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workers POWER

**Special
global
protest
issue**

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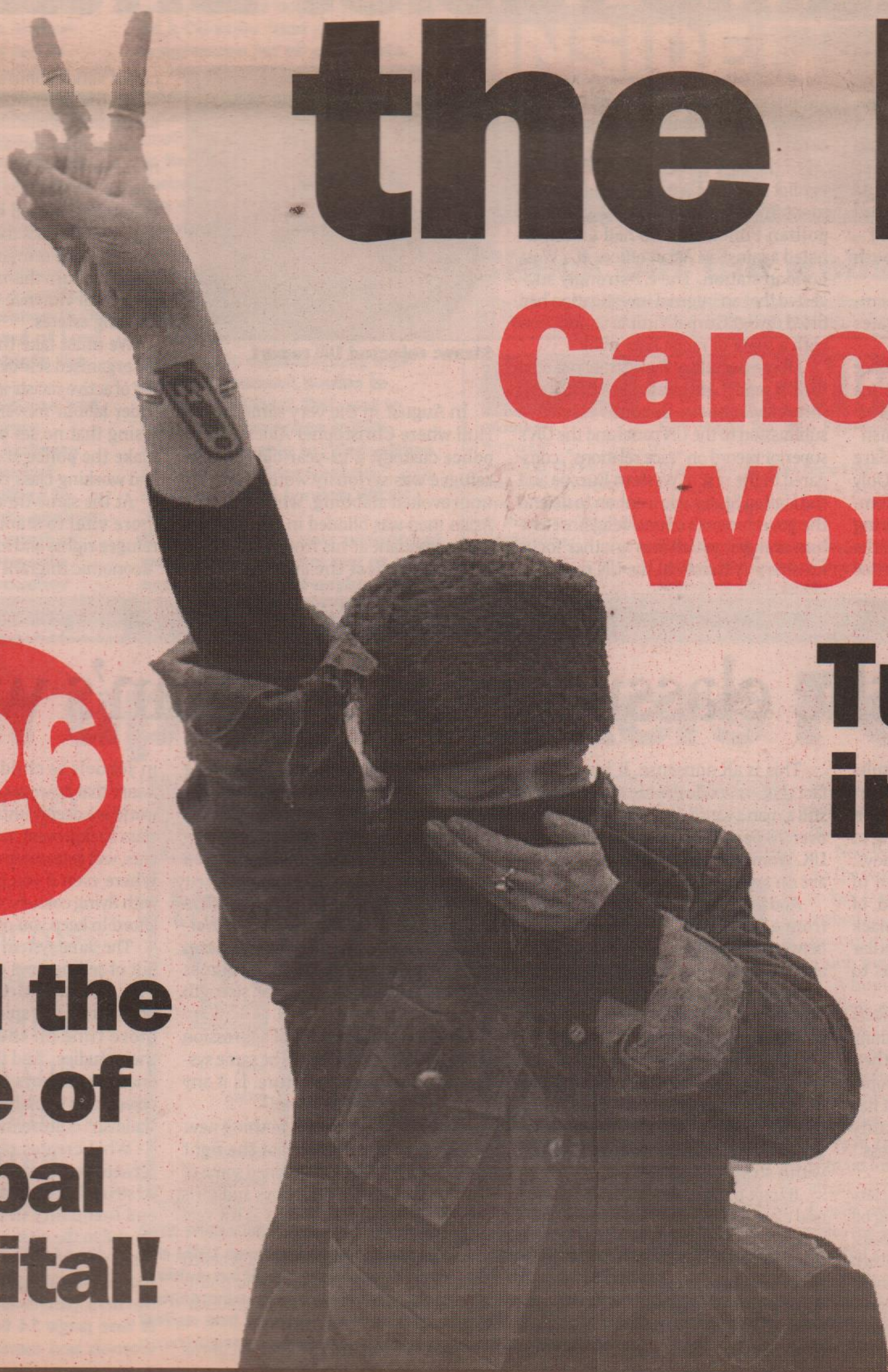
Shut down the IMF!

Cancel Third World debt

Turn Prague into Seattle

S26

End the rule of global capital!



26 September is the Global Day of Action to protest against the poverty, injustice and eco-disasters inflicted by capitalism. Unions, anti-poverty groups and environmental campaigns will converge on the IMF annual meeting in Prague, Czech Republic. To find out how you can take part in the worldwide protest - turn to page 3

IN BRIEF

Workers in New Zealand have found that there is more than one way to take a bite out of the Big Mac. The Service and Food Workers' Union has recently secured a three-year recognition deal with McDonald's, covering 140 restaurants across New Zealand. This is the biggest concession on union rights by the hated symbol of global capitalism since it recognised unions in Denmark in the late 1980s. There, hourly pay for McDonald's staff, aged 18 and up, now stands at £7.27 an hour. It may still be McHell but it sure beats Britain, where most workers in the chain's non-unionised restaurants are on the £3.70 an hour minimum wage.

Activists in Camden Unison and the council's Black Workers' Group are jointly fighting the sacking of the Group's convenor, Sasha Maharaj. Sasha, a long-time shop steward in Camden's Housing Department, had worked for 17 years with an unblemished disciplinary record. On 4 July, however, he was sacked in connection with the alleged theft of obsolete computer equipment. His dismissal looks like a blatant case of victimisation. The manager presiding over his hearing had crossed swords with Sasha when he represented a black member subjected to racist abuse by a white colleague. Management moved to dismiss him despite witnesses strongly supporting Sasha's account of events and the fact that a criminal case has yet to be heard. An internal appeal hearing is expected in mid-September. For more details contact Camden Unison/Camden Black Workers' Group (CBWG), c/o 59 Phoenix Road, Brill Place, London NW1 1ES, tel: 020 7911 1633 (Unison)/020 7911 1683 (CBWG).

One of the truly great writers for cinema and television died earlier this year. Jim Allen not only wrote for Coronation Street in the mid-60s, but was a union militant in the mines, who committed much of his life to revolutionary politics. He worked alongside the socialist director, Ken Loach, in some of his finest work, including *Raining Stones* and *Land and Freedom*, a gripping exposition of the role of Stalinism amid the fight against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Jim's family, friends and colleagues, among them Ken Loach and Tony Garnett, will be part of a unique tribute to his life and work on Saturday 7 October at Manchester's Cornerhouse cinema. Tickets cost £7 (waged)/£5 (unwaged) and are available from the Cornerhouse on 0161 200 1500.

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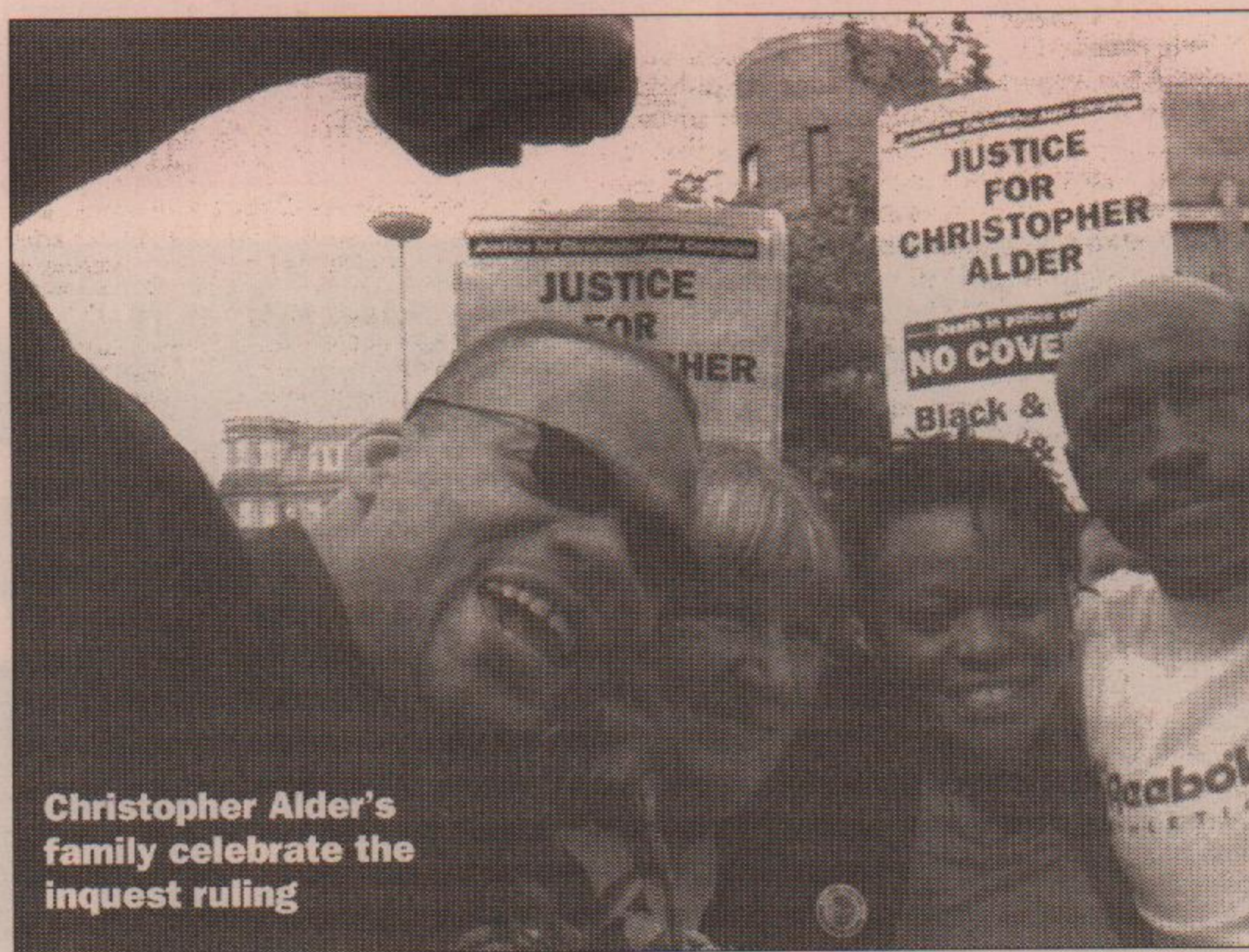
RACISM

Christopher Alder: killed by the police

CHRISTOPHER ALDER choked to death on the floor of a Hull police station in 1998. He had been arrested after hospital treatment for a head injury, sustained in an altercation outside a local nightclub. He was handcuffed behind his back and his trousers had been pulled to his ankles – a standard police arrest procedure, whatever the handbook may say. While he lay dying, five police officers stood laughing and joking. Like so many of those killed in police custody, Christopher Alder was black.

The Crown Prosecution Service eventually charged the officers – with minor misdemeanours. Meanwhile, Alder's clothing was destroyed and the police team's clothing was not subject to forensic checks.

As with the suspects in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, the five police refused



Christopher Alder's family celebrate the inquest ruling

to answer "incriminating questions" at the inquest – on 150 occasions.

But when an eight-person inquest jury in Hull saw the 12-minute tape of Christopher's last moments they had no doubts: he was unlawfully killed. Now his family are calling for manslaughter charges against the police.

The Alder case marks the fourth time in recent years that an inquest jury has actually returned a verdict of unlawful killing in a case where an individual had died in police custody. Despite last year's Macpherson report on the Stephen Lawrence murder and institutional racism in the police force, racism remains endemic – not just in the police but in the Crown Prosecution Service and in the courts. Hull's coroner told the jury to disregard "the colour of his skin", yet Alder's "race" was a crucial aspect of this case.

UN slams racist Britain

BRITAIN IS so racist that even the United Nations (UN) through its Commission for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has issued a warning to the Labour government over race relations. The UN report said ethnic minorities are increasingly concerned about racist attacks and harassment – fuelled by racist rhetoric from both Labour and Tory politicians.

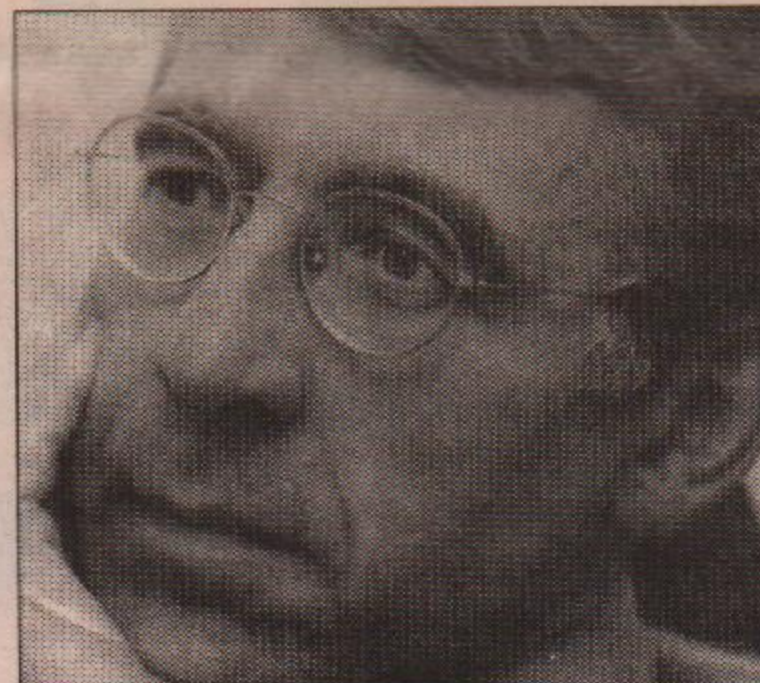
The report highlights high unemployment and school exclusion rates among visible minorities.

It also pointed the finger at the police response to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry: an effective "go-slow" on fighting street crime in order to "punish" working class communities that dare oppose the reality of racist policing. Only years of work by a combination of community justice campaigns, monitoring projects and principled members of the legal profession have brought police

racism into the open. Submissions from such organisations and individuals featured prominently in the evidence considered by the UN.

In the very same week as the Alder verdict and the UN report, an Employment Tribunal (ET) ruled that Metropolitan Police officers had discriminated against an Asian officer at a West London station. The ET strongly suggested that an internal investigation had fitted up Sgt Guralp Virdi in connection with a spate of racist hate mail.

Home Secretary Jack Straw rejected the UN report. He bleated to a BBC radio interviewer about Britain's extensive submission to the UN panel and the UK's superior record on "race relations", compared to the rest of Western Europe and the United States. He went on to defend the government's offensive against asylum seekers, which was another focus for sharp criticism in the UN report.



Straw: rejected UN report

naked xenophobic and racist hostility which the government has fuelled with its asylum legislation.

Socialists and anti-racist activists must point to the tragic killing of Christopher Alder and the damning indictment lodged in the UN report to highlight the fact that the racism of the British state remains largely unchallenged. In turn this racism gives a covert licence to violence on the streets and housing estates.

We must take the arguments both for organised self-defence and the sacking of active racists in the police into the wider labour movement, while recognising that no set of reforms can ever make the police accountable to black and working class communities.

At the same time it has never been more vital to stand up in defence of refugee rights and for the right to be an "economic migrant".

EDUCATION

Outside the classroom, it's a man's world

THIS YEAR'S GCSE and A-level results sparked off a panic about boys' underachievement. The press and education ministers went into overdrive trying to explain why girls have overtaken boys: laddish culture, the wrong kind of assessment, too much football and, of course, the girls themselves. For black young men it was even worse: popular music (not racism, of course) was to blame!

Education secretary David Blunkett moaned that if something wasn't done to "reassert a degree of balance" then resentment would grow from people who thought: "that the pendulum has swung too far from gross inequality for women to aggressive assertiveness". People like him, presumably.

Commentators prescribed a variety of measures to stop the girls running off with all the prizes. Single sex classes; more male teachers; or perhaps a return to total reliance on final exams which boys are supposed to be better at (ignoring the fact that coursework has already been cut back).

This is all nonsense. It ignores the fact that – outside the exam system – it's still a man's world. Women still earn just over 70 per cent of men's wages in the UK. Women's incomes at retirement age are on average half those of men.

And this furore has diverted attention from a far greater inequality: the one between the children of the middle class and the children of the working class.

While the difference between girls and boys achievements is just 0.6 per cent at A-level, the gap between the achievements of selective grammar schools and comprehensive schools is much greater with the grammar schools dominating the league tables for A Level and GCSE grades. Here, boys as well as girls end up with a string of A-grade results.

In fact the problems of gender, race and class are linked. Class society offers many young people only a dead-end future of low paid work or unemployment. And for that you only need a second rate education. On top of that, modern capitalism has seen traditional male-dominated industrial jobs

destroyed in repeated crises – leaving low paid women workers as the main breadwinners in some communities.

Working class boys are not the problem: the society that denies them a future is.

The same capitalist system that offers them a future stacking shelves on poverty wages, and a second class education to prepare them for that life, also pumps them full of ideology about war, strength and "masculinity".

Boys are pumped full of aggression and sexism by capitalism. The same system says: you have no future. Is it any wonder they rebel at school?

The panic over boys is nothing new. The only new aspect is that the fight for women's rights has lessened some of the inequalities between boys and girls in education – exposing class as the real problem.

School students have always rebelled against the petty discipline and pointlessness of parts of the capitalist education system.

Socialists call this alienation: it grows

in schools as children become more aware that however hard they work, the world is a deeply unfair place where your class background, not your effort or talents, will determine most of your future. Where even if you pass all your exams with flying colours, your parents cannot afford to keep you on at college.

The same system that makes millions out of selling boys clothes, magazines, CDs, football shirts, computers then goes into a flat spin when they spend more time on these pursuits than their studies. And the very society that encourages boys to view girls as sex objects gets into a hypocritical panic over "laddish" culture.

What creates respect and equality between young men and women? A united struggle for a better future. What will end inequality in the GCSE results? An end to the class system in education. What will end alienation in the classroom? Education under the control of teachers, parents and students.

■ See page 14 for more on women and capitalism

Welcome

TO THIS special issue of Workers Power focused on the struggle against globalisation. This month sees a Global Day of Action against capitalism on 26 September. Demonstrators from across the world will converge on Prague to protest against debt, poverty and exploitation as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meets there. Across the globe there will be local actions to draw attention to the way the unelected international financial bodies rule the world.

This protest is supported by the AFL-CIO – the USA's equivalent of the TUC – as well as trade unions, socialist and communist parties from all over Europe.

The media is already full of scare stories about the anti-capitalist protest in Prague. The message is "stay away – it will be violent". But the violence will come from the Czech riot cops, and the American FBI and UK Special Branch "advisors" who have flooded into the city to guard the bankers' and bosses' banquets.

Whether it's in Prague or in a local shopping centre near you – you should join the Global Day of Action. We have a right to protest as the profit system destroys the lives of millions of working class people and poor peasants around the world. When you're on the streets you will be part of a big global movement of people who have decided they don't just want crumbs from the capitalist cake – they want to run the bakery!

Campaigners have declared this month Red September. It will start with a counter-summit to the United Nations Millennium jamboree on 8 September, New York. On 11 September trade unionists and environment campaigners will besiege a meeting of the World Economic Forum – a capi-

talist back-slapping club – in Melbourne, Australia. After S11 the Olympics begin in Sydney: there, Aboriginal protesters and their supporters will highlight the appalling, ongoing oppression of Australia's indigenous communities in defiance of censorship by the corporate alliance that runs the games.

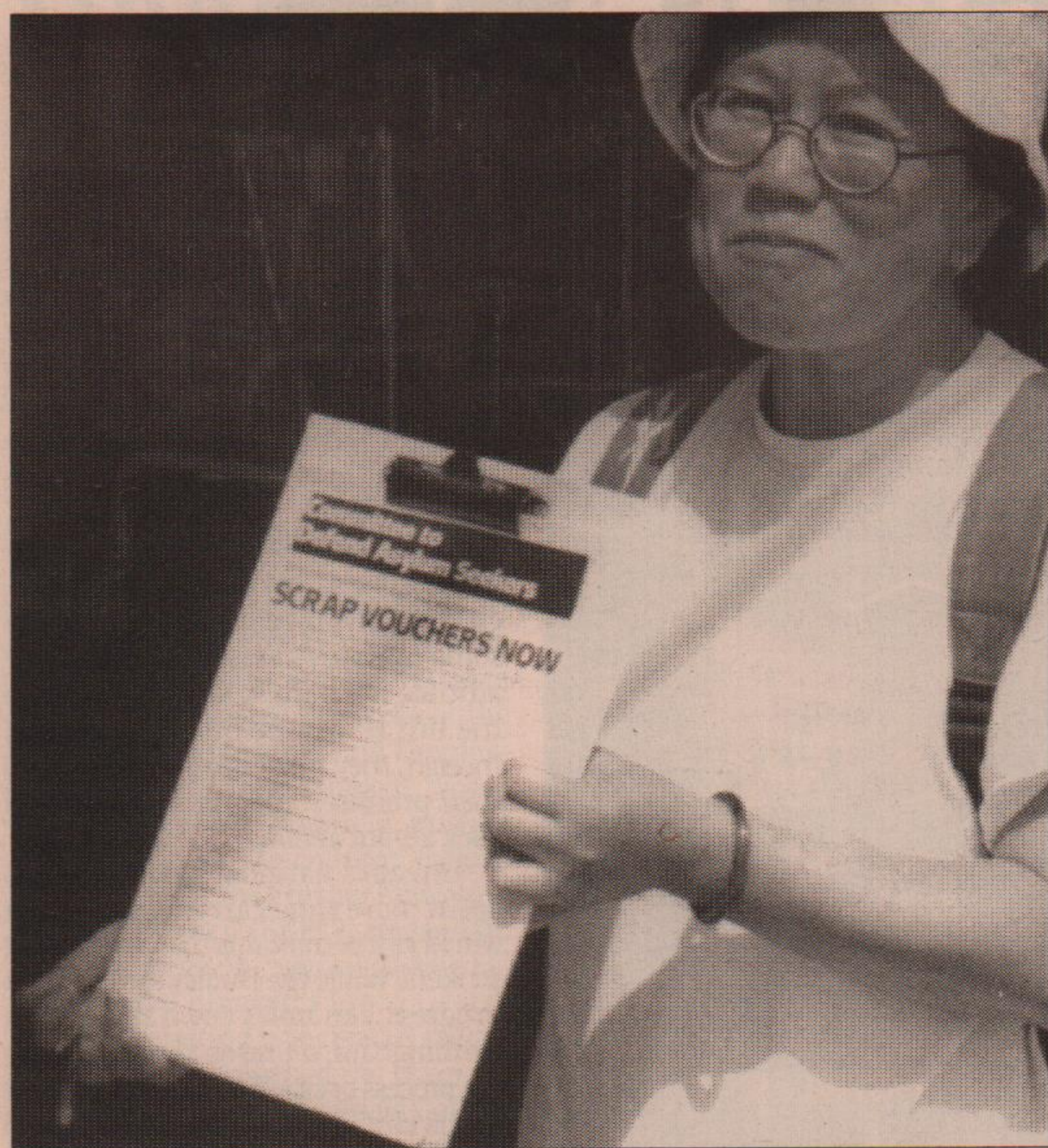
Then comes the week of action in Prague. On Saturday 23 September Czech unions, youth and left-wing parties will be joined by delegations from across Europe to say "enough is enough" to privatisation, unemployment and wage cuts.

A whole week of teach-ins will unfold including an arts festival, and a counter-summit. Then comes the Global Day of Action (S26). In the thick of it all will be Workers Power and its sister organisations across the globe – especially World Revolution, the independent working class youth movement.

Our protest website, "DestroyIMF", is already attracting media attention as the number one site for those who reject pacifist reformism and middle class anarchism and want to put the organised workers centre stage in the anti-capitalist movement. Check it out at www.destroyimf.org. It's an open forum for all anti-capitalists – so send us your reports and viewpoints, and we'll put them online.

Best of all: come to Prague with us. As at Seattle, the whole world is watching. We are going to Prague for a militant, non-violent working class demonstration and to assert our right to protest. There is affordable transport (from £25) going from major cities in the UK and cheap accommodation (£10 a night) at the other end organised by our Czech comrades.

■ For more information phone 0773 022 0962 or e-mail: prague@workerspower.com.



Fight Straw's voucher scheme

CAMPAIGNERS BACKING the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS) were out in force on 29 July and again in mid-August at supermarkets across Britain. They were leafleting and petitioning in opposition to the government's voucher scheme for asylum seekers. This was imposed in the spring as part of New Labour's drive to stigmatise current asylum applicants and deter refugees in the future. Sainsbury's has been a particular target due to the presence in the New Labour government of Lord David Sainsbury, an heir to the family's billions.

Thousands of signatures and hundreds of pounds were collected, with many ordinary shoppers and supermarket workers more than willing to listen to the arguments against the scheme and in support of refugee rights. Many people rightly fear that the voucher

scheme could be the forerunner of a US-style food stamp programme for all claimants.

The CDAS campaign aims to intensify the pressure on the retailing giants, currently profiting from their participation in the scheme, in an effort to force the government to drop the voucher scheme and restore the right to claim full benefits. Activists will be in the car parks and at store entrances again on Friday 8 and Saturday 9 September.

Workers Power urges community organisations and labour movement bodies to affiliate to CDAS. The cost to local union branches is £25. Cheques payable to "Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers", c/o BCM Box 4289, London WC1N 3XX.

■ Check out the new website at www.defend-asylum.org or e-mail: info@defend-asylum.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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A Manifesto for Revolutionary Change

- ★ What is Globalisation
- ★ The United States and the Third World
- ★ The Working class and revolution
- ★ The fight against capitalism in Prague

Check out the website below for more on S26

Address: <http://www.destroyimf.org/index.html>

SEPT 2000 DESTROYIMF TURN PRAGUE INTO SEATTLE!

Mission: A mass working class protest against the IMF summit in Prague, 23-28 September

Get ready for Red September! Welcome to DestroyIMF - a web resource for all those mobilising to end the poverty and injustice inflicted by global capitalism.

on... RED SEPTEMBER manifesto

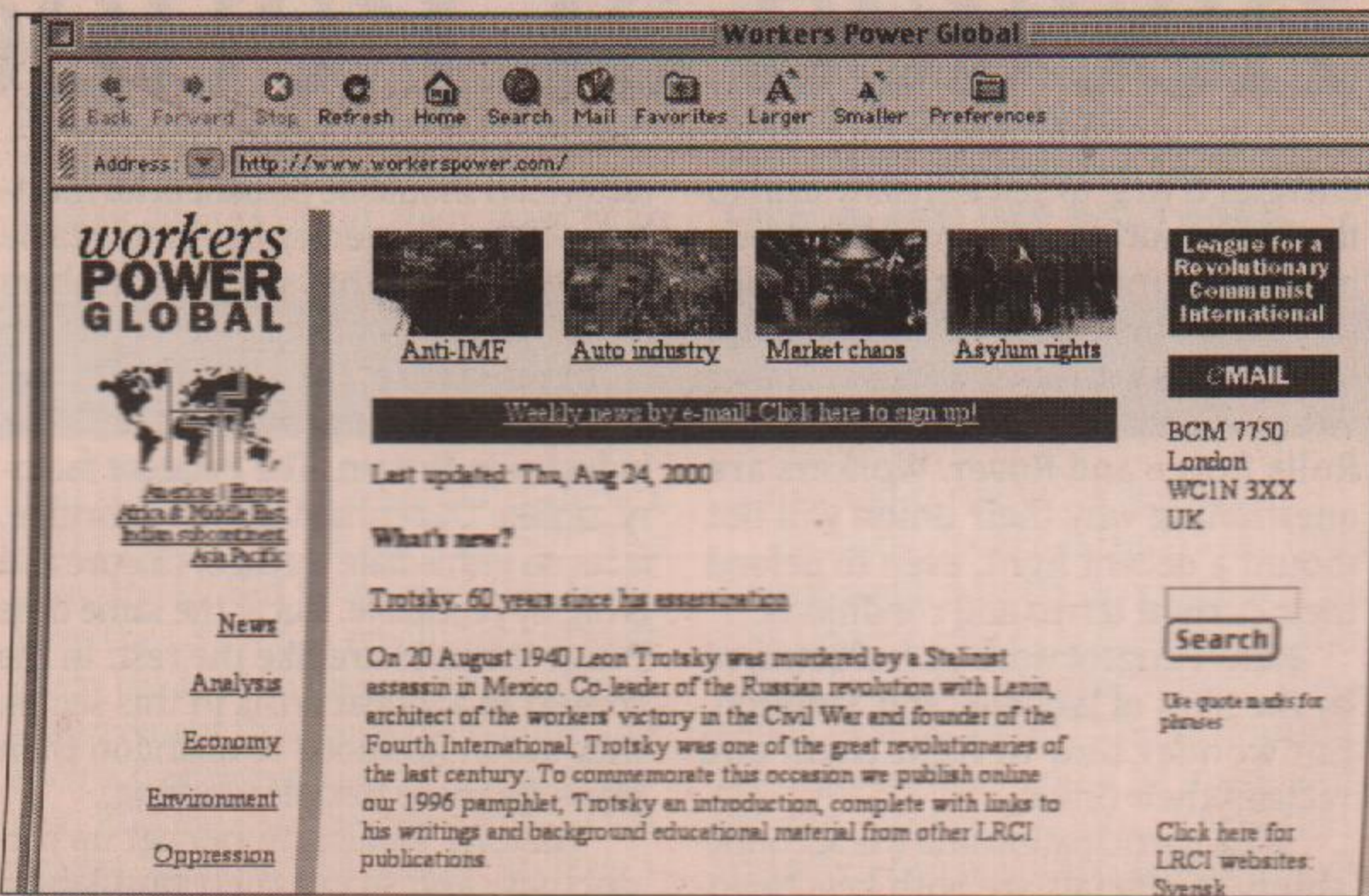
Our demands...
 Protest/teach-in plans
 Sign the calls for

BREAKING NEWS: Read a report of the LA Democratic National Congress protests - and a debate on the way forward: [click here.](#)

www.workerspower.com

Sign up for Workers Power Global

Workers Power website is a resource for socialists across the globe. As well as regular updates on the class struggle, there is a free weekly email newsletter and a huge Marxist archive



SITE INCLUDES: ■ News: Regular updates from correspondents in the LRCI sections. ■ Analysis of the global class struggle. ■ A huge archive on Marxist theory, history and the revolutionary programme. ■ Links to LRCI sites in Czech, Swedish, German, Italian and French. ■ Download and print LRCI leaflets, stickers and newspapers. ■ PLUS – A weekly email newsletter

Workers Power has had a website for the last two years – but it just got better.

Now you can access regular updates on the world class struggle, with links to key trade union and anti-capitalist websites. There is everything that's in your monthly Workers Power and much more:

A huge archive of Marxist theory, analysis and comment from the LRCI. Links to websites in French, German, Czech, Italian and Swedish.

Regular reports from working class militants at the front-line of class struggles across the globe.

And from this month you can sign up for a weekly email. You will, in effect, get a weekly issue of Workers Power with the latest on UK politics, calls for solidarity action, and links to what's interesting for socialists on the web.

There will be free downloads of Workers Power leaflets and stickers, and other LRCI publications.

With internet access costing just £1 an hour in some cafes, and free in libraries, it is becoming easier for ordinary workers to get on the web.

Also, in many Third World countries the web has become a lifeline for anti-imperialist, human rights and environmental campaigners – as well as trade union militants.

We don't think the internet can substitute for the real class struggle: but it's becoming an important weapon to link up militants across the globe, circumventing the "official channels" and bureaucratic censorship.

The site is more text than pictures – so you get straight to the politics. It's a not-for-profit site – so if you like it, send us money. The more you send, the more features we can add.

And it's interactive: we will publish your reports on what's going on in your town, college, or workplace.

So don't delay: make this your first stop on the web every day: www.workerspower.com

PRIVATISATION

Dudley workers fight PFI

"THIS IS privatisation by the backdoor. If they can do it to us, it'll be the clinical staff next. Soon we'll all be working for agencies, the service will get worse and the better-off will pay for separate care." These words from a striking healthworker sum up the ongoing industrial action at the Dudley Group of Hospitals.

Nearly 600 Unison members at this West Midlands NHS Trust have staged a series of strikes over the impact of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme. The Dudley Group's management wants to build a new "super hospital". Under the Labour government's rules, this has to be done using private finance. The immediate cost will be 170 jobs and 70 in-patient beds.

The Trust is insisting that under the PFI scheme, non-clinical staff transfer to Summit Healthcare, a private consortium. This is despite the fact that recent changes to regulations leave open the possibility of the staff remaining within the NHS. The NHS Executive has told the Trust's bosses that this cannot apply to the Dudley scheme because it was put out to tender before the regulations changed.

But as Mark New, the local Unison joint branch secretary, puts it: "The Trust does not appear to know which way to turn. They are trying to sit out the strike, but their credibility amongst all Dudley's healthworkers and the public is close to zero."

Wherever such transfers occur, conditions worsen. Although employees transfer with their existing contracts, the new bosses can sooner or later move to change terms and conditions. This is already happening. In Carlisle, for instance, despite promises to the staff. Here, Building and Property (B&P) Ltd, the facilities management company at the new Cumberland Infirmary, is trying to change the shifts for 100 domestic staff, forcing them onto impossible patterns with compulsory weekends.

Even in the case of UCLH, where strike action forced managers to guarantee negotiated conditions for transferred staff, the bosses have pushed for early transfers and are calling for new methods of working.

PFI schemes threaten both hospital workers and the working class people who rely on NHS hospitals. The private consortia seeking to build these hospitals leech off the NHS since it has to pay the private investors back, putting it in hoc to the profiteers for



some 30 years. More savings have to be squeezed out of the system, so nearly all PFI schemes involve ward closures and cuts to in-patient treatment.

That is why the Dudley NHS Defence Campaign is demanding that Health

Minister Alan Milburn steps in and cancels the Dudley project altogether. They point out that Dudley has among the seven worst waiting times in the country – but the project will cut beds further!

Outright cancellation would deal the biggest blow to PFI, but there is no doubt that it would be a tremendous victory if the strikers won their demand to stay in the NHS.

The first strike lasted two days and the second for four days. The workers have voted for a further seven-day strike, which looks set to get the green light from the union's Industrial Action Committee. Their resolve was summed up by one striker who said at a 24 August mass meeting "if we don't win after seven days, then we're out for another seven, and then another seven days". There has also been tremendous support from both the local working class community and workers around the country. Solidarity greetings have come from as far away as Australia.

The messages of support have a common theme – it is time someone stood up to the PFI plans and told the Labour Government to stop handing over the NHS to profiteers. There is a growing recognition among the strikers themselves that their battle is part of a broader, international one. That's why they voted to send a delegation to the Prague

demonstration against the IMF and World Bank on 26 September.

The Dudley strike, however, also shows the need for a national campaign of action against PFI. Rank and file workers will have to organise this themselves. Unison's national leadership has a poor record in supporting, let alone leading real action.

The Dudley workers' determination has meant that the local Unison officials are giving more support than in some previous cases. Certainly, their attitude has been in sharp contrast to the UCLH dispute in 1998-99. Now, though, they must be made to keep to their promises: pay full strike pay and back all-out action.

Unison's national leadership has spent more time carrying through a witchhunt of militants than supporting strikers. While the Dudley strike was in progress, ten miles down the road in Birmingham, a Unison hearing was in the process of expelling a leading activist in the city's local government branch!

The workers now need to launch an all-out indefinite strike. Union full-timers to date have backed away from this call. In response to those strikers who have demanded it, they say it needs to be built for since it could be a long strike. But the solid action so far shows that workers can be won now to launching all-out action. The perspective of a long strike rather than a speedy victory could otherwise see the onset of demoralisation.

The fantastic support gained from Unison branches and other workers shows there is a real possibility to build a national campaign against PFI. This opportunity must not be squandered. Unison leaders must organise a national meeting of branches facing privatisation with a view to hammering out a strategy of action. If they do not, then Unison members at Dudley Group of Hospitals should take the lead in launching such a campaign, using the moves towards a united left in the union to spread the campaign nationally and call a delegate-based conference to organise a more effective fight against the profiteers, currently aided and abetted by New Labour.

Messages of support and donations to: Unison, Dudley Group of Hospitals, c/o Union Office, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5QX, Tel/Fax 01384 244350.

Hackney shows the way

THE THREAT of an indefinite strike has forced council bosses in Hackney, East London to back off from the privatisation of its refuse collection service. A leaked letter from one of the council's senior bosses indicates that the private firm, Serviceteam, "will not be entering into a contract with Hackney to run the refuse service at least for some months."

The letter came after members of Unison, GMB and TGWU had all voted by a thumping majority to walk off the job

from 4 September at least until management lifted the threat of 40 compulsory redundancies in a workforce of 280. A work-to-rule and overtime ban had already begun to bite when council management officially confirmed the major climbdown on 23 August.

Workers must be on their guard against attacks by the council's management but for the time being their resolve in the face of a profiteer which has trampled on workers' terms and conditions in Camden and Lambeth is a fine

CAR INDUSTRY

Indefinite strike needed at Peugeot

AFTER 10 months of wrangling over new working hours, Peugeot workers in Coventry finally took strike action this summer. Shop-floor workers voted to reject Peugeot's plan to alter shift patterns and went ahead with two one-day strikes on 27 and 30 July.

The proposed changes in hours would mean that workers would spend even less time with their families than under the current agreement. Jackie Cole, whose husband works at the Ryton plant and takes the weekend shift to help look after the couple's three children while she works, explained: "They say they are reducing hours but he would be working four days which is an extra day. They do nearly 12 hour shifts and don't get a decent break and my husband comes home and is nearly dead."

TGWU chief negotiator Tony Woodley had originally backed the management's proposals that were then rejected by over 80 per cent of union members

in the first ballot. After the two day strike, the officials then worked overtime to extract another deal. They were backed by local Labour councillors – when Socialist Party councillor, Dave Nelligan, proposed a motion supporting Peugeot workers in the council chamber, it was blocked by Labour councillors who had received advice from the union that any discussion would "prejudice negotiations".

After the two strike days and the summer break, Peugeot responded with yet another "new" offer. In exchange for more flexible shift patterns, workers have now been offered a one-off £100 sweetener. This time the AEEU national car industry negotiator Duncan Simpson says this deal "represents significant changes to the situation and warrants another ballot". But he has adamantly and publicly opposed strike action.

In contrast to the trade union bureaucrats, who have expended their

energies trying to sell a shabby deal to the Ryton workforce, a small but growing layer of militant rank and file militants has emerged. They are seeking to forge links with other workers at other West Midlands car plants such as Jaguar, Rolls Royce and Rover. Workers are questioning why their union will not mount a decent fight, even to defend their current terms and conditions.

Many Peugeot workers feel betrayed by the likes of Woodley and Simpson, but wonder how to fight them and reclaim their union.

Mass participation and the accountability of officials are both key. Negotiators should regularly report to mass meetings of the whole plant membership, whose subs pay their inflated salaries. In the event of action a strike committee should be elected from, and be directly accountable to, the mass meeting. The union negotiator can be held to account by the strike commit-

tee, which should be present at all meetings with management as an obstacle to cutting deals that sell the members short.

In one sense, the situation at the Ryton plant is unusual in today's car industry in Britain. The Peugeot factory, unlike Dagenham and Longbridge, faces no immediate threat of closure and is highly profitable. But at the same time Peugeot bosses are like the rest: in the context of a global crisis in this sector, they are in no mood to abandon their plans for more flexible working.

They are looking to ratchet up productivity and so cut their unit labour costs. The union bureaucrats, to a greater or lesser extent, have all bought into the idea of partnership with these bosses in the context of a battle to gain a competitive edge against other manufacturers in the industry and other factories in the same combine in other countries.

In the here and now this means that car workers across the industry as a whole need to develop an international strategy: successful struggles in one country will merely export the problem to another. International solidarity is not just a question of sympathy, but the basis for really effective action in the car industry in defence of workplaces, wages and working conditions against the multinational giants. We need an international, cross-company committee to co-ordinate action and draw up a workers' answer to the industry's crisis. To get involved write or e-mail us at auto@workerspower.com.

In the meantime, Peugeot workers should reject the latest offer which contains no significant concessions. As one worker said, "We seem to be giving up an awful lot and they seem to be giving up very little. Enough is enough!" To translate these words into action will mean an all-out, indefinite strike.

SHEFFIELD

Biggest FE college set to strike

OVER 600 lecturers belonging to NATFHE at Sheffield College, one of England's biggest further education institutions, are planning to strike to oppose any compulsory redundancies. College management wants to sack 186 workers, 10 per cent of its workforce, with the cuts hitting both teaching and support staff.

The College ran into a financial crisis last year. The Principal, the Human Resources Director and the Finance Director all departed the scene at the end of 1999. Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett, whose constituency is in Sheffield, pushed for intervention. The colleges' national funding body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), stepped in, put the college on "special measures" and imposed Blunkett's friend George Sweeney as acting principal. A special FEFC review confirmed the financial problems, stated that Sheffield College was not doing enough to meet the educational needs of local people and argued that the college funding should grow by three per cent a year.

But in the topsy-turvy world of FE under New Labour, this diagnosis of the problems has led, not to a massive injection of funds, but to cuts and redundancies. As an appeal from the NATFHE branch to local trade unionists states: "We welcome plans for future expansion and widening participation in further education, but how can we equate this with the axing of experienced teachers and the withdrawal of student support?" NATFHE members fear that the staffing cuts are so damaging that whole areas of provision will simply disappear.

Just four days before the redundancy notices went out, Sweeney became "Sir George", dashing any remaining illusions that he was acting without

Blunkett's approval.

Sheffield College's situation is acute but not unique. The FE sector is still scandalously underfunded, has poor working conditions, low pay compared to school teachers and relies heavily on agency staff. The rot set in when the Tory government put all colleges into "corporate status" and pitted them in competition with each other. A massive attack on existing contracts ended in defeat when NATFHE abandoned national action in the face of the anti-union laws. Stronger branches such as Sheffield had at least managed to salvage locally negotiated contracts.

Labour promised increased funding and a better deal, but refused to bring the colleges back into local authority control. It said it wanted a new industrial relations climate – but rejects a return to national bargaining. It has tackled some of the worst examples of corruption and malpractice – but still allowed the sacking of whistle-blower and NATFHE national negotiator Andy Murray. It has stopped practices such as "franchising" (where colleges farmed out work to cut-price partners and creamed off funding), but left colleges like Sheffield in dire straits when they were ordered to pull out of the franchise deals.

Sheffield is the tip of the iceberg. Up and down the country, restructuring is taking place involving redundancies, whether compulsory or forced "voluntary" ones. Staff and students are being asked to pay for underfunding and bad management. Successful action at Sheffield would be a major boost to workers and students across the FE sector facing these attacks.

The NATFHE branches in Sheffield, organised together through their co-

ordinating committee, have launched a strong campaign of resistance. A mass meeting at the end of the summer term confirmed the determination to strike against compulsory redundancies and a ballot was launched.

Over the summer period, branch members were out in force petitioning in the city centre. They urged people to come and enrol in the college, and at the same time join the campaign to save decent provision and support any eventual strike.

In the next few weeks, branch members will be going out to union branches and workplaces explaining how the attack on jobs is an attack on educational chances for local working class people. Already several Labour Party meetings have voted their support, including David Blunkett's own constituency.

This growing support has put pressure on the management to modify its plans, but unless it withdraws the threat of compulsory sackings, the branch must launch all-out, indefinite action.

The Sheffield dispute is a test of NATFHE's leadership. Sir George is Blunkett's man. This attack shows the problem's with the current strategy of relying on New Labour. At NATFHE conference, General Secretary Paul Mackney welcomed the "engaged" speech from Lifelong Learning Minister Malcolm Wicks, who promised more funds for FE and an end to "macho management". But many conference delegates pointed to the gap between the rhetoric and the reality at college level, where managements are constantly seeking to worsen pay and conditions, and cut staffing.

At the moment, the union leadership has promised full support for Sheffield. NATFHE branches now have to turn that into reality, demanding guaranteed strike pay, collecting a levy, and calling on the leadership to launch a nationally co-ordinated fightback against redundancies.

Messages of support to:
jon.cowley@virgin.net
Update on the dispute:
www.sheffcol.natfhe.org

UNISON

Defend Glenn Kelly

MANAGEMENT AT Bromley Council have launched another attack on Unison branch secretary Glenn Kelly. He is currently suspended and faces a second disciplinary hearing on 31 August for his role in campaigning to save Bromley's Night Care service for elderly and disabled people living in sheltered accommodation.

Glenn, a prominent member of the Socialist Party and secretary of the Campaign for Fighting and Democratic Unison (CFDU), faced victimisation in 1998 for his CFDU role. At that time management appeared to be acting in cahoots with some Unison full-time officials who had made the CFDU a key target as part of the witch-hunt of left activists in the union. Then, a lively lobby by Uni-

son members from Bromley and other London local government branches led to management backing off.

This time Glenn describes the "attack on myself as an attack on everybody who wants to protect decent public services." In effect, the council's director of Housing and Social Services moved against him for accepting an invitation to attend a meeting with elderly tenants in sheltered accommodation, run by a housing association!

Glenn's suspension and the threat to sack him also mark a fundamental attack on union organisation in the outer London borough, which is currently run by a Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition. If the council's bosses opt to proceed any further against Glenn, there must be an

immediate fight to win strike action across the branch in his defence. This would almost certainly encounter opposition from Unison regional officials. This makes it all the more important that activists bombard both management and Unison headquarters with faxes expressing anger at Bromley Council's attack and declaring support for Glenn and the campaign to save the Night Care service.

Write to: Mr Jeremy Anbache, Director of Housing and Social Services, London Borough of Bromley, Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley BR1 3UH. Fax: 020 8313 4620. Solidarity messages to Bromley Unison, fax: 020 8313 4885.

LETTER

Dear comrades

In your last edition (July/August 2000) you quote with relish the remark by Mark Fisher (of the CPGB) at the LSA conference that: "If the LSA was to become an effective challenge to New Labour, we would need to transform it not into another reformist workers party, but into a revolutionary party capable of defending our class and leading it in the overthrow of the system of exploitation and oppression Labour defends."

Yes, but you don't explain anywhere how the LSA, in today's acutely adverse political conditions, could be transformed into a revolutionary party!

You suggest a programmatic debate within the LSA, which may well be a good thing. But how could this transform the LSA into a revolutionary party given the high degree of programmatic agreement that would be required for such a transformation? It's inconceivable. And the constant repeating of the mantra that the LSA should become a revolutionary party won't make it one. Even a regroupment of some (even a minority) of the revolutionary organisations currently within the LSA, a much less ambitious project, would be an extremely difficult and lengthy process, although it might be possible,

and would certainly be desirable.

And why would it be such a bad thing if what could possibly develop out of the LSA under current conditions – an anti-capitalist party of some tens of thousands – came about? The revolutionary organisations could be inside with the aim of turning it into a revolutionary party when political conditions made it possible. Why is that denounced as a "half-way house"? Surely it would be a very good development, like the SSP in Scotland, which would strengthen the left and be extremely useful to the working class.

Alan Thornett, Socialist Outlook

workers POWER

BCM BOX 7750 LONDON WC1N 3XX ★ 020 7793 1468

COMMENT

There is an alternative

AFTER GORDON Brown's July announcement of a dramatic increase in public spending – especially on the NHS and education it looks like New Labour is set for another parliamentary term.

It will achieve this with the backing of millions of working class voters – in spite of a programme that will continue handing over hospitals and schools to the private sector, maintain the persecution of asylum seekers, and offer little comfort to workers fighting low pay and bullying management in the workplace.

That is because most workers can't see an alternative: they see the Tories for the marginalised far-right empire fantasists they really are. They see Labour as an untrustworthy bunch of careerists, trampling over the poor to line their own pockets. But they ask: what's the alternative?

The past year has shown there is an alternative. There is widespread distrust and sporadic opposition to the Blair government across sections of both the organised working class and the inner-city poor, scraping by on state benefits. In addition, there has been the growth of the anti-capitalist youth movement, inspired by the Seattle protest last November.

With Ken Livingstone's election as London mayor, Blair suffered a bloody nose. The highly publicised resignation of the traditional Labour right-winger, Peter Kilfoyle, from his ministerial post highlighted a more general problem in many northern working class constituencies, where already high levels of abstention have continued to rise under New Labour.

The working class is certainly not about to break its organised links to Labour but new cracks are showing and it is possible that many branches in the CWU, FBU and other unions will begin to look for an electoral alternative to Labour.

The levels of electoral support for some Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) candidates; for Dave Nellist and other Socialist Party candidates in Coventry; and for the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) in London's working class heartlands; all point to the potential for a socialist challenge to Labour at the general election.

Workers Power has consistently called for a Labour vote in virtually all constituencies at general elections. We did this in full knowledge that Labour is a pro-capitalist party. The aim was to break the illusions of working class voters in Labour by putting them to the test in practice.

But the political terrain has now shifted and new possibilities have begun to open up in the context of enlivened debate and a genuine, if limited, new spirit of unity on the left.

That is why, at the next general election we will be backing a socialist challenge to Blair and New Labour at the polls. We will also be working hard not just to maximise its vote in contested seats, but to equip it with a political programme for socialist transformation.

A Socialist Alliance conference in Coventry on 30 September should chart the path to a serious electoral challenge to New Labour at the next election.

This is a crucial step towards waging a serious electoral battle against New Labour and its unabashedly pro-boss policies. Out of the Coventry conference should emerge a single campaign across the whole of England and Wales, and if possible linked to the SSP in Scotland, to stand at least the number of candidates required to obtain a party political broadcast.

The 30 September conference should also agree the outline for a unified national campaign. A democratically elected national steering committee is a vital ingredient if the campaign is going to make the most of its potential – not only to win votes but to establish vibrant campaigning bodies. To persuade working class voters that this alliance is serious will require such a united and truly national campaign, standing on an agreed manifesto.

Workers Power supporters intend to use the conference as an opportunity to argue for a short, openly revolutionary manifesto that makes plain that there is no parliamentary road to socialist change and that a revolutionary workers' government is our goal.

Our manifesto will form the basis of any Workers Power supporter's campaign as a Socialist Alliance candidate at the general election.

In the meantime, we will fight doggedly for the election manifesto to have clear, consistently socialist positions on such issues as abortion rights, immigration controls, military spending and nationalisation under workers' control.

As we have already begun to do with the London Socialist Alliance, Workers Power supporters will work to build local socialist alliances that are vibrant, campaigning bodies: that emphasise action to back strikes, working class community struggles, defend asylum seekers and link up with young people around the anti-capitalist movement.

There is no time to lose and much to be gained between now and the general election. We need a united socialist challenge to Labour. We need a programme that makes clear we are finished with crumbs from the capitalist table. We want to use the election to take the unadulterated message of socialist transformation into every single household.

GLOBALISATION

The lessons of Seattle

Stuart McKee reviews *Globalize This! The Battle Against the World Trade Organisation*. Edited by Kevin Danaher and Roger Burbach. Common Courage Press, Maine. (US \$15.95)

GLOBALISE THIS! is a set of essays by prominent anti-globalisation activists. It opens with accounts of the Seattle protest at the World Trade Organisation last November and follows this up with contributions on the nature of the WTO, and the debates within the Seattle movement. It ends with proposals for "democratizing the global economy." It gives an excellent picture of the American movement after Seattle and provides some important lessons for the coming anti-IMF demonstration in Prague.

The book starts with a dramatic proclamation, "November 30th 1999 marked a turning point in history". N30 was the mass demonstration which marked the opening ceremony of the WTO. Tens of thousand demonstrators disrupted the conference while, inside, Third World countries prevented delegates from reaching a deal on world trade.

It was a humiliating experience for the world's most powerful imperialist power, delivered under the eyes of the world's media.

How did the protesters do it? The key organisers, the Direct Action Network (DAN), had been planning for months how to bring the maximum number of protesters to Seattle. They were aided in this by the fact that the American union federation, the AFL-CIO, was also organising for Seattle, for its own demonstration and rally. Thousands of rank and file teamsters, postal workers, machinists, refused to follow their leaders away from the confrontations to a rally elsewhere in the city and joined the blockade. But it is a weakness of the book that they barely get a mention.

The DAN was a broad coalition committed to non-violent direct action to halt the conference. Decisions in the organising committees were taken by

consensus, "Minority views were heeded and included. The basic rules shared by all were: no violence, physical or verbal, no weapons, no drugs or alcohol". The participants were organised into units called "affinity groups" which were empowered to decide how they would participate in the blockade. Affinity groups themselves were organised into smaller "clusters" to take on specific tasks. Co-ordination was carried out at "spokes council meetings" where affinity groups sent along representatives "empowered to speak for them".

Paul Hawken, in one of the essays, describes how this worked out on the day, "Protesters had divided the streets around the convention centre into 13 sections and individual groups and clusters were responsible for holding these sections. There were also 'flying groups' that moved at will from section to section, backing up groups under attack as needed."

The blockade was effective, but the revenge was swift. The demonstrators were subjected to sustained violence from the police, they were tear-gassed, hit with batons, shot at with rubber bullets, squirted with pepper spray and driven away from the Convention Centre. One protester describes what happened after being tear-gassed, "We all sat down, hunched over, and locked arms tightly. By then the tear gas was so strong our eyes could not open. One by one our heads were jerked back from the rear, and pepper was sprayed directly into each eye. It was very professional. Like a hair spray from a stylist. Ssst. Ssst."

The question of violence on the day provoked the most disunity amongst the coalition at Seattle. The media concentrated on "anarchist violence" to deflect from, or justify, the massive police violence against the demonstrators. The "civil

disobedience" strategists condemned the anarchist black bloc because of this.

Fortunately most of the demonstrators, which included thousands of trade unionists used to defending themselves, followed neither the pacifists, nor the window-breaking anarchists. Barricades of burning "dumpsters" hindered the police charges, while tear gas canisters were hurled back to police lines as fast as they were fired. For socialists, "self-defence is no offence" (see page 11, "Is non-violence the only way?")

The essays on the WTO reveal another important lesson from Seattle, the ability of mass protest to take advantage of division amongst our rulers. The conference was already in trouble before N30. The EU and the USA were at odds over labelling of GM foods.

The normal procedure of the WTO was to stitch up such differences behind closed doors in meetings that exclude the majority of the poorest nations affiliated to the WTO - who are then expected to rubber stamp the decisions. The mass protests emboldened the normally compliant ruling elites of Africa and Asia. They refused to play ball, adding to the disarray of the conference and contributing to its breakdown.

One of the proposals before the WTO was to introduce a set of general labour and environmental standards for all countries for trading purposes. The AFL-CIO has been pressing for a so-called "social clause" in future trade agreements, setting basic labour standards including prohibitions of child and forced labour, and of violations of the rights of workers to organise. This proposal has not only divided the WTO, with the Third World ruling classes generally opposed, but also the Seattle movement.

The contributions in *Globalize This!* reflect this disagreement. While

many, like Manning Marable, recognise that unrestricted free trade under capitalism means a "race to the bottom" in terms of working and living conditions, others oppose the social clause as a new form of protectionism directed against the Third World by pampered US trade unionists. A contribution by David Bacon reflects the latter view. He argues that "simply prohibiting child labour does not provide opportunity, it simply cuts family income" and counterposes support for a programme of "national development which seeks to protect local industries" rather than encouraging socially responsible foreign investment. Clare Short, Labour's "Minister for Colonialism", has also weighed in recently on the side of the "right" to use child labour in poor countries.

Of course, the leaders of the AFL-CIO are more concerned about keeping out "cheap imports" than they are with child labour but this does not mean such a campaign is reactionary. Trade unionists in Third World countries are against child labour both for humanitarian reasons and because children are a cheap replacement for adult workers. The same is the case for forced or prison labour. We should campaign against it. Regimes which ban trade unions, or have fraudulent "state unions" like China or repress workers in struggle should have workers' sanctions applied against them. Some of the most effective anti-capitalist campaigns in the USA have been against firms like Gap that profit from such super-exploitation. It is to these methods of struggle the trade unionists and anti-globalisation movement should look to support their brothers and sisters overseas, not to measures taken by the imperialist WTO.

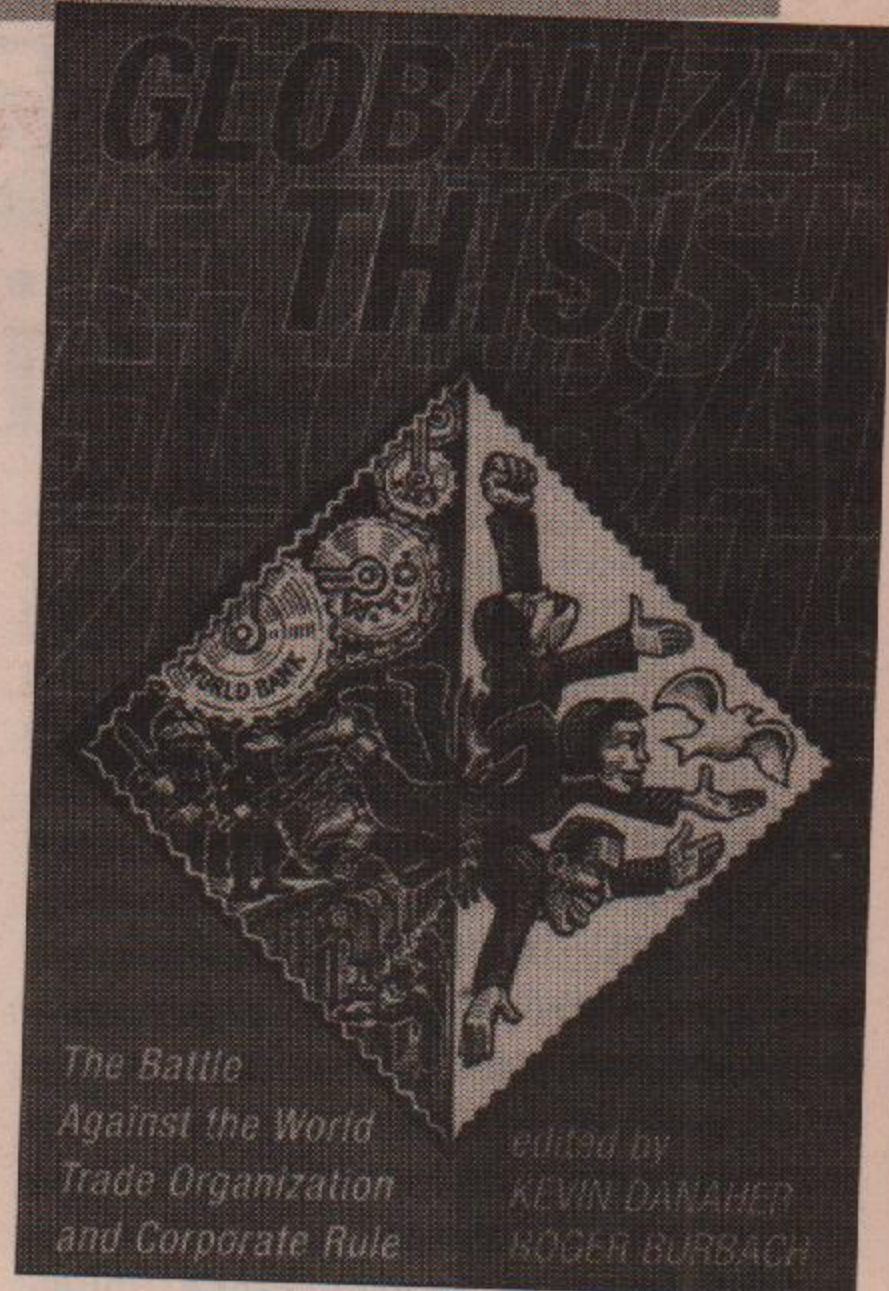
The weakest part of this book is its last section on "ways to restructure the

global economy". It calls for reform of international institutions like the WTO, the World Bank and the international financial system.

Predictably the Tobin Tax, a tariff of less than half a percent on foreign exchange deals, is peddled as a solution to foreign exchange speculation and international economic crisis. Another essay suggests that the crisis in the WTO should be a signal for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to reassert itself, and for the "South to push for the creation of institutions which truly serve its interests", a proposal that presumes that the workers and peasants of the "South" have the same interests as the rulers of these countries.

"Ten ways to democratise the global economy" argues that corporations must be accountable to public needs and suggests that "shareholder activism is an excellent tool for challenging corporate behaviour". It isn't: nationalisation under workers' control is the answer.

N30 in Seattle will only be a "turning point in history" if the anti-capitalist workers and youth who braved tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets can build on their radical methods of struggle and organisation. This means arming themselves with a clear understanding of the nature of international capitalism and the weapons to destroy it. The weapon is revolution, not reform.



OLYMPICS PROTEST

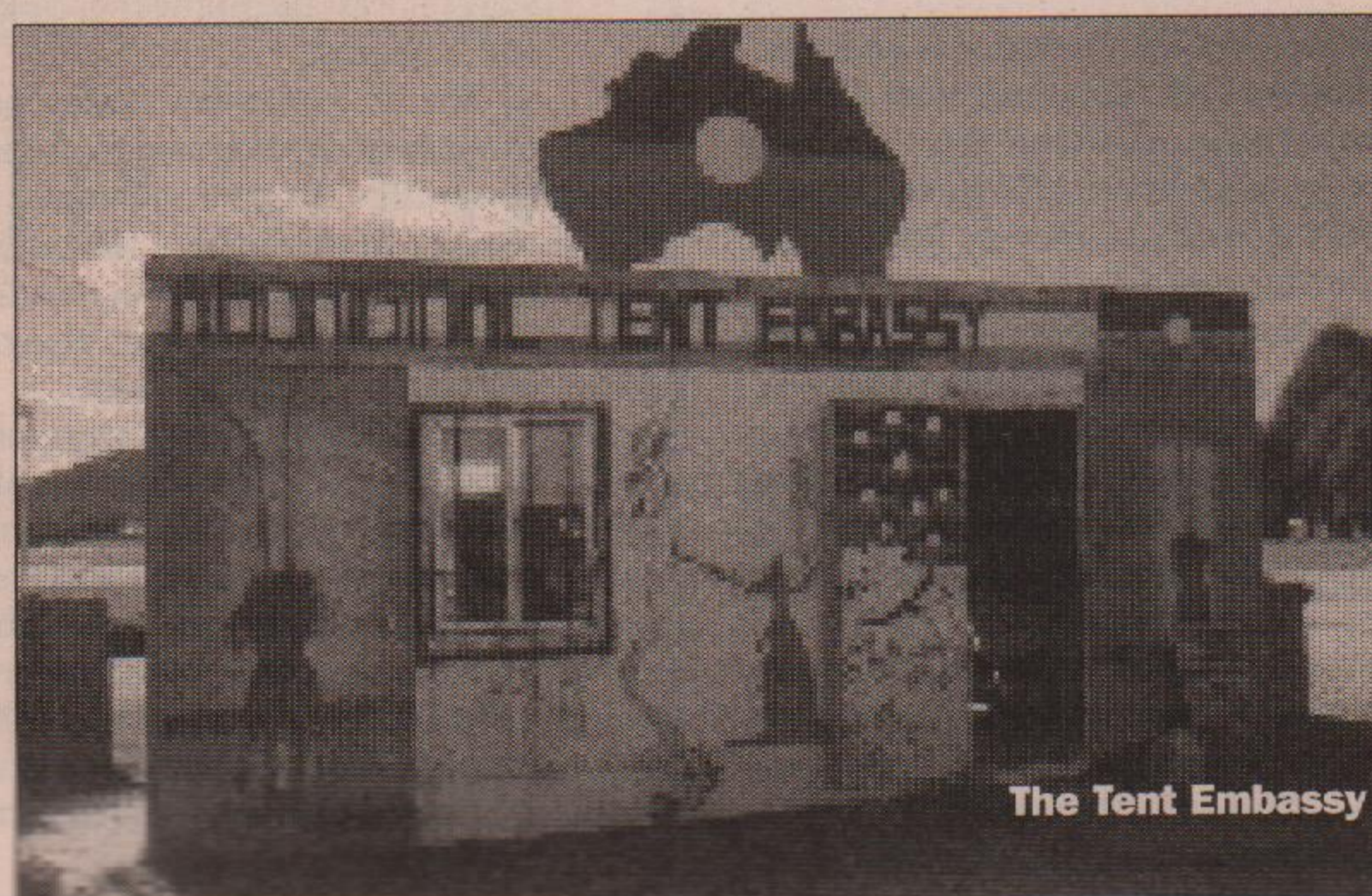
Justice for indigenous peoples!

The eyes of the world will be on Australia from 15 September, as Sydney plays host to the Olympic Games. Indigenous rights protesters plan demonstrations to expose the truth about Australia's appalling record on indigenous rights

WHEN AUSTRALIA won the bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games not all Australians were celebrating. For many, the fact that Australia had won the bid over China - on the grounds of China's terrible record on human rights - was too much to swallow.

Australia itself has a shameful human rights record towards its indigenous population - the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Island peoples. State-sponsored inquiries into aboriginal deaths in custody and into the decades of torture and abuse that took place under the policy of removing Aboriginal children from their parents, document the crimes of the Australian state - as do numerous court cases over indigenous land rights. And present-day statistics on indigenous health, education, welfare, mortality rates, unemployment and imprisonment tell the story of a people systematically oppressed within the "lucky country".

The Olympics offers an opportunity to protest against the racist Australian state, and to make the whole world sit up and take notice of the rights and demands of Australian Aborigines. Australia's political elite is determined to stop all protests.



To channel anger into effective political protest action, a Sydney-based alliance - the Anti-Olympics Alliance - has been organising political demonstrations that will kick off at 10am on 15 September, the day of the Opening Ceremony.

An Aboriginal Tent Embassy has been set up in central Sydney, which is planned as an assembly point for pro-

testers on 15 September. But this peaceful Tent Embassy has recently come under attack from the South Sydney Council. The council has taken the Tent Embassy to court following the presentation of an eviction order that could see the Tent Embassy removed before the start of the Olympic Games.

The Government and big business are desperate to quell the protests dur-

ing the Olympics, and to present an unmarred image of Australia to the world. This they can only do by suppressing indigenous protesters, and by eradicating all evidence of the truth of indigenous affairs Australia.

Indigenous Australian athletes have been warned that they will risk losing their medals if they raise the Aboriginal flag at the Olympics.

This threat seeks to prevent any repeat of Cathy Freeman's famous flying of the Aboriginal flag after winning the 400 metres gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Canada - an act for which she was reprimanded by team officials.

According to the Australian Olympic Committee, flying the Aboriginal flag would be a breach of International Olympic Committee rules. It would allegedly put athletes at risk of breaching rule 61 of the Olympic charter, which states that: "No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in the Olympic areas."

Olympic officials have also threatened to close the indigenous cultural pavilion at Homebush Bay, under the guise of a contract banning political

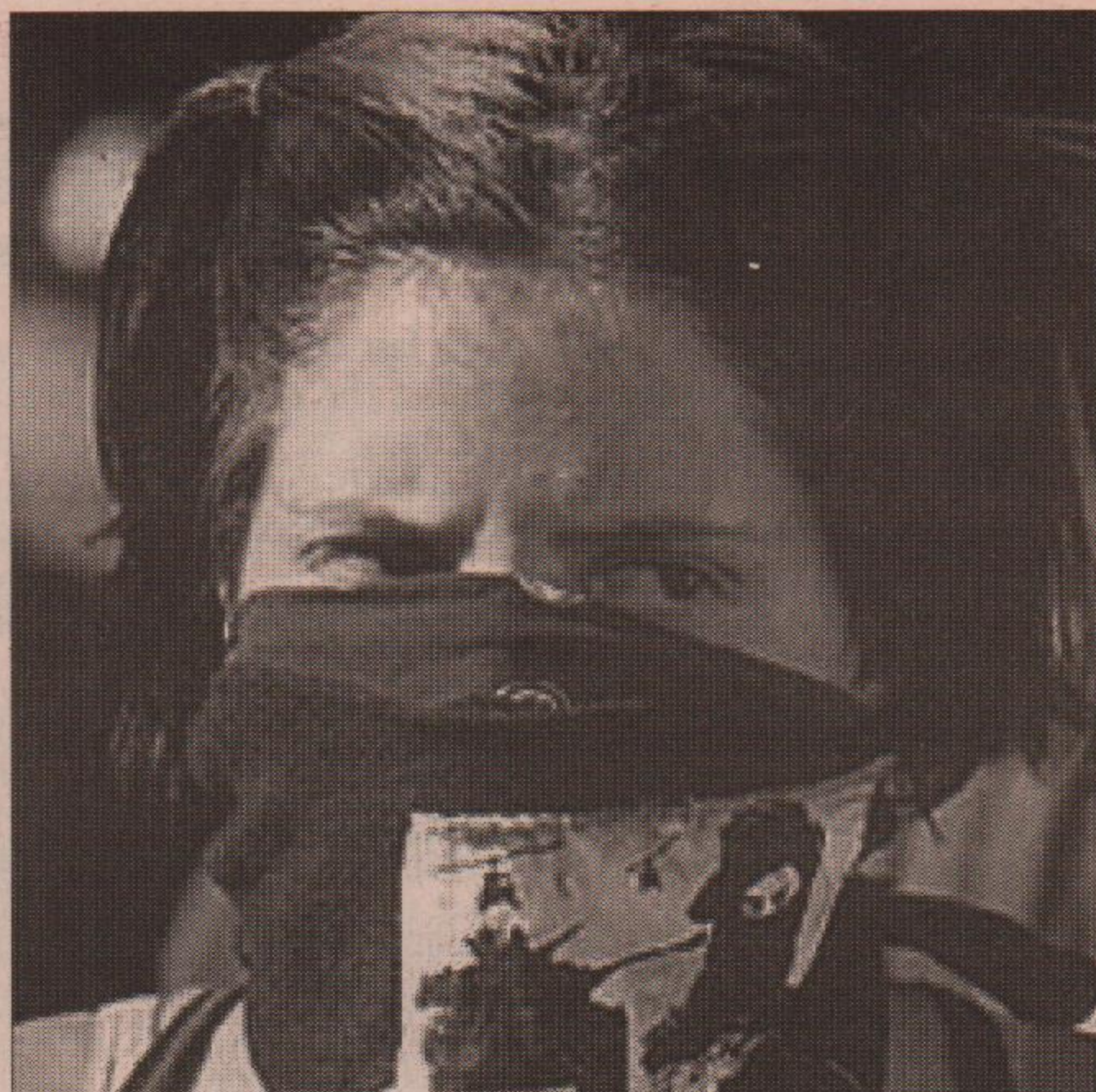
speeches, demonstrations and marches on the site during the Games. The 700-square metre pavilion is expected to attract up to 9,000 visitors daily to buy art and artifacts and learn some Aboriginal history. Aboriginal leaders have warned that any bans could only lead to a heightening of protest at the site.

Olympic officials have demanded the right to "review the [historical and cultural] text of all material on display in the pavilion", and the right to shut down the pavilion in response to "political activity".

A spokesperson from Workers Power Australia - our sister organisation - said: "We must show the world that no matter what intimidation tactics we face, fighters for indigenous justice will not be silenced, and will not play along with the government's plans to showcase Australia as a nation without blemish. The truth is far more ugly. And the truth must come out."

- Support indigenous protest around the Olympics!
- Compensate the stolen generations!
- Land rights now!
- Defend the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination!

A Manifesto for Revolutionary Change On 11 September the **World Economic Forum** meets in Melbourne; on 26 September, many of the same chief executives of the world's biggest corporations, G8 finance ministers, the heads of the **International Monetary Fund** and the **World Bank** will reassemble in Prague. The bosses of the multinational corporations, the top bankers and the heads of government of a handful of countries together rule over a global empire. Their frequent meetings and conferences have a common agenda: how to remove any barriers to the **economic domination** of the giant corporations. Whether these barriers be health and safety regulations in America, welfare entitlements in Europe or environmental standards in Asia, they are targeted for **destruction**



A MANIFESTO FOR REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

With one click of the keyboard...



global capitalists shift billions of dollars from one currency to another; they close and relocate factories at a moment's notice. They devastate communities, destroy millions of lives, ruin the health and blight the education of millions of people.

The sheer economic might of the global corporations enables them to make elected presidents and prime ministers scuttle to do their bidding. In national parliaments, they can buy or frighten the legislators and thus block all proposals hostile to their interests.

The International financial institutions — the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank, force governments to abolish protective measures, to privatise not only industries but social services, to reduce levels of health care and lower standards of labour protection.

Their teams of top lawyers and judges threaten to ruin any trade unions or human rights groups which stand up to them. In many countries, whose natural resources they plunder wholesale, activists are assassinated or tortured by special high-tech paramilitary units trained by Washington, London or Paris and paid for by the multinationals.

Millions worldwide are becoming more and more aware of this system and are giving it a name — GLOBAL CAPITALISM. They are targeting the institutions and conferences of this system for mass protest. These protests have been met by the usual response—that

the protesters are divided and incoherent and in any case there is simply NO ALTERNATIVE to global capitalism.

This is the big lie of the turn of the century. Global destruction, poverty and insecurity are not inevitable. There is an alternative. But how do we change this system? What do we replace it with?

Tens of thousands of self-sacrificing workers for "non-governmental organisations" (NGOs) can scarcely touch the surface of the problem of world poverty.

Millions generously respond to charitable appeals to help the victims of wars, floods and drought. Yet the sums pale in comparison to the billions of dollars spent by governments and the multinational companies on the weaponry that fuels these wars and on environmental degradation which causes most of these "natural" disasters.

No: the answer is not individual self-sacrifice but collective, political action — linked to a vision of a new social and economic order for humanity.

Will parliaments and the road of social reform provide it? No! Millions already sense that the everyday political institutions of government exercise less and less control over the banks and the big corporations, over the bureaucrats and armed forces of the state.

Secrecy, business lobbying, corruption, and the manipulation of the media have eaten the heart out of even the formal rights of capitalist democracy. It has been transformed into a disgustingly trivial pursuit — that of buying the votes of the middle classes and better-off work-

ers with promises of privileges for themselves in education and health care, tax cuts and economic policies to boost the value of their shares.

Today, at the dawn of the new millennium, tens of millions are increasingly outraged at the crimes of the giant corporations and their crony politicians; they are appalled at the callousness and injustice of it all. We have to unleash a torrent of political mass action, not concentrate on the stagnant pond life of the national parliaments.

Away from the world of spin doctors, opinion polling, and the ever-sinking percentages of those bothering to vote, there is a whole world of intense, if fragmented, struggles. People organising themselves to defend their jobs, services, housing and environment. People fighting racial and national injustice.

The self-sacrifice, organising capacity and commitment found here are total contrast to the cynical self-seeking, the covert and overt bribery and corruption that makes most people think of a "politician" as the lowest form of human life.

With power in the hands of people who create the wealth of society, we can re-organise economic life to be more efficient, just and less wasteful. The rule of democratically elected and accountable workers' councils, having smashed down the militarised machinery of injustice, intolerance and inequality, will set to work repairing the untold damage caused by capitalism.

We will eliminate the billions spent

on means of mass destruction, the meaningless and harmful marketing of useless products, the billions spent in commissions to advise on the latest corporate take-over.

New technologies and scientific breakthroughs will realise their genuine potential only if they are delinked from commercially-driven priorities. Advances in genetics and pharmaceuticals can — once liberated from the tyranny of patent rights — end millions of premature deaths from easily curable diseases.

Mass interactive communication systems can transform democracy by providing cheap and non-hierarchical access to information and opening up a host of forums. This is no utopia; it is just a matter of liberating the present from the chains of capital and profit-driven production.

A world without food giants poisoning our food, without trade sanctions that kill our children, without ethnic cleansing; and in its place a planet with planned allocation of resources under the direct control of the people who produce the wealth of the world — this is a goal worth fighting for.

The LRCI appeals to all the world's exploited and oppressed, those hardened by many battles and those fresh to the ranks of struggle — join us!

Next: what is globalisation?



Globalisation...



was the catchword of the last decade of the 20th century. It describes the enormous increase in cross-border mergers, the "free" movement of money around the world and the massive growth in international trade and communications.

But what does it signify? Its advocates say that by pulling down national barriers and creating a seamless web of international commerce, globalisation creates more jobs than it destroys. They tell the miners and steelworkers of the G7 countries, and the small farmers of the Third World that the pain is worth the gain – eventually things will be OK. This, too, is a lie.

Despite two decades of increased suffering inflicted on the world's workers and peasants, there is no sign of the promised increases in living standards. Even in the major imperialist countries, the profit rates of the 1960s, and the full employment and the social welfare regimes that went with them, are gone for good.

The planet is a more unequal place than at any time in history. The richest 350 people today have wealth far in excess of the income of the poorest third of the world's population.

Every marketing director is taught at management school that, although we live on a planet of 6 billion people, 90 per cent of us can effectively be treated as non-persons, for only 600 million people are considered "bankable". A mere one-tenth of the world is seen as useful to the continued expansion of globalised capitalist markets! The fate of the nine-tenths is at best is to provide cheap and expendable labour for the goods that only others can buy.

The concentration of wealth is obscene in its effects. Bill Gates' personal wealth would guarantee every child in Africa and Asia a primary education for ten years! Yet this basic right is presently beyond the reach of millions of children.

This massive and growing inequality is just one expression of an unresolved, and ultimately unresolvable, problem at the heart of capitalism – an inability to prevent the rate of profit from falling even while profits are still being made. Repeated rounds of technological innovation aim to boost productivity and profit rates. But, under capitalism, this only works so long as the technology displaces more and more workers from productive activity.

Globalisation and its accompanying high-tech revolution are just the latest attempts to restore profit rates. Although they have had their undoubted successes – the huge wave of mergers in industry, commerce and banking, the "internet revolution" now in full spate – these are more than outweighed by the increased inequality and instability that have been injected into the world's economy and politics.

Globalisation will not lead to the creation of an international capitalist class peacefully cultivating a world economy through such institutions as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. Rather, it is leading to the creation of monster transnational corporations, locked in a struggle to the death with one another for bigger shares of the world market.

Each is backed by powerful capitalist states or regional blocs – willing and able to break the rules of the free market and to resort to force if need be. In this battle of the giants, it is their workers, their customers and the planet itself that are being trampled underfoot.

Three years ago, global capitalism seemed on the edge of a major economic collapse. The most dynamic sector for the first half of the 1990s, East Asia, plunged into a catastrophic slump. Massive over-investment of speculative short-term capital, industrial overcapacity and falling profits combined to produce a meltdown.

There was just too much capital to be profitably invested. Slump and mass unemployment were the result. In Indonesia alone, 27 million people were made unemployed by the crisis of 1997-98. Japan, the world's second largest economy was paralysed by a decade-long stagnation and could do nothing to help.

The effects of this crash on capital flows and commodity prices sent shock waves around the world, crippling economies from Russia to Latin America.

The tidal wave of economic disaster threatened to sweep over the shores of the United States and engulf it. This would have devastated the world economy but the storm defences of the USA proved strong enough – at least until now. Acting through the IMF, it injected hundreds of billions of dollars into its own exposed financial institutions and also caused the wounds in Russia, Brazil and South Korea.

In doing so it showed that the reserves of the richest imperial power on earth, while tested to the limit, were not exhausted. Indeed, the USA actually benefited from the huge inflow of capital seeking a "safe haven", making it even stronger in relation to its rivals than before the 1997 crash.

By the end of the decade, the USA had inflation and unemployment figures not seen since the mid-1960s and compa-

ny profits at late 1960s levels. But the 1990s were no rerun of mid-century prosperity. The social results were starkly different from those of the boom of the 1960s. Forty years ago, economic growth resulted in a rise in real wage levels alongside productivity and profit growth; job security increased and working hours fell.

Since the beginning of the 80s, average real income in the USA has stagnated. Although a small group of wage earners has seen an increase, for the majority there has been a drop. The phenomenon of the working poor dramatically demonstrates this. Since the middle of the 90s, the number of people living in poverty has increased despite a clear decrease in unemployment and a high level of economic growth. The highest paid fifth of the population in the USA today account for around 45 per cent of total income (in Germany this is only 36 per cent). At the beginning of the 80s, the figure was around 40 per cent. The lowest 60 per cent of society receive just 30 per cent of the national income. This divergence in income and the massive creation of the "working poor" is presented to the rest of the working class in the imperialist world as the US model for fighting unemployment.

The 1990s were a decade of corporate revenge and clawing back of the gains that were made in the long boom. Each year of the current phase of growth has made the USA a more and more unequal society with mounting social and racial tensions as a result.

But despite all the efforts of big capital and all these attacks against the working class US capitalism is much more vulnerable than bourgeois economists might think. Both the investment and the consumer boom have been financed by a record debt level not seen since WWII. Spending is financed with debts today and hopes of improved profits and income

tomorrow. In addition a growing share of US spending is financed by the influx of foreign capital. Again the US has a record current-account deficit. This can not continue for much longer.

Today, an overvalued stock market threatens to bring the economy crashing down. This would result in a huge clearing out of e-commerce stocks and further concentrate capital in the hands of a few key monopolies.

A major crash would eliminate the current and future basis of domestic demand in the US economy, much of it based on share ownership and borrowing on the back of pension fund growth. Millions of small investors will lose out.

A US stock market crash would hit the "real economy" of the US and make the recovery of the world economy falter and fail. Europe and Asia would be pushed back towards recession; Japan's escape from stagnation, already faltering, would be blocked off.

By making itself the indispensable engine of global growth in the late 1990s, the USA has built explosive charges into the foundations of the whole economic edifice that threaten, when the US economy finally falls, to bring the rest of the world crashing down with it.

An overvalued stock market threatens to bring the economy crashing down



The United States of Ame



is the world's first and only "hyperpower". It won the Cold War and, at least in Central Europe, it also won the peace. US military expendi-

ture is larger than that of all other countries combined; its weapons technology is a generation ahead of its nearest potential rival.

The US is the only country capable of a sustained political intervention into every region of the world to shape outcomes favourable to itself. Via its hegemony over the IMF, WTO and World Bank, the USA is able to exert considerable pressure on the nations of the world, imposing economic systems on governments, and manipulating trade and labour legislation. The US can veto any decision it dislikes in the UN security council and is able to act unilaterally when it cannot gain consent from others. The UN will even approve the actions of the US retroactively.

The US has used its enormous economic, political and military headstart to impose its ground rules on its potential rivals. It occupies half a continent, has a huge home market, a common language, a single currency, a 200-

year-old federal system, and the most powerful centralised military force on the planet. Europe has all these features to build before it dare measure its strength with what is still "the transatlantic colossus".

The military exertions of the US in the 1990s (Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo) have been victorious in terms of the goals set – containment and repulsion of the regional expansionist ambitions of Hussein and Milosevic. Europe proved itself still incapable of acting diplomatically and militarily without US leadership and military muscle, even in its own backyard.

At the end of the 20th century, the US was, probably, stronger than at any point in its history, more unrivalled in its foreign policy objectives than at any time since it escalated the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s.

Japan's dream of dominating an East Asian zone is an even more distant one than that of the leaders of the "disunited states of Europe". The Chinese bureaucracy's flattering vision of being the world superpower in an Asian century is even more of a mirage.

However, new challenges to the USA will emerge over the next few years. The power of the US and its mega corporations, its naked

self-interest when acting as the world's policeman, are designed to ensure the continued dominance of US multinational corporations over markets and resources.

But Japan and Europe have designs on those same resources and markets. This is steadily forcing them onto the road of economic rivalry and ultimately to political conflict.

Russia's renewed hostility to US hegemony will lead to further and greater clashes in the next few years. Nationalism is rampant. Popular sentiment is fiercely anti-western and anti-USA. The continued decline of the Russian economy in the wake of the collapse of the rouble a year ago has discredited those forces who placed their hopes in US-sponsored capitalist restoration. The assault on Russia's allies, Iraq and Serbia, enraged Moscow, as have further plans for the eastward expansion of NATO to include parts of the ex-USSR such as the Baltic republics.

The second Chechen War and the installation of Putin by the Russian military are warnings against future Nato expansion. They carry the message that Russia will not willingly cede control of the Caucasus and Caspian oil routes to US imperialism. Georgia, Kazak-



rica...

stan, Azerbaijan have all become potential flashpoints.

Russia has already reincorporated Belarus into its orbit: it may seek to create a sphere of influence in central and south eastern Europe in the struggling transitional states such as Romania and Bulgaria and even Slovakia. It will continue to "make mischief" for the US in the Balkans and the Middle East.

China's long march to capitalism has been completed. Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji face huge difficulties, however, in dismantling those state-owned enterprises that will not survive open competition in the internal and foreign markets, with their implied mass sackings. All this will come to a head with the implementation of the WTO deal, if not before.

The sabre-rattling by China over Taiwan will not easily lead to war. China does not have the military capacity to challenge a US willing to use its fleet and airforce to defend Taiwan; such a conflict would also set back China's

attempts to integrate itself into the leading circles of finance capital.

But Peking's bellicose air is an indication of the severe internal strains within the Chinese bureaucracy, stemming from the problems of capitalist restoration. As the recent history of Yugoslavia and Russia shows, bonapartist regimes racked by economic problems and internal political tensions can become highly unpredictable and "irrational" in their foreign policy.

An increase in incidents and crises between China and her neighbours is possible, indeed probable, in the coming years. US strategy is determined on the one side by the need to open up China – over the next 20 years – to the exploitation of US multinationals and, on the other, by the need to ensure that China does not become a powerful partner in, let alone leader of, an East Asian monetary and political union. Such a body would weaken the region's dependence on the dollar, restrict "free" trade and weaken US political dominance.

Major flashpoints...



in the next years are likely to be in Asia, Latin America and the Indian sub-continent. The stabilisation of the Indonesian state is fraught with difficulties. So far, the management of a controlled transition from Cold War stalwart Suharto to limited democracy has been a success for the US.

But economic and social grievances could rekindle the democratic revolution inside the country and the break up of the Indonesian state, hitherto the backbone of ASEAN, is a real possibility.

The East Timorese paid a heavy price for their highly regulated "independence"; it was a bloody warning to all other movements claiming autonomy or independence from Jakarta. The fragmentation of Indonesia along ethnic or national lines would be immensely destabilising for SE Asia. It would fuel Islamic separatist movements in Malaysia and the Philippines, and encourage Japan and Korea to play more assertive diplomatic and military roles; hence imperialist diplomacy will do its utmost to strengthen the new regime in Jakarta.

In Africa, the chronic instability of west Africa has spread from the smaller states like Sierra Leone to draw even economic and military giants like Nigeria into religious and ethnic conflicts which reflect in turn the economic and polit-

ical interests of rival rulers. Zimbabwe has been rocked by trade union and democratic struggles against Mugabe who, in turn, has cynically sponsored and manipulated agrarian struggles in order to stabilise his rule.

Rwanda and Burundi have exported their civil strife into the Congo. Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea are racked by war and Somalia has collapsed into two states.

The workers and urban poor in South Africa have been cheated of the social and economic fruits of their decades-long liberation struggle against apartheid.

In Latin America, the 1997 crash and recession created mass poverty and rebellion in the Andean region. In Venezuela, it brought a populist left general to power and in Ecuador two Presidents have been felled by mass action.

The determination of US multinational companies to keep the region their number one source of trading and investment profits will ensure further social and political explosions.

Colombia is riven by social struggles brought on by the deepest recession in 60 years and an entrenched civil war between peasant-based guerrillas and the government.

The guerrilla armies' continued success now meets with a dangerous escalation of US financial and logistical support for the government, a development which promises further huge clashes.

Who will lead...



these struggles to victory? The cowardice and collaboration of trade union and reformist leaders encouraged a savage bosses' offensive over the past 20 years or more.

The employers demanded, and got, a massive intensification of work, short-term contracts, part-time jobs, longer working hours, more overtime and a steady rise in night and weekend shifts. Downsizing, outsourcing, merger mania, privatisation, have all put the unions in particular on the defensive.

Politically, the past decades have seen a massive move to the right by the traditional reformist parties. Under pressure from neoliberalism and globalisation, the room for political and social manoeuvre has shrunk for the reformists. For 40 years after the Second World War, the trade unions and the reformist parties policed the working class in the interests of big business.

Today, the inner life of these parties has been stifled by the leadership, their left oppositions demoralised or expelled. The roots of these parties in the working class, especially its most combative sectors and its vanguard, have been greatly weakened – a serious danger in the years to come for the social democratic and post-Stalinist leaderships.

But these roots are not completely severed. Important links still bind the workers' movement to these parties, whether via the unions, through a passive mass membership and a loyal working class electorate that still sees these parties as theirs, or via various front organisations.

The recent struggles of workers in Europe, Australia and parts of Asia and, more importantly, the way these struggles were sold short or defused by the election victories of the reformist parties, prove this.

Millions of workers still expect that their economic struggles will lead to political reforms delivered by the reformist party in office. Indeed, many of the social democratic governments in Europe have had to respond to this pressure by conceding reforms – for example, the 35-hour week in France, the minimum wage in Britain – though they have made sure that these do not really inconvenience the multinationals.

Workers must press their leaders from every side to force them to fight for the most important demands from reformist parties, something which will soon expose the leaders as the craven servants of big business that they are.

The sharpening of the class struggle in the coming years can shatter the chains that tie workers to their reformist leaderships. Already, across Europe, there are signs of discontent in the working class base of reformism – initially through votes for parties that stand to the left of the main reformist parties, even if only marginally, or through initiatives for more radical joint platforms of far left organisations.

Meanwhile, land hunger, corrupt and bloated dictatorships and IMF imposed austerity packages are forcing workers and poor peasants in the semi-colonial countries to develop new parties of struggle. These problems can only be solved by revolutionary actions: land occupations, free elections defended by workers' militias, cancellation of the debts and expropriation of the multinationals. The danger is that these new parties, like the Movement for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe, will sell the workers and peasants a new deal with the landowners, the generals and the imperialists.

The crisis of working class leadership has another more sinister dimension. Right-wing populist and racist parties (e.g. Fini's Alleanza Nazionale, Haider's FPÖ) or even fascist front parties (Le Pen's FN) remain a serious threat. These parties are led by, as yet, minority sectors of the bourgeoisie that refuse to make an institutional compromise with the reformist bureaucracy – even for the purpose of dismantling the welfare state.

Instead, they aim to mobilise small business owners and farmers threatened with bankruptcy by the globalisation process and demoralised elements of the working class, frustrated by the reformists and trade unions bureaucrats who, as in Austria, are seen as the architects of a regime of poverty and unemployment. This too is a global, not simply regional or national, development.

Beyond these parties lies a tiny but violent fringe of ultra-right fascist groups whose attacks on immigrants and refugees have grown in areas of high unemployment or in periods of recession.

This danger facing the labour movement is a further motivation for it to transform itself into a fighting force which can recover the backward workers and chase the racist scum out of the working class and back into the sewers from which they have emerged.



The class that will change the world...



A large part of the old "aristocracy" of skilled labour has disappeared and at the same time new layers of skilled workers have emerged whom big business tries to keep as professionals, un-unionised and competing fiercely with each other in the scramble up the career ladder.

Companies trick this layer with share options and other corporate benefits and, thereby, bind them more closely to the fate of the company. The impact of information technology has increased the gap between this new labour aristocracy and the rest of the labour force.

But the first serious recession will reveal to these workers the reality of their social situation – at the beck and call of capital – when it decides that they are surplus to requirements.

In the first rank of those fighting back against the big corporations are women and youth. In particular, the employment policies of the neo-liberals have placed women in the forefront of the workplace struggle as never before.

The past decades have seen more and more women in employment. But women still get paid substantially less than men, even where they do the same job. Women still have to bear the main burden of household and childcare work.

They are disproportionately over-represented in part-time work, which has worse working conditions and is less unionised. At the same time, reactionary governments try to lay the burden of the crisis on the shoulders of women workers by increasing part-time instead of full-time jobs and cutting money for public child-care institutions.

Young people have been in the forefront of struggles in the last years. They are denied basic democratic rights, they are railroaded onto fake training

schemes, corralled into sweated labour. They are forced into low-wage jobs, with insecure working conditions and contracts. Capitalism offers a bleak future for the majority of young people. Free education is being slashed, its quality diluted and the courses increasingly geared to the agenda of big business.

At the same time, young people are not yet daunted by a string of defeats and betrayals, not dogged by the dead weight of routinism, reformism and out-lived national prejudices. They are looking for radical solutions – and revolutionary socialism, communism, is the most radical and only workable solution.

The youth – like all socially oppressed layers of society – can only be won to the workers' movement, if their demands and needs are taken seriously and fought for as a central part of the struggle. They cannot be expected to wait till "the grown ups" have made the labour movement ready and attractive to them.

Indeed, so long as reformism dominates the official workers' movement, petit-bourgeois radicalism will grow among young workers and students. But there is no reason for the next generation to relive the defeats of the last century, if revolutionary communists give a practical lead.

They need their own independent and democratic organisation to struggle now against oppression and exploitation. They have the energy and the sense of urgency to build a mass international revolutionary socialist youth movement. Such a movement and its sections across the globe can play a pioneering role in transforming the whole workers' movement.

Racism, both that sanctioned by the state and that summoned up from below by racists and fascist gangs, has created in each country a new generation of fighters against racist oppression. In its ranks are found citizens born to the country but treated as second class as well as immigrants and refugees.

But anti-fascism or anti-racism as a single issue, special activity – however useful against the provocations and crimes of the fascist grouplets – will not uproot the social roots of fascism and racism. The struggle against fascist and racist organisations has to be combined with the struggle for the defence of the social and democratic gains of the workers and oppressed and with the struggle against the capitalist system itself which can never be cleansed of racism.

The struggles ahead will recharge some old and traditional organisations that are prepared to adopt new leaders and revolutionary methods of struggle. Workplace occupations, mass strike action, the general strike, the blockade of roads and rail lines, marches to the capital city – these can challenge and break the stranglehold of the bureaucrats and stand up to the giant corporations and the bosses' state no matter how imposing they seem at first.

New organisations of the grass roots will be built, too, and they will take their place in a mass united front of combat. But this new tapestry of resistance must include a revolutionary workers' party equipped with a clear view of what it is fighting for and how it intends to get it – a revolutionary programme.

This programme is not "too good" or "too advanced" for the mass workers' vanguard. On the contrary, nothing else will suffice to arm it with a strategic goal – the overthrow of capitalism.

This can only mean the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling class, necessarily involving violence since it will never yield to the simple will of the majority. It means the establishment of working class power expressed through workers' councils, elected in the factories and working class districts and defended by workers' militias. This is nothing less than the dictatorship of the proletariat necessary to smash all counter-revolution.

The working class...



needs to overcome national-centredness and to build strong international links and organisations. Already, the first international wage bargaining is taking place in EU countries. Close co-operation is being developed between US and Mexican unions.

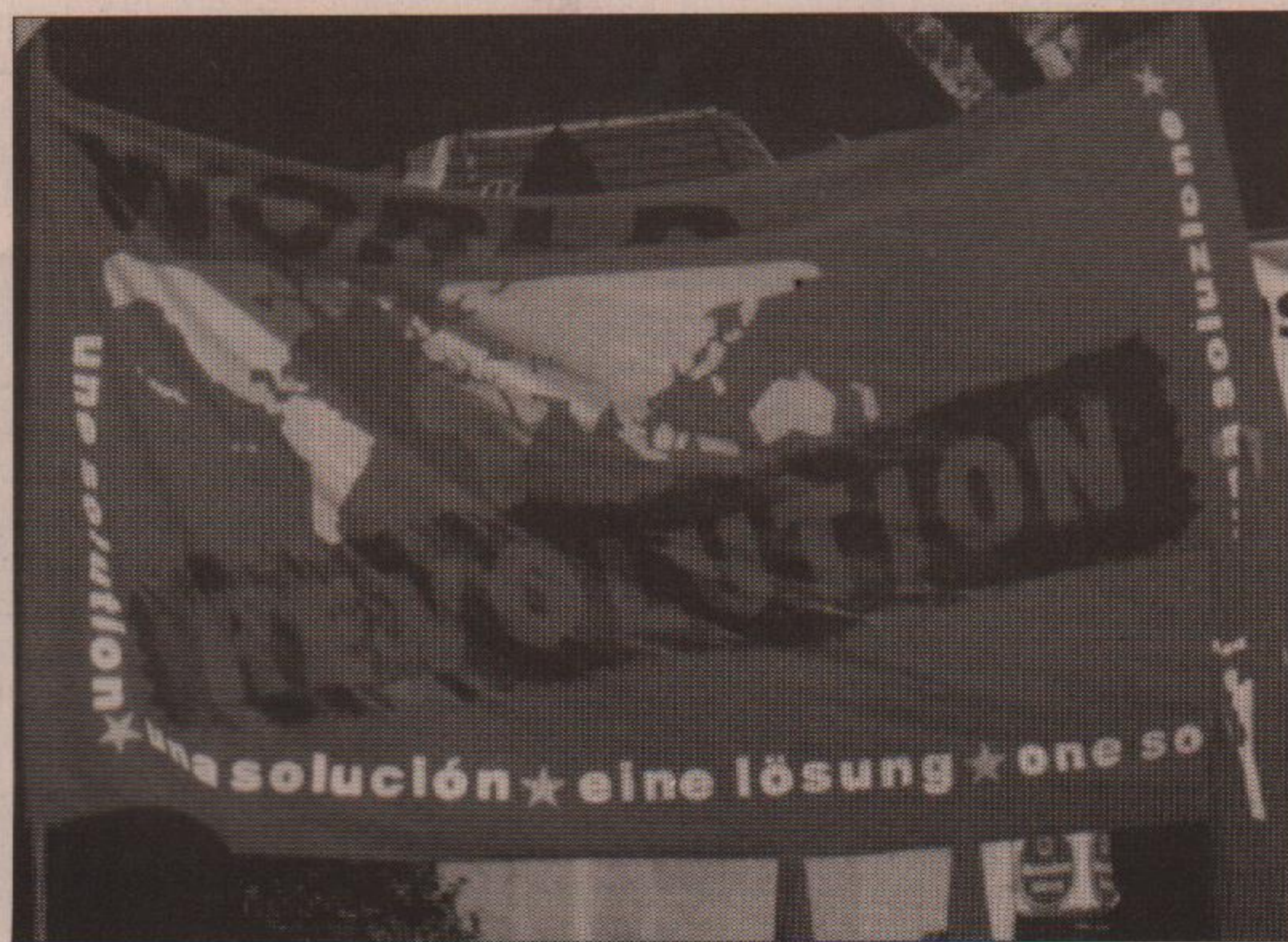
Active international solidarity was also shown around the Liverpool and the Australian dockers' strikes, the national liberation struggle in East Timor and between the workers' committees from the Belgian Clabeq steel factory and from the Russian mill in Vyborg.

Although still on a small scale, these are important first steps in the right direction: globalisation of class organisation and struggle to counter the globalisation of capital.

At the Melbourne and Prague conferences in September, in Nice at the end of the year, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and EU will meet to plan their strategy – how to raise profits, how to resolve damaging conflicts among themselves and how to put the workers, the peasants and the poor on shorter rations.

Together, they represent the International of the Exploiters. Unfortunately, today, the exploited have no International body in which to plan their strategy for resistance.

Millions of activists from Seattle to Singapore struggle on a thousand fronts: against unfair global trade, for the restoration of human rights in Burma,



against national genocide in the Balkans, for a decent wage and trade union rights in Mexico's *maquilladoras*. The most important feature of these struggles has been that they have sought and received a quite remarkable degree of international support from the very beginning.

International solidarity action or co-ordinated activity has been actively taken in the struggle of the Australian and Liverpool dockers, in transport workers' actions in Europe, of Renault and Alcatel workers.

In the mobilisation against the WTO in Seattle, workers and youth came

together in a massive anti-capitalist demonstration and fight. When the police gassed and batoned them they chanted "The world is watching" and they were right.

From one trench of the class battlefield to another, calls for help and offers of solidarity have been sought and sent over the Internet, bypassing layers of traditional bureaucracy and injecting a sense of urgency into the cause. This spontaneous "new internationalism" is a tremendously encouraging feature of the world at the beginning of the 21st century.

All this shows that there is a pro-

gressive and growing recognition of the need for internationally co-ordinated action, of the need to put every "local" and economic struggle into the context of wider joint action.

True, these forces are not yet part of the same army, do not yet share a common understanding of what can unite their different struggles. They sense the need to do this but they do not yet have a global strategy which links them together. But it is only with such unity that each and all of these struggles can win!

If we are not to fall prey to isolation and defeat – or be demobilised by partial concessions only to see these snatched away the moment we lower our guard – then we need a mass international organisation to weld these struggles and the activists together.

This current wave of radicalisation by workers and young people is the forerunner of an increasingly international mobilisation. While their political ideologies are often confused, petit-bourgeois, reformist, centrist, environmentalist, they nevertheless reflect a progressive movement away from the right-wing bureaucratic leaderships. They are elements of an emerging vanguard of struggle against global capitalism, which have to be won to a new revolutionary international and to communism.

A new, Revolutionary International can only be formed by drawing in the new forces fighting global capitalism. This means developing a new world pro-

gramme of socialist revolution in common struggles and in debate with them. At the same time, it means creating, internationally and within each country, a democratic party of working class activists and leaders of struggles.

Our goal must not be a federation of "independent", that is, nationally-centred, organisations, not a confusion of banners between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries. Such an international would replicate the weakest aspects of the First and the Second Internationals.

It would be confused and divided in its actions from the outset and fall easy prey to our global enemies. But, with a common revolutionary programme, with democratic and centralised combat organisations, a genuine proletarian revolutionary international can be created – a worthy successor to the preceding four – which can lead the struggle for world revolution to victory.

The LRCI is fighting to win the millions of active fighters of the working class and all progressive struggles world wide to the construction of a New Revolutionary International. We appeal to all individuals and organisations that share this goal to take practical steps to achieve it now – not in an indeterminate future but in the years immediately ahead. Join with us in this struggle!

League for a Revolutionary Communist International
27 July 2000

Mobilising for Prague

This month, as anti-IMF protesters gather in Prague, they will witness the impact of 10 years of capitalist restoration. We talked to members of the Czech Socialist Workers Organisation (SOP) about its impact on Czech workers, and about the mobilisation plans for the protest in the Czech Republic

WP: Why are the anti-IMF protests so important to Czech workers and youth?

SOP: The 10 years after the fall of Stalinism have seen ruthless capitalist restoration – bringing a massive decline in living standards, real wages and working conditions for the vast majority of workers, and unemployment for half a million people.

The IMF has overseen what it calls “transformation”. In fact it is the transformation of a layer ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and organised criminals into a new bourgeoisie – and the transformation of the working people into an even more impoverished class than under Stalinism.

The IMF/World Bank summit is a chance for revolutionary socialists to raise issues of imperialist domination of the country, to expose the link between integration into world imperialism and the massive budget cuts that are hitting the working class. It will be a chance to raise the idea of international solidarity with Czech workers.

If the protests succeed, it will improve the conditions of class struggle in the Czech Republic, and help break the hold of the reformist leaders on the working class.

WP: What have been the problems in trying to create an alliance of radical youth and organised workers – for “turning Prague into Seattle”?

Two problems: the leadership of workers’ organisations and leadership of radical youth. The main trade-union federation, CMKOS, is effectively led by Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), which is in the government, which is hosting the summit. Obvi-

ously it will do its best to stop workers joining the protests. A chance exists that the Czech Communist Party (KSCM) will give some support to protests, albeit via the TU federation that they control, OSCMS. The Stalinist trade union federation is much smaller than CMKOS, but the KSCM still has widespread working class support, especially among the most militant workers.

The Prague-based organising committee for the demo, INPEG, is led by anarchists and ecologists. They do not co-operate with the KSCM.

More surprising was that Socialist Solidarity (SocSol the Czech sister organisation of the British SWP) and the anarcho-syndicalist group Solidarita failed to fight this disastrous policy of the anarchists and liberals. SocSol has even defended this policy and argued that because the OSCMS is a Stalinist rump union, they would rather orientate to winning the ASO, an independent TU federation.

The SOP would be first in line for a campaign to win ASO support for anti-IMF protests. But a massive campaign would be needed to achieve it, which would require common action by a number of left groups. SocSol have prevented getting this forces together by supporting INPEG’s move not to allow Communist groups to join it.

So in reality OSCMS is a small, but growing union, and not very active. But it has now given official support to the anti-IMF protest – largely because of the activity of the SOP.

WP: How bad is it for youth in the Czech Republic? Do young people see the IMF and World Bank as their main enemy – or

is the old Communist regime seen as responsible?

SOP: The conditions of young people, especially working class and lower middle class youth, are getting worse. The schools have less and less money and for many families it is becoming a problem to support young people on their studies. Unemployment is highest among youth, specifically in the worst-hit regions of Northern Bohemia and Northern Moravia, where young people can hardly get a job at all. Young people are also faced with repressive anti-drug laws – a campaign that is really there just to criminalise youth and allow the police to clamp down.

Most youth have no clear political outlook, but there is a general tendency to revolt. Recent street parties have reflected this mood among young people. They get together and have fun. Then they march to stop the city, clash with the hated police and attack a suitable target such as McDonalds or the US embassy during the war in ex-Yugoslavia.

It’s difficult to say whether the youth see the IMF as the main enemy, but I can guarantee that many are fed up with official propaganda about the “Communist regime”... and more and more see there was nothing “Communist” about it.

WP: What do you hope to achieve as a result of the international mobilisation in Prague this month?

SOP: We need a mass revolutionary workers’ party in the Czech Republic. And we are linking all our struggles and tactics towards this goal.

We hope that the week of action will inspire

workers to struggle for their own interests and that it will bring the spirit of internationalism into a Czech workers’ movement which is affected by the highly nationalist culture of Czech society. We also hope that the success of the Prague mobilisation can help the Czech left to politically mature and thus unity in action, political culture of solidarity and comradeship will become a norm, rather than the exception.

Also, it seems that the issue of unity will have prominence. The CP’s youth union, KSM, has proposed to far left and left-wing youth groups the formation of what they call an “anti-imperialist front”. SocSol has also spoken about the need for unity at their “Socialism from Below” event, but they made it clear that their message was for some of the anarchists, not the “orthodox Trotskyists”.

Red September can change the atmosphere on the left and SOP will not stand aside. We will fight for our goal – through unity in action, through the programmatic discussion and common experience in struggle.

We are looking forward to meeting the thousands of activists who will converge on Prague in September and – unlike the “official” Czech labour movement we will welcome them.

In turn, we will expect their continued support. The SOP has been campaigning against the IMF summit for nearly a year and a campaign of arrests, fines, police violence and harassment has been meted out to us and other groups during the run up to S26 – no doubt it will increase as our protest rocks the world.



We are for legal demonstrations that are collectively defended but reject both individual violence (above) and pacifism (below)



Is non-violence necessary?

AS S26 approaches fears are growing that the Czech police will seize any opportunity to attack demonstrators. So what should we do?

One wing of the movement says “nonviolent direct action” (NVDA) is the key – and that whatever the police do against us will only rebound on the state itself in terms of sympathy for the cause. Another wing, the anarchist-dominated black bloc, says the only answer is to go to every demonstration tooled up for a fight with the cops.

Both approaches are self-defeating. They share one thing in common – no understanding of the power of mass working class organisations.

NVDA protests can be vital in drawing attention to the injustices of capitalism. But on their own they can’t shut down the IMF conferences: the repression of the state will always be more powerful.

The black bloc strategy guarantees we will be cut off from the mass of workers who do not want to live a semi-legal lifestyle. The black bloc gives up the fight for the right to legally protest in advance. It ignores most demos and, as events in Los Angeles show it holds the non-balaclava’d masses in utmost contempt.

The most decisive event in Seattle was when organised workers joined the protest.

Trade union activists are well aware of the dangers of police violence – but we don’t accept that every demo has to become a riot.

Our aim is a mass, peaceful, legal demo. But ensuring it takes place involves organising democratically controlled self-defence units that can repel police attacks and also stop individual idiots giving the police an excuse to wade in.

We reject the argument of the NVDA advocates who think that resisting police violence plays into the hands of the media. Sticking to sit-down protests just leads to mass arrests.

As for attacks on property, in general we should oppose them. One of the biggest arguments the reformist leaders in the Czech Republic have used in refusing to support S26 is that “protesters are coming to trash our city”. We have to be absolutely clear – and mean it – we are not!

We say: defend the right to protest legally, but be prepared for organised self-defence against the state and agents provocateurs – and demand official support for that from the workers’ movement. Check out the debate at www.destroyimf.org

In the run-up to the Global Day of Action against the IMF, an international meeting of activists was held in Prague last month. *Jeremy Dewar* reports on some of the key debates on the way forward

ONE THOUSAND trade unionists, socialists and radical youth will be making the 42-hour trek from Greece in September to join the mass protests against globalisation in Prague this month. This convoy of coaches, from one of the most militant labour movements in Europe, is the best indication yet that we can turn Prague into Seattle II.

The third international conference called by the Czech-based INPEG (Initiative Against Economic Globalisation) in Prague on 18-20 August heard how a group of socialists, rank and file trade unionists and single-issue campaigners snowballed their campaign until the Greek TUC and Communist Party were forced to give the S26 mobilisation their

active support. We also heard reports from Germany, where the Communist and Democratic Socialist parties (who sent delegates) were supporting the campaign. Up to 5,000 are expected from Germany – with large delegations from Italy, Sweden, Norway and the UK.

Delegates swapped stories of packed public meetings in towns, schools and colleges, of tremendous enthusiasm greeting activists on the streets and the housing estates and of donations from trade unions.

In all between 15,000 and 20,000 people are expected to converge on Prague in protest at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

Despite making some telling points in the national media and forcing Pres-

ident Vaclav Havel to answer their points in public, INPEG itself was not in a good shape. It has moved decidedly to the right in the past two months. The reason for this is that the Czech activists have failed to make a breakthrough to the Czech workers and youth in particular. Instead, INPEG seems now to be dominated by a growing band of individualist anarchists, mainly drawn from Britain, the USA and Western Europe. They have utter disdain for mass working class participation.

One example: instead of accepting an offer from rap group Public Enemy to play at the anti-IMF arts festival, some of the INPEG activists preferred to splash out £3,500 on “celebrating our own culture”. Public Enemy can draw tens of thousands of Czech youth to the anti-

globalisation movement – a workshop on nose-flutes cannot. This fact seems to escape these self-appointed leaders of the anti-capitalist movement.

Arguments like this reflect the existence of two broad wings of the anti-globalisation movement represented at the 19-20 August conference – the revolutionary socialists, reformists and anarcho-syndicalists on the one hand, and the individualist anarchists, liberals and out-and-out pacifists on the other.

The debate on strategy came to a head during a 12-hour discussion on the question of whether we should organise a giant demo on 26 September.

On our part, no one suggested that space for individual actions should be denied, but simply that all who wanted

to participate in a show of unity and strength should have the space to do that too. In the end, a compromise was thrashed out which did allow for a big demo, though the details were left to a later meeting. All those going to Prague on S26 should listen out for the rally point for ONE BIG DEMO: whatever else happens we are determined to assert our right to demonstrate.

While the LRCI was present at the international conference, unfortunately it remains the case that INPEG excludes our Czech section from participating – as it does the Communist Party. Despite this the LRCI is fighting for maximum unity in action to make sure that the workers’ voice is the loudest voice in Prague.

Anti-capitalist movement dominates global congress

In late July the League for a Revolutionary Communist International held its 5th World Congress. Forty-nine delegates, from nine countries, met at a hostel near Deelen, Holland.

Colin Lloyd reports

ONE THEME dominated the LRCI's 5th Congress: the growing anti-capitalist movement and the need to put the working class centre stage within it. The LRCI Congress takes place every three years, so a lot has happened since the last one in 1997.

- Capitalist restoration has progressed further in the former Stalinist countries – but a new generation of young workers has come forward who are not encumbered by memories of Stalinist “communism”.

- The stock market crash that took place around the time of the 4th Congress did not translate into a world recession. Instead US imperialism launched a speculative boom – and strengthened its grip on the world economy in the process. This period coincided with the emergence of real technology innovations in the USA that the capitalists claim is the basis for a “long boom”.

- The backlash against neo-liberalism – which had led to mass strikes in several countries in the mid 1990s – has been diverted into the parliamentary arena: in most of Europe there are social-democratic governments. In turn, many of these are bringing mass disillusionment among their traditional working class base.

- The radical youth movements of the mid-1990s have moved spontaneously from the single-issue politics of protest and reform to an “anti-capitalist” agenda.

All of these developments offer new opportunities for revolutionary organisations to grow – and the LRCI recorded significant growth in membership since 1997, with a new section in the Czech Republic, sympathisers in the Ukraine, and both the Swedish and German sections being strengthened through fusions with other left-wing groups.

However, all delegates recognised the need for a more outward orientation to new layers of young people and workers. We recognised that several of our attempts to build revolutionary unity with left groups trying to break with their opportunist past – notably two splits from Lutte Ouvrier in France and with the Argentine-based Trotskyist Faction/PTS – had not borne fruit.

The big changes in the objective situation also prompted us to re-look at our perspectives and theory. After prolonged pre-congress discussion, and hours of democratic debate in our national conferences and at the Congress, the LRCI decided to make the following changes of line:

- We no longer stick to our characterisation of the 1990s after the fall of Stalinism as a world-historic revolutionary period. We recognised we had overestimated the effect the fall of Stalinism would have in destabilising world capitalism. Instead we characterise the 1990s as a transition period towards such a new revolutionary period. In 1997 we had seen the early 1990s as a counter-revolutionary phase that would give way to one of mass struggles – and saw in the French general strike of December 1995 the beginnings of this. But social democracy was able to channel discontent away from mass action, while the economic resilience of the USA allowed it to stave off the recession that we expected to follow the Asian crash. We got the tempo wrong, but not the direction of development.

- We abandoned the theory of the “moribund workers’ state” as a way of understanding the phase in the former Stalinist states where capitalism has not been restored but a pro-capitalist government holds the reins of power. We recognised that in these cases the state apparatus promotes and defends capitalist class inter-

ests and capitalist property relations. This means that the designation “bourgeois restorationist state” is the most accurate.

- After a debate, the Congress reaffirmed a resolution on the environment from a previous international executive committee. While generally uncontentious, this involved a change of line on nuclear power. We formerly argued that nuclear power had to be treated like all other energy sources when assessing the issue of plant closure: now we are in favour of the planned global closure of all nuclear plants and their replacement by sustainable energy sources under workers’ control and inspection.

- We reaffirmed our slogan “for a new International” but debated the way forward in building it concretely. We recognised that at the same time as the chances of rescuing significant portions of degenerate centrist forces were declining, new opportunities are opening up as workers and youth look for a way of linking their struggles globally. While we reject the idea of a “return to the First International” or the rebuilding of

From London's J18 protest through the 300,000 strong anti-fascist demos in Austria, through to Mayday protests the world over and now Prague – the LRCI has been a prominent part of the movement

reformist parties from scratch, we need to address those who are looking towards these solutions. We need to address the slogan of the new, revolutionary workers’ international to the mass, vibrant forces that are emerging rather than to dyed-in-the-wool “Trotskyists” who have proved incapable of breaking their addiction to piecing together fragments of the Fourth International.

The Congress confirmed our orientation to youth work and the building of party-aligned but independent revolutionary youth groups. The success of this orientation could be seen on the floor of Congress: about half the delegates were in their twenties and some were in their teens. We also discussed the emerging opportunities for revolutionary electoral work as splits to the left of traditional workers parties begin to create left reformist and centrist challenges at the polls. We discussed the lessons of the LSA in Britain, the LO/LCR list in the French general election, the Left Party in Sweden and swapped experiences of intervention into these movements.

Numerous sessions were devoted to discussion of trade union work. Delegates who work in car plants, post offices, railways and the public sector – with a combined workplace experience of decades – swapped experiences. Despite the widely variable conditions, common themes emerged: surviving witch-hunts by employers and the union bureaucracy, keeping alive workplace bulletins, building rank and file opposition to the union leaders, avoiding incorporation into the bureaucratic machine and – through it all –

winning new recruits to communist groups in the workplace.

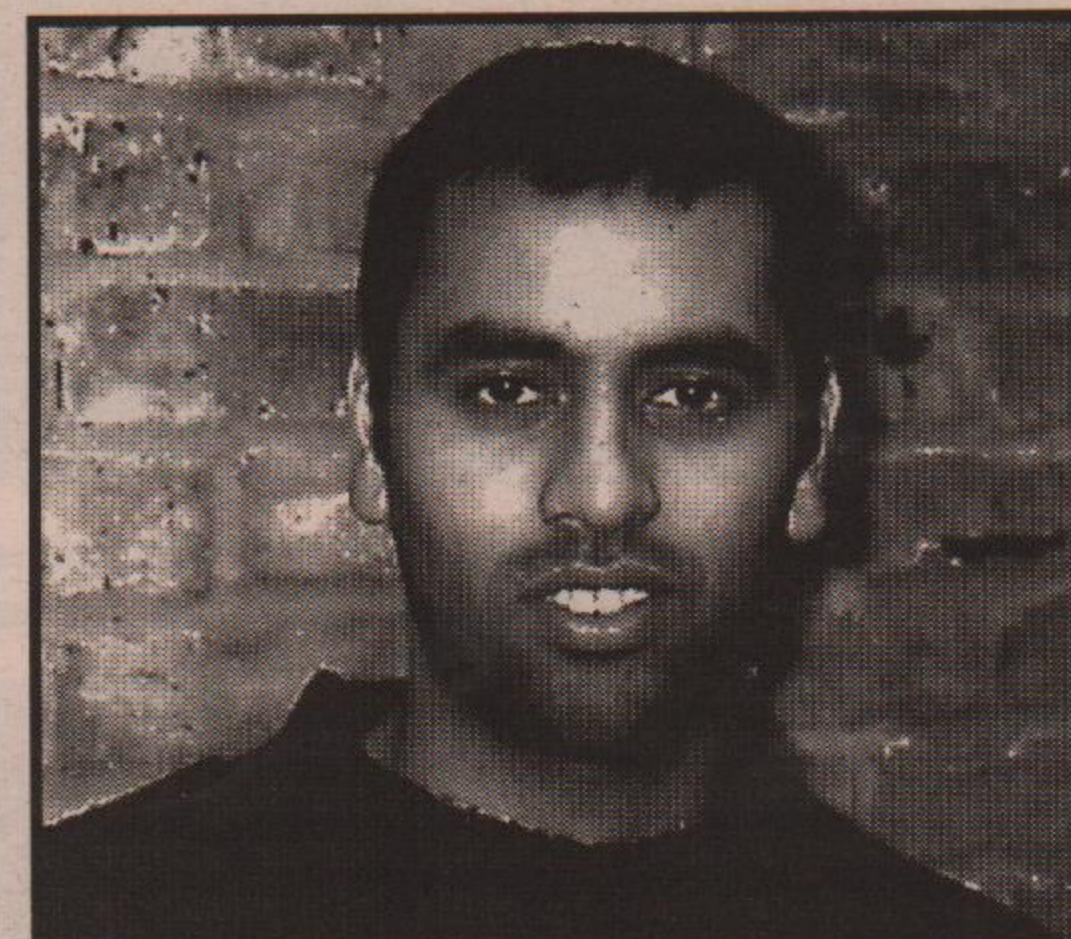
We also decided to place a renewed emphasis on women’s struggles. With the combination of a backlash against feminism and the rightward orientation of most feminist leading-lights it falls to revolutionaries to revive activism on the issue of women’s oppression.

At the centre of the whole debate was how to take forward the anti-capitalism movement that has come together to oppose institutions like the WTO, World Bank and IMF. This is the first truly international movement for decades and the LRCI has taken a firm stand from the beginning that revolutionaries need to be part of it. That is why we have built prominent contingents on two Euromarches (Amsterdam, Cologne) and likewise played a prominent role in protests like the Stop the City demonstrations.

Now the LRCI stands well placed to fight for two vital goals: the anti-capitalist movement must turn to the organised working class; the organised workers’ movement should become anti-capitalist. From London’s J18 protest through the 300,000 strong anti-fascist demos in Austria, through to Mayday protests the world over and now Prague the LRCI has been a prominent part of the movement. We will not flinch from confronting the dead-end ideas of anarchism, zero-growth environmentalism and NGO-style reformism within that movement. But we will be part of it and we will fight for revolutionary leadership within it – much to the disgruntlement of the literary superstars and ageing charity gurus who have appointed themselves as its leaders.

This Congress showed what democratic centralism can do in action. Democratic centralism means maximum rights to internal debate, maximum unity in carrying out decisions. Anarchists, greens, reformists, centrists and Stalinists all in their own way vilify the concept. But our Congress showed that it can work.

■ Find out more about the LRCI at: www.workerspower.com



One elected delegate was missing from the Congress. Kuldip Bajwa, who is currently serving 21 months in a British jail for his role in the defence of the J18 protest in London last year, was an honorary member of the Presidium at Congress and sent revolutionary greetings.

SOUTH AFRICA

Mbeki's attacks on workers endanger alliance

FURTHER CRACKS are appearing in the alliance between South Africa's governing party, the African National Congress (ANC) and its partners. The alliance with COSATU, the main trade union federation and the South African Communist Party (SACP), has helped to tie the working class to the government and to ward off growing criticism.

But the continuing attacks by President Thabo Mbeki's administration on working class jobs and services are pushing the union leaders to more and more open criticism.

The ANC plans to change the labour

laws to favour the employers, making it easier to carry through sackings and remove workers' protection against unsocial hours. Echoing the mantras of big business, the government argues that the current laws are “too restrictive” and “deter foreign investment”.

It is also driving ahead with its privatisation plans: Mbeki recently announced he wants to speed up the privatisation of state-owned assets to meet a 2004 deadline.

COSATU president Willie Madisha has warned the ANC against putting more

strain on the relationship. “We are coming out to say to the ANC, you either change or we fight you”. The COSATU leaders are under pressure from rank and file workers and want a “summit meeting” of the Alliance to push for concessions. The federation's secretary general Zwelinzima Vavi warned that the labour law changes “threaten to plunge the country into major political crisis”. COSATU's leadership knows that it will be difficult to pull the vote out for the ANC in the important municipal elections in November.

Thabo Mbeki shows no sign of

changing course. The ANC is wedded to a strategy of making South Africa competitive and restoring profit levels. But he is worried enough to have launched an attack on corruption and greed within the ANC and the new bureaucracy. He hopes this kind of left talk can deflect criticism, but while it may reassure some foreign backers it is unlikely to satisfy the critics of the ANC leadership in the black working class.

That criticism needs to be turned into outright opposition and the COSATU leadership must be told to stop backing the government and start fighting.

workersPOWER

Victory at Verizon

"The strike of the 21st century", was how one sociologist described August's battle between 87,000 trade unionists and the recently formed telecoms giant, Verizon. *G.R.McColl* reports on one of the most important fights waged by organised workers in the US in the past decade

IN THE EARLY hours of 6 August more than 85,000 telecoms workers in the north-eastern USA walked off the job. They had entered into battle for a new contract and, from day one, the gloves were off.

On Thursday 24 August some 37,000 members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) in Washington, DC and six mid-Atlantic states returned to work after an historic 18-day strike. Their union negotiators were the last to conclude a settlement with management at Verizon, the biggest regional player in the US telecommunications industry and merged with Bell Atlantic.

Representatives of another 35,000 CWA members and 14,000 workers belonging to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in New York and the six New England states had already cut a deal three days before. But within 48 hours, flying pickets from the mid-Atlantic states swiftly shut down Verizon operations at numerous New York workplaces, with the public blessing of the CWA's district chief, Larry Mancino, and union president Mort Bahr.

This move certainly hastened further concessions from Verizon bosses and a victorious end to this round in the battle to sustain and build union organisation in one of the most strategic sectors of the "new" capitalist economy.

Despite the ambiguities and deficiencies in the new three-year collective bargaining agreement, the widespread perception among both workers and academic commentators is that we can chalk one up for the unions.

According to Verizon's own management, the first day of the strike witnessed picketing by 14,000 union members at more than 300 sites. By the end of the strike a backlog of customer repair and installation orders had surpassed

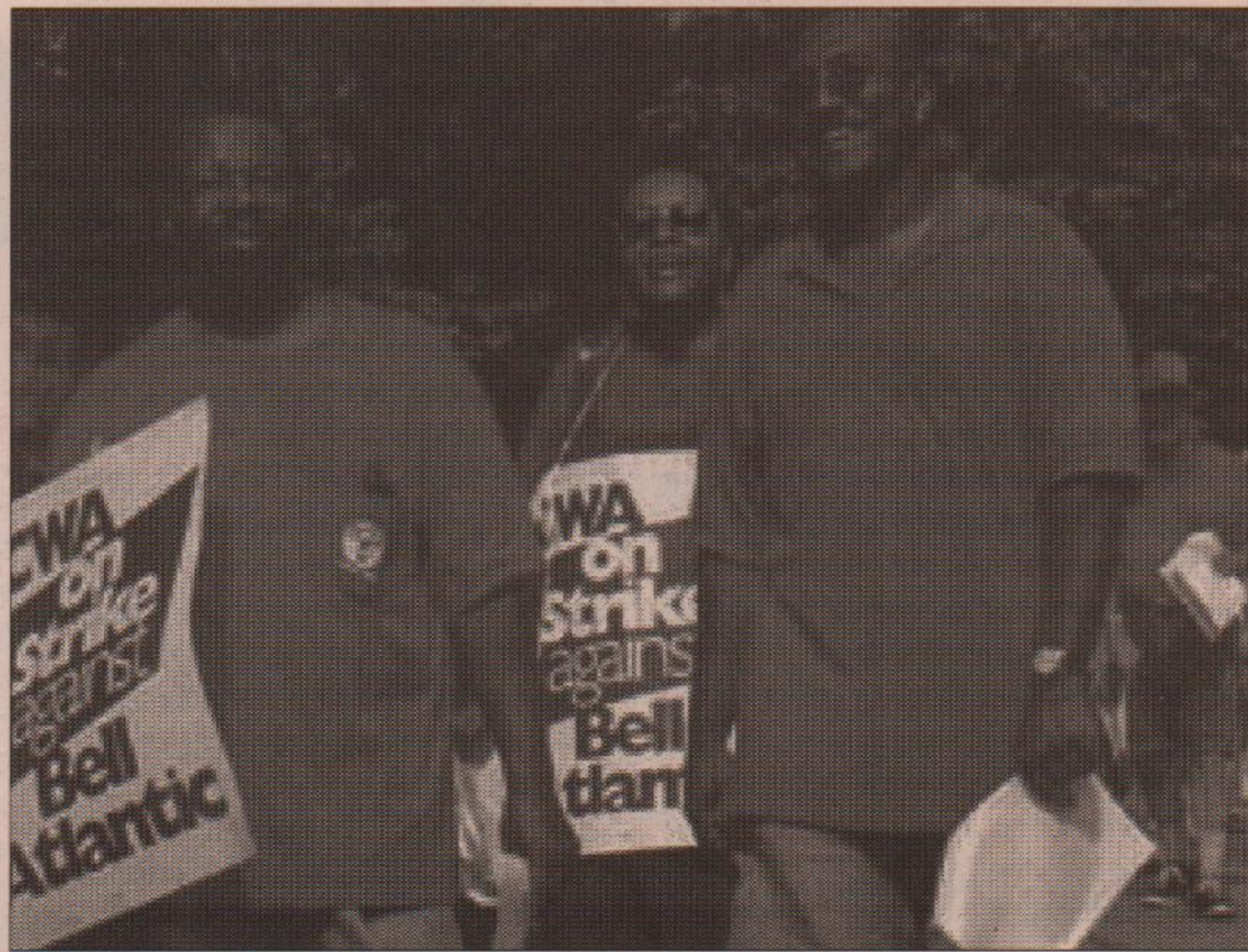
100,000 in the New York and New England region alone. Thousands of Verizon's 25 million residential and commercial customers had temporarily lost telephone services during the dispute. The widespread problems unfolded even as Verizon tried to break the strike by placing 30,000 managerial staff on seven-day, 84-hour weeks.

Verizon bosses also sought and obtained injunctions in a number of cities in an attempt to beat back effective picketing. Courts in Philadelphia and the state of Delaware issued orders by the second day of the strike limiting the number of pickets at company entrances to four.

On the third day of the walk-out there were violent clashes between pickets and police in New York City, with the cops making several dozen arrests. The management made wildly exaggerated claims about vandalism by strikers, alleging that more than 400 incidents had occurred in 48 hours. Verizon offered a reward of \$25,000 (£16,600) for information leading to the prosecution of strikers and supporters for vandalism or harassment of scabs.

By Thursday 10 August some 10,000 strikers and supporters were marching through the streets of mid-town Manhattan at mid-day to rally outside Verizon's headquarters. Not only Ralph Nader (see below) but even Hillary Clinton felt obliged to get in on the act, as the US senate candidate joined a CWA picket line in Albany, New York.

The t-shirts worn by workers at a CWA rally in Providence, Rhode Island summed up the militant mood of many Verizon workers. Bearing the image of a hooded cobra, the logo read: "Will Strike If Provoked". At one Verizon subsidiary in New Jersey, not balloted for action, a further 800 IBEW members simply joined



Strikers walk the line against Verizon bosses

the strike after management threatened them with disciplinary action for refusing to cross CWA picket lines.

This was an incredibly popular battle despite Verizon's propaganda offensive. In numerous smaller cities even the local police were seen donating money to strikers' collections. This level of public sympathy reflects a widespread feeling of anger at unbridled corporate greed against the background of stagnating real wages, mounting hours of mandatory overtime and, with it, intolerable levels of stress.

Verizon exemplifies many trends in the US capitalism over the past two decades. Its chief executive officer, Ivan Seidenberg received combined earnings of \$13.1 million in 1999. His basic salary alone was \$1.2 million, and that was an increase of 41 per cent over the previous year.

Meanwhile, the average working week for ordinary staff in the US telephone industry stands at 42 hours, up from 38 hours in the late 1950s. In New Jersey, where the previous contract had contained no ceiling on overtime working, many customer service representatives were routinely compelled to put in an extra 20 hours a week.

Against this background the strike has struck an enormous blow for organised labour against the global corporations that dominate the "new economy".

For customer service representatives, a cap on mandatory overtime of 7.5 hours will take effect immediately, while for Verizon technicians, operators and other staff there will be an immediate ceiling of 10 hours, falling to eight hours next year. Customer service employees will have the guarantee of 30 minutes "off-line" per shift. The CWA also claims

that the corporation is specifically committed to hiring more workers, though as in the case of the Teamsters' 1997 settlement with UPS, Verizon bosses may renege on the deal.

One of the unions' biggest achievements came with provisions curbing the bosses' ability to transfer jobs into southern states with ironically named "right-to-work" laws - a legal charter for keeping the unions out. Most significantly, Verizon conceded the so-called neutrality card check.

This will mean far greater access for union recruiters to thus far unorganised sections of the 3,500-strong workforce in Verizon's mobile phone subsidiary. As a result the unions can avoid the bitter and costly exercise of a recognition ballot under the supervision of the National Labor Relations Board.

Robert Ross, an industrial relations academic, characterised the neutrality card check deal as "a major, major accomplishment for the unions and a major concession by the company". Elsewhere, US bosses have shelled out tens of millions on union-busting management consultants to keep their workplaces unorganised.

The Verizon strike shows the tide is turning in the US class struggle. Along with the Teamsters' strike three years ago and the recent walk-outs and inventive protests by mainly Latino janitors in and around Los Angeles, there is growing evidence of a revival in workers' combativity from coast-to-coast.

The strike is important, above all, because it took place in the heart of the new economy. Much of the ideology of US capitalism rests on the illusion of a golden internet-driven future. The Verizon strike was a sharp reminder amid the e-frenzy: no workers = no internet and no new economy.

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Nader: diluted spirit of Seattle

THE RACE FOR the White House has begun in earnest, with the self-styled "compassionate conservative" George W Bush accusing his Democratic rival, Al Gore, of stirring up "class warfare".

This came after Gore's vaguely populist "fighting for working families" speech to his party's Los Angeles convention.

Gore's current pose may seem more than a bit ironic having spent the preceding eight years as the vice-president in Bill Clinton's administration. Over the course of two terms it intensified the neo-liberal offensive around free trade and cuts in the welfare "safety net".

Bush, Gore's Republican opponent, despite his rhetoric about compassion, proudly presides over a state that tops the league tables for both executions and levels of child poverty.

So it's one ivy-league capitalist versus another - with little to choose for the working class.

But a third contender has emerged for the presidency who is making waves in the workers' movement and among anti-globalisation activists.

The crusading lawyer and consumer advocate Ralph Nader has surged in the opinion polls and is attracting up to 10 per cent of the potential vote in a number of key states, including California.

Though not a member of the US Green Party, Nader had already stood as its presidential candi-

date in 1996. His name did not get on the ballot in all 50 states, his campaign spent less than \$5,000 and he captured only 700,000 votes - less than 1% of the total poll. This time things are looking rather different: Nader is energetically campaigning and fund-raising across the country. He is riding high on the impact of last year's N30 protests in Seattle. *LA Weekly*, a radical equivalent of London's *Time Out*, dubbed Nader "Seattle Man", claiming that "Nader has come to personify the spirit of Seattle".

A debate swiftly developed among contributors to the radical magazine, *The Nation*, over whether or not Nader deserved their support. And some trade union bureaucrats toyed with the idea of backing Nader.

But as the liberal media started to complain that Nader could cost Gore the election, the big and influential United Auto Workers' (UAW) union has thrown its weight behind Gore.

The most ardent Nader enthusiast among the union tops has been none other than Teamsters' president James P Hoffa, the son of the notoriously corrupt union legend Jimmy Hoffa. In June Hoffa introduced Nader to a Teamster audience, declaring that "Ralph Nader understands what globalisation means: money and jobs are going overseas. US workers can't compete with slave labour." But to date there is no evidence that the

Teamsters nationally are about to bankroll Nader's campaign.

Nevertheless, the Nader campaign has struck a resonant chord and not only with environmentalists: student activists opposed to sweatshop conditions in the Third World have cheered him to the rafters and a significant element among the demonstrators at the Democratic Party convention were clearly backing Nader.

Since July, however, the Green Party/Nader candidacy has garnered support from a more unlikely quarter: the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its currently estranged sister organisation the ISO in the USA. Why are organisations that would claim to espouse revolutionary Marxism voting for a candidate who, by his own description is not a socialist, and not part of the workers' movement?

The rising Green Party vote in both Britain and the USA may be a reflection of the growth of the anti-capitalist movement - but it is a potentially disastrous expression of it. To equate the growth of the greens with the growth of left alliances like the LSA is to blind yourself to the class character of the Green Party: its programme is bourgeois and its membership middle class.

Nader's hard-hitting populist rhetoric denouncing a "government of the General Motors, by the Exxons and for the DuPonts" may be sweet music,

along with his attacks on "two parties merged into one corporate party, with two heads in different make-up".

The reality remains, however, that Nader enjoys minimal support within the working class, whether white, Latino or African-American. While his public identification with recent workers' struggles may change that to some extent, the impact of his candidacy is likely to prove to be no greater than that of Jesse Jackson when he twice stood for the Democratic Party nomination in the 1980s.

At that time, the ISO rightly resisted the temptation to back Jackson's candidacy. His Rainbow Coalition had sparked interest among minority ethnic communities and in a number of trade union locals in the "rustbelt" states.

The ISO took an aloof, sectarian attitude towards the formation of a US Labor Party in the 1990s. The Labor Party was formed with the backing of leading bureaucrats from a number of unions and such broad left formations as the "New Directions" group in the UAW.

The US workers need a workers' party. A good deal of tactical flexibility will be required to achieve that - given the co-existence of industrial militancy with political hostility to socialism.

But the path to its construction does not mean a detour through the Nader campaign and the Green Party.

WOMEN AND GLOBALISATION

Capital dooms half the world to a 'double shift'

The massive wealth of the capitalists is built on a pyramid of exploitation and working class women are at the bottom. *Lesley Day* outlines the impact of globalisation on women's work and women's struggles

GIRLS ARE BEATING boys in the exam leagues; more women than ever before are in the workforce; women are picking up jobs fast in the new hi-tech industries. Does that mean the new global economy produces a fairer world for women?

No, these facts are only part of the picture. There are certainly changes going on, but for many women an increase in work outside the home means an increase in the "double shift" and in super-exploitation. And for the millions of women living in countries with a debt burden, the International Monetary Fund's policies mean an increase in poverty and exclusion.

Worldwide, women head one-third of all households, are responsible for half the world's food production yet own just one per cent of the world's property.

In the last three decades, as industry expanded worldwide and moved to find new cheap labour forces in poorer countries, women have been drawn into production in virtually every part of the globe.

In developed countries like the UK, women now make up half the labour force. In areas like south Asia, 44 per cent of women work outside the home compared to 25 per cent twenty years ago.

But as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) puts it: "The bottom line is that, while more and more women are working, the great majority of them

are simply swelling the ranks of the working poor".

Women's wages are on average between 50 per cent and 80 per cent of men's. They earn less than men in every single country of the world. They earn less per hour on average even when in full-time work: in Britain, for every £1 a man earns, a woman earns 81p.

For many women, their situation is made worse by precarious employment status. They work part-time or in temporary jobs or they are clustered in lower paid jobs like textiles and domestic work.

Employers often seek out women workers, knowing that their position in the home means that it can be more difficult at first to organise for better conditions and wages. Eighty per cent of the workers in some of the special export zones in East Asia or the sweatshop factories of Latin America, are women.

Women work longer hours than men worldwide, devoting extra hours to unpaid household tasks in every single region of the world. Women in rural communities fare no better. In many areas they do the lion's share of the agricultural work as well as many other tasks within the household.

Nevertheless, the changes in the world economy aren't all bad news. They can be turned to the benefit of women. As women are drawn into paid work, into work outside the home, this can give them independence. In Singapore, one study noted that "an increasingly egalitarian relationship" between husbands and wives followed on from women working outside the home.

The tens of thousands of young women who leave home every year as migrant labourers face dependence and exploitation in their work – but many will be able to break their dependence on home and their voice will carry greater weight in the family. Old patriarchal structures are breaking down.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, the new workplaces and the new communities in the cities make chances for working class women to organise and fight together. Young women working in US call centres join the union; women campaign for better education in Zambia; girls lead the children's campaign against the debt in Peru. Women are on the march worldwide. And in taking up these fights, they find they are up against a whole connected system of business, profiteers and governments.

The problem for global capitalism is that it wants women's labour power at its disposal but doesn't want to pay for the consequences. It needs an educated workforce – but doesn't want to increase education spending. It would like women to go on doing their traditional tasks, child rearing and unpaid housework, while boosting the supply of cheaper labour.

All this happens not just because of sexist politicians, ruthless individual bosses and oppressive husbands and fathers. It happens because, without women's oppression within the family, capitalism could not exist. The "double shift" of low-paid work and unpaid domestic labour is key to the system that generates profits for the employers.

In Britain, the Labour government's "family friendly" policies are a classic attempt to keep women in the workforce while getting the family looked after cheaply. We get parental leave in line with European law – but it's unpaid. Employers are told to encourage flexible working – but this turns out to mean shift work to maximise the bosses' profits.

Right across the globe, the services that employ women, health, education, municipal work, are being cut or privatised. The services themselves get pushed back onto the shoulders of women who are supposed to perform them unpaid.

This is because the world's big companies and the governments they influence have decided to cut the amount they pay for state spending. The "Washington consensus" – the policies pursued by the international capitalist clubs like the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organisation – means slashing public spending and turning services over to the profiteers.

The results for health services can be seen from Dudley to Dar-es-Salaam:

closed hospitals, wage cuts, job losses and falling standards of care.

Inside the developed countries, these policies have resulted in an increase in the difference between rich and poor. Welfare payments are slashed – and in the richest nation in the world, 52 per cent of the single mothers are officially categorised as poor.

The wave of privatisations and contracting out of services has had a detrimental affect on earnings and conditions of thousands of women workers across Europe. In Norway, for instance, this meant that whereas in the early 1980s, women's wages in the public sector were better than in the private sector, by the mid-1990s this was reversed.

In the Third World, women's plight is much worse. The debt burden has weighed down on the budgets of poorer nations and the Structural Adjustment Policies imposed by the IMF mean less public spending.

Worldwide, women head one-third of all households, are responsible for half the world's food production yet own just one per cent of the world's property

This applies too to the new packages offered to the heavily indebted poorer countries. In schemes ironically labelled "poverty reduction" the countries are told to – carry on cutting public spending.

This produces the craziest, most contradictory and most tragic results with regard to education. Even the World Bank itself acknowledges the importance of girls' education. The vice president of the bank in 1992, Lawrence Summers, put it straightforwardly: "Expenditures on increasing the education of girls... appear to be far more productive than any other social-sector outlays". Educating girls leads to lower maternal and infant mortality rates, passing on education to the next generation and later marriage. The level of female literacy is the factor most closely associated with overcoming poverty. Every year of education raises a woman's earning power by 15 per cent

YET DESPITE these clear benefits, women's education is still way down the list of priorities. Worldwide women still make up two-thirds of the one billion people who are illiterate and 60 per cent of the 100 million who have no access to primary education. Tanzania's debt interest payments are to be reduced by 20 per cent over three years, but it will still be paying

around \$146 million annually while the basic education budget is \$85 million. Tanzania's literacy rate, once enviable even by western standards, is now falling, especially for girls. Nowadays it has to charge for education.

This is how 12 year old Amina Hassan in Tanzania describes her day:

"I wake up very early. I sweep the compound, wash last night's dishes. Then I go to the well but I have to walk very far and wait in a long queue. I go to the farm to dig or pick cashew nuts. If I am lucky I can play for a few hours in the afternoon. I prepare food for the evening and next day. Later I can listen to the grown-ups' conversations then I go to sleep. I would like to go to school but it's too expensive."

In Zambia, where parents have to meet 80 per cent of education costs, the World Bank itself has observed "serious drops in attendance, disproportionately affecting girls".

In Pakistan, 55 per cent girls do not attend primary school. Yet Pakistan spends twice as much on defence as on education and health put together.

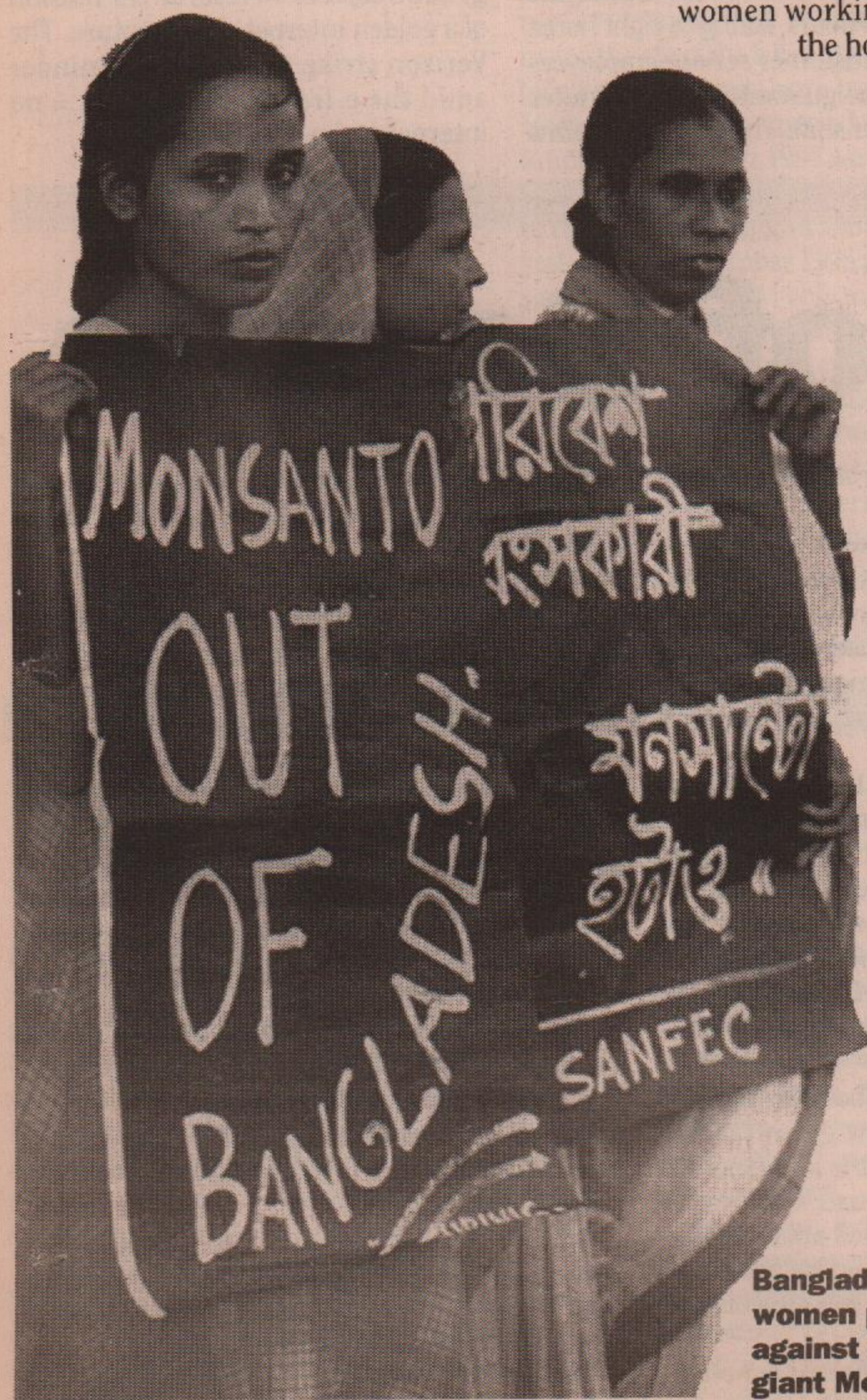
We will never overcome these terrible inequalities while government's and the big companies that back them are able to carry on enforcing poverty on the world's majority.

Of course there are women who belong to the ruling class who can escape the effect of being second class citizens. When women go on the march in Red September and on the Women's World March in October, we must remember that not all women have the same interests. Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State, can sit back in comfort in Washington enforcing sanctions on Iraq while ordinary Iraqi women watched their children die of malnourishment and preventable disease.

Unlike these privileged women, the majority of women have to fight for every improvement. For them the claims for the new global economy ring hollow – yet it does in fact bring the chance of a better future, because it brings closer the day when working women can unite together, and with their brother workers, to get rid of the whole profit system.

Women health workers across the world identify with each other's struggles. Women in the richer countries are active in trying force big companies to employ decent working practices overseas. Young women have been drawn into campaigning against the debt in huge numbers.

As we build a new working class movement against global capitalism, we need to bring together all the women struggling against oppression and exploitation into an international working class women's movement.



Bangladeshi women protest against GM food giant Monsanto

WOMEN'S MARCH AGAINST POVERTY AND OPPRESSION

- As part of the World March of Women 2000, women marchers will converge on Brussels between 8 and 13 October for a mass demo on 14 October.
- For more details go to <http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000>
- Email marche2000@ffq.qc.ca
- Or Phone Workers Power on 0773 0220962 for details of planning meetings, campaigning and transport.

IN JULY thousands of scientists, researchers, health workers, activists and people with HIV/AIDS attended the International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa. During the five-day meeting, over 9,000 more people would have acquired HIV in South Africa alone. Globally, 50,000 people would have died from AIDS.

At the end of the 20th century, the perception of AIDS had shifted away from being a disease of "alternative" western lifestyles to being yet another disease of poverty. More than 95 per cent of cases are in the misnamed "developing" countries, where development is choked by the stranglehold of debt and economic domination by imperialism.

Staging the conference in South Africa ensured that the political aspects of AIDS could not be ignored by the participants or the media. More than 70 per cent of people with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa, and the epidemic is growing faster in South Africa than anywhere else. In the closing ceremony, Nelson Mandela reported recent estimates that suggest up to 50 per cent of today's South African teenagers will die of AIDS. In common with many neighbouring countries, the whole economy is being devastated by the epidemic.

The raw facts show the global scale of the epidemic (see box), but the true toll was revealed by many conference reports. In Zambia, education is threatened, with 1,300 teachers dying of AIDS in the first 10 months of 1998, the equivalent of two out of three newly-trained teachers each year. Children cannot gain the most basic schooling because their parents have died, and they are left to bring up their younger brothers and sisters. An estimated 13.2 million children have been orphaned because of AIDS since the epidemic began. The proportion of children who are orphaned in developing countries has soared from an average of two per cent to between seven and 11 per cent.

The conference was opened by South African President Thabo Mbeki. This sparked immediate controversy because he has voiced scepticism about the link between HIV and AIDS. He insists that poverty is the real problem.

He is wrong to doubt that HIV causes AIDS, and the dispute has delayed government action on funding treatment for people with HIV/AIDS. The ANC-led government has effectively refused to fund treatment programmes, and, most controversially, failed to provide drug treatment to pregnant women in order to reduce the risk of transmission to their babies. As a result, 500 babies are infected daily in South Africa, while in the west effective interventions means that almost no children are now infected this way.

But for all the furor, Mbeki is right to link AIDS to poverty. HIV leads to AIDS, but its rapid spread through sub-Saharan Africa is not because of different genes or viral types in Africa. Social conditions hugely affect the risk of acquiring the disease. Millions of families in South Africa are separated for weeks on end to survive – for example men work in the mines away from their homes and living in appalling conditions reminiscent of 19th century

The Aids epidemic blights the prospects for a whole generation in sub-Saharan Africa. *Helen Watson* documents the devastation and its real causes

AIDs – patented genocide

workhouses in Britain. Casual unprotected sex and prostitution flourish around these "barracks". Other sexually transmitted infections are rampant due to absent or inadequate health services for the majority of workers in South Africa.

Once people have been infected, South Africa can't afford the drugs that are now available to treat HIV. Although these drugs are not yet a cure, and have many side effects, they can turn HIV from a rapidly progressing fatal illness into a manageable long term condition. People with AIDS can now expect to live for 20 years rather than two. Given appropriate therapy, the transmission of the virus from mother to child can be cut to almost nil, and sexual transmission reduced.

Judge Edwin Cameron, a South African who is HIV-positive, spoke to the conference about his experience. He is one of the very few Africans who can afford the (US) \$400 a month for combination therapy, and his health has been transformed. He said:

"But this near-miracle has not touched the lives of most of those who most desperately need it. . . . This is not because the drugs are prohibitively expensive to produce. They are not. Recent experience in India, Thailand and Brazil has shown that most of the critical drugs can be produced at costs that put them realistically within reach of the resource-poor world.

The primary reason why the drugs are out of reach to the developing world is two-fold. On the one hand, drug-pricing structures imposed by the manufacturers make the drugs unaffordable. On the other, the international patent and trade regime at present seeks to choke off any large-scale attempt to produce and market the drugs at affordable levels. . . . This gathering can address the drug companies. It can demand not dialogue, but urgent and immediate price reductions for resource-poor countries. It can challenge the companies to permit without delay parallel imports and the manufacture under license of drugs for which they hold the patents. Cor-

porately and individually we can address the governments and inter-governmental organisations of the world, demanding a plan of crisis intervention that will see treatments provided under managed conditions to those who most need them."

The major drug companies have responded to pressure through a number of price cuts and special deals for poorer countries, but these are seen as temporary acts of charity to prevent any undermining of their profits. The conference itself was sponsored by such major pharmaceutical companies as DuPont, Pharmacia (incorporating Monsanto), Glaxo-Wellcome and Roche, along with other multinationals including Cisco, Dell and Microsoft.

There was a lot of protest around the conference, with a large coalition of groups supporting a global march for HIV/AIDS treatment, and backing a call demanding that:

"All people with HIV/AIDS have a right to access to these [combination] treatments in addition to health care, employment, education, clean water, adequate nutrition including vitamins and mineral supplements, and housing.

Denying people with HIV/AIDS access to affordable medicines in order to protect profits or intellectual property rights is tantamount to genocide.

Denying access to treatments or preventative intervention by any government body using the smokescreen of questioning the cause of AIDS is unacceptable."

Activists around the world are starting to link issues of rights for sex workers, women's and lesbian and gay liberation, and anti-racism with the struggle against international capitalism. AIDS activists have focused immediate attention on the drug companies, but this soon extends to the role governments and international institutions play in supporting exploitation and oppression. In Philadelphia, the Republican Convention was greeted with massive protests, featuring an ActUp banner which read "Bush and Drug Company Greed Kill: Generic AIDS Drugs for Africa Now!"

These protests need to be generalised and linked to the wider anti-capitalist movement. Let's start by calling on all AIDS activists to join the protest against the World Bank and IMF in Prague this September.

LINKS:

www.aids2000.com (website of the Durban AIDS conference)
www.unaids.org UNAIDS
<http://www.actupny.org> (ActUp New York)
<http://www.tac.org.za> (Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa)
<http://aids.org/healthgap> (The Global Health Gap Coalition)

THE GLOBAL EPIDEMIC

In 1999 there were:

- 5.4 million people newly infected with HIV
- 34.3 million people living with HIV/AIDS, including 1.3 million children
- 2.8 million HIV/AIDS-related deaths, one third of them from associated TB

Since the start of the epidemic

- 18.8 million people have died
- 13.2 million children have been orphaned.
- In 1998 200,000 Africans died in wars. More than two million died of AIDS.

■ 70 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS are in sub-Saharan Africa

- 16 per cent are in South and South-East Asia
- 4 per cent are in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

THE SCIENCE – WHAT WAS NEW AT THE CONFERENCE

■ **Treatment:** Combination therapy (the use of several different anti-retroviral drugs together) has transformed the lives of people with HIV/AIDS. These have been in use for five years, but there is growing concern about drug resistance and side effects when these drugs are taken over many years. The conference reported continuing progress in developing new anti-retroviral drugs, and promising results of trial of new treatment regimes (taking the drugs in cycles rather than concurrently, for example). Other promising new approaches to treatment include interventions to promote the immune response.

■ **Prevention:** Transmission of the virus from a mother to her baby can now be almost completely prevented with the use of drugs, Caesarean section and the avoidance of breast feeding. The conference addressed the difficulties of achieving this in poorer countries, where drugs are too expensive, Caesarean section too risky and breast feeding important for preventing other diseases. There were also reports on the difficulties of encouraging pregnant women to undertake screening for HIV infection. In Zimbabwe, half of the women offered testing declined, and many of those who had the test did not return to find out their results. This is a result of the stigma of HIV infection, and the abuse and neglect that many people with HIV/AIDS face.

■ **Health promotion:** While the overall picture on prevention is one of an avoidable genocide in Africa, with governments slow to recognise the problem and unwilling to give political or financial support to prevention and treatment, the conference also heard a few apparent success stories. In Thailand, Cambodia, Uganda and Senegal infection rates have declined following aggressive prevention campaigns and investment in counselling etc. Interventions with people who inject drugs (outreach programmes, peer education, needle exchange, drug treatment, voluntary counselling and testing) have also been effective. In New York City the prevalence of HIV infection among IV-drug users nearly halved in seven years.

■ **Economics:** One report demonstrated that the Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe had contributed to an increase in HIV/AIDS through increasing poverty and decreasing public spending on health care.

■ **Oppression:** There was a lot of discussion about young people who are most affected by HIV/AIDS but were least represented at the conference. In particular, there was a virtual silence about issues facing young men having sex with men. In many developing countries male homosexual experience is denied, but there is growing evidence of how common it is. The link between women's oppression and HIV has been well established, with sexual repression, domestic violence and poverty all increasing the risk. Too little has been done to address these issues, and many presentations at the conference lamented the fact that in this as in other areas, we know all too well what is needed, but the action is lacking.

Around the time of the AIDS conference the United States announced a "generous" \$1 billion loan programme to 24 countries in Africa, specifically to help them buy anti-AIDS drugs. The money will take the form of five-year loans at a steep seven per cent annual interest rate. This means that even if the loans are paid back over those five years and not extended, the profit on the loan will be over US\$400 million. But that's not all. The strings attached require that the loans be used to buy US-manufactured drugs.

To summarise, the US government is promising \$1 billion to the poorest countries in the world. All of this money will go straight into the pockets of the bosses of the richest pharmaceutical companies in the world. The poor countries will get expensive drugs to treat some people with AIDS, and then be landed with a further debt of almost half a billion dollars five years later. Even Oxfam was prompted to condemn this as "a debt that tomorrow's AIDS orphans will be forced to pay".

workers POWER

Socialist Alliance Elections Conference

Saturday, 30 September, 12 noon - 4.00 pm, Central Methodist Hall, Warwick Road, Coventry
 Further information from Pete McLaren on 01788 569766 or Dave Nellist on 024 7622 9311

This month the conference halls of Glasgow and Brighton will echo with the sound of self-congratulatory speeches.

At the Trades Union Congress, suit-wearing union bureaucrats will praise themselves for their successes under New Labour: union membership is edging upwards, some recognition deals are being signed under the new employment legislation, and a host of European Union directives have been grudgingly enacted.

At the end of the month in Brighton, the "Labour faithful" will cheer Gordon Brown, the man who has dispensed £47 billion of public spending to revive the party's fortunes at the polls.

For the millions of people excluded from this orgy of self-congratulation, things do not look quite so rosy.

■ In the workplaces, it's the employers who remain on the offensive. All most workers have got to show for the supposed economic boom is a few pounds more gained through working overtime.

■ In the union recognition fight, the union bureaucrats are "winning" new deals at the price of partnership agreements that sign away our right to fight - or losing them as anti-union firms like Virgin or the Wackenhut private prisons group exploit the loopholes in the law to stave off campaigns for union rights.

■ But it is in the public sector that the picture looks bleakest. Labour never gives workers something for nothing - and Gordon Brown's public spending plans are no exception. The billions earmarked for road and rail transport, new hospitals, schools and social services will end up in the pockets of the privateers. In short, Labour is offering massive subsidies to private capitalists.

The deal Labour offers to its working class supporters could not be clearer or more cynical: we give you money for schools and hospitals and we patch up the transport system. But in return you must accept our racist asylum laws, our pro-employer union laws, our attacks on civil liberties, our "humanitarian" bombing campaigns.

And you must accept that the welfare state is now a means-tested safety

Brown's billions fuel PFI bonanza

net for the very poor - not the system of social provision your taxes have paid for.

On top of that you must accept that "private money" is the only sustainable way to improve services - so our railways, schools and hospitals will be used under the guise of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and "public-private" partnerships to generate cash for the private contractors for years to come.

Public-private partnership means

profits for the rich and second-rate services for the rest. Look at Cumberland Infirmary - the first PFI hospital to be opened. In mid-August all its beds were full and doctors are now dreading the onset of winter. Why were there not enough beds? Because the PFI plan demanded by the multinational contractor Amec would only work if the number of beds was cut. The same story is emerging at other privately financed

hospital projects.

Blair and Brown's offer to the working class is a "take it or leave it" deal. No "partnership" in the workplace - no union rights. No "partnership" with the privateers in health, education and the rail, you can forget better services.

The union leaders gathered at the TUC will make disgruntled noises behind the scenes, but virtually all of them will take what's offered. They will once more stump up the millions of pounds many of us have contributed through our affiliated funds for Labour's election campaign, and they will viciously witch-hunt any union activists who actively reject the deal with Labour.

But there is an alternative. Across the country Socialist Alliances have sprung up to challenge Labour at the polls. On



the doorstep - and in the many grassroots campaigns sparked by Labour's privatising, union-busting, racist rule - socialists are gaining support.

The task now is to combine the grassroots struggles - on health, education, transport, racism and union rights - with a more fundamental and openly socialist political challenge to New Labour.

We don't need the resurrection of "old Labour". Even well-meaning, reformist socialists who wanted to curb capitalism ended up - faced with the economic demands imposed by the bosses and their crises - running the system for the rich against the poor.

What we need is a new revolutionary socialist party, that brings together all the workers and young people struggling for a very different future than the one currently on offer from Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Join us in the fight to make it happen.

Mounting an electoral challenge to New Labour - see page 6

BRIGHTON S24 - THE COUNTER CONFERENCE

Starts 10.30 am on Sunday 24 September at Hove Town Hall, followed by a march to the Brighton Centre, where the Labour Party conference will be assembling. Counter conference tickets cost £10 waged, £5 unwaged. Further information from Brighton 2000 Committee, PO Box 29689, London E8 2XR

FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 020 7793 1468 ■ Prague details on 0773 022 0962

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