of the UNIFIL compound was the result of gross technical and/or procedural error."

The Van Kappen report also indicated that IDF officials of "some seniority" were involved in orders to fire upon the base, which they knew was sheltering hundreds of civilians.

International human rights organisations also conducted investigations and concluded that the shelling of the UNIFIL compound was most likely deliberate, not mistaken.

The United States and Israel vigorously contended that the attack had been an unfortunate mistake. No further action was taken by the United Nations.

Moreover, the United Nations has yet to act upon a petition filed by families of the victims of Qana with the UN Human Rights Commission.

The families' petition



Illegal occupation is upheld through brutal daily repression of Palestinians

Robert Malley, Director of the Middle East Program at the International Crisis Group and former special assistant to President Clinton for Arab-Israeli Affairs, state:

"Many of the refugees presumably want to go back to their original homes. But these homes, and indeed, in many cases, the entire villages where they were located, either no longer exist or are now inhabited by Jews."

The conclusion drawn is that while limited numbers of refugees may be able to return, "consistent with the exercise of Israel's sovereign powers over entry and resettlement locations", financial and other incentives will be needed to "persuade" the majority of the refugees (i.e., impose arbitrary restrictions on the basic human right to return) to "choose" some form of resettlement, either in a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or in a third country.

The land owned by the refugees has remained largely vacant; Jewish settlement is concentrated in a number of urban centres, while some 160,000 rural Jewish Israelis live on more than 17,000 sq. km of refugee land.

In light of this fact, the argument that the destruction (or even secondary occupation) of a Palestinian refugee's home, and even village, permanently negates the right of return is at best misinformed, if not duplicitous. No one has raised the argument, for example, that Israel's destruction of hundreds of Palestinian homes in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada negates the right of the homeowner to continue living in his/her city, town or refugee camp.

Nor have such arguments garnered serious consideration in other refugee cases. In Kosovo 50 percent of the housing stock was destroyed, 65 percent in Bosnia, and 80 percent in East Timor. In each of these cases the international community supported the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their places of origin.

The logical solution to the

problem of damaged or destroyed housing is rehabilitation and reconstruction. Five years after the Dayton peace agreement was signed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, the international community had assisted with the repair and reconstruction of nearly 30,000 housing units.

The experience of UNRWA in rebuilding destroyed refugee shelters in places of exile over the past five decades provides one immediate example of a model directly applicable to housing reconstruction for returnees in the Palestinian case.

The mass destruction of Palestinian refugee homes and villages in 1948 is not a credible reason to deny Palestinian refugees the right to return to their places of origin inside Israel, nor can it be argued that the passage of 54 years renders claims for real property



restitution irrelevant.

To do so would not only violate basic principles of international law but would also essentially punish Palestinian refugees for Israel's rejection of the right of return and real property restitution. Israel's sole argument for denying Palestinian refugees their rights (and thereby obstructing a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) is that the refugees are not Jewish.

As numerous UN human rights treaty bodies have noted, this argument is not consistent with international human rights law including the universal norm of non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity,

nationality, and religion.

On the occasion of the 54th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba, BADIL Resource Center calls upon the international solidarity movement to:

Educate and inform about the history and the scope of Palestinian displacement and dispossession;

Educate and inform about Palestinian refugees' right of return, real property restitution and compensation in accordance with international law and UN Resolution 194.

Resources are available on the websites of BADIL (www.badil.org) and the Palestine Right to Return Coalition (<http://al-awda.org>)

Nakba memorials of the Palestinian community in Israel start traditionally on April 17, the day on which Israel celebrates its independence day according to the Hebrew calendar. On the morning of 17 April 2002, collective visits were organised to several depopulated Palestinian villages. In the afternoon, the fifth Al-Awda (Return) March took participants to the depopulated village of al-Birwa (near Acre). Around 7,000 marched from the Acre-Safad intersection to the village, raising the names of the destroyed Palestinian villages and banners demanding the right of return for internally displaced Palestinians and refugees in exile. Other slogans called for the end of Israel's military occupation and Sharon's war crimes committed against Palestinian towns and refugee camps.

Participants were internally displaced Palestinians and their supporters, Palestinian NGOs, community organizations and public representatives. Most noteworthy was the first-time participation of Jewish-Israeli groups, such as Zikhrot, Sawt Badeel, Re'out, Bat Shalom and others. The participants marked the sites of the four cemeteries of al-Birwa village with signs in English, Arabic and Hebrew.

For additional information contact: Association for the Defense of the Rights of Internally Displaced in Israel: soliman_fahmawi@hotmail.com

For more on the case of Qana and investigations conducted by the UN and independent human rights organisations see:
www.merip.org (see Press Information Notes PIN, No. 11)
www.amnesty.org/news/1996/51504996.htm
www.hrw.org/hrw/summaries/s.israel-lebanon979.html
 End Israel's impunity for war crimes! www.indictsharon.net
 Boycott Israel: www.BoycottIsraeliGoods.org

May Day in Rotterdam

Susan Moore

In Rotterdam, the second city of The Netherlands, people began to gather in front of the town hall at 6pm. The big crowd varied from supporters of the "left liberal" D66 party to revolutionaries – and everyone in between.

The main slogan was "Against war and racism, together for socialism", but others carried banners saying "Stop the Dutch Haider" (a clear reference to Pim Fortuyn, indicating the parallels that many on the left drew with the Austrian neo-fascist).

Other slogans included: "Long live the workers' day" (in Dutch and Arabic, "Stop war for oil and money", "Stop the corporate media campaign against immigrants". "Legalise the Kurdish language in Turkey".

There were pictures of Che Guevara and Kurdish Workers' Party president Ocalan, a political prisoner in Turkey while Red flags and Kurdish flags floated together on the breeze. On a truck, a Brazilian percussion band played.

When well over a thousand people had gathered, they started to march through the city centre streets. Marchers cheered a construction worker, as construction trade unions are stepping up strike action on May Day.

Earlier that day at a meeting in Amersfoort, Lodewijk de Waal, the National chair of the Dutch trade union federation the FNV, said that they had abandoned

their previous policy of not allowing illegal immigrant workers to join the unions. He admitted that trade union leaders used to allow themselves to be influenced too much by anti illegal immigrant politicians.

On this May Day also, a public opinion poll by national TV showed that 65% of the public in The Netherlands said that the PvdA, (the Dutch Labour party), the biggest party in the Dutch government coalition, should stop drifting toward the political centre and should become a clearly socialist party.

The left and the anti-racist movement in particular will be looking for ways to strengthen those sentiments and build on those developments in the new conditions after Fortuyn's murder.



Far right looking to cash in on murder

The elections in the Netherlands on May 15 will take place in an extraordinary context following the murder of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, whose party could emerge from the contest as the largest single party.

TERRY CONWAY from Socialist Outlook talked to PETER DRUCKER of the Socialist Workers Party (SAP – Dutch section of the Fourth International) about the background to the election and how the events of the last week have played out. Below we also print the statement of the SAP on Fortuyn's murder.

Reaction of the Dutch Socialist Workers Party (SAP) to the death of Pim Fortuyn

We condemn the murder of Pim Fortuyn. An act of this kind can never be a contribution to achieving the society of solidarity and freedom that we are fighting for.

Pim Fortuyn's ideas were far removed from our ideals. Fortuyn tried to mobilize people, not only on the basis of their – justified – discontent with the political establishment in The Hague, but also on the basis of irrational prejudices such as: the Netherlands is full and has no room left for immigrants, people on disability benefit are doing too well, and women should go back to the kitchen. We have been hard at work in recent months opposing Fortuyn's ideas in words, in writing and on the streets. We strongly object to any insinuation that Fortuyn's – left-wing – opponents have contributed to creating an atmosphere that led to the murder.

Fortuyn's programme and public statements made us, and many others, angry and determined to continue fighting for solidarity and against racism.

Efforts will be made to take advantage of his death, just as that occurred after the September 11 attacks. We have already seen the first examples. The conservative daily De Telegraaf is trying to criminalize the left.

TV Rijnmond asked several young Moroccans to react to Fortuyn's death for the sole purpose of expressing disgust at the fact that they were not upset enough.

Now more than ever in the coming days and

months, we must fight in large numbers and with renewed energy for a social, multicultural Netherlands – before, during and after the elections. Fortuyn's "martyrdom" could well lead to an even greater lurch to the right.

We call all the more urgently on everyone to vote for one of the left-wing parties: the Socialist Party or the Green Left.

Since the municipal elections in March we have been very active in mobilising and organising for the demonstration on May 11 in Rotterdam under the slogan "Not One Vote for Racism".

We support the decision of the organising coalition, Nederland Bekent Kleur, to cancel this demonstration, because holding the demonstration as scheduled would be counterproductive and would not help build a broad movement against racism.

The decision not to hold the demonstration does not mean that we are letting the far right, which had already announced a counter-demonstration, intimidate us. Nor does it mean that we think action for a multicultural society is no longer necessary.

Now more than ever in the coming weeks and months we must continue fighting in large numbers and with renewed energy for a social, multicultural Netherlands.

Socialist Workers Party (SAP)
email: redactie@grenzeloos.org
web: <http://www.grenzeloos.org>

was ambitious – but he also came over as being rather lonely.

What is also clear is that while he had these ambivalences, this was not true of others at the top of his party – those who will now be left behind.

If they form a coalition as they have done in Rotterdam with the Christian Democrats and the VVD (right wing secular party) following the recent municipal elections, we will end up with the most right-wing government we have had for more than 30 years.

SO: Fortuyn was openly gay. How did this play?

PD: I suppose it was a neutralising factor. People said, well he can't be that bad if he's gay... He also used his sexuality in a cynical way – saying he couldn't be racist because he liked Moroccan men!

SO: Immediately after Fortuyn's death, there was a discussion about whether the election should be postponed. Was the decision to go ahead controversial?

PD: Yes it certainly was – particularly with the current head of the Socialist Party(1).

But once Fortuyn's party said they wanted to go ahead the government felt it had no alternative – they feared that there would be riots otherwise.

Despite the contradictions of both Fortuyn and those that have mourned his death, there can be no doubt that his murder has already resulted in a shift to the right.

As a person he was also contradictory. He started out a being quite left wing and ended up on the right. He A far right party has been

out leafletting in Rotterdam calling for a ban on the far left. People, especially in the environmental movement, but also in the anti-racist movement and on the left have had death threats.

SO: There has been quite a lot of coverage in Britain of the mobilisations in the wake of his death. What has it been like living through it?

PD: I think it will take weeks, even months to fully untangle the different strands of the outpouring.

Part of it is a specifically Dutch phenomenon – these gatherings have been in the tradition of "marches against senseless violence".

A number of times in recent years people, not famous people or politicians, just ordinary people, have been killed – usually on the streets late at night, sometimes after arguments.

Then there have been silent marches to protest – to say we don't want this sort of thing happening in our country. And some of this carried through into the Fortuyn situation.

On top of that it's been a cross between the aftermath of September 11 the response to Princess Di's death. The mobilisations have been enormous, and very mixed politically and socially.

I have seen and read about many people who came out who said that they didn't support his ideas, that they wouldn't vote for his party, but that he didn't deserve to die.

But then there were people like the guy who said he had been going to vote for the Socialist Party, but now he was going to vote for Fortuyn's party. So there is no doubt that the right hope to capitalise on his death at the polls.

(1) The Socialist Party is a far left, ex-Maoist Party – currently in the government but well to the left of the Dutch Labour Party which is the largest party in the current Parliament.

Revolutionary artist who sided with Trotsky

Andre Breton and the politics of Surrealism



Breton (left) with Mexican artist Diego Rivera and Trotsky (right)

Jay Woolrich

When Andre Breton spoke to a packed meeting of students and intellectuals in Port-au-Prince in December 1945 on the philosophy of surrealism, he inadvertently sparked off an uprising which led to the overthrow of the Haitian government a few days later.

As Breton himself pointed out, the country in any case was ripe for revolt, with the bulk of the population living in grinding poverty under a repressive regime. But this incident undoubtedly reinforced his belief that raising the watchword of liberty could constitute a revolutionary act.

Surrealist engagement with political struggle has a long history. The movement's emergence from the nihilism of Dada was marked by the dawn of a new political consciousness within its ranks.

Faced with the attack on the Rif tribesmen by the French government in 1925, Breton's circle published the first of many collective tracts, declaring "...we profoundly hope that revolutions, wars, colonial insurrections, will annihilate this Western civilisation." This statement was followed by a series of consistent and principled interventions on all the major political issues of the day throughout the twenties and thirties.

After the Second World War, which dispersed the movement and led to a series of fractures and regroupings, the surrealists renewed their assault on Western imperialist pretensions.

Breton signed the "Manifesto of the 121" against the French war in Algeria, and declared that "the cause of the Algerian people, which has contributed in decisive fashion to the overthrow of the colonial system, is the cause of all free men."

They continued to agitate against war, exploitation and clericalism.

Following Breton's death in 1966 the movement again fragmented, but remained influential in the arena of ideas. The Paris slogans of May 1968 were "Long live the surrealist revolution" and "All power to the imagination".

Surrealist groups, which had existed at one time or another in countries as diverse as Japan, Yugoslavia, Martinique and Czechoslovakia, began to spring up once again, and inevitably made new interventions around the struggles of the day. In recent times they have protested against the attack on the rights of indigenous peoples, the war against Afghanistan, and the rise of the fascists in France.

But it is the surrealists' involvement with Trotsky which most sharply catches the imagination. The abrupt shift towards a revolutionary political stance in the twenties had its roots in Breton's reading of texts by Lenin and Trotsky, which convinced him of the heroic nature of the Bolshevik uprising and of the need for proletarian revolution.

There followed several years of stormy relations with the French Communist Party, whose reactionary ideas on art and literature - not to mention their impatience with the surrealists' desire to maintain their own separate group - ensured that the marriage would not be a happy one. The adoption successively of the absurd doctrines of "proletarian literature" and "socialist realism" by the Stalinists widened the rift.

It was the Moscow show trials which prompted the surrealists to come out openly against Stalin, characterising the trials as "an abject police enterprise which far surpasses that of the Reichstag fire", and their perpetrator as "the great negator and principal enemy of the proletarian revolution."

Breton and his supporters were active in building support for Trotsky and the other victims of Stalin's purges. In Spain, where a number of surrealists went to fight for the republicans, their sympathies were with the POUM and the anarchists.

In 1938 Breton travelled to Mexico on the pretext of a French cultural mission to meet Trotsky. He was deeply moved by the heroic isolation of the great revolutionary:

"I saw him as that man who placed his genius in the service of the greatest cause I know....I saw him at the side of Lenin and later, as the only one continuing to defend Lenin's ideas. I saw him standing alone among his fallen comrades....accused of the greatest crime possible for a revolutionary, threatened every hour of his life, delivered up to blind hatred....And yet, what self control, what certainty of having lived in perfect accord with his principles, what great courage!"¹

It was during this visit that Breton and Trotsky wrote the "Manifesto: Towards A Free Revolutionary Art" which has since become the classic statement on the subject of art and class struggle.²

The manifesto was designed both as a vigorous rejection of Stalinist attempts to impose military discipline in the cultural sphere, and as a rallying cry for writers and artists who supported the class struggle but were not prepared to accept Communist Party hegemony. The necessity of facilitating the development of an organic, unfettered revolutionary art is made clear:

"In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint....To those who would urge us....to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we

give a flat refusal, and we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula complete freedom of art."

How different from the prescriptive formulations of the Communist Party's cultural bureaux, and from the injunction of the surrealist renegade Louis Aragon, recently converted to Stalinism, to eschew the avant-garde in favour of "writing the Stalinist truth".

Publication of the Manifesto was followed by the setting up of an embryonic revolutionary artists' organisation, the F.I.A.R.I., which however failed to flourish in the worsening political climate of the late thirties. The outbreak of war put paid to the experiment.

The impact that the collaboration with Trotsky and the infusion of revolutionary socialist ideas had on Breton lasted for the rest of his life. He fought a principled, and at times bitter, struggle within his own circle against defections to both right and left. Salvador Dali, whom the surrealists nicknamed Avida Dollars ("greedy for cash"), is the best known of those who sold out to commercialism.

But in a sense the defections to Stalinism were far more damaging; Breton lost his closest allies, Aragon and the poet Paul Eluard, to the French CP. Even after the "occultation" of the surrealist movement in the post-war period, Breton's insistence on the link between surrealism and the fight for proletarian emancipation remained as strong as ever.

The potency of this link can be judged from the fact that even today politics is written out of the accounts of surrealism which we find in the media, in the groves of academe and (perhaps above all) in the art world.

The recent exhibition of surrealist work, "Desire Unbound", at the

Tate Modern in London paid Breton and his comrades a back-handed compliment when (as Andrew Kennedy pointed out in his recent review) it omitted any serious reference to the politics of surrealism from what was supposed to be a definitive account of the movement's development.

Even Breton's translator and biographer, Mark Polizzotti, who seems to have established a monopoly position for himself in the publication of Breton's work, manages to combine political illiteracy with a thinly-veiled antipathy to his subject's revolutionary views.

If it is the relationship with Trotsky and the political engagement of the surrealists as a collective which is most immediately striking, there is another aspect to the relationship of surrealism to revolutionary politics which should not be overlooked.

If we look for the driving force behind the surrealists' move to the left in the early twenties, it lies not only in their reading of Lenin and Trotsky, but also in the profoundly revolutionary analysis they produced of the creative process itself.

At the heart of surrealism is the belief in the creative potential of every human being, and a vision of a post-revolutionary society in which the role of artists as specialists will wither away.

The surrealists saw themselves as technicians of the imagination, developing a series of techniques - some borrowed from other disciplines, some wholly innovative - which would enable non-specialists to tap into the well-springs of the imagination located in the unconscious mind.

They seized on the researches of Sigmund Freud but rejected therapeutic applications in favour of using his techniques as a means of exploration. Their tool-kit included experiments in automatic writing and drawing, the use of hypnosis and trance, collective inquiries and games, word and image collage, found images and objects.

They investigated objective chance, occultism, eroticism, dreams, tribal art and art produced by mental patients. Their focus throughout was on the pragmatic exposition of a new poetics, a new democratic art in which - to quote the words of their hero Isidore Ducasse - "poetry should be made by all."

Breton realised that this specifically surrealist revolution could never be accomplished within class society. Under capitalism, such techniques would be the preserve of a privileged minority.

"Surrealist activity," he stated, "had to cease being content with the results....which it had originally planned." The surrealists had to turn to Marxism in order to create the social conditions in which the imagination could regain its rights. The surrealists joined the revolution.

■ Jay Woolrich runs the surrealist website at www.uplandtrout.co.uk and is a member of the Leicester Surrealist Group.

(1) Quoted in Helena Lewis, "Dada Turns Red", Paragon House Publishers, 1988. Several of the quotes used here originate in this excellent book.

(2) Originally published under the names of Breton and Rivera, it is now accepted that Trotsky was Breton's actual co-author. The full text can be found on the website at www.uplandtrout.co.uk in the Theory section.

Workers' power in Paris

**The dictatorship
of the proletariat**

The Commune was elected on March 26, and the Central Committee resigned and handed over power to it two days later.

The politics of the members of the Commune were by and large of two camps, the Blanquists and the Proudhonist wing and the

**Second of two articles
by Matthew Jones**

International Working Men's Association, the First International set up by Marx and Engels.

The Blanquists, followers of Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), believed that mankind would be freed from wage slavery not by means of the class struggle but through a conspiracy by a small minority of intellectuals. They lost sight of the real conditions necessary for a successful uprising and ignored contacts with the working class and peasantry.

The Proudhonists were socialists of the small peasants and self employed master-craftsmen. In keeping with this, they believed in a form of cooperation in which each worker owned his own means of production, his tools. They abhorred mass organisation of the working class against the employers, seeing it as unnatural other than in the "exceptional" case of large workplaces.

Even in Paris, long a centre of artistic artisans, by 1871 large enterprises were becoming the rule rather than the exception. Circumstances, and the involvement of the mass of proletarian Paris, turned both these programmes on their heads.

The Commune was majority Blanquist and most of its delegates were of petty bourgeois origin.

Twenty-five working class delegates, including 12 members of the International were elected on March 26. Subsequent elections on April 16 brought in more socialist delegates including Marx's son-in-law Lorguet.

The members of the International were responsible for most of the economic measures of the Commune. The ministry of Trade and Labour was headed by a German revolutionary, Frankel, the posts and telegraph, the Mint and direct taxation, and (towards the end of the Commune) finance were all directed by socialists.

In keeping with its role at the head of an entirely new form of state, the Commune was an entirely new type of body. All delegates were subject to recall by the constituents at any time.

Executive body

The Commune was no mere Parliamentary talking shop, it was also the executive body, its members had to carry out their own policies, breaking down an important barrier between people and state.

In addition, the Commune declared that all judges, magistrates, administrators and teachers would be elected and subject to recall by their constituents.



As Marx put it: "Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent and repress the people in parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for workers, foremen and accountants for his business." (Quoted in Lenin, *State and Revolution*).

And Lenin himself comments: "The Commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the Parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents."

This workers' democracy, developed and tested through the experience of the Commune and the Russian Revolution, is a key element in every genuine revolutionary socialist programme.

The basis for the establishment of this new workers' state was the destruction of the old fundamentally capitalist one. The last act of the Central Committee of the National Guard was the abolition of the notorious Paris "Morality Police": the first act of the Commune on March 30 was to abolish conscription and the standing army, plus the old state administration.

The army was replaced by the National Guard in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled. The state as the repressive machine of the minority

bourgeoisie was replaced by the armed people, i.e. the majority, armed to repress the counter-revolutionary minority.

"It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush their resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune, and one of the reasons for its defeat was that it did not do this with sufficient determination. The organ of suppression, however, is here the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom and wage slavery. And since the majority of the people itself suppress its oppressors, a 'special force' for suppression is no longer necessary! In this sense, the state begins to wither away."

(Lenin, *State and Revolution*). Lenin saw the Commune as a first step towards a classless Communist society in which no repressive state apparatus need exist.

Workers' wage

Two additional measures completed the new state. The first was the decision on April 1 that all state employees including the members of the Commune themselves should be paid at most 6,000 francs (i.e. working men's wages) thus preventing any form of careerism at the expense of the state.

The second was the abolition of all state payments for religious purposes on April 1 and on April 8 the removal of the church from the schools, clearing the way for education free from mysticism.

The Commune was able to manage with roughly a quarter of the number of functionaries employed by the old Second Empire, and moreover it paid them at most a

salary barely amounting to one fifth of what Professor Huxley put forward as a minimum for a secretary to a metropolitan school board:

"The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions 'cheap government', a reality by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure the standing army and state functionarism."

(Marx, *The Civil War in France*)

This had its effect. Shortly after the National Guard seized power in Paris there were risings in Marseilles, Lyons, Dijon and elsewhere, attempting to set up Communes along the lines of Paris.

Federation

The Paris Commune's own programme was for a national federation of urban and rural Communes along the same lines as in Paris with a Federal body made up of representatives from all the communes to be convened in Paris as the central authority.

The risings in the cities were suppressed, but the real fear of Thiers and his Rurals was that the programme of the Commune might reach the French peasantry. The peasants had been ground down by taxation (it was they, the majority, who paid for the excesses of the Second Empire) and the weight of the state bureaucracy.

The Commune promised the peasants freedom from the tax burden, from the petty state officials and gendarmes who under Communal rule would be elected by and responsible to the population, and from the superstitions of the priest in - the schools.

"The Rurals - this was in fact their chief apprehension - knew that three months' free communi-

cation of Communal Paris with the provinces would bring about a general rising of the peasants, and hence their anxiety to establish a police blockade around Paris, so as to stop the spread of the rinderpest."

(Marx, *ibid.*, p. 61).

Before going on to discuss the economic reforms of the Commune it is necessary to say a word about its internationalism. Despite being surrounded on its Eastern and Northern fronts by a hostile German army, the Commune elected a German socialist Frankel as Minister of Labour.

In addition, several Polish revolutionaries including Dabrowski, who was a general, served in the National Guard. On March 30 all foreigners elected to the Commune were confirmed in office with the words "the flag of the Commune is the Flag of the World Republic" (quoted in Lenin, *Paris Commune and the tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship*).

The Commune lifted the financial burden imposed by the big bourgeoisie and the Second Empire on the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. It declared on March 30 that no rent would be paid on dwelling houses from October 1870 to April 1871 and all payments already made would be booked as rent in advance for the future.

At the same time it also deferred the debts of the small shopkeepers and the like and proclaimed an end to foreclosures on their mortgages. The sale of all articles pledged in the municipal loan office (the state pawnshop) was stopped.

For the workers, the Commune outlawed the fines imposed by employers to claw back a part of the meagre wages they paid. Night work for bakers was abolished on April 20, and the employment offices, previously run by agents of the police, were handed over to the mayoralties of the twenty arrondissements (districts) of Paris.

April 30 saw the closure of the pawnshops as private exploitation of the workers and a contradiction of the right of the workers to their instruments of Labour and to credit.

Workers control

A start was made on workers' control of industry when on April 16 the Commune ordered a list to be made of all factories closed down by the employers - and called for the previous employees to form cooperative societies and work out plans to run them.

The demolition of the symbols of the previous power was started by the 137th Battalion of the National Guard, who dragged out the guillotine and publicly burnt it amid great rejoicing.

The great victory column on the Place Vendome, cast from guns captured by Napoleon was ordered to be demolished because it served as a symbol of chauvinism and an incitement to national hatred; this was done on May 12.

The Chapel of Atonement built in memory of the execution of Louis XVI by the French Revolutionaries suffered the same fate. But in their economic measures as in their military and political ones the Commune stopped short.

They remained standing outside the Bank of France, centerpiece of the bourgeois financial order. If they had seized it, they could have reworked the financial system, offering cheap credit to workers and the petty bourgeoisie including the peasantry, and at the same time bought the French bourgeoisie to its knees by refusing to allow them the services of the Bank.

Militarily and politically the Commune lacked the resoluteness of purpose to win an insurrection. After seizing power in Paris on

March 18 the leadership went on the defensive, defending Paris against the skirmishes of the Versailles Rurals instead of delivering the deathblow to the crippled bourgeoisie.

Even then the problems posed for the "Party of Order" were massive. The municipal elections of April 27 in the 35,000 remaining French communes elected 700,000 councillors - of whom less than 8,000 were supporters of the assorted Royalists and Bonapartist rubbish that made up the majority of the Versailles National Assembly. This deprived the "Rurals" of their last claim to represent France in crushing the Commune.

Bismarck

Bismarck chose his moment to intervene - signing a punitive treaty with the National Assembly in Frankfurt on May 10. The conditions included the release of the Prisoners of War held by the Prussians - for the specific purpose of crushing Paris, and that Prussian troops would stay in France, until Bismarck was satisfied with the state of the country.

The Prussians remained occupying the Northern and Eastern forts of Paris to assist in the smashing of the Paris workers. This was signed by the Assembly on May 18.

By May 21, the Versailles troops gained entry to the city and eight days of slaughter began. Men, women and children fought on the barricades as the bourgeois army forced its way across the city, culminating in the last stand in the cemetery Pere la Chaise.

The firing squads used

mitrailleuses to annihilate over 20,000 men, women and children of the Commune. Their monument is the "Wall of the Federals" (so called because of their demand for a Federal Communist state) or "Wall of Communards" in the cemetery where the last atrocities were carried out.

Some escaped. Fifteen thousand were deported to New Caledonia. Many made their way through the Prussian lines with assistance of the Prussian soldiers. Marx's epitaph for the Commune was:

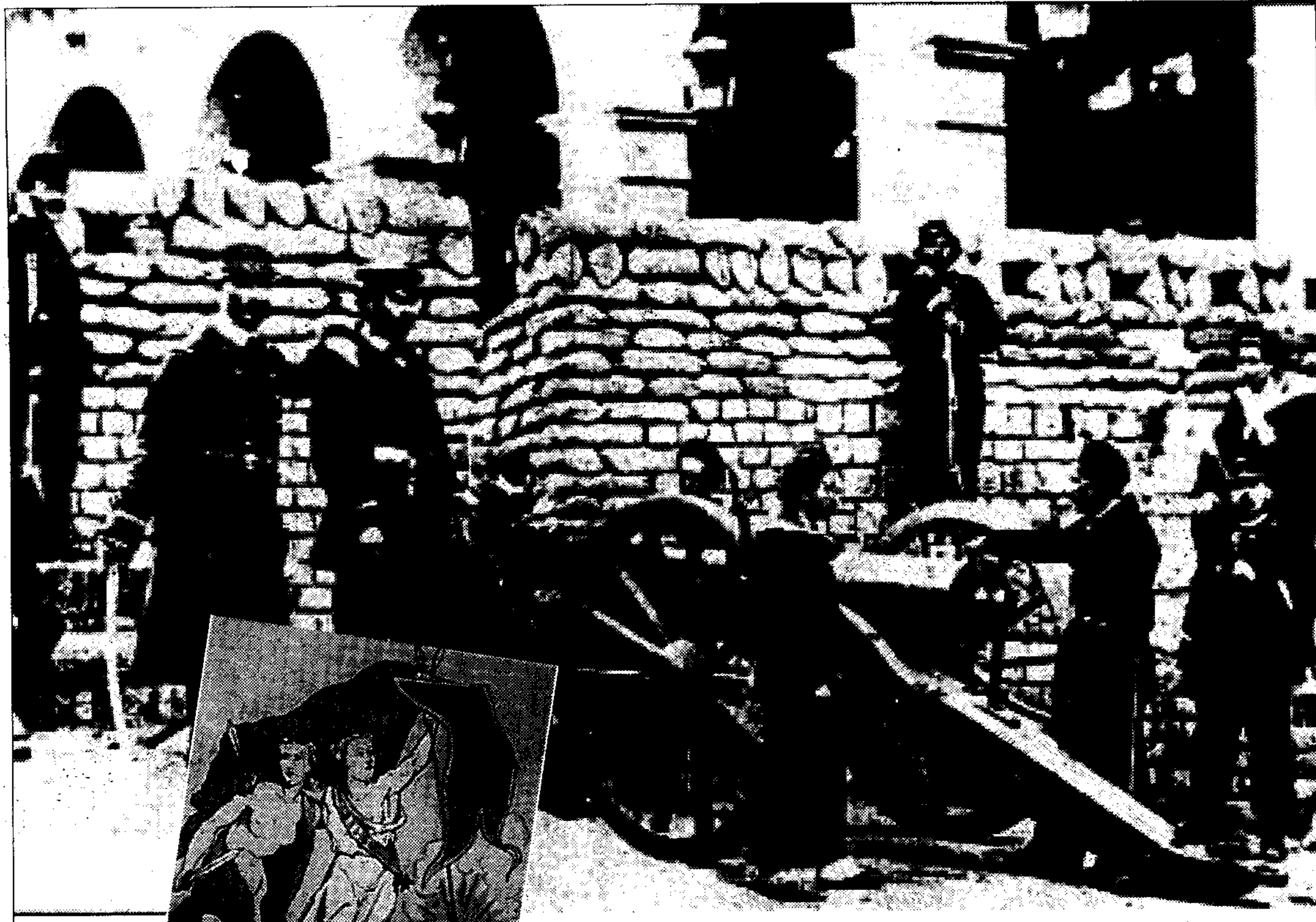
"Working men's Paris with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators' history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them."

(Marx, *The Civil War in France*).

The Commune's political tasks were largely democratic in nature, carrying out the unfinished tasks of the 1789 bourgeois revolution. It freed the system from the fetters of religion, the people from the fetters of usury and crippling taxation, and opened up democracy for the masses.

But its driving force was the working class allied to the petty bourgeoisie and extending the arm of liberation to the peasantry who made up the majority of the French population.

In this way it exemplified the fight for what Marx called Permanent (uninterrupted) Revolution, with the working class carrying forward the democratic



revolution as a part of the fight for socialism.

The measures carried out by the Paris workers: regulation of employment; abolition of unsocial hours; the workers' takeover of parts of manufacturing industry, were what Lenin called a minimum socialist programme.

Bolshevik revolution

The true heirs of the Paris

Commune were the Bolsheviks of 1917. Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* in August and September 1917 using the lessons of the Commune to urge opposition to the bourgeois Provisional Government, a seizure of power in Russia, the smashing of the state machine, and carrying into its full flower the Commune's embryo programme.

In 1891 Engels wrote an introduction to *The Civil War in France* to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Commune.

He used it to argue against the reformist attitudes then creeping into the Second International (revolutionaries of the time still called themselves Social Democrats). His closing words were:

"Of late the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

"Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

Eddie Coles (1937-1002)

Militant trade unionist and revolutionary socialist

Alan Thornett

Eddie Coles, who recently died at the age of 65 was not known very much outside of his native Oxfordshire. But Eddie was a militant trade unionist and a Trotskyist with a tremendous record of service to the working class.

He lived in the Cotswold town of Chipping Norton, 20 miles from Oxford, and had worked on the assembly lines in the Cowley car factories continuously for 38 years until his retirement four years ago.

Eddie and I were the same age, and both started our working life as farm labourers. He then went into the airforce and I went into the army. After that we both started work in Cowley the same time, in the summer of 1959. He started as a track worker in the North Works assembling the new Morris Oxford, which was just going into production at that time. I started as a forklift truck driver in the South Works feeding the new Mini Minor track.

We both participated in the building of the trade union movement in the plant during the 1960s. I became a shop steward in the early 1960s and Eddie in the early 1970s. By that time the shop stewards movement in the plant had

developed into a powerful force and controlled many aspects of the functioning of the plant. It was forcing up wages and improving conditions year on year.

Eddie never held a position in the union above shop steward, but the role he played was more important than that of many who did hold prominent positions. The words "unsung hero" spring readily to mind. He, and others like him, were the bedrock of the trade union movement in the plant. He was always there, always standing by his principles, and always ready to help and defend his fellow workers.

It was a militant period with strikes in the plant running at well over 300 a year. Eddie was in the thick of it. When the shop stewards committee called strike action - in one of its many confrontations with management - Eddie Coles' track would be one of the first out of the gate.

When the T&G officials led by Jack Jones removed the left from the leadership of the plant in 1974 and replaced us with right-wingers, Eddie was amongst those who continued the struggle for militant trade unionism. He was in the thick of the battles against the so-

called "workers' participation" plan introduced into British Leyland in the mid-1970s.

When four shop stewards in the North Works, the most militant part of the plant at that time, were famously victimised by management after Jack Jones called militant shop stewards "the enemy within", Eddie was amongst the group of North Works shop stewards who came to their defence in a bitter battle not only with management but with right-wing officials within the T&G.

When the left retook the T&G convenorship soon afterwards in a spectacular victory against the right, Eddie was in the forefront of the campaign for the vote. When the wages struggles broke out in BL in the early 1980s Eddie's was a part of the struggle to get the strike votes of the membership implemented by the full-time officials.

When I wrote my first book on Cowley in the mid-1980s (after I had been victimised out of the plant in 1982) I met him to discuss several of the chapters and asked him how things were going.

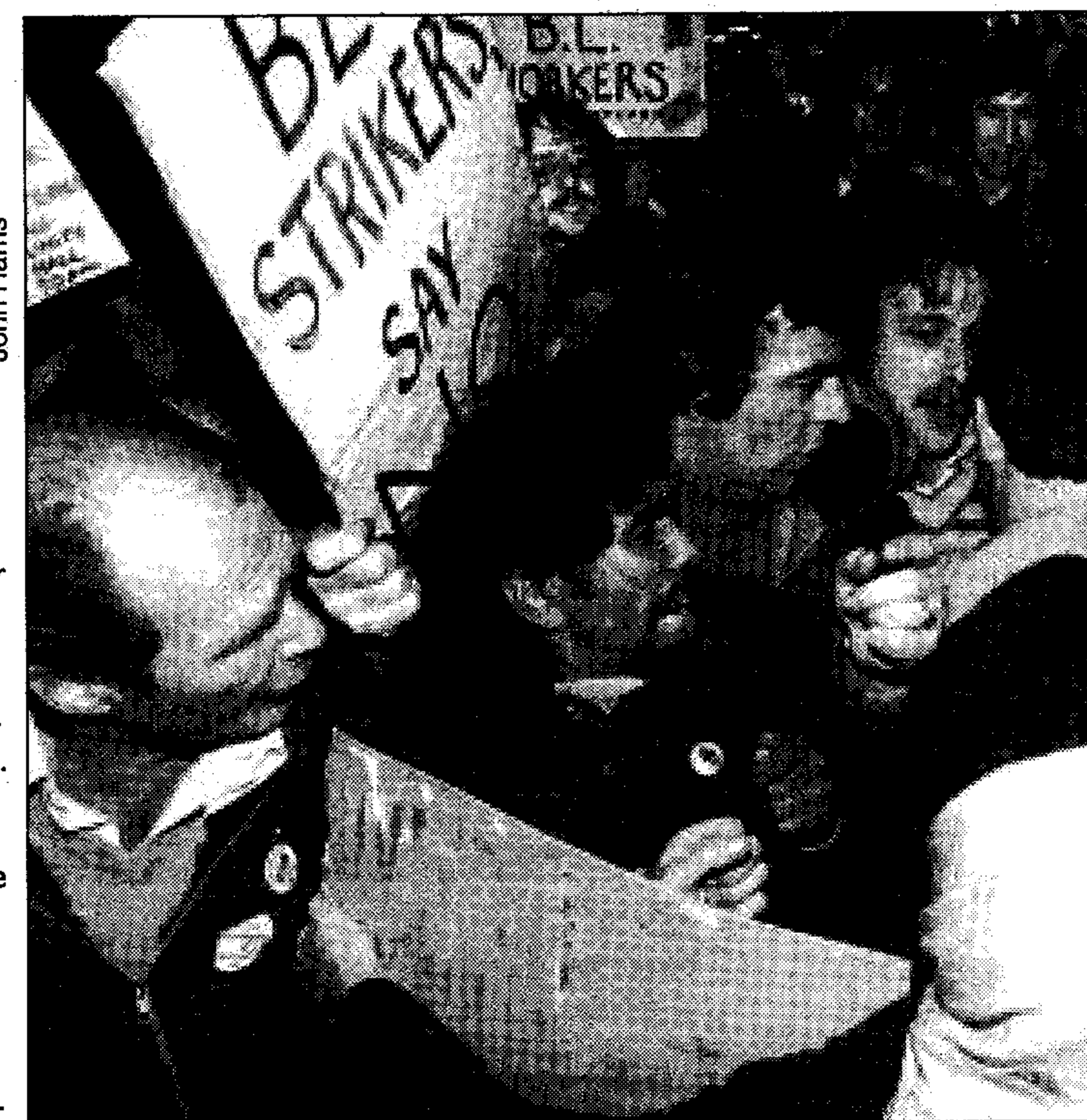
He said that it was a constant battle, and at times he could hardly face another drive into the plant and another con-

frontation with management. But he always did. I fact he hardly ever lost a day.

In the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990s, with the right-wing back in control of the plant and attacking the left, Eddie never compromised his principles or caved in to management as many others did. The picture of him was always with a group of workers around him in the canteen at lunch time discussing problems.

The legacy Eddie leaves behind is one of political trade unionism. He comes from a generation which produced a strong shop stewards and trade union movement. But Eddie was outstanding because he became political and worked from the basis of a socialist analysis of society. That is what allowed him to stick to his principles as others fell by the wayside.

There is now a generation of



In the thick of the action: Eddie Coles (left) in 1981, lobbying for rejection of a 3.8% pay offer

younger workers who have not had the experience of that militant period, and it is for those that the legacy of Eddie and his generation is so important.

Eddie's political life was not just in the car factory. He was a member of the Labour Party and an active member of the Labour left, and a part of a militant tradition in the Chipping Norton area which goes back to Joseph Arch and the struggles of the Oxfordshire agricultural labourers. He remained a Marxist in the Labour Party (and chair of the Chipping Norton constituency) until quite recently, when he could not stand New Labour any

longer. He was also involved in local campaigning in Oxfordshire, whether it was defending asylum seekers, opposing privatisation, or defending hospitals against closure. Not long before his death he was in Oxford at a meeting of Labour against the War. In all these areas Eddie will be sorely missed.

He is survived by a son and a daughter and his wife Eve, who is still a member of the LP and a formidable campaigner against the effects of the policies of new Labour especially in defence of social services and elderly care.

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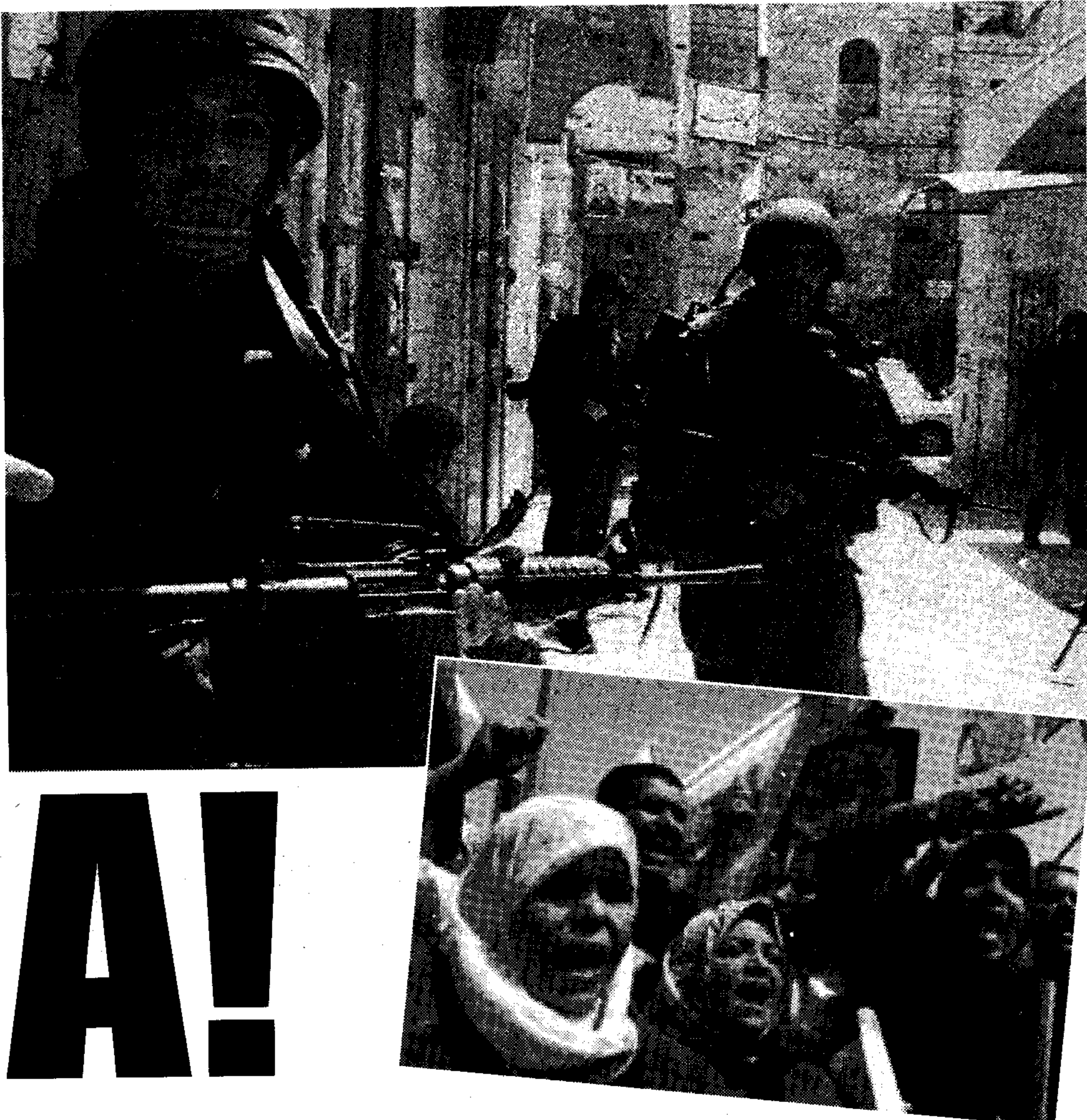
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