

DOCKERS STRIKE FOR JOBS

LIVERPOOL dockers started 'unofficial' strike action on 28 September against sackings by Torside Limited.

The company 'offered' redundancy to 80 trainees taken on four years ago under a special agreement with the union to employ the sons of ex-dockers.

Torside want to reduce their number by 20 and replace them with casual agency workers.

In a ballot the 80 young dockers voted unanimously to strike against any reduction in the workforce.

The company took no further action until the expiry of the 28-day legal time limit within which workers must take action following a ballot.

Then, in a clear provocation, management sacked all 80 workers for supporting six of their mates who refused to work overtime. The trainees put a picket on the dock gate, which the rest of the dockers refused to cross.

There was a unanimous decision at a mass meeting to go out on unofficial strike. A strike committee with a picket rota and regular communication was set up. Two committee members were despatched to the Labour Party conference in Brighton to get hold of their general secretary, Bill Morris.

Mike Carden, TGWU shop steward explained: 'The lads were within their rights, and the rest of us could not cross their picket line. There are principles involved here. But what are the legal implications?'

That is the \$64,000 question!

Under the Tory government all basic trade union rights have been legally smashed up.

And Blair says: 'New Labour' will serve the interests of the nation and not of any 'vested interest' such as the trade unions.

A Labour government will not repeal the anti-union laws.

Six years ago the National Dock Labour Scheme — under which the dockers' trade union was recognised and they had security of employment and wages — was abolished by Act of Parliament.

The 'left' TGWU general executive council refused to support the dockers' demands for strike action to defend the scheme.

The union's general secretary at the time, Ron Todd, said that he

BY DOT GIBSON

was responsible for the whole union and not just the dockers! Solidarity action could open the union up to sequestration of its funds under the Tory laws, he explained.

Isolated and deterred from going on strike until abolition of the scheme had been rushed through parliament, the dockers were defeated. In Tilbury the union was outlawed. The Liverpool dockers held on to their union organisation under duress.

In that same year new anti-union laws started their passage through parliament and were later enacted.

Employers have the right to sack unofficial strike leaders. Such strike leaders cannot seek financial redress through an Industrial Tribunal.

Union leaders are responsible for the actions of unofficial strike leaders, and are expected to actively distance themselves from unofficial strikes. Not to do so faces them with fines and ultimately sequestration of union funds.

The legal position is clear. There is no right to strike!

Solidarity

But working-class solidarity keeps being reasserted. Trade union principles are alive and kicking. The Liverpool dockers' sons defend their jobs and stand up for their workmates. The older dockers will not cross the picket line.

We can't leave it at that. Workers need a new socialist party which has these principles at heart.

See centre-page call for a conference on the 'Crisis in the labour movement'.



Liverpool dock labourers T&G shop stewards' committee banner on an anti-poll-tax demonstration in the late 1980s

Workers Aid heads for Bihac

BY BOB MYERS
Secretary, Workers Aid for Bosnia

LAST WEEK two Workers Aid for Bosnia convoys left Britain. On 28 September, ten lorries set off for Tuzla and three days later three lorries began the journey for Bihac.

Nothing could more demonstrate the depth of public feeling over the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the growing number of people determined to prevent the ethnic division of the country than these convoys.

It is only five weeks since the Tuzla trade union convoy returned home and in that short space of time lorries have been serviced, food and other aid collected and approximately £16,000 raised to fund them.

Teams of people, many of whom joined Workers Aid only since the fall of Srebrenica, have been out night after night collect-

ing money in pubs. Others have been working in the warehouses boxing up tons of aid and loading the lorries.

A last minute supermarket collection in Salford ensured that an extra lorry was able to go to Bihac. In two days Bosnian refugees and other local supporters collected £760 and 1,500 kg of food.

This will be the first Workers' Aid visit to Bihac. It follows a long-standing promise to Workers' Aid members with relatives in Bihac that as soon as the route into the besieged town became passable we would send aid to the town.

The convoy will be escorted from Slovenia by Bihac refugees. From contacts in the town we have learnt that all pre-war organisations have collapsed but meetings are being arranged in the town with a variety of people, including those who want to see the trade unions rebuilt.

The Tuzla convoy will develop the contacts made with people in

the towns in the canton by the last Workers' Aid visit.

Lorries will go to trade union committees in Gradacac, Lukavac, Zivince, Banovici, Kalesija and Gracanica as well as to the Tuzla Trade Union Committee and the Kreka Miners' Trade Union (Tuzla).

On the convoy is the lorry of the British Communications Workers Union, now making its third trip to the Tuzla communications workers.

Working

There is also a lorry organised by the GMB general union members working for Derwentside council in the North East. A farmer and her two daughters from Somerset are taking a lorry of aid to Kalesija where trade unionists are trying to keep the region's largest dairy farm working right on the front line.

A member of the print workers' union who went on the last

convoy is taking several tons of aid he managed to collect from various factories in Trafford Park, Manchester, in the 17-ton lorry lent by the Gas Board.

A member of Lanes Women Against Pit Closures is taking a large quantity of aid to the Tuzla orphanage that she visited in August.

The three Muslims from Leicester who travelled with one vehicle on the last convoy have also spread the word about their trip and have campaigned for support, not just for their fellow Muslims in Bosnia, but also in defence of multi-cultural society.

Now four vehicles and drivers have been sent from the Muslim communities in Blackburn, Bolton, Leicester and Dewsbury.

The Muslims living in Bradford have also been very involved in the work of the Bradford Bosnia Solidarity Committee which has also sent a truck on the convoy. One of the drivers is a Labour councillor.

Workers Revolutionary Party/Workers Press meeting
10th anniversary of the expulsion
of G. Healy from the WRP

Saturday 7 October 1995, 2pm

Conway hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
(Holborn Underground) Doors open 1pm for refreshments.
Admission £1 (50p concessions)

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68 days and nights' non-stop picket for Bosnia

BY BRONWEN HANDYSIDE
Picket organiser



Brown Handyside

picket for Bosnia

campaign and encourage more and more people from all backgrounds and of all ages to join our stand against racism, fascism and in defence of multi-cultural life.

There is much to be done. Displaced people must have the right to return home, everyone must have the right to live where they want. Humanitarian aid is needed for the hospitals, schools, universities, the mines, the factories, and the farms.

We must do everything we can to overcome the enormous damage done by rampant nationalism, aided and abetted by the Great Powers, to people who have lived together for generations.

The picketers have decided to continue our weekly meetings, and make new recruits; to picket and campaign in different parts of London and throughout the country; build Students' Aid in the universities, join the convoys organised by Workers Aid for Bosnia and the trade unions; and acquire an office/workshop/coffee bar as an organising centre.

If you want to join us, contact us through the ADBH, 12 Flitcroft St, London WC2H 8DJ, Tel: 0171 240 7992.



Bosnia demonstration, Trafalgar Square, 6 August, held once the picket started on 22 July

THE students, intellectuals and workers who came forward to organise the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign picket of the British Foreign Office have ended that stage of the campaign after a magnificent 68 days and nights.

Many of the picketers had never campaigned on any issue before. The knowledge that the Serbian fascists were carrying out genocide in Bosnia made them decide that they could no longer go on living their ordinary comfortable lives — that they had to do something.

Dozens of mainly young people, of every nationality and background poured their energies into the non-stop picket, gaining invaluable experience in campaigning and organising.

The students who were the backbone of the picket are now building Student Aid for Bosnia in universities throughout the country.

The picket team that organised 'Bands for Bosnia' in Trafalgar Square have formed themselves into a permanent group to fundraise for Bosnia through musical events — and according to them, the sky is now the limit.

We made important contacts with groups from Mauritius to Brussels who are now part of an international campaign for Bos-

nia. Thirty thousand signatures were collected calling for an end to genocide, and the lifting of the arms embargo. Among those who signed were two members of the Russian Duma on a visit to Westminster.

But the highpoint of the picket was the visit by members of the Serb Civic Council, and Jovan Divjak, deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Bosnian and Herzegovina army — who were very obviously delighted with what they saw.

The most important questions now are: can multi-cultural life be reconstructed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the whole of former Yugoslavia? What can we do to assist this process? What are the implications for the whole of Europe and the rest of the world?

At our weekly picket meeting we have decided that we must continue to act together, discuss,

interested in carving out and defending their own financial and political interests (and by definition those of the IMF and World Bank) than helping victims of fascism.

Dave thought the next target had to be to take the campaign to local areas; to find new and innovative ways of drawing people's attention to the destruction and misery that racism and nationalism would bring to our lives if these forces were not fought against and halted.

The divided and devastated cities, mass murder and rape, orphaned and crippled children, destroyed communities and mafia-style corruption at all levels.

We had to ensure that the lessons of Bosnia were learnt by as many people as possible. People had to be alerted and educated about the barbarous strategies of racism and nationalism that capitalism would mobilise to buttress its ailing powers.

Dave thought the picket should have had much greater publicity, somehow we had to find new ways of bringing the campaign to a much wider audience, new and innovative ideas were needed.

Farid Momi, from Algeria, was another regular on the picket. Farid was certainly no stranger to the way in which Western governments manipulate the domestic politics of former colonial countries.

In the case of Algeria, this had created great bitterness that had fed the growth of fundamentalism, intolerance and State repression.

In Bosnia, manipulation by Western governments had also created a situation that had encouraged the growth of extreme nationalism and bigotry.

Farid joined the picket as an expression of his solidarity with the people of Bosnia, to fight for a peace built on multi-ethnic tolerance.

Originally from India, Saleh Kurtha had first hand knowledge of the destructive effects of partition on a country and its people.

When India was partitioned by Britain in 1947, Saleh (a Muslim) was thrown out of his home and business and onto the streets of Bombay. His story was not a

happy one. For many years he and his family were forced to spend 22 hours a day in a putrid factory making balloons in order to stay alive.

Unsurprisingly, Saleh had no hesitation in joining the picket, he knew all too well how it felt to be forced to leave one's home and country, to live as a refugee.

Each time Saleh joined the picket he set himself a 'target' of 100 signatures to add to the petition, and he was also determined not to let anyone pass without pressing them to give money.

Saleh felt that more than anything else the picket educated the public about the effects of the one-sided arms embargo imposed on Bosnia — revealing the covert support the Western Powers had given to Serb expansionism.

When Layla Nezirovic and her sister Duha Nezirovic joined the picket on VJ Day they had some surprises, one of which was the support expressed to Bosnia by Serbian and Russian people who passed.

Layla recalled the day when a Russian man demanded to have his signature removed from the petition after he realised it was calling for the raising of the arms embargo.

After talking to this Russian for well over an hour, trying to explain the situation in Bosnia, Layla said the guy was finally persuaded that his judgement was mistaken and was terribly sorry.

The discussion ended with an exchange of addresses and mutual invitations to holidays in their respective countries.

The other surprise came when a large group of old people passed on their way to the VJ celebrations. Despite the fact that there were a good number of ex-soldiers who said they were proud to have fought against Hitler and defeated fascism, only two or three were willing to sign the petition.

Layla thought the value of the picket had been to bring so many people of different nationalities together, Bosnian people had been greatly heartened by this support.

Another picket stalwart, David Mosley said that it was of great importance that the picket had brought together people of different political backgrounds.

Although he initially thought that this diversity of political attitudes might prevent the building of relationships he told me he was impressed by the way in which people were willing to talk through their political differences in a non-sectarian manner.

David said the picket had given him a great opportunity to vent his anger at the various members of the MoD officialdom that passed the picket daily and demand of them that they explain to him just what they thought they were doing in Bosnia, and to argue it out with them.

David thought the picket had made a significant contribution in raising the awareness of the general public to the true nature of what was happening in Bosnia. Having organised a 'Students Aid for Bosnia' stall at his University during Fresher's Week David was surprised at how many students asked if 'Students Aid' was connected with the picket.

The picket had also provided a focal point for people to get involved in the Bosnia Campaign. David feels that without that focal point it might be more difficult to keep up the campaign's impetus, and this would have to be worked at.

At a job interview last week, David was asked if there was any one thing that he felt proud of in his life? He said more than anything else, he was proud to have been a member of the 24-hour 'Stop the Rape of Bosnia Picket'.

Another picket regular, Billy, from Ireland said that he had been really impressed by the 'internationalism' of the picket, people of all nationalities had come together and identified them-

selves around a single issue — the defence of multi-ethnic Bosnia.

He said it was very encouraging to find that people understood the issues involved and genuinely wanted to discuss and learn from each other.

He also said that this picket had been different from those he had supported in the past, not least because of the enormity of the task it had set itself, a beacon of opposition going against so many different powers. Yet, he thought, the picket had helped people see that the actions of the British government had been criminal.

Billy also pointed out that the picket had inspired many passers by to join in the campaign. He spoke of the many Russians who wanted to know why people didn't discuss the many similarities between the situation in Chechnya and that in Bosnia.

Australian Maoris had talked of their own struggles and their identification with the people of Bosnia.

Mexican people from Chiapas had spoken of the fight of the Zapatistas against a rapacious capitalism that is throttling the working class of Mexico with so-called 'development loans' — a taste of what would undoubtedly happen when the IMF and World Bank started their 'reconstruction loans' to the people of former Yugoslavia.

Billy had been particularly impressed by the energy and commitment of WRP members to keep the picket going, and the political line of the Workers Press, he thought that of all political parties it is only the WRP who understood the necessity of building a new workers party.

'A greater experience than France in 1968'

There was a wide variety of people on the non-stop picket for Bosnia. LESLEY THOMPSON spoke to some of them

Marie Dagurn is from Brittany, France — now living permanently in London.

Up until the demonstration on 22 July Marie had been feeling depressed about the situation in Bosnia. She recalled the day she opened the Guardian and saw the photograph of the Bosnian woman who in desperation had hung herself from a tree — Marie just froze in her tracks.

From that day she became a regular on the picket, eventually deciding that the fight to defend Bosnia's besieged people must take precedence over everything else.

Marie said the picket had been a 'great political education', an oasis of resistance where she has met 'a most marvelous group of people'.

Marie described herself loosely as an 'anarcho-feminist', by nature 'not good at everyday commitment', but she feels that the structure of the picket has changed her attitude — giving her life more meaning and direction. 'An even greater experience than May 1968 in France.'

A student at City University and somewhat 'famous' for his charming and tenacious methods of fundraising on the picket Adil Tahir was virtually ever-present on the picket from day one.

Adil likened the picket to 'one big international family', a place where he had made many friends and where religious and ethnic differences simply did not matter. He said he had been greatly inspired by the number of Bosnians who had joined the picket, he was proud to have campaigned alongside them.

Adil felt that the picket achieved much, he pointed out for instance that many of the people that stopped to sign the petition did not realise that the Western powers had imposed an arms embargo on Bosnia.

Many were horrified to learn that the country had been invaded by fascists. The picket provided a place where people

could pick up information on the true nature of the conflict in Bosnia, moreover because it was situated outside the Ministry of Defence and No.10 Downing Street. It also focused people's attention on the criminal policies of the British government.

Although Adil felt that it was an appropriate time for the campaign to change its location and demands, he felt very sad that the picket had ended, almost as if 'he has lost part of himself'.

He felt that only the Bosnian army could achieve a lasting peace in Bosnia.

For Dave Lawrence the main value of the picket was to demonstrate to Bosnian people that even in a country such as Britain — which is seen as a strong covert supporter of the Serbian nationalists — there were many people willing to put themselves out in order to demonstrate their solidarity with the people of Bosnia.

To maintain a 24-hour picket over a prolonged period of time, despite weather and personal inconvenience, required people who were willing to make sacrifices.

Dave thought that the fact that this support was expressed outside the MoD sent a message to the British Government that its own people would not accept its complicity in genocide.

He was also impressed by the number of Russians who expressed their support for the Bosnians, notwithstanding the way in which the media invariably represents the Russian people as supporters of the Serbs.

Dave also recalled the number of foreign visitors who had told him of campaigns in support of Bosnia in their own countries — Holland, USA, Mauritius, Spain.

Valuable international contacts that could be called upon to demonstrate their support not only for a multi-ethnic Bosnia, but more widely in defence of multi-ethnic societies everywhere.

Many of the people Dave spoke to on the picket were well aware of the cynicism and duplicity of the British government, and many commented that if Bosnia had oil reserves it would have quickly attracted support.

Dave thought the picket helped people realise that Western governments were far more

WORKERS PRESS IS THE PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

British section of the Workers International (to Rebuild the Fourth International)

Please send me information about the WRP

Name date

Address

Trade union (if any) Age (if under 21)

Send to: PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB

Inside left

Hard Labour

CONSIDER the work of a witchfinder general in Tony Blair's New Labour Party. It used to be fairly straightforward; there was a list of banned organisations and publications, from Artists for Peace and the Anglo-Bulgarian Friendship Society, etc., to the Socialist Labour League, forerunner of the Workers Revolutionary Party. It was periodically updated on the commendation of Labour agents, or their agents. If members stepped out of line there'd be a purge. There were awkward cases, like the Leeds woman set up for expulsion for associating with her husband, a member of the Socialist Labour League. But on the whole it was simple. If you were in a banned outfit, or caught selling the wrong paper, out you'd go.

A leader whose friends are protesting his infallibility should have a capital index. But having dropped it some years ago, Labour is making do with rule of thumb, public information, and retrospective law.

'I am not now nor have I ever been Trotskyist', says Liz Davies, truthfully. But she admitted resisting the all tax, and nursery closures, and writing in *Labour Briefing*.

Among those denouncing her was former Islington council leader Margaret Hodge MP, who used to write in *Briefing* herself. Oh, the price of a parliamentary seat these days!

'We will not be silenced', says the new, improved, and renamed, *Labour Briefing* in its October issue. But the Blairites are aiming higher, planning for *New Statesman* editor Steve Platt, and for what they call a 'hard left clique' at the *Guardian* (it posed that memo proposing preme powers for the Leader).

Blair allegedly prefers the *Sun*. Considering he flew round the world to see Murdoch, and has promised to continue Thatcher's work, it's only fitting.

Well said

HAVING exposed inhumanities in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia and Vietnam, John Pilger is consistent. He supports the people of Bosnia. Writing to the *New Statesman* (29 October), Pilger says he does not blindly support the Bosnian government: 'That I support is people's right to defend themselves, in Bosnia as in Indochina or East Timor.'

Rejecting attempts to equate Bosnia with the regimes in Serbia and Croatia, Pilger also firmly denies supporting Western intervention. 'I propose it: both NATO's cynical bombing and the less spectacular intervention of effectively disarming one side.'

Well said!

Verbal power

ADDDING its voice to the pack yapping over Krajina, *Workers Power's* October issue has a three-quarter-page article by Paul Morris dubbing *Socialist Outlook*, and Branca Magas 'Tudjman's Trotskyists'.

'We don't support Tudjman, we support a multi-ethnic Bosnia with democratic rights for all, and the same applies to Croatia. Has *Workers Power*, itself denounced by the Communist Party *Weekly Worker*, decided to join the Stalinists, rather than beat them?'

'We stand proudly by our record,' Morris boasts. What record?

In the early days of Workers Aid for Bosnia, *Workers Power* offered twice, but couldn't spare anyone to take part in convoys. Its July/August issue called for 'heavy artillery, tanks and aircraft' to be sent to Bosnia.

'That sure beats *Workers Aid's* appeal for flour and cooking oil to keep the trackloads of flour and oil on the rail, whereas *Workers Power's* appeals and gags were theoretical, supposed to be the kind of victories that would be won in the pub.'

Charlie Pearce

A conference sponsored by Workers Press

Crisis in the labour movement The need for a new party

**Manchester Town Hall
24 February
11.30am – 5.30pm**

NEXT February a conference will bring together all those who see the need to work towards the formation of a new, socialist party in Britain.

Millions of workers and sections of the middle class are deeply hostile to the Tories. Many of these people at the moment see the election of a Labour government as their only hope.

We understand these feelings. We will continue to work closely with many Labour Party members and voters — in defence of multi-ethnic Bosnia, in defence of the working class against the attacks of the Tories.

Yet we cannot stand aside and allow Blair and his cynical team to take advantage of the desperate hopes of millions of working people that after 17 years of Tory attacks things can only be better under a Labour government.

A Labour government will continue the Tory attacks. So the working class needs a party of its own. And it needs it now, to beat back the Tory government's attacks on the National Health Service and education; its attacks on jobs and benefits; its attack on young people, ethnic minorities, the poor, the homeless, the disadvantaged.

A real fight against the Tory government now will give strength and confidence to the working class to fight in the future against a Labour government and the employers who will stand behind it.

It is because Blair knows this that Labour carries out no fight against the Tories.

■ That is why Blair and company support the anti-trade-union laws. They prefer to have the working class shackled by these laws.

■ And that is why Blair told the TUC last month that a Labour government will not repeal the anti-union laws: they will need these laws for use against the unions!

Blair and his team work day and night to prevent any fight against the Tory attacks. They want to separate the Labour Party from the strength of the organised working class in its trade unions.

Fear

They removed Clause Four because they fear that the aim of 'common ownership' might become a socialist rallying-cry for a working class solution to the crisis.

In removing Clause Four, and in separating the Labour Party from so-called 'trade union power', they are making their final and complete declaration of acceptance of the capitalist order — and they are presenting their credentials to the ruling class as 'the party of government'.

When Blair declares his 'admiration' for Thatcher he is making a declaration against any opposition from below within the Labour Party.

This was made clear in the Labour Party document leaked on 11 September. It speaks of a 'centralised command structure leading directly

to the Party leader', who will have 'sole ultimate responsibility for campaigning'.

This is the leader who shouted about the need to replace 'trade union power' in the Labour Party with... democracy!

Already he talks like a dictator. In his speech to the TUC he refers to the 'futility of opposition,' and suggests psychiatric treatment for those who continue to talk about socialism.

Now Liz Davies is rejected as a Labour candidate on the ground that she is a socialist.

Blair likes to justify his 'new Labour' by repeating that the collapse in the Soviet Union shows that socialism is dead.

On the contrary, it was not socialism but Stalinism that collapsed, with its nationalist 'socialism in one country', its accommodation to world capitalism, its bureaucratic dictatorship over the working class. Blair is against none of these things.

Key

He was only against the social ownership of the means of production. And in fact the fall of Stalinism is the key to the whole new period in which we find ourselves.

Stalinism's fall weakens capitalism and it weakens social-democracy. It opens the way for the working class to rediscover true Marxism, real socialist objectives, and working-class internationalism — and so reconstruct the working-class movement.

Blair is taking the Labour Party in exactly the opposite direction. When his leaked memorandum says that the Party is 'not yet a party sharing the same single and coherent political ideology', he means that socialists will be driven out, and only those who will remain who share his objective of 'rebuilding the country as a great nation again'.

That is reactionary nationalism. It harks back to the bloody exploitation of Empire. It stretches out a hand to the Tory Party and to every reactionary and racist.

It is from this standpoint of 'the nation' that Blair, in his TUC speech, talked of serving the interests of the nation and not of any 'vested interest' such as the trade unions.

The same reactionary nationalism is contained in the Labour Party's support for the Tory government and its criminal failure to bring solidarity and aid to the people of Bosnia in their fight against fascism.

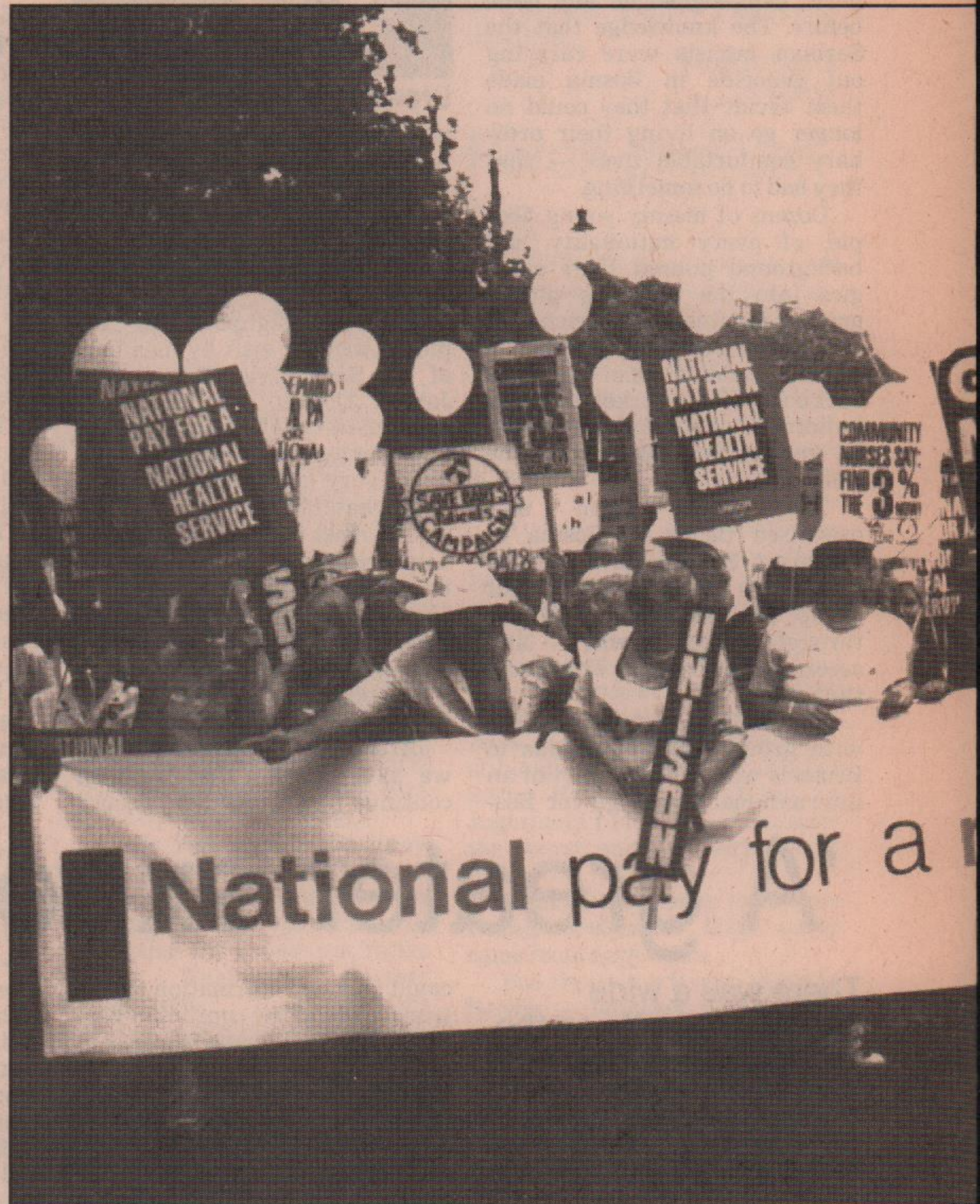
It should surprise nobody that the Labour leadership remains totally unmoved by the fact that in Bosnia there will be:

Either the first of a series of fascist and racist advances in Europe;

Or the first advance by the international working class in halting the fascists.

It is vital to understand the real content of this 'national interest' talk. This is the language of big capital preparing to use state power against the 'sectional' interests of the greedy working class.

Remember how Thatcher dealt



The working class needs a new party now, to beat back the Tory go with the miners — and remember Blair's admiration for Thatcher.

When Blair and Straw declare that the Labour Party is the real party of law and order they mean they will use the power of the state machine to impose their 'single ideology' of conforming to capitalism, not just in the Labour Party but throughout 'the nation'.

Socialists cannot stand aside and watch these preparations against the working class. How can we answer the ruling class and its chosen instrument for the next period, the leadership of the Labour Party?

Every form of working-class resistance and organisation has to be strengthened, but above all these struggles must be politically united.

We believe that a new party has to be formed!

We cannot carry on as if it were simply a question of 'answering Blair' with words and resolutions. Behind Blair stands big business. The Labour Party leadership is the spearhead of the ruling class and its preparations against the working class.

After two years of working for a discussion in the Labour movement of the need for a new, socialist party of the working class, we in the WRP/Workers Press now propose a conference of all those who want to work towards the founding of such a party.

We invite every socialist and labour movement organisation, and every individual socialist to attend, to submit contributions to Workers Press or other publications on the programme, aims and constitution of such a party, and to join with us in the organisation of such a conference.

We do not exclude Labour Party voters and members from attending, even those who, while opposed to the Blair leadership, still hope that the Labour Party can be changed into a

socialist party. On the contrary, you are cordially invited to state your point of view.

We want to turn our paper, Workers Press, into an organiser of this conference.

Our position is this: The conference must address the main issues in the crisis confronting the working class, all of which point to the necessity for a new party.

How can the working-class movement take its internationalist responsibility by uniting in solidarity with the working class of Bosnia and all former Yugoslavia, and defend the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Implications

What are the implications for defending the multi-ethnic working class of Britain against racism, the state machine, and right-wing political forces?

Can the trade unions still pay money to a Labour Party that continues to attack them and will use the anti-union laws against them when in office?

How is this new socialist party to be built in the trade unions?

How to develop policies through which the poor, the unorganised, the most oppressed, can defend themselves against attack and be organised and united with their class as a whole.

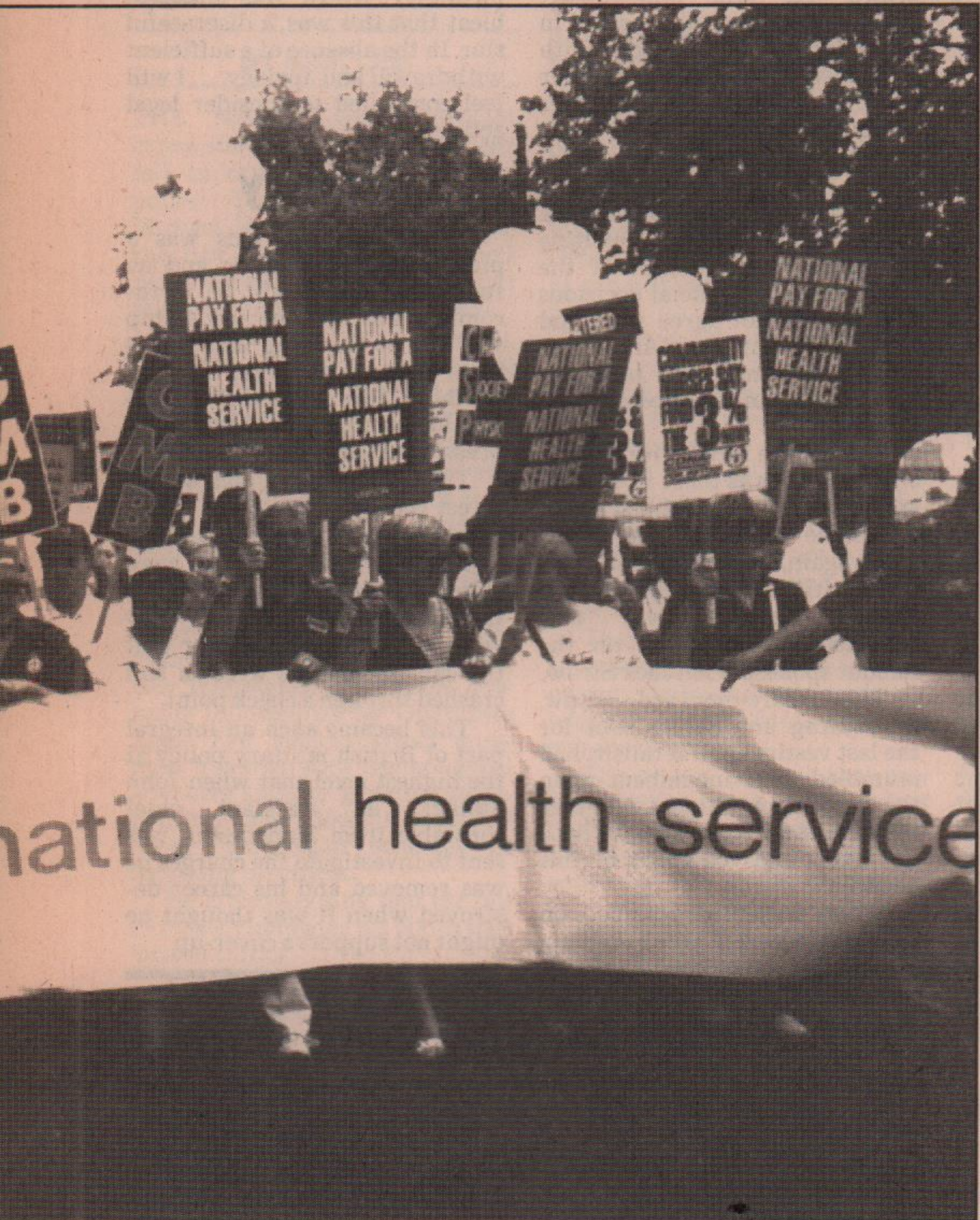
How to defeat and reverse the dismantling of services and of the nationalised industries?

How to defeat the attacks on benefits and on the welfare state as a whole.

How to take the necessary resources out of private hands for the planned use of all.

This, and not the 'partnership' proposed by Blair, is the only way forward. Those capitalist 'partners' are telling us every day that the sys-

Our movement socialist party



Government's attacks on the National Health Service and education

tem cannot afford to sustain the old and the sick, or to educate or employ the young.

Therefore the system must go. Socialism was never more necessary than today.

WHO will build this new socialist party and take on this fight?

1) All those trade unionists who know that the future of trade unionism now means a political step forward to reject Blair's 'partnership' and, on the contrary, change the unions into instruments for the struggle of the working class as a class.

The days of small political groupings such as the 'Broad Left', to deal with the affairs of individual unions, are over.

It is time to go over to the offensive.

Trade unionists for a socialist party should organise all over the country. They will be a vital component of the coming conference.

2) All those young people who are being forced to understand that they must fight for their future against the barbarism of the capitalist order in this century, with its wars, its nuclear weapons, its destruction of nature, its racism.

Already they are coming forward — young workers, employed and unemployed, and students — in Workers Aid for Bosnia, as are more and more young trade unionists. The new party will rally these forces for a socialist youth movement.

3) All those workers from other countries, many of them from the former 'Empire', who have been forced to come to work and live in Britain.

We are for the unity of the working class of all national origins, and for it to lead the fight to organise against the fascists and racists, as well as against the state and those

political parties which enforce anti-immigration laws.

4) All Labour Party members who have fought against Blair and the removal of Clause Four, and who know that there must be a political party through which the working class organises itself to fight for socialism.

5) Unemployed workers and their organisations.

6) Community leaders and activists who defend themselves, their facilities and services, against state attacks.

7) All supporters of a united Ireland.

The new party must give a clear message for the unity of Ireland, as part of a solution for all workers in Ireland and Britain, reviving the best socialist traditions of the movement against British imperialism.

8) All those intellectuals, writers, teachers, researchers, scientists and creative artists and technicians who know that capitalism in its period of decay involves the destruction of human culture, the

future of which depends on the achievement of socialism. The January conference on the Future of Marxism is a stepping-stone to the February conference for a new party.

9) Women, on whom capitalist exploitation and the social problems now rampant because of the decay of the capitalist system bear down most heavily.

The Labour opportunists offer women nothing except a few changes of rule to allow a tiny number of women to join the same careerist rat-race as themselves. A new socialist party will have to work for the equality of women in all respects, and for the self-organisation of working women.

Emancipation

The conference will have to decide what kind of party is needed. We in the WRP/Workers Press fight for a party which bases itself on Marxist theory and its conclusion that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.

So the new party must be a working-class party. The working class is international; so the party must be internationalist.

We shall fight for it to be part of the Workers International, as we are fighting for the reconstruction of the Fourth International, founded in 1938 against Stalinism and all labour traitors. The new party will be the party of the reconstruction of the working-class movement, which is an international task.

It will give a socialist answer to the pressing problems of all working-class people.

It will adopt methods and means, forms of organisation, which develop the independence and initiative of the working class itself, which conform to our socialist aims and advance those aims.

It will work to be represented in Parliament, but it will not be a 'parliamentary' party, tied to the capitalist state. Its aim will be a state formed of workers' councils, whose purpose will be to lay the foundations of socialism and a classless society, in which the state will no longer have any function.

If you would like more details of the Manchester conference, fill in the form below. Write to us with your ideas. Set up committees of members of Workers Aid for Bosnia who are for a new party. Form committees of trade unionists for a socialist party, and set up with us a committee for the conference.

There is no time to lose.

Please send me further details of the 'Crisis in the labour movement' conference.

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The Daiwa débâcle

TOSHIHIDE IGUCHI bids fair to join Nick Leeson in the folklore of international finance.

For although Iguchi has not brought about the collapse of the bank for which he worked in the way that Leeson's activities brought down Barings, this one-time car salesman and graduate from a minor US university has managed to wipe out a tenth of the capital of Daiwa, one of Japan's premier banks.

If early reports are to be believed, Iguchi lost £730 million not as Leeson did by trading in fancy 'derivatives' but in US Treasury bonds. Alarmed by the losses he had sustained during 1984, Iguchi began exceeding an internal limit on the volume of trading and then selling, in Daiwa's name, millions of bonds and bills that had been deposited by clients in the bank's New York branch.

Like Leeson, Iguchi was responsible for both the deals and then carried out the related paper work and authorised settlement of the deals. (In banking parlance he ran both the front and the back offices at Daiwa's New York branch.) He alone knew the bank's true trading situation.

'For 11 years we really believed him and regarded him highly. He created a system where he was in charge of everything,' lamented Daiwa's president Akira Fujita.

His words echoed the sentiment of Barings's group treasurer about Leeson:

'We just accepted his word that the figures required ran into millions. Yes, we just about accepted what he said.'

Alarmed by these developments, finance houses throughout the world are desperately seeking new security measures to guard against possible fraudsters. Potential employees are being psychologically profiled and subjected to handwriting and psychometric tests.

Iguchi's dealings never went through the bank's books. It was a practice he had been engaged in for over a decade, during which his losses mounted and mounted.

Daiwa is in a quite different league from Barings, being among Japan's most powerful banks. But even so, having lost a tenth of its capital it will be forced to sell at a heavy loss large numbers of the shares it holds in other companies.

It will join many other Japanese banks who over the last five years have also been forced to off-load shares to cover losses on bad loans. Before the latest débâcle Daiwa already had some £6,000bn in 'non-performing' loans. The bank says it will also have to sell considerable real-estate assets in order to fill the gaping hole in its accounts.

The financial press have reacted in a predictable manner: this was yet another case of a 'rogue dealer' engaging in transactions beyond those sanctioned by his bosses and in Iguchi's case resorting to widespread forgery to cover up his tracks. Of course this is no explanation at all.

Why was it that both Leeson and Iguchi were allowed almost unlimited freedom of action? Because their deals were making millions for the banks that employed them. While the money rolled in few questions were asked. Indeed Daiwa never discovered what their New York representative was up to until Iguchi wrote to them in July when investigations started. Even after they suspected fraud Daiwa continued to issue shares, and it was not until September that they told the Tokyo authorities of its impending losses. Many of the bank's shareholders will certainly have lost money as a result of these delays.

Even more important, the activities that Leeson and Iguchi were engaged in are becoming increasingly mandatory for any bank wish-

ing to survive intensifying international competition.

Even the biggest banks can no longer expect to live simply by borrowing and lending money. Such activities are of less and less significance for many banks. Investment banking has also become a much less profitable activity. It is these pressures, brought on by the 'deregulation' of the financial system in the 1980s and 90s, that have driven banks to take ever greater risks to restore sagging profits.

The Daiwa losses are a product of the attempts by the big Japanese banks to expand into the international securities market from the 1980s onwards. In fact most of the executives of Japanese banks were blooded by being sent to New York to spend three years or so in buying and selling securities, usually with little supervision from Tokyo and Osaka, where Daiwa had its headquarters. Until the 1980s, like most those of Japanese banks, Daiwa's US operations were of a strictly limited nature, confined to servicing the accounts of a small number of the bank's US-based clients.

Enter Ronald Reagan. It was his policy of running up huge federal government debts that began to change all that. For the debts needed servicing and Japan, with its considerable savings, was in the key position to carry out this role. Japanese banks such as Daiwa saw the chance of big money in the buying and selling of US government bonds.

Iguchi's troubles seemed to have started in 1984 when he lost \$200,000 in one day. His attempts to trade his way out of the loss got him into even bigger difficulties. Last year his troubles mounted as US bond prices fell following a series of unexpected rises in interest rates, and Iguchi's dealing got wilder and wilder. On some days he was trading \$100m dollars at a time.

The question is not whether Iguchi was a rogue. This weekend he will have completed his second week behind bars. If convicted he faces up to 30 more years. The real question is why such people find themselves in key roles in the international financial system. They are there because of the growing fragility of that system.

That is why we can confidently predict that Toshihide Iguchi will by no means be the last character to appear in this unfolding story.

Back in the news

ONCE again the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) is back in the news as the City waits anxiously for the release of the September figure. (The PSBR measures how much the government is forced to borrow to cover its expenses beyond the money it raises in taxes.) What is worrying the banks and financial institutions is that the PSBR is not coming down as it should.

At its peak of £46bn two years ago, it was expected to fall rapidly as the economic 'recovery' got under way. But far from its falling to an anticipated level of £13bn, the government now admits that it will still be at a near-£30bn at the end of this year, with some estimating that the figure could be as high as £35bn. This means that the Bank of England has to borrow £3bn every month just to square the government's books. This is one reason why the Bank of England's governor, Eddie George, makes persistent demands for an increase in interest rates, which would make the Bank's job that much easier.

Among the main reasons for the government's rising debt is that taxes on things bought in the shops are rising far more slowly than previously predicted, another indication of the real nature of the supposed economic recovery.

A superb historical novel

PERSONAL COLUMN

gises to them: 'It has taken me a Long Long time to realise what we did to you... Perhaps one day, in some way, we can learn to live together in Love and Respect?'

And with those words the book ends.

HERE is a theme that, attempted by a lesser writer, might at times steer dangerously close to sentimentality. But Gregory is too sensitive and talented a novelist ever to fall into this trap.

From first page to last, the reader is drawn into two disparate worlds and sees alternately, as it were, through two pairs of eyes, two sets of cultural norms and preconceptions.

At first, there is nothing but mutual incomprehension. This reaches an apogee of poignancy when Died of Shame dies and cannot be buried properly.

'No cooking pot, no piece of chalk, no beads for her hair, no bowl, no spoon, no sharp knife, no hoeing stick, no purse with coins or cowrie shells, no comb. No little pretty women's things that a young wife should have laid in her grave beside her, none of these things could go with Died of Shame to the other world.'

'And her son, her young son who should be the first to say farewell to her, who should wash her face in the funeral rites and kiss her goodbye — she had left him before he could say more than her name, before he could do more than call and call for her, and never hear an answer.'

But Gregory is too accomplished an artist to paint only in these sombre colours and not to show also the dawn of something else, in the relations between these uprooted Africans and their white fellow domestics.

It is night. In the kitchen the Africans are dancing to Mehuru's singing and his drumming on an upturned wooden washtub, and the accompanying drumming, with metal fork and bare hand on a brass saucepan, of the Manding Kbara.

The children drag Cook forward, trying to make her dance. 'You ask Brown to dance a jig for you', she says. 'She had an Irish mother!' And then:

'Mehuru... hefted the washtub under his arm. He snatched up a wooden spoon and walked towards Brown, smiling, drumming as he advanced... Brown... stood before him and followed his movements like a thin English mirror of his potent image. He shuffled and stamped, and she followed him, he drifted to the right and she moved as he did.'

'He turned and strode forward and she was behind him, then he whirled and hammered on his drum and called out to her and Brown hitched her skirts up in both hands and let her feet pound into the rhythm of an Irish jig, as wild a dance as could ever be — the deep irresistible drumming of Africa with the lightning heel-tapping toe-stamping dance of a Celt.'

And the hidden, watching Frances witnesses this 'sudden explosion of joy and sensuality and passion on the stone floor of her cold empty house'.

Here is the very dawn of the acculturation process. It may never have corresponded, in every last detail, to the scene that Gregory depicts; but her masterly word picture is an imaginative *tour de force* that rings absolutely true.

So does this whole superb book. Don't miss it — and don't miss the television serial when it comes to the screen.

Frances dies giving birth to their son. In her will she frees her slaves, all but two of whom have been captured while on a mission to unite the inland polities against the slave trade, and who has found friends and allies among the radicals of Bristol.

Peter Fryer

'Death on the Rock' judgement shows state's contempt

BY JOHN STEELE

ONCE again the savagery of Britain's rule in Ireland has been exposed. Last week's decision by the European Court of Human Rights on the three IRA members murdered at Gibraltar in March 1988 confirmed how the British state throws away all pretext of democratic actions in order to try and deal with the nationalist revolt.

By finding that 'more force than absolutely necessary' was used when Daniel McCann, Mairead Farrell and Sean Savage were summarily executed by the SAS in a hail of bullets, the Court confirmed what was already widely known and revealed in such programmes as Thames Television's *Death on the Rock*.

Britain has been found guilty of abuses of human rights by this court more times than the combined total of all other countries. Most cases have involved Irish people.

The conflict in the north of Ireland has consistently revealed how democratic rights are thrust aside by the state in order to maintain power.

It has also shown how sections of the British armed forces and

ruling class are prepared to physically eliminate people, not only to 'strike fear' but because they have lost confidence in their own judicial system.

All three of the IRA members, who were unarmed, were under surveillance by the SAS and Spanish police and could have been arrested from the moment they landed at Malaga airport two days before the killings.

From November 1987, the British and Spanish authorities had been monitoring the actions of McCann and Savage who spent a lot of time driving up and down the coast from Malaga to Gibraltar.

A joint-forces committee led by MI5 was formed in Gibraltar but it was in London that a decision was taken to use the SAS and execute the IRA members.

Anonymous

At the inquest anonymous SAS and MI5 members sat behind screens and claimed that they were 100 per cent sure that a car bomb had been planted and that McCann, Savage and Farrell had remote control devices and weapons.

In fact, of course, the car left by the IRA members did not con-

tain a bomb and they were unarmed. As MI5 undoubtedly knew, they were still involved in reconnaissance and the car with unprimed Semtex was at another Spanish resort, Marbella, further along the coast.

After the European court's decision, the Tories rushed to defend the actions of their agents. Deputy prime minister Heseltine expressed the contempt of the ruling class for judicial decisions that it does not agree with and confirmed that the SAS killers would continue to be used not only in Britain but elsewhere in Europe.

'If we were faced with similar circumstances as those in Gibraltar, I have not the slightest doubt the same decisions would be taken again,' he announced.

Heseltine's contempt for the Court's decision was also reflected in his attack on the Labour spokesperson Jack Straw.

The mealy-mouthed Straw, scrambling around his soul for the last vestiges of liberalism, had mumbled: 'It is incumbent upon the British government, whether they like it or not, to observe both the letter and the spirit of this decision.'

When Heseltine rounded on him and accused him of giving

'encouragement to the terrorist mentality', Straw was stung to blurt that this was 'a disgraceful slur. In the absence of a sufficient withdrawal and apology... I will feel compelled to consider legal action.'

Empty

Needless to say this was a piece of empty rhetoric and no such legal action will be forthcoming. The Labour leadership will not do anything that makes them seem more liberal than the Tories on 'law and order' including the maintenance of brutal oppression in the north of Ireland.

The Gibraltar slayings were a direct continuation of the 'shoot to kill' policy in the six counties.

Here British soldiers were primed to shoot at people under the pretext that they felt they were in danger of attack or that the car the victims were in had crashed through a check point.

This became such an integral part of British military policy at the highest level that when John Stalker, an assistant chief constable from Manchester, was sent to investigate the charges he was removed and his career destroyed when it was thought he might not support a cover-up.

October issue of Workers' Liberty magazine out now

Features in this issue include Darcus Howe on the Black Panthers, debate on Bosnia, Bob Pitt on John Maclean and Peter Cadogan continues the discussion about the IS-SWP tradition. £1.20 from Workers' Liberty, PO Box, 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques to 'WL Publications'.

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Day of solidarity with McDonald's workers

12 October 1995

The High Court libel trial brought by the \$26 billion-a-year McDonald's corporation against two unwaged London Greenpeace supporters is now the longest libel trial in British history. In October, over 30 ex-McDonald's workers will be giving evidence about their experience of organising in the face of McDonald's hostility to trade unions, and exploitation of workers. 12 October is the third anniversary of the death of Mark Hopkins, a worker electrocuted at McDonald's Arndale Centre store in Manchester. We aim to leaflet workers at every McDonald's branch in the country with information about employment rights (particularly health and safety) encouraging them to get together and organise against their bosses who are exploiting them for massive profit. We are building up an independent national network of locally-based contacts involving McDonald's workers and activists. Write to us (with donation if possible) for bundles of leaflets to give out on the day.

London: McDonald's on the Strand, Charing X tube, 5-6pm.
Manchester: Mark Hopkins's parents are organising a picket of the Arndale store, 12-1pm.
Support network for McDonald's workers, c/o Colin Roach Centre, 53 Clarence Road, London E5. Tel: 0181-533 7111.

Fighting McWage slavery

SE London WRP

Lecture series on Marxist philosophy
Four: *Historical Materialism* (2)
Monday 16 October, 8pm
141 Greenwich High Road (near Greenwich Station)

Ken Tarbuck memorial meeting

Sunday 14 October, 3pm.
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Nearest tube Holborn.

Bosnia — Solidarity not Charity

An account of the August Tuzla Trade Union convoy
Produced by Tony Samphier, NUJ delegate on the convoy
Published by Workers Aid for Bosnia

Get your union branch, Labour Party, etc., to buy copies
Available for £1 from Workers Aid for Bosnia, PO Box 9, Eccles SO, Manchester M30 7FX. Tel: 0171-582 5462.

Arkan's thugs back at their dirty work

THUGS and mercenaries organised by the Serb gangster and warlord Arkan are back at work in occupied Bosnia. Some 2,000 Bosnian Muslims were rounded up by them in a three-day operation around the town of Sanski Most, in western Bosnia, at the end of last month.

They were taken to a village called Sehovci. Their fate is unknown. The round-up came as Serb forces launched a counter-offensive into territory which the Bosnian army had recaptured. They began with missile and artillery attacks on Bosnian towns, including a cluster-bomb rocket fired into Travnik.

Bosnian refugees returning to the homes with liberating Bosnia and Herzegovina army troops have been finding mass graves of people slaughtered by the Serb nationalists. More than 11,000 Muslims and others could have been wiped out by Serb nationalists in western Bosnia.

Arkan's 'Tigers', or Serbian Volunteer Guard, were responsible for some of the worst atrocities committed in the Bosnian war, and before this, for mass killing of civilians at Vukovar in Croatia.

They came into Srebrenica after it fell to Serb forces, crossing the border behind regular Serb units, accompanied by Greek fascist mercenaries, to carry on terrorist 'ethnic cleansing' of Muslims.

Arkan himself, real name

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

Zeliko Raznjatovic, was already wanted by Interpol as a criminal racketeer before the war, and suspected of working for the Yugoslav secret service. His volunteers were organised by the Interior Ministry in Belgrade, and financed by it, although they have supplemented their income by plunder and black marketeering.

Arkan has headquarters at Erdut, Serbian-occupied east Croatia. The UN, just up the road, looks the other way as this war criminal directs his army of thugs. He has been kept in the field by Serbia's Milosevic regime to do its dirty work at home as well as in neighbouring lands.

If tomorrow Milosevic was replaced by the fascist Radical Party leader Seselj, Arkan's job would remain secure. Should circumstances change he is probably wealthy enough to avoid being brought to trial.

■ ELDERLY Serbs were murdered when Croat forces destroyed their village in the Krajina, according to human rights groups in Croatia.

Ivan Zvonimir Cicak of the Croatian Helsinki Committee said at least 12 people between 60 and 85 were killed in the village of Varivode. The committee's investigators found bloodstains and body tissue on the floors and walls of houses.

Reports by European Union and UN monitors said civilians had been murdered around Knin after the Croatian army recaptured it, and that a 'deliberate hostile policy' of looting, killing and burning had been pursued to make sure Serbs did not return.

The Croatian opposition group Transition to Democracy warned in August that such actions made nonsense of the Tudjman government's invitation to Serb citizens to come home. Croatian authorities say they have arrested about 400 people, including soldiers and police, for looting and burning.

In Luxemburg, where EU foreign ministers were meeting, it was reported that atrocity reports would spoil Croatia's progress towards EU membership. Some of Tudjman's backers in the EU had hoped the reports would not be published.

Tudjman insults Bosnians — and confirms carve-up aim

BY JANOS BOROVI
in Paris

CROATIA'S president Franjo Tudjman has told a French newspaper that he aims to 'Europeanise the Bosnian Muslims', and confirmed that he wants to carve up Bosnia, to 'put landmarks between Oriental and Western Europe' as part of imperialism's 'new world order'.

Tudjman, whose forces hold a sizeable chunk of Bosnia-Herzegovina, either seized in war with Bosnia or the more recent offensive against Serb Chetniks, was invited to Paris by President Chirac on the eve of the US-hosted peace talks in New York. The Croatian president told the conservative daily 'Le Figaro' (25 September):

'To establish a new and durable international order in the south-east of Europe, the normalisation of relationships between

Croatia and Serbia has an importance comparable to that of the Franco-German treaty for the construction of Europe.

'Thanks to the efforts of the West, the creation of a Croatian-Muslim federation has been proposed. Croatia gave its agreement to this for strategic reasons. Thus we have accepted the task given us by Europe.

'That is to Europeanise the Bosnian Muslims, to act for their best possible integration into European civilisation and to avoid them becoming the instruments of fundamentalism in Europe...'

As well as confirming suspicions about his government's war aims, the racist arrogance of Tudjman is glaring. He permitted revival of the pro-Nazi Ustashe militia, tried rewriting history to excuse its barbaric crimes, and encouraged massacres in Bosnia.

Now he offers to 'civilise' Bosnian Muslims for another 'new

order' in Europe! 'The most important problem is territorial delimitation,' Tudjman said.

'According to the Geneva peace agreement, Bosnia-Herzegovina remains a member of the United Nations.

'But the fact that the Serb Republic of Bosnia as well as the Croat-Muslim federation could be linked respectively to Serbia and Croatia proves that the question is not only to delimit the areas of influences between Serbs, Croats and Muslims but to put landmarks between Oriental and Western Europe.'

Speaking about his map, drawn on the back of a menu at the Guildhall banquet in London, which showed a carved-up Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tudjman says: 'This map expresses a historical reality,' adding: 'We have all a historical interest in realising this federation.'

'For the Muslims it is almost the only way to survive on this territory.

'If, obviously, they become Europeans and not fundamentalists.'

Tudjman is pitching to anti-Muslim racists in France, just as Serb nationalist leader Karadzic has done before.

His frank avowal of designs on Bosnia, coupled with hopes for a deal with Serbia, confirms that Bosnian leaders were right to insist on the integrity of a sovereign Bosnian state before going to peace talks. Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhammed Sacirbey has said there will be no federation with Croatia.

It must be underlined that Chirac has not protested at the Croat president's declarations. On the contrary, at the end of Tudjman's visit, both the French and Croatian sides stressed the 'friendly' atmosphere of their secret discussions.

The fight for Bosnia against racist carve-ups must be waged by workers in Bosnia, Croatia, and here in western Europe.



Bangladesh garment workers demonstrate for a day off a week, Friday 22 September. National Garment Workers' Federation fax: 00 880 2 867 485

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Chirac may ditch PM

BY PIERRE DUPONT

FRENCH prime minister Alain Juppé may be sacked by President Chirac amid continuing rows over his personal finances.

The bad news is that Chirac's choice to replace him could be former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, whose hardline reputation on race and 'law and order' appeals to National Front voters.

Juppé, who as Foreign Minister planned to offer eastern Bosnia to Serb rule, is in trouble over his generosity with Paris real estate to himself and his family. He took over a large flat on the

Rue Jacob for 11,000 francs (£1,400) a month, well below its market price, after the city had spent a million francs refurbishing it.

A taxpayers' association is suing, alleging that Juppé broke the law by signing the lease himself, when he was deputy-mayor of Paris.

The Paris prosecutor's office is investigating who authorised the work on the flat.

The anti-corruption agency SCPC says Juppé could be liable to prosecution for using his influence to reduce the rent of son Laurent Juppé's apartment by 1,000 francs (£128).

If either of these cases came to court, and Juppé was convicted, he would risk jail and a £60,000 fine, and could be declared ineligible for public office for life.

Even if Chirac himself, who was mayor, escaped the scandal, Justice Minister Jacques Toubon would probably not.

He tried to suppress the SCPC report by putting pressure on judge Bernard Challe to resign. The judge refused.

At a meeting of French mayors Juppé (who is mayor of Bordeaux as well as prime minister) said the country's revenue was in a disastrous state, with nearly 40 billion francs (£5 billion) in VAT

and company taxes not paid this year.

'In the face of this situation of national peril, I am forced to make savings.' He has sacked one finance minister, and had a row with the successor over taxes and plans to help the car industry.

France is facing a strike wave, starting with Air France workers, and a one-day strike by public sector workers on 10 October.

Unpopular abroad for France's nuclear tests, and steadily losing popularity at home as well, President Chirac may try to make a saving by dispensing with a prime minister seen as a liability.