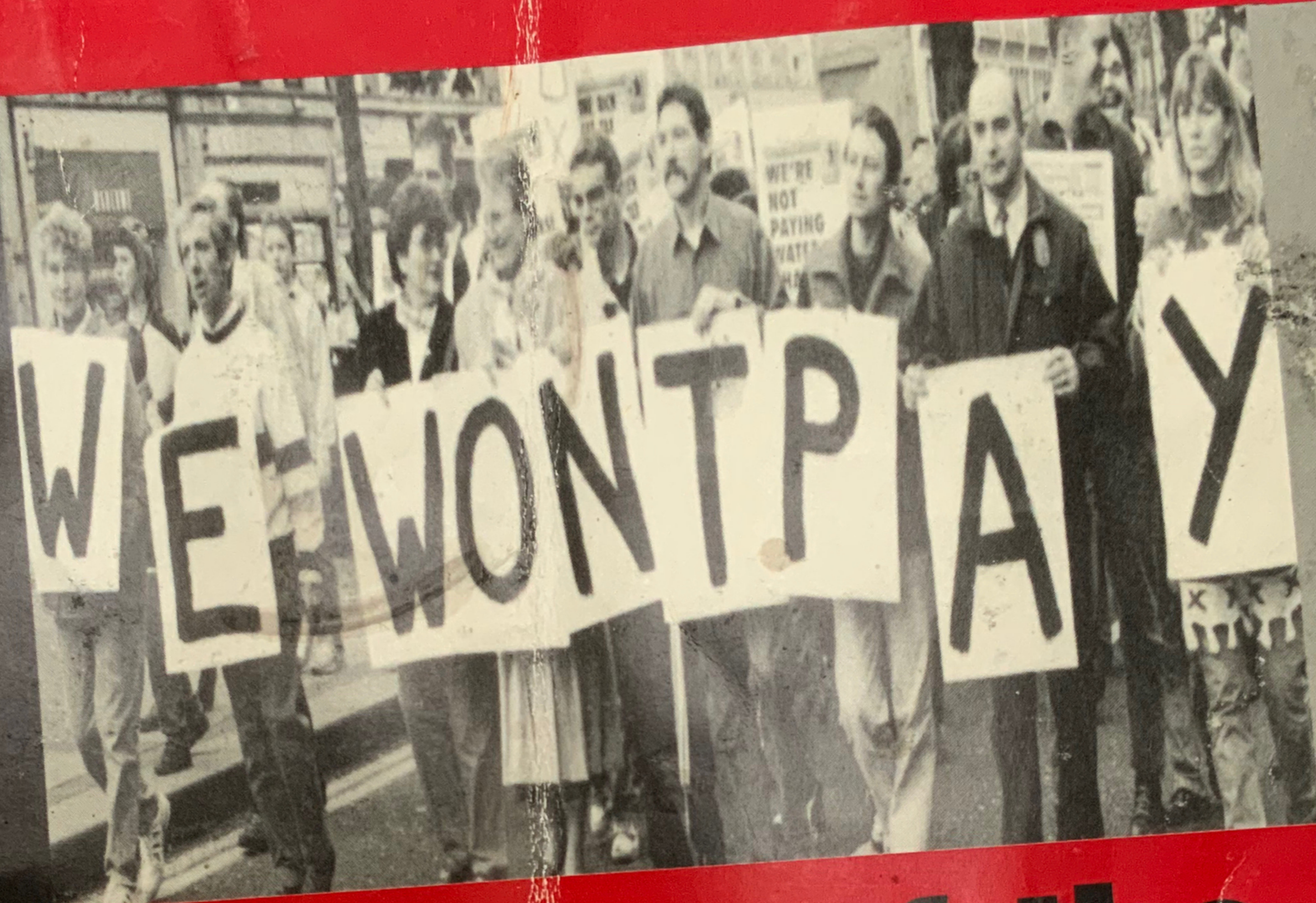


Socialist View

Political journal of the Socialist Party



Lessons of the WATER CHARGES STRUGGLE

Issue 8
Spring 2001
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O'DONOGHUE

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"PEACE PROCESS" UNDER STRAIN

The institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement have now been in place for one year, allowing for the period when it was suspended. Once again the entire process appears to be at an impasse. Whether it gets back on track or not is an open question, dependent on a number of interlocking developments.

By **Ciaran Mulholland**

The Agreement is ultimately flawed, based as it is on sectarian division. It is not designed to overcome this division but to copperfasten it. Whilst there is now a relatively peaceful situation, this peace is far from complete, and the Agreement has done little to improve the day to day lives for working people. Sooner or later the contradictions inherent within the peace process and the Agreement will bring it crashing down.

The issues of policing, decommissioning and demilitarisation remain unresolved. Against a background of low level violence, and with elections and the marching season looming, a resolution of these issues seems very far away. Nevertheless the main pro-Agreement parties have much to lose if the Executive is suspended. It is in all their interests to demonstrate that the institutions are working. The problem is that they have sold the Agreement to their potential electorates in very different ways and they find it very difficult to bridge the gap that divides them.

Assuming that the elections go ahead in May/June, and are not postponed because of the foot and mouth crisis, it is likely that the Executive will limp on until then, though a suspension cannot be ruled out. The outcome of the elections, particularly on the Unionist side, will be crucial. There is a real risk that Trimble could take a pounding at the hands of the DUP in both the Westminster and local elections. Such a scenario could fatally undermine the Agreement. In order to avoid this the two governments may decide to suspend the Executive unless the Republican movement come up with some movement on arms. It is probable that the Adams leadership are inclined to give

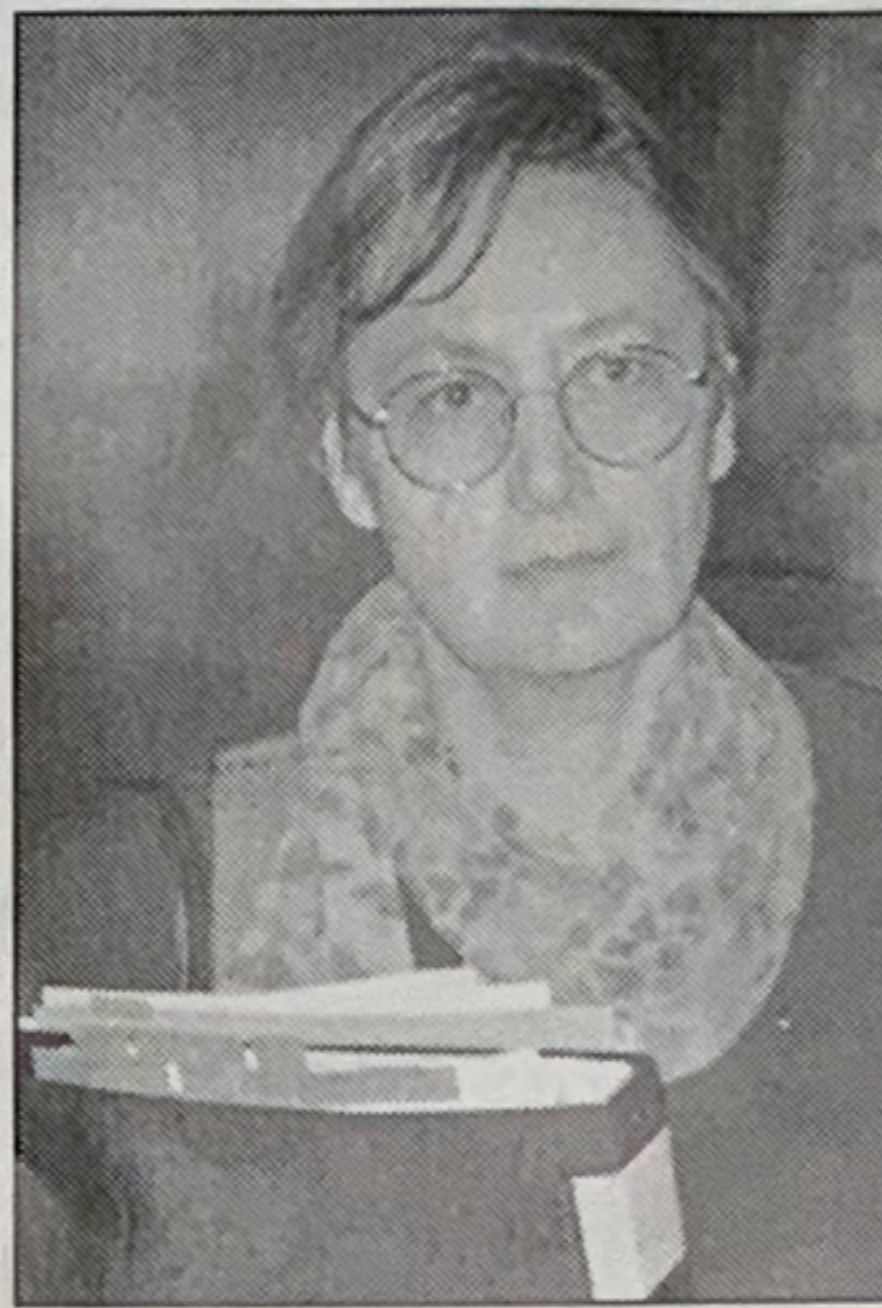
on arms but are concerned about the risk of a further split unless such a move is accompanied by further concessions on policing or military installations.

If the SDLP were to move to back the new police force this would go a long way to bolster Trimble's position, but such a move would pose risks for the SDLP in their electoral battle with Sinn Fein. The recent talks have taken place against a background of continuing low level violence. In January and February there were more than 50 pipe bomb and gun attacks on Catholic homes across the North. Last year there were only 50 pipe bomb and blast bomb attacks in the entire year. The attacks have occurred in North and West Belfast and in towns in Counties Antrim and Derry, especially Larne, Ballymena and Coleraine. Whilst in the main it is Catholic families that have been targeted there have also been attacks on Protestants, especially in Larne, and a Protestant taxi driver was the victim of the most recent fatal attack. So called punishment attacks continue on a nightly basis. There is only a relative peace in the working class areas of the North.

Trade union and community activists in a town like Larne should establish anti-sectarian committees. A firm lead from these committees could mobilise both Protestants and Catholics to isolate the bigots in the communities, through protests, marches, meetings and pickets.

The recent threat to staff at the Mater Hospital was met by the hospital unions calling a protest on the Crumlin Road. It is quite possible that this protest was one of the reasons that the attacks became less common in late February.

A successful movement along these lines would encourage others to take action against the paramilitaries and ultimately free all communities from the nightmare of daily sectarian threats, harassment and violence. Without such a movement there is the risk of the situation deteriorating as we face into the upcoming elections and the marching season, especially if the Agreement institutions further unravel.



Trimble and De Bruin.

The Assembly parties have all aped New Labour's attempts to ingratiate themselves with the employers. They are selling Northern Ireland as "a good place to do business", by which they mean low pay for workers and compliant unions. They are fully behind the Private Finance Initiative and Public-Private Partnerships as methods of financing developments in the public sector, despite the fact that the result will be poorer services and the enriching of a few at the expense of the many. Indeed Martin McGuinness has announced that eight schools are to be built under Public-Private Partnerships in the next few years. Parents recently picketed the first school to be built under this arrangement, Wellington College in Belfast, angry that the new school will lose most of its playing fields so that the private developer can make millions by building houses on the land.

All of the Assembly parties are pro-market, including those who voiced socialist phraseology in the past. They have not stepped away from the New Labour line on any major economic or social issue, though they have made some minor concessions on financial support for students and on free travel for pensioners. They have managed to reward themselves handsomely with pay rises and increased holidays and they continue the sectarian bickering which contributes to sectarian tension on the ground.

What working people require is a mass working class party that can win the support of both Catholic and Protestant workers and which takes independent, socialist positions on the key political issues. Such a party does not exist at present and will only be created through mass struggles and the pressure of events. The Socialist Party intends to stand in the local elections and we hope to return our sitting councillor, Johnnie McLaughlin, in Omagh. The inherent unity and strength of the working class remains intact and will be exercised in the political arena in time. A small but significant victory for the Socialist Party in the local elections will help to bring that time forward.

All of the Assembly parties are pro-market, including those who voiced socialist phraseology in the past.

O'DONOGHUE STEPS UP DEPORTATIONS

Over the last period, the government has engaged in a cynical and secretive campaign to deport asylum seekers from the country. This, despite predictions that the economy will face severe shortages of labour in the near future.

By Matt Waine

On 15 February, Joe Higgins, accompanied by members of the Socialist Party and others in the anti-deportation movement, were called to Dublin Airport to try to stop the deportation of a Nigerian asylum seeker, Blessing Ogueri. This man happened to be visiting Dublin the day of his arrest and it was only because of the colour of his skin that he was picked off the streets to face imminent deportation. Were it not for the work of anti-deportation activists, Blessing would have been deported straight away. We managed to delay the deportations for a few days so that the discrepancies surrounding Blessing's case could be challenged. At the same time we were able to successfully challenge deportation orders against several other asylum seekers. Unfortunately despite our best efforts the deportation of Blessing Ogueri went ahead. This could well prove to be a death sentence for a man who had witnessed a massacre of Christians in the Hausa North of Nigeria and who – as a Christian preacher – had himself been threatened.

The state has seriously streamlined the deportations procedure so that a person is arrested, brought to court and expelled in the shortest possible period of time, without arousing the suspicion of other asylum seekers or refugee support groups. In fact by the time we hear of an arrest, it is often too late. Blessing's was one of the

first cases we heard about this year. However the *Irish Times* reported that the government has already deported 26 people since the start of January.

The hypocrisy of this government has never been so blatant. We have one minister jetting around the world, begging workers to come to Ireland to work, while another minister actively endorses the forced deportations of people more than willing to work, people who face appalling of poverty and sometimes the threat of imprisonment or even death when deported.

This fact alone proves the racist nature of state policy. This government has said it will issue 285,000 work visas for immigrant workers, needed for the implementation of the National Plan. Why is it that none of the asylum seekers or refugees in Ireland at the moment can even apply for these work visas?

A key part of the government's approach has been the utterly false distinction between "bogus" asylum seekers who are coming to Ireland for economic reasons and the "genuine" cases of those fleeing persecution. As the overwhelming rate of rejection of applications makes clear, the government believes almost all asylum seekers are "bogus".

We believe ordinary people fleeing economic disasters caused by neo-liberal policies have as much right to seek asylum as political dissidents. This was after all the situation which faced hundreds of thousands of Irish people in the past.

But we also need to nail the lie that only a handful of those who managed to get here have any legitimate fear for their physical safety if they are deported.

Recall the way that the Kosovars were welcomed here with open arms two years ago. This was at least partly because

we were reminded every day of the situation there by the media.

But the suffering in a country like Nigeria – from which a large proportion of asylum seekers in Ireland comes – receives far less attention.

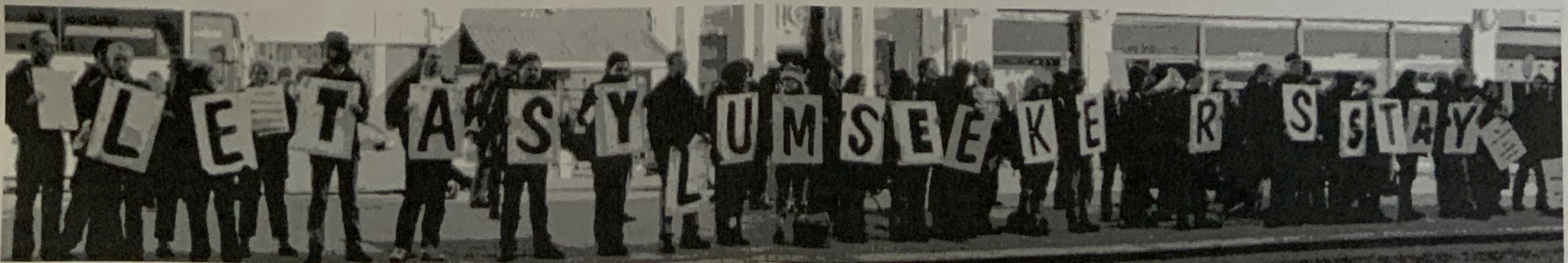
Although the brutal military dictatorship in Nigeria has been replaced by a civilian government, repression and even murder of political dissidents continues. There has also been escalating ethnic tension which has led to massacres like that which Blessing witnessed.

On top of that, the majority of the Nigerian population lives in dire poverty while companies like Shell are allowed to run off with huge profits from the country's massive oil resources in return for the arms they provide the corrupt regime. Average incomes have fallen by 75% since the 1980s. This is the reality of life for tens of millions of Nigerians and this is the nature of the regime which the Irish government colludes with to deport people.

Blessing Ogueri's case makes clear that the state's deportations machine will not be stopped by a handful of activists running around Dublin Airport. A serious discussion needs to be urgently had among the genuine anti-deportation activists the best way to respond to the government's strategy.

The Socialist Party calls for asylum seekers to be given the right to work and for an immediate end to deportations. We are opposed to all racist immigration controls. Nevertheless, as a first step there should be a serious campaign for an amnesty for all asylum seekers in Ireland. This campaign could bring together a wide range of political forces and the labour movement. If victorious, it would deal a powerful blow to state racism.

We need to nail the lie that only a handful of those who managed to get here have any legitimate fear for their physical safety if they are deported.



WATER CHARGES STRUGGLE

The lessons for today

Water charges were strongly resisted throughout the country since 1983. In the end it was the intense battle waged in Dublin for three years which resulted in their abolition in 1996. There were many facets of this campaign but this article will try to outline the key lessons that can be learned and on that basis pose the tasks facing the new movement against refuse charges.

By Kevin McLoughlin

Water charges of between £70-£90 were passed in February 1994 by the three newly formed councils that covered Dublin's suburban districts, Fingal, South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown. The extent of the opposition can only be understood if you take into account the big political and economic developments that were happening at the time.

Tax evasion by big business was rampant. The tax official's union estimated they owed £2,500 million in unpaid tax. On many fronts they were getting away with murder. As an example, the Beef Tribunal found that Larry Goodman's companies were involved in fraudulent practices. Instead of being penalised, the government used tax payers money to bail his company out of debt and to pay the £100 million fine that Europe had imposed because of his actions. To add insult to injury, Fianna Fail and Labour had just brought in the second tax amnesty in six years, which wrote off a massive £500 million in unpaid taxes from the rich.

Tax inequality

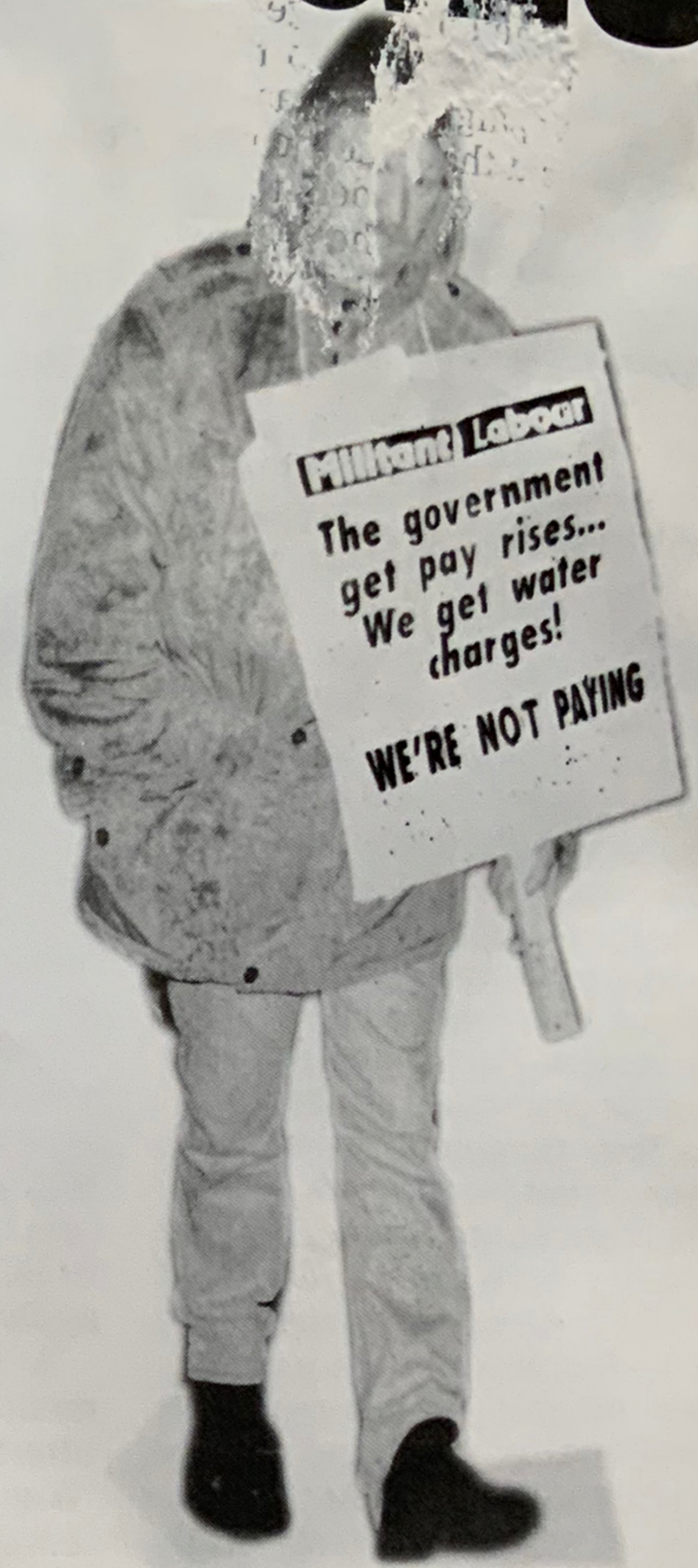
Political corruption had created a very angry, left leaning mood against the Fianna Fail/Labour government. The Labour Party had tapped into the anti-establishment mood in the 1992

election, winning a massive 33 seats. However, within months they were in government with Fianna Fail in one of the most unpopular administrations in the history of the state. The mood of disgust was palpable.

For workers the taxation system had long been the sharpest expression of the growing inequality in society, a blatant case of one law for the rich and another for the rest of us. At the time, PAYE workers paid 86% of all income tax. Farmers paid 1.7% and the self employed paid 11.6%. Corporation tax accounted for only 11% of total tax income. In reality the PAYE worker was paying for everything. The fact that local taxes in the form of rates had been abolished in 1978 was of little comfort.

The government at that time had given a commitment to compensate local authorities through a rate support grant, which would increase as the financial requirements of the councils expanded. In 1978 they gave £79.3 million to the local authorities, by 1983 this had increased to £163 million. After 1984 the government in general withheld additional cash. By the early 90s the councils were cash starved getting in total £185.9 million when the grant should have been £285.8 million. When – rather than fight a battle with the government for resources – the councils decided to increase their funds by imposing another double tax on already overburdened workers, the mood of opposition was intense.

While they started at less than £100, people knew the charges would increase to anything up to £400 or £500 – equivalent to two weeks income for many. But there was another side to people's opposition. For most it was a political decision that they'd had enough of being ripped off by the politicians and in principle they were not going to pay. The by now traditional opposition to double tax was inflamed further when they began to charge for



water, something that most people considered to be a basic human right.

Angry mood

Militant Labour, as we were called then, was alive to this issue right from the very start. Having Joe Higgins as a councillor meant we were on the inside track and this gave us real authority in taking up the issue. The party was also open to seeing the potential in the issue because our consciousness had been raised by the role our comrades had played in defeating the Poll Tax in Britain. We organised three public meetings in our own name when the bills dropped just to test the mood in Swords, Mulhuddart and Tallaght. The response was strong, over 200 angry residents attended. Certain things became quite clear.

There was instinctive support for a non-payment boycott from those who attended. But it was vital that this argument was won not just amongst the activists but with the mass of people right throughout the affected areas. The basis of any campaign had to be substantial non-payment in order to have a chance of victory. It was also obvious that, with a few exceptions, existing res-

idents' or tenants' groups were not coordinated enough, energetic enough nor representative enough to build the type of campaign that was necessary. We concluded that a new campaign on this issue alone needed to be established, rooted in the communities where workers lived and open to everyone. The first march we organised in Swords on a very sunny Saturday 28 May, illustrated the potential when 300 locals marched up and down the main street.

Mass campaign

There were over 160,000 houses in the council areas. We established the Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaign and began to systematically call public meetings and formally establish the campaign in area after area. 20,000 information bulletins were distributed as we went. 1,000 large posters advocating non-payment and with a contact phone number were put up in areas where the campaign wasn't yet organised to register that it existed and would be in their locality soon. On 24 September 1994, the Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaign convened a conference to pull together all the local groups and establish clearly the principles of the movement and a campaign structure and leadership. 130 attended the event. A further 500 marched in our first city centre demo on Saturday, 26 November. It was a working class march from start to finish.

While there were areas that the campaign still had to penetrate, as a result of six months of hard work the campaign was firmly established with an elected leadership, democratic structures and groups locally which had hundreds of active participants. By the end of the year average non-payment stood at 65%, the figure was much higher in the key working class estates.

Over the next two years the campaign extended and consolidated. The campaign went through different phases of lull and intense activity. Local public meetings were held regularly. A leafletting network was established which covered over 60,000 houses. More than

15,000 households paid £2 to join the campaign. This money was used as a legal defence fund. All-Dublin activists' meetings were convened when necessary. Two well attended conferences and another march were held, as well as countless protests designed to exert maximum pressure on the politicians.

Showing the strength of the movement which had been built, an incredible event was held on 8 March 1997 in the National Concert Hall in Dublin. The charges had been abolished three months earlier. 500-600 people who still had legal action pending against them packed the main auditorium to demand the dropping of all court cases. Each person willingly paid the £10 registration fee. There was an emboldened mood of confidence and pride that our movement had defeated the charges.

As was often the case the media ignored this extremely significant event but it was clear to anyone in attendance that we had come through the most significant community-based political movement that Dublin had seen in decades.

Tactics & strategy

Why was the Dublin water charges campaign able to achieve a victory unlike other campaigns on similar issues? The leadership provided by Militant Labour served to maximise the power of the working class communities. Our analysis gave us a clearer view of how the battle was likely to unfold. We were able to outline at the outset a strategy and at the decisive times adopted the best tactics to counter the attacks of the councils.

The imposition of the charges was not a decision taken by small time local politicians on a whim. Undoubtedly they underestimated the potential for the opposition to double taxation to get organised. However this was a serious attack by the ruling class as part of their wider offensive against ordinary people. There was a lot at stake. The ground had been prepared by forcing through charges in the rest of the country. They kept the most difficult area till last. They wanted to impose the charges

from what they considered to be a position of strength.

We explained that regular protests, marches or lobbying of the politicians alone would not be enough to defeat the charges. We were taking on three councils and the government who had serious resources including the legal system and the state on their side. Of course we created intense political pressure particularly in the run up to the yearly estimates meetings but the charges were very unlikely to be voted out in such a way. They would try to ride out such stormy periods. The movement needed to be much more extensive than that if it was going to win. The battle was likely to go on for a number of years.

Non-payment

Non-payment had to be the basis of the campaign. It was a way for every person to participate in the campaign and it linked thousands of people in united action. It was the nub of the issue, they want your money so you have to refuse to give it to them. We argued strongly that without non-payment there was no campaign. Mass non-payment had to be established and then maintained, regardless of the consequences. However, it is one thing to state that and it is another thing to be able to withstand the attacks and intimidation that the councils would then unleash on residents. Crucially it was the capability of the campaign to stop disconnections and to defend people in the courts that gave enormous confidence to thousands of people to continue not to pay. A mood developed that whatever the councils threw at us could be dealt with. If the council's attacks had succeeded, non-payment would have been undermined and the campaign could have crumbled to defeat.

Council tries to hit back

The first real challenge came in early December 1994 when South Dublin County Council had arranged to send out fourteen water inspectors to carry out disconnections of non-payers. We





Clare Daly and Joe Higgins TD on the march against double taxation.

obtained vital information from sources sympathetic to the campaign about who exactly would carry out the disconnections and on what day it would start. The council boasted that 1,000 homes would be disconnected before Christmas. If that happened the mood for non-payment would have been badly affected.

Our response to disconnections

The campaign needed to respond but stopping 14 different disconnection teams in a very large geographical area like south Dublin could only have been achieved if we got an active response from campaign members and residents generally. At less than a day's notice an emergency activists' meeting was convened in Tallaght on a Sunday. 100 responded to the call. People volunteered for an intense period of activity. One team was established with the job of reconnection. Cars, vans, mobile phones and CB radios were pooled. Leaflets were distributed advertising a 24 hour disconnections hotline. Through loud speaking equipment and through the work of activists in the estates, people were encouraged to be vigilant, to come out and by their physical presence stop anyone tampering with stopcocks on the pavement.

We got more information that the inspectors wouldn't report to work but would go directly from their homes at 4.00am to disconnect non-payers!

However, the moment they went to do the dirty deed, they were followed by 14 campaign patrol cars which were centrally linked to a headquarters and therefore could be re-directed to any

location within minutes.

This battle lasted for a number of days. It really stretched the human resources of the campaign. However they were only able to carry out 20 disconnections. Even then the water was turned back on within hours. Their strategy of disconnecting 1,000 homes hit a brick wall and they were forced to pull back. There was a very angry mood and if they had continued there was a real chance their actions would have provoked a major controversy.

Reflecting the pressure, the new government, which had to be cobbled together between Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left without a general election, intervened with new legislation which altered the right of the councils to disconnect domestic water supply, making it in reality an unworkable option. The campaign had passed a severe test but had emerged strengthened. 1995 was the first year for a long time there were no water disconnections anywhere in the country.

Campaign in the courts

The councils were then forced to pursue non-payers through the courts. However it took them a while to readjust and the first court cases took place nearly a year later in November 1995. For a whole period the councils operated off the new legislation and brought people to court with a view to getting a court order allowing for water disconnection. However, in reality, the best the councils could hope for in that situation was a return to a disconnections war like December '94. Later they dropped this approach and pursued non-payers in court for payment of arrears.

The court cases raised important tactical questions. On the one hand it was important that non-payers understood that the campaign did not expect any justice in the courts. On the other hand, for many people, being summoned to court was a very serious issue. Having weighed up the mood we concluded it would have been completely incorrect to boycott the courts or just disrupt the sessions as some people advocated. It was important that we went into court and defended non-payers and the stand they had taken and clog up the system as much as possible. Not to do so would have handed victories to the councils and would have undermined the campaign.

Over the three years well over £50,000 was raised for just this eventuality. The best solicitors and barristers were employed by the campaign. Campaign leaders had to pay meticulous attention to details and preparing non-payers for their court appearances. On the first court date 50 cases were scheduled to be dealt with. On a working day 400 activists turned to protest and show their solidarity with the summoned. Noisy protests were organised for every court date. The problem for the councils was that initially the legislation they were using was untried and our legal team exposed its many flaws. The first 50 cases were struck out.

By May 1996 the campaign had been in court on 25 occasions. The results for the councils were again dismal. They got 22 disconnection orders but were not able to implement any of them. Undoubtedly some non-payers were frightened with the prospect of being brought to court and paid some of the charge. However the opposite also happened. Some who paid in 1994 subsequently didn't because of our successes. Even when they changed tack and pursued people for their arrears, fear of the courts had diminished and non-payers understood if they held firm and boycotted the court order, there was very little that could be done against them. By 1997, thousands were either under summons or had orders issued against them but non-payment levels remained high. The campaign had been able to counter the council's arguments, their attempts at disconnections and their legal challenge.

Political challenge

The campaign then went on to the political plane to directly challenge the right-wing parties themselves. Well over a year and a half before the 1997 general election, the question of candidates from the campaign standing in Dublin and linking up with similar can-

didates in the Dublin area country was raised. There was an enthusiastic response in the campaign. People understood that the campaign was political and it made common sense to try to punish the politicians who had implemented the charges. Again our party played a vital role in this process. We explained that the campaign wasn't party political and was open to all who wanted to fight on the issue. But we were honest and up front that we were members of Militant Labour. When the proposal was put forward in January 1996 that the campaign should endorse Joe Higgins, the Militant Labour candidate in the April '96 Dublin West by-election, there was no opposition from the ranks of the campaign. The feeling was that Joe as chair of the campaign deserved the full support of the campaign because of the role he and the party had played. There was no mood that the campaign was being politically abused.

Victory in sight

Against all the expectations of the establishment parties, we turned that by-election into a referendum against the water charges with Joe only failing to take the seat by a whisker. The historic significance of that result both for us and the movement generally has been dealt with in other material we have produced. Our party became the political arm of the water charges movement. The result was only possible because of the authority of the campaign and again the willingness of people to be active in the by-election itself.

Scared now of the influence that the campaign could potentially wield in a general election in Dublin, the government were resolved to get rid of the charges and they were duly abolished throughout the country in December 1996. We had held back the council's offensive but the result in the Dublin West by-election saw the campaign take the initiative in such a decisive way that it represented the final nail in the coffin of the water charges. They had been battered into submission.

The campaign had gone through many stages of development. It built its membership and influence using the traditional methods of the labour movement. It used direct action to stop disconnections. It switched between legal and illegal tactics by sometimes using the courts, only to the defy the courts' rulings in the best tradition of civil disobedience.

The lessons are clear. The first task was to build mass non-payment because if mass non-payment was maintained the tax was dead. That was done

through hundreds of public meetings, probably over a million leaflets and using the media to challenge the propaganda of the councils. The second task was to defend non-payment through resisting disconnections and the courts.

All this was achieved because of the outstanding role that members of our party played in terms of strategy, tactics, thoroughly professional organisation and because the campaign had hundreds of organisers and leafleters based in all the key housing estates. Unlike other campaigns it was the conscious approach of the campaign leaders to develop activists in each area. The success of the campaign depended on people stepping forward. Time and again the issues and what needed to be done were discussed clearly and patiently with residents. On that basis you could see the confidence of people grow, which was essential for turning residents into campaign activists. Through the activists and our successes the campaign developed a mass influence with tens and even hundreds of thousands following its lead.

Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Council and now Dublin Corporation have imposed a charge for refuse collection. Local charges have not been a factor in the city part of Dublin since 1985. The water charges did not apply in this area. As a sign of fear of our party and of a water charges mark II, councillors in South Dublin and Fingal rejected refuse charges unanimously.

Lessons for the fight against refuse tax

It is very important that the real lessons of the anti-water charges movement are applied to the specific conditions that relate to refuse charges. The recent experiences of the campaigns in Drogheda and Limerick must also be taken into account.

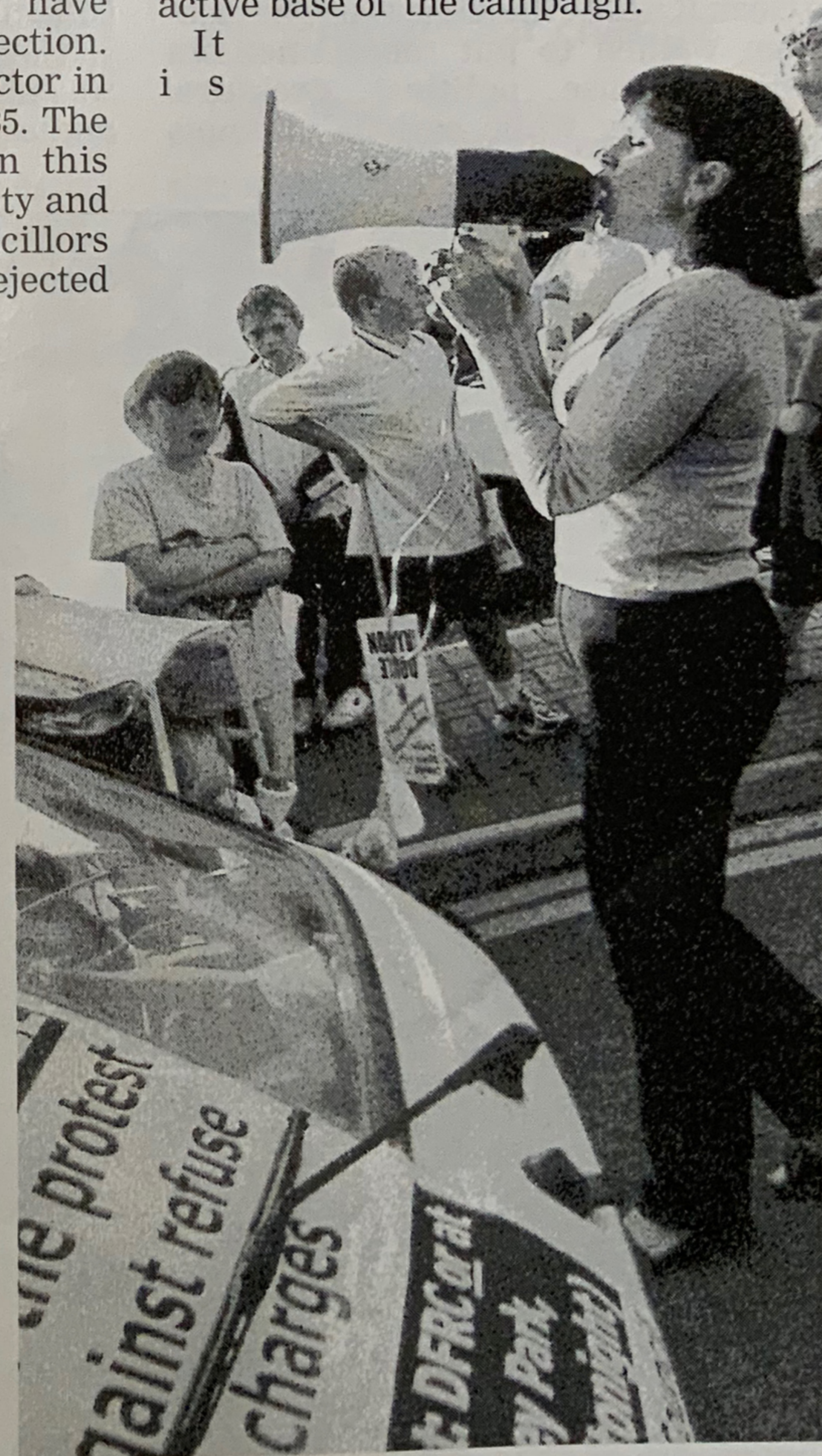
While the rates of income tax have been reduced, it is still the case that the vast bulk of tax is paid by the PAYE sector. There is still a strong mood of opposition to any form of double taxation. However there are certain differences between water charges and refuse charges. People are concerned about the environment and the councils will try to pose this as a green charge. However this can be quite easily dealt with. One of the sanctions that the local authorities can implement is the non-collection of the rub-

bish from non-payers, which happened in both Drogheda and Limerick. People are more fearful of this than they were of water disconnection. It is easier not to collect rubbish than it is to disconnect water. Re-connection was relatively straightforward and quick and was being practiced for many years around the country. People are less sure what to do in the event that rubbish is not collected from a substantial number of homes.

The question of tactics

The refuse charges have been implemented in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown for over a year now. The council has at this stage not withdrawn the service to non-payers nor has it brought people to court. It has confined itself to propaganda and threats. It is one thing withdrawing the service in Drogheda or Limerick but it is an altogether more serious thing to do it in a city the size of Dublin. We cannot be sure exactly what they will do and the key thing at the moment in both areas is to consolidate mass non-payment and develop the active base of the campaign.

It
is



Lisa Maher, Socialist Party public rep, campaigning against refuse charges in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown

Water charges

vital however that any new campaign is as sharp on tactics as the water charges movement. Bringing people to court holds less fear now than before and can be countered. The most serious weapon the councils have is to withdraw the service and the campaign must come up with appropriate tactics, otherwise confidence in the campaign and mass non-payment can be undermined.

In Drogheda, within seven months of implementing the charge, the council withdrew the service. In Limerick, within four months of privatising the service, Mr Binman stopped collecting the rubbish of non-payers. We need some more discussion about what people should do practically with non-collected rubbish with a view to putting huge pressure and the responsibility for such a situation back on the councillors.

In Limerick the campaign identified local sites owned by the local authority which were relatively close to most housing estates and advocated that in an organised way residents should dump their rubbish there on a weekly basis. The council would then be forced to clean it up. At the same time the campaign wanted to put the councillors under intense political pressure. Unfortunately while serious attempts

were made to implement such tactics it didn't materialise.

To implement such an approach you would need a vibrant campaign with numbers of activists in each estate. To achieve this you need to convince people to be active and that takes a certain period of time. Within three and a half months of people becoming aware of the charge their bins were not being collected. It was very difficult in that time to prepare activists and residents generally for what needed to be done.

Activists crucial

For the movement in Dublin certain tasks are already clearly posed. The campaign must have activists in each estate and area who can intervene and affect the mood of the community. We know what sanctions the councils can impose and we need to work out a response that can capture the imagination of residents and be seen to be achievable. One aspect of the campaign which assumes even more importance than during the water charges battle is the need to build strong links with council workers generally and the bin workers in particular. If the campaign was able to get these workers to agree not to withdraw the service to non-pay-

ers, the council would be in difficulty. As of now many of the bin workers in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown have stated that they support the campaign and will refuse to implement any such instruction from the council. It is very important that a key part of what the campaign stands for is no privatisation and for increased investment to expand council services. The additional cash necessary must come from central government.

Just as the water charges developed from being a very serious community campaign to being a successful challenge to the establishment parties, there is also huge potential to do the same in Dublin City. We will have to see how things develop but because leadership, strategy and tactics are essential, our party will have a crucial role to play.

For more information on the campaigns against refuse charges in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and Dublin Corporation, contact the Socialist Party at (01) 6772592.

The Socialist Party will also be producing a pamphlet on the history of the water charges campaign in the coming months.



Outside the courthouse in Rathfarnham, November 1995.

NIPSA elections

Victory for the left

On 16 February 2001, the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), Northern Ireland's largest trade union, came within a hair's breadth of passing into the hands of the left.

By Padraig Mulholland

In the annual election for the General Council, the ruling body of the union, left candidates won 12 of the 25 seats, one short of the number required for a majority. Four of the candidates to win seats were members of the Socialist Party. This major earthquake in the elections which comes on the back of a year of rising militancy in the union will have serious repercussions for the trade union movement and the new Stormont government.

NIPSA has 38,000 members across the civil and public service in Northern Ireland. In effect the union has the power to close down all the vital areas of government and many parts of the economy at a stroke. The union is mainly white collar based but has increased its blue collar numbers particularly in education and health. It has a long tradition of a vocal and active Socialist Party opposition to the conservative leadership at the top of the union and has been the starting point of many of the most important industrial struggles in the North.

With this rich history and powerful membership the tasks and challenges facing the left in the union are serious not only for the future of NIPSA members but for the overall development of a socialist alternative to capitalism in Ireland.

A dramatic change

The elections transformed the position of the left in the leadership from one where they had two members on the council to having 12. Some of the longest serving stalwarts of the old leadership were kicked off and the up and coming second layer of the union bureaucracy have been decimated.

Naturally such a dramatic change did not happen overnight. The foundation was laid over years of day to day work in the union by left activists, the increase in the determination to fight by the union members and a correct understanding of this change of mood by the left who, because they are based in the branches, are more in touch with

the members.

A number of notable struggles have taken place in the public service in the last year. "Crisis in child care" strikes in the health service and the term time dispute in education are battles that ended in enormous successes for the workers involved. These disputes led to a strengthening of the union, an increase in confidence amongst members and an increase in the standing of the leaders of the disputes who, in every case, were left activists.

Bureaucracy out of touch

What was clear was that in both these areas the conservative bureaucracy was well placed to take the lead, holding positions which they could have used to direct developments but in each case they not only did not develop the struggle but in fact stood opposed to the very idea of fighting at all. They claimed that there was no interest amongst members and that the battle was unwinnable.

When a leadership is so acutely out of touch with members and so completely incapable of giving a lead, the union's members will try to remove them. This process is beginning to develop in all the unions but has developed more speedily in NIPSA than in other unions because the years of ground work had been laid and because, for historical reasons, NIPSA has been a relatively democratic union. NIPSA's bureaucracy is of course only democratic up to a point. In fact, serious consideration was given to annulling the election but no excuse could be found. Currently a legal challenge to the result is being considered.

The members of NIPSA have taken the step of removing a section of the old leadership and replacing it with a new one that has promised changes. Although the left did not take a majority they are the largest single grouping on the council. The right wing conservatives are split three ways. No issues of principle are involved but the right-wing factions hate the sight of each other and may not be able to pull together to stop the left. If this happens the ability of the left grouping to deliver a fighting democratic union will be tested and the question of the programme the left adopts will be of vital importance.

The left grouping stood under the banner of "Time for change. Reclaim your union" putting forward a collec-

tive commitment to: fight for members interests; use resources for members; implement members' decisions; rebuild branches; make officials work for members. In addition, individual candidates put forward their own programme. Seven Socialist Party candidates stood on the "time for change" ticket but also clearly put forward a socialist position both in official manifestos and in party leaflets. While recognising that the "time for change" programme is limited and not fully rounded out, for the Socialist Party the opportunity to stand together with serious, committed and respected activists was an enormous plus. Our role in the unions is to assist in developing the militancy and fighting capacity of the unions and to work with left activists to achieve change while developing a conscious socialist grouping. The "time for change" campaign gives an opportunity to do this.

Prepare for change

The "time for change" group will have to prepare for its responsibilities seriously. The new General Council comes into being after the annual conference in May and, by then, the left will have to have a more fully developed programme.

NIPSA, like all unions, faces a number of obvious problems: a world economic downturn is likely; the Northern Ireland assembly is committed to privatisation and cuts in public services; and central government in London is openly hostile to public sector spending. These problems will mean increasing attacks on the pay, terms and conditions and ultimately jobs of members. Shrewd negotiating will not resolve these difficulties. The left must put forward a concrete fighting programme to resist attacks and win improvements. NIPSA's numerical and social strength must be brought into play in a massive mobilisation to defend workers interests.

Northern Ireland's political problems also pose challenges. Sectarian tensions can at any time bubble to the surface and, in the long run, a return to the breakdown of society into warring sectarian camps is not impossible. At present a number of walkouts by health workers have happened following sectarian attacks. To properly defend members, NIPSA must be prepared to lead this development and organise resistance to sectarianism from any quarter.

Fight sectarianism

Resistance to sectarianism is of such importance that the unions must be prepared to use any means necessary to ensure its success.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Assembly is packed with conservative bigots who – although at this point content to accept the privileges of power in exchange for their good behaviour – are quite capable of vicious right wing sectarian attacks on the working class. It is absolutely essential that NIPSA as a leading trade union comes out clearly in favour of a political challenge to the conservative bigots. The union's official "non-political" stance must be broken. To do so the left must win the membership to a clear position for an independent working class party backed by the unions and challenging for power in the Assembly.

Internal democracy

The internal life of the union is also of vital importance. NIPSA is a relatively small union by British standards and its power lies in the fact that it has traditionally had a strong activist base and branches that functioned well. Over the last number of years this base

has decreased. Branches are inactive and in some cases do not have even have officers.

Large sections of the union are now run by all-powerful officials, NIPSA has 53 full time officials employed by the union and almost the same number again paid for by employers. These officials in many ways are the real power in the union. They direct the day to day activities of the union they have the power to stop the implementation of decisions taken by the members either by apathy or obstruction. Not all the officials however can be lumped together and some do carry out a good role in the union but in the vast majority of cases their role is one of doing as little as possible and perpetuating their own power base.

Within the elected bodies of the union the officials have a considerable weight. 11 out of the 25 members of the current General Council hold full time official positions paid for by employers. They, along with their allies, have been a fetter on the democratic functioning of these bodies. They prefer their activities to be carried out behind closed doors and play the same obstructive role. The left must take steps to develop the democracy of the union. It is the life blood which will be needed if future

struggle. Democracy must be successful. The union are open to criticism, debate and discussion. Those holding negotiating positions must be elected and subject to recall (this is particularly important when employers are paying the wages). Membership decisions must be carried out and the structures of the union must fall under the control of the members and the elected representatives.

Transform the union

All the various aspects of a programme must be pulled together. The "time for change" campaign should become a membership-based campaign to transform the union and form a fighting democratic union. The General Council elections represent a small step in the right direction. It is a sea change for the left in NIPSA and points to the future in other unions. There will be no automatic increase in successes and at times the situation will fall back but we can confidently say that a major opportunity is in front of us not only to build on the concrete gains that have been won for members but to build powerful unions which can play a key role in the process of transforming Irish society.

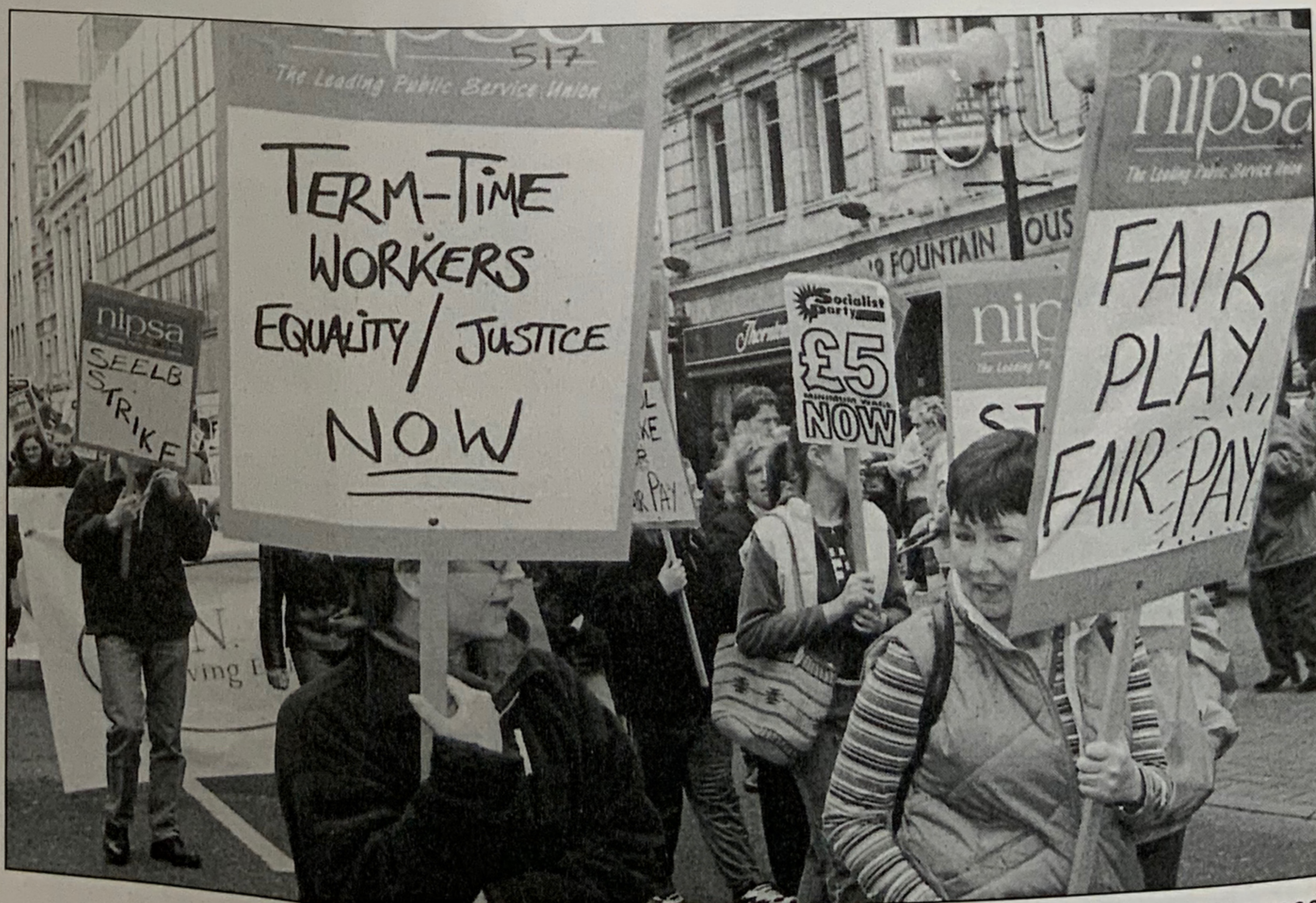
NIPSA term time workers VICTORY ACHIEVED AT LAST!

Northern Ireland's most significant and bitter industrial dispute in many years – "term time workers in education", will come to an end on 12 March 2001, with the signing of an agreement between the unions and management of the five Education and Library Boards, heralding an end to "forced" term time working in education.

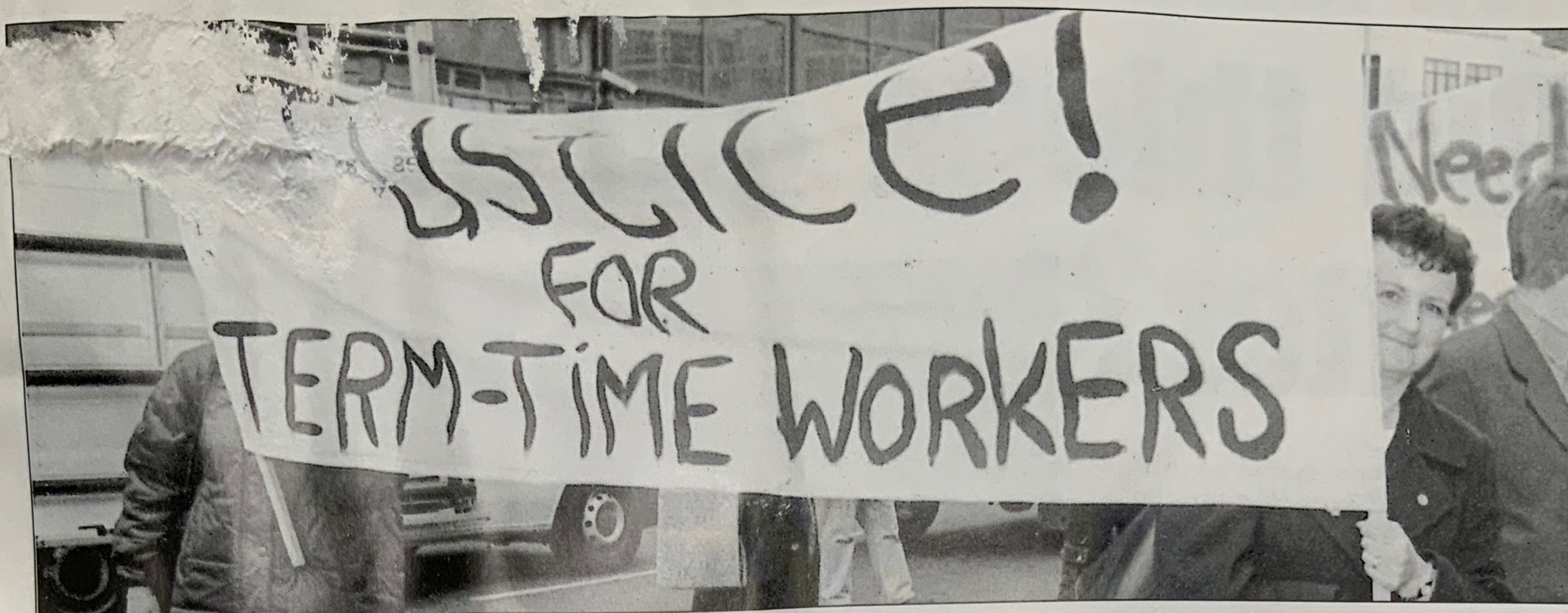
By Brian Booth

In monetary terms, this victory has given £5 million per year to a group of around 5,000 workers. This is a pay rise of up to £3,000 for some full time workers. In Northern Ireland terms this is massive.

NIPSA (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance), the lead union in the dispute, which holds over 90% of the workers affected, had five branches involved. Branch 517, whose leadership is made up of Socialist Party members,



Term time workers on the streets of Belfast, April 2000.



played a crucial role and organised the workers, mainly women, into a fighting unit who endeavoured to secure victory from their employer.

How it started

The spark of this struggle was the removal – by the “New” Labour Minister for Health & Social Services, Harriet Harmon – of the “Jobseekers Allowance” during school closure from term time secretaries, technicians and classroom assistants. To add insult to injury, the Boards and the Department of Education said that they were not to blame, despite the fact that during school closures, some of “their” staff faced going to the wall with financial ruin through no fault of their own, through being refused any pay, including retainer fees, for these three months. In effect, the Boards wished to retain the staff, but not pay for the privilege in any way whatsoever. This total disregard helped to stoke the already strong flames of discontent. One manager is quoted in a daily paper as having said at a meeting with term time workers, whilst metaphorically patting them on the head “sure this is a great wee job for women, you can be at home with your kids in the holidays”.

The dispute started back in August 1999. NIPSA lodged a claim for a retainer fee and launched a letter writing campaign targetting politicians and employers. Because of the unrelenting letters the local politicians were receiving, support became widespread from every political party in the North. Within three to four months all 26 local councils in Northern Ireland had passed motions in support of the campaign and calling for retainer pay.

Campaigning

The workers in NIPSA 517 organised petition-signing at shopping centres and town centres over a three-week period to highlight their plight to the general public and raise awareness.

Over 22,000 signatures were collected including that of the Education Minister, Martin McGuinness, who signed the petition at the Irish National Teachers Organisation conference in Derry, back in May 2000. The members organised pickets at their Board’s annual Christmas dinner two years in a row, then demonstrated at the NI Assembly twice in a month to highlight and seek support for the claim.

At that point, management made an offer of a one off payment of £200 as a final resolution. The Minister stated that they should accept the “generous” offer. This offer was also recommended by our NIPSA union official, who had no mandate to do so. This pathetic offer was put to the members of NIPSA throughout the North, with all but one person rejecting it. The offer was put at a time when term time workers were most vulnerable, at the end of June 2000, and it was expected by the Minister, the management and OUR union official that they would be broken by this stage. How they were mistaken! The workers’ goal was to win by the end of the summer term, but that was not to be, and the campaign took a setback for a couple of months whilst schools were closed.

Strike threat

Soon after the term restart, the campaign got back to life with the union wishing to put a proposal for resolution to the management side. Management rejected this point blank in November 2000. Their response was, “we will not pay a retainer fee, not now, not ever”. This caused the unions to cease negotiations and consult members on strike action. A motion was carried by the NI Assembly calling for the payment of a retainer fee, with all but two Sinn Fein MLAs dissenting. This added further momentum to the campaign. Strike action was seen now as inevitable, and with massive public support to the campaign, the workers were buoyed.

NIPSA 517 wanted rolling action, one

day in the first week, two days in the second week, and so on until an all out situation occurred. The other branches were of the view that they couldn’t sustain such action, and a compromise of one day a week for an indefinite period was agreed. The balloting of members was due to take place at school return after the Christmas holidays. On initial consultations over 97% wished to take action, and management knew this. The dispute coming to a head seemed to be the ideal tonic which forced a serious offer from management on 15 December 2000. Instead of retainer pay, the offer was of FULL pay. NIPSA 517’s members saw the offer as being at last something positive, although they were sceptical of it and the intentions. It was possibly a basis for a settlement. Further negotiations were needed and clarification was sought and received.

Victory

After lengthy negotiations and changes to the offer, all for the better, a draft final offer was put to members with well in excess of 98% voting in favour to accept.

In brief the offer consisted of:

- Full all year round pay (up to £2,500 increase in pay).
- Full entitlement to sick pay.
- Full maternity pay.
- Between 6-14 additional annual leave days (based on length of service).
- Increased pension entitlement.
- A review of all temporary posts with a view to making them permanent.
- An end to term time working in education.

Judge for yourself, militant action pays. This victory will now hopefully be replicated in Britain and serve as an example of how to organise and lead workers in struggle. 5,000 term time workers know what they have achieved, and NIPSA 517’s term time workers are proud of their special effort and achievement!

New Labour in power

Did things get any better?

New Labour's theme tune during the 1997 election was the Dream song "Things Can Only Get Better". The choice of this song was apt – Tony Blair's approach was timid and promised little, instead focusing on the record of John Major in order to win a majority.

By Ciaran Mulholland

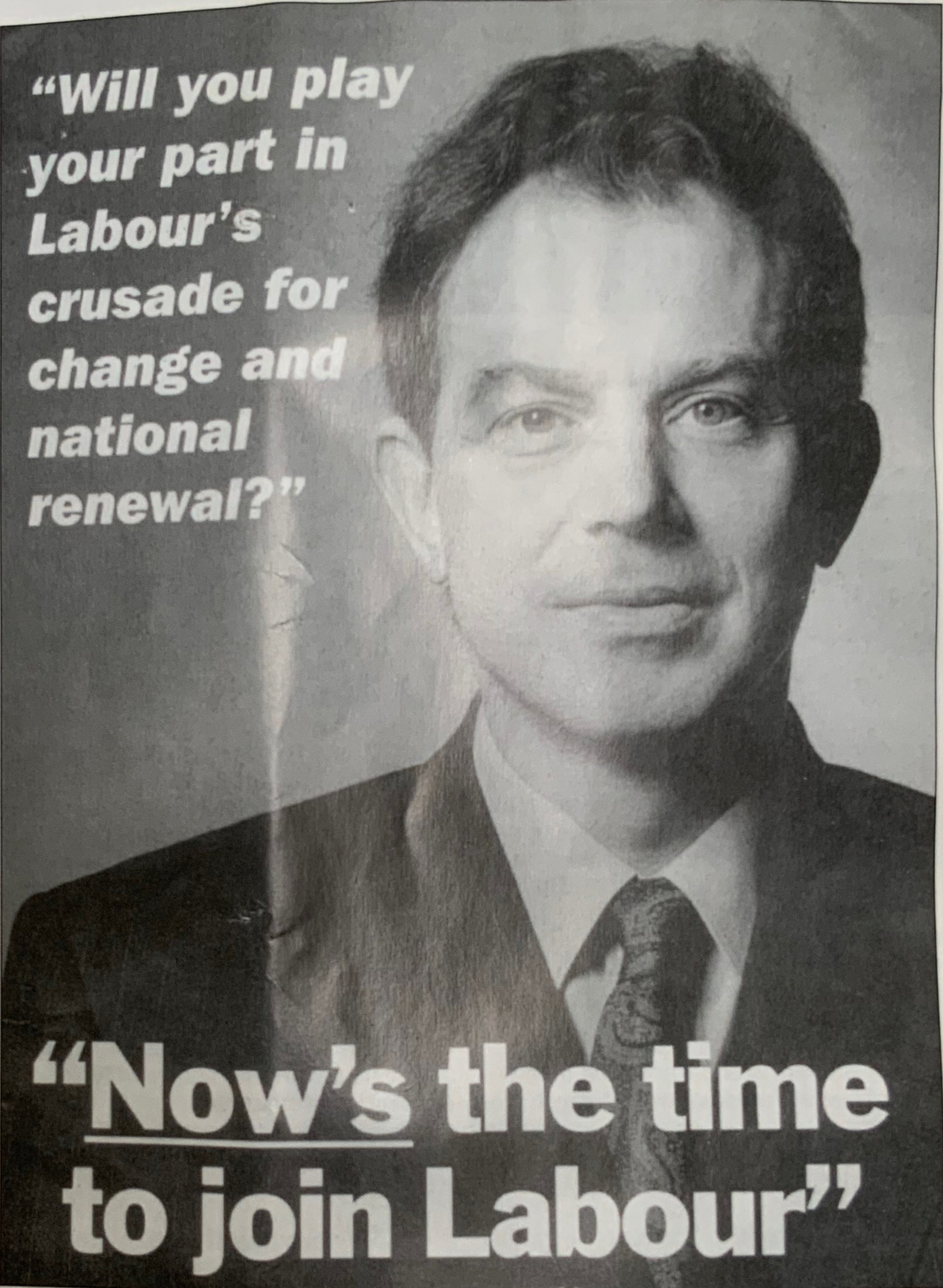
After the election there was little enthusiasm for the new regime, rather a hope that things just might improve and overwhelming relief that the hated Tories were at last gone. Now that the next General Election is imminent the question can fairly be asked – did things get any better? And, importantly, did New Labour in power deliver anything that a Tory administration could not have delivered?

Tory spending plans

In the first two years New Labour continued as the Tories left off, desperate to persuade the City of London that they were "safe". The Bank of England were given enhanced powers over the economy and spending was held down. In a scandalous move benefits for lone parents were cut. A minimum wage was introduced but was set at a poverty level at the behest of the employers. Similarly New Labour bent to CBI pressure when introducing new trade union legislation. The result has been no loosening of the legal straitjacket that impedes workers who try to organise.

The most dramatic action of New Labour in the early days was to bring two generations of free education to an end by the introduction of fees for university students. The result has been a drop in the number of applications from working class young people, especially for longer courses such as medicine. The fact that the cabinet, almost to a man and a woman, had benefited from the introduction of free education in the post-war period did not seem to deter them as they moved to ingratiate themselves with the market.

It is almost certain that a Tory administration would not have introduced reforms to the House of Lords or have devolved power to Edinburgh or



"Will you play your part in Labour's crusade for change and national renewal?"

"Now's the time to join Labour"

New Labour's election propaganda four years ago.

Cardiff. Apart from these limited measures, however, there is little else that New Labour has done that a more mainstream Tory regime could not have, especially given the relatively favourable economic situation of the last few years.

Some of Jack Straw's measures on crime, and his vicious attacks on refugees in particular, would put more liberal Tories to shame. In essence New Labour did not challenge the prevailing belief in the "market" and did much less than all previous Labour governments to ameliorate the worst effects of

the system. In the last year there have been improvements, albeit marginal ones, for some of the poor. The weekly income for the poorest pensioners rose from £68.80 in 1997 to £92.15 in April 2001. Child benefit has risen by 25%.

Spending on education and health was screwed down until 1999 but has begun to rise in the last year. The extra sums pledged have so far made little difference, however. This is because huge sums are required just to make up the accumulated shortfall from years of underspending, especially the decades-long lack of investment in new schools

and hospitals. Further increases in spending will help, but only so much. Many of the NHS's problems, for example, are problems of the system. Much ill health is a result of inequality, and New Labour is on record supporting inequality. And of course, in the last analysis, Gordon Brown can only deliver on his promises if the economy stays on course. As we shall see he has not, despite his boasting, abolished the cycle of boom and bust. And a new recession will mean that all bets are off.

Increasing inequality

New Labour has presided over a widening gap between rich and poor. Average household income in Britain is now £23,000, up 19.6% on 1996 and up 8.6% on 1998. This increase was concentrated in richer areas - Surrey saw an increase of 12.5% over the last two years. Overall, after-tax incomes have risen less under this government than under six of the last seven governments since 1964 (the exception is the first Thatcher regime from 1979 to 1983, a time of deep recession). Alongside this paltry rise in income, there has been a fall in the social wage, or the benefits a worker can expect to receive from the state, such as free education.

Poverty remains endemic in Tony Blair's Britain. The biggest concentration of poverty is in Liverpool. The central L16 postcode area has 65.8% of households earning less than £10,000 a year. In Vauxhall, Liverpool, the average annual household income is only £9,000. A few miles away in Heswall, the Wirral, the comparable figure is £46,000.

The richest one fifth of the population have seen their share of post-tax national income rise from 36% to 45% between 1978 and 1998-1999. The incomes of the chief executives of the 100 largest companies rose by 20% last year to an average of £717,000. In 1983 there were 7,000 millionaires in Britain. Now there are 77,000.

Benefits have been increased but not to the extent that would be required to lift people out of poverty. The government ignores the effects of the social fund in their calculations on poverty. In February 2000, 709,000 claimants had an average of £9.42 deducted per week to repay loans taken out to buy essentials. They were thus reduced below the official poverty line but were considered to be above it by the government. Overall there are half a million more people living in poverty now compared to 1997.

By 1998-1999 there had been no decrease in the proportion of children living in poverty (still about one third).

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) estimate that the number of children in poverty will fall by 1.2 million over the next two years due to government measures that are now being implemented. This will leave 4.5 million in poverty even if the target is met.

According to the CPAG the first two years of New Labour were "dire for poor children" and the cut in lone parent benefits was "arguably the first real-term cut in the level of social assistance paid to any group of claimants since social assistance was introduced in 1948". Some record!

Britain's infrastructure is collapsing. Nowhere is this more clear than on the railways. It is clear that the private sector can deliver profits but that it cannot deliver good public services or safety. A massive programme of public spending is required. New Labour is not delivering.

In the late 1960's net public sector investment reached 7.5% of gross domestic product (GDP). Last year it was a pitiful 0.4% of GDP. In real terms public investment was a tenth of its level of thirty years ago. As a share of GDP it was a twentieth. Public investment in Britain is less than in Germany (1.8% OF GDP), Italy (2.2%), the US (2.8%), France(2.8%) and Japan (7.9%).

Low public investment

The squeeze on public investment begun under the Tories has continued under New Labour. Net capital spending last year was £3.2 billion. This is only 60% of 1996-1997 levels and less than a quarter of the 1992-1993 level.

New Labour is now planning spending of £4 billion a year under Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) over the next few years. PPPs and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) will enrich the private sector and impoverish the public sector. Hospitals built under PFI have fewer beds and staff and ultimately cost the public more.

Public spending under New Labour actually fell between 1997 and 2000. Only this year has it finally returned to the level last seen in 1994-1995. Furthermore spending in 2001 is likely to come in at £5 billion less than the figure announced.

The truth about unemployment

New Labour would like to claim that mass unemployment is a thing of the past. The number out of work and claiming benefit has now fallen through the one million mark for the first time in 25 years. Unemployment had actual-

ly been falling since 1992, from 2.96 million to 1.6 million by the time of the 1997 election. What New Labour conveniently forget is that when they were in opposition they attacked this same figure as a fraud given that the Tories had made 30 changes to the method of calculation in order to massage the figure downwards.

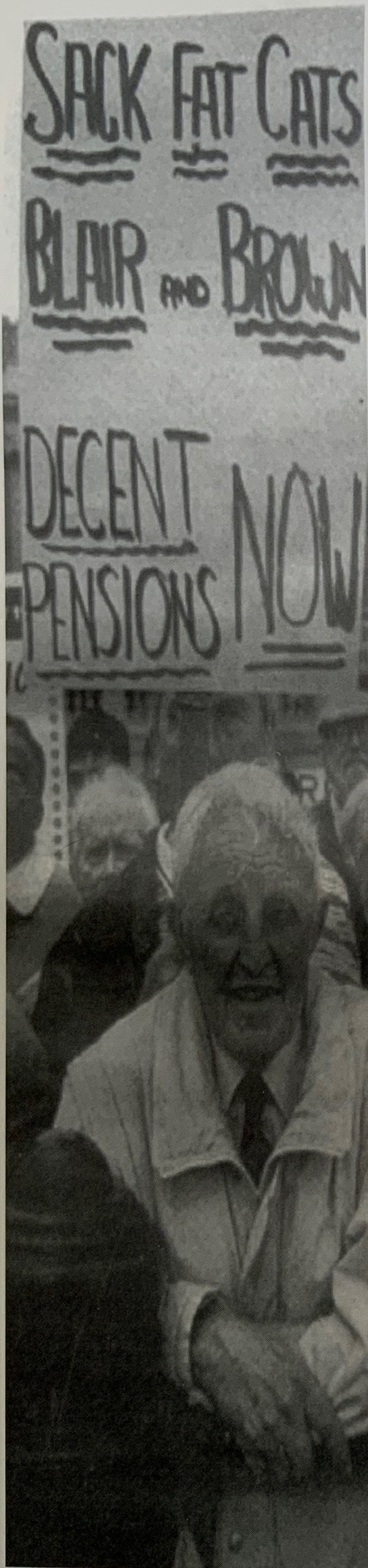
For a time they put more emphasis on the International Labour Organisation count, which includes all those looking for work, not just those claiming benefit. This figure now stands at 1,560,000 but it too paints a misleading picture. Paul Bivand, senior research fellow at the Unemployment Unit argues that "the ILO definition....excludes large numbers of people for one reason or another. For example, people with family responsibilities who nevertheless want to work, people who have given up hope of finding work, and people who are sick or disabled."

Professor Stephen Fothergill of Sheffield Hallam University believes that "the true level of unemployment since 1997 has fallen. Now I suspect the real level is somewhat below three million. It is a significant improvement but it is not as big as we would wish to see. There is still a huge problem which is not picked up by the official figures."

One distorting influence is the number of people on sickness benefit. In the early 1980s only half a million people were classified as long term sick. The figure now is two million.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research found that only 30,000 of the 145,000 who found work





500,000 more in poverty than in 1997.

under the New Deal would not have done so without it. And whilst many jobs may have been created they are often characterised by poor wages and conditions.

The *Economist* admits that "the British people are doing better by working longer and harder, not by working 'smarter'". Typical are the 400,000 jobs in the modern day sweatshops – the call centres. The *Independent on Sunday* (25 February 2001) recently quoted one 17 year old in South Wales on his experiences. Many of his friends had gone straight on to the dole after leaving school and he was glad to land any job. "I'm working twelve hours straight, five days a week, answering call after call. It's sales support and I'm getting lots of customer complaints to deal with. It just stresses me out, and my supervisor shouts even more if I can't deal with the problems."

A TUC survey has revealed bullying, impossible sales targets, not getting wages on time and hostility to unions. Staff are forced to report sick in person rather than phoning in, to put up their hands when they wish to go to the toilet and being timed there, are given only three seconds between calls and are not allowed to take more than three days leave at once.

A new world recession

A new world recession now looms. Manufacturing output in Britain has been falling since last summer. Rates of return (or profits) for manufacturing companies have fallen to 6%, the lowest rate since 1993. Manufacturing lost 106,000 jobs last year, mostly in textiles, leather and transport equipment. The number of manufacturing jobs actually increased under the last Tory government. Under New Labour manufacturing output has only risen by 4% since 1997 and 300,000 jobs have gone in the sector in total.

Economic problems are rippling around the globe. Manufacturing is also in decline in Germany, Europe's largest economy, where export orders fell 2.5% in November. In early January, the shares of America's largest commercial bank, the Bank of America, were suspended after panic selling was prompted by fears that it had made heavy losses.

The main global stock markets have been marking time for three years. About £2,000 billion has been wiped off the value of American stocks alone, leading to plummeting consumer confidence. Savings there are at historically low levels, credit at historically high levels. Clearly this is an unsustainable

situation. Manufacturing activity in the USA in December 2000 was at its lowest level since the end of the last recession in April 1991. Over 133,000 jobs went in the USA in December, the highest figure since records began.

At the time of writing Turkey is in economic freefall and there is concern that Russia will default on its foreign debt (which totals a massive £32 billion). Japan remains in a deflationary spiral and the stock market there is nearing a 15 year low. The leader of the Japanese employers federation has recently warned "the possibility that a financial system crash will be induced is strong" (*Guardian*, 12 January 2001).

According to economist Stephen King of the HBSC Bank "there are now sufficient signs of distress to suggest that the (British) economy is likely to lurch over the edge during the course of 2001." If the world's two largest economies (the US and Japan) go into reverse a world recession is inevitable.

New Labour's second term

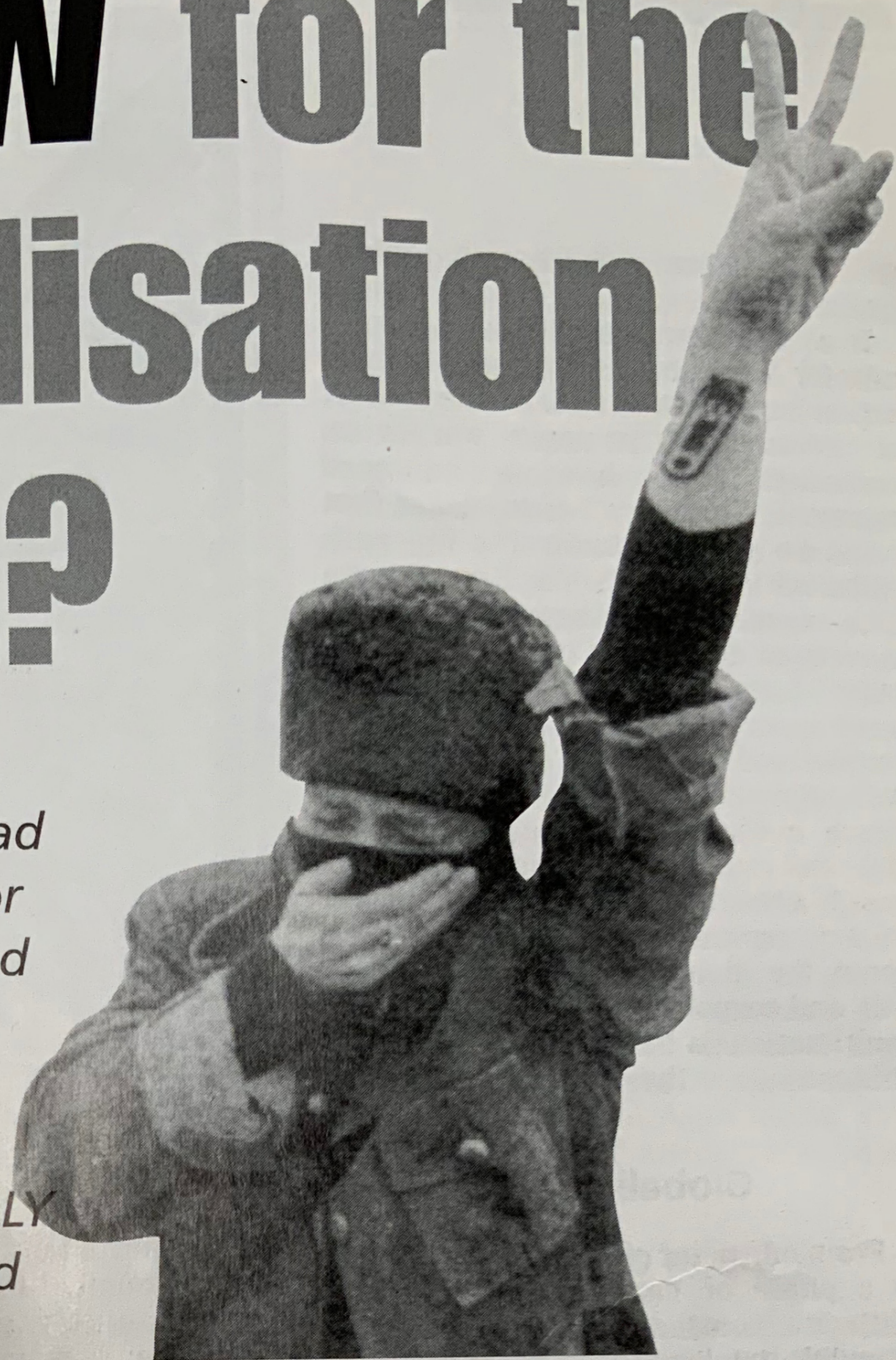
The steel workers of Corus or the deprived on the inner city estates around the country have little to thank Tony Blair for. Despite this New Labour will almost certainly be returned to power. The memory of the havoc wreaked by the Tories is too fresh and as yet there is no credible left wing alternative.

The fuel revolt, the anger of the Rover and Luton workers and the many dozens of localised public sector disputes up and down the length of Britain are a portent of things to come. The New Labour government has been characterised above all else by luck and by a craven bowing to the market. Their luck is about to run out. A second term for New Labour will be very different from the first. The bowing of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown before the god of the market will prove their ultimate undoing. A new world recession may have a temporary stunning effect on the working class but will ultimately lead to titanic battles as they rediscover their strength in struggle.

What is clearly needed is a political alternative on the left to New Labour which has been an out and out bourgeois party for some time. The Socialist Party in England and Wales, sister organisation of the Socialist Party in Ireland, now has six local councillors and will be standing a number of candidates in the forthcoming general elections. Our candidates will be raising the need for a new mass party of the working class, a demand which will find an increasing echo in the coming period.

WHERE NOW for the anti-globalisation movement?

The Battle of Seattle was a turning point in many ways. 18 months ago many people had never even heard of the WTO, or the IMF or World Bank for that matter. Seattle changed all that. It sent a powerful message to billions around the world, a message of resistance and a challenge to the idea that capitalism is all powerful. ROBERT CONNOLLY analyses the "anti-capitalist" movement and asks the question "where now?"



This year the WTO will meet in Qatar. This small state in the Middle East is one of the most repressive in the region. In Qatar the government does not allow political demonstrations, severely limits freedom of assembly and has never had a parliamentary election. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why the 4,000 delegates of the WTO are scurrying out of harm's way. They are desperate to avoid any repeat of the mass protests of Seattle 1999.

New period

The wave of anti-globalisation protests has to be seen in the context of other important developments over the last period. For example, mass movements led to the overthrow of the dictator Milosevic in Serbia. In the Philippines, mass movements shook the regime to its core. Joseph Estrada was toppled in a situation that was potentially very dangerous for the capitalist class in that country. The revolt in the Philippines were less dominated by workers than in the movement in Serbia but it was very significant because of the effect it will have on millions of workers in other parts of South East Asia.

In Latin America the uprisings in Ecuador and Bolivia have shown the deep popular anger that has been building up over the last decade at the effects

of neo-liberal policies. In Venezuela the populist policies of Hugo Chavez have acted as an annoyance to the ruling class and a spur to the developing radicalisation of sections of the population. Many of these movements resound with echoes of the era of Che Guevara. But if Che Guevara was alive today he would see a different South America than in his time. Firstly, the working class now makes up the majority across the continent. And secondly, the inequality and exploitation of the people of South America has never been more acute. Future explosive movements in South America are inevitable.

In Europe, we witnessed the fuel protests last September. They were impressive because of the sheer scale and the militancy of the protesters. Thousands across Europe blocked motorways, oil refineries etc. Already this year, in France, large trade union protests resulted in violent clashes between striking firefighters and the hated CRS riot police. Across Europe there is now growing anger among working class people on a variety of issues. The issue of the environment (global warming) and food safety are examples.

On top of all this, it's now clear for anyone with eyes to see that the downturn in the US economy is real and recession is likely. At this stage economic growth is almost at zero and

bourgeois commentators are no longer discussing if there will be a downturn or not. The discussion centres on how hard or how soft the "landing" will be. Since the Asian crisis of 1997, the American economy has been the only impressive growth region for capitalism internationally. Now that phase is over and a new one is beginning. The working class of the advanced capitalist countries has experienced a "joyless boom" of increased exploitation. Already 120,000 manufacturing workers in the US were laid off in January alone. After the last ten years, however, even the softest of landings will feel like a slump for workers. The effects of a US recession in the rest of the world will be very serious generally and catastrophic in many areas.

"Anti-capitalism" in context

These processes mean that Marxists must reassess what is meant by "anti-capitalist consciousness". The demonstrations across the world against certain institutions like the IMF, the WTO, World Bank and G7 etc. are only one side of the story. These are a reflection of deeper shifts in the attitudes of sections of society to the inequalities of the world economic system. The types of protests and mass movements seen in South America over the last period would easily put the Battle of Seattle

Anti-capitalism

(the largest anti-globalisation protest in the shade.

It would therefore be a serious mistake for Marxists to see the anti-globalisation movement outside of the context of the emerging struggles worldwide. Socialists must have a balanced approach. There are two mistakes that could be made in analysing the anti-globalisation protests. The first mistake is to exaggerate the significance of the movement and to talk up its "anti-capitalist" features. In reality, it would be more accurate to talk of an anti-globalisation and anti-corporate movement. Anti-capitalist means challenging the whole market system but anti-corporate and anti-globalisation consciousness is a reaction to features of contemporary capitalism. People are angry about the global institutions like the IMF and corporate institutions like the multi-nationals but many don't extend this critique to the entire capitalist system.

Globalisation

From our point of view, globalisation is a phase of capitalist development with its roots in the crisis which brought the long post Second World War boom to an end in the mid-1970s. It has particular features including extreme mobility of capital on a world scale; the dominant role of finance capital; and a partial erosion of the nation state. These features are reversible as will be seen in the next period when national governments try to reassert their control over their economies to protect against the ravages of a world economic crisis. But despite the particular features of globalisation, the essential nature of capitalism as a boom/bust system based on the ceaseless search for profit remains unchanged. The level of global inequality has certainly reached unprecedented heights in the last decade but it would be wrong to conclude that globalisation is an "aberration" and that through a bit of reform we can return to the mythical "good old days" before Thatcher and Reagan. If anything, capitalism is showing a return to the worst features of its long 20th century decline, a process temporarily interrupted by the boom of the 50s and 60s.

The other danger in analysing the movement is to be dismissive and not to see the immensely positive development of young activists and protesters who are being radicalised and are being watched by and having an influence on millions of youth internationally. A developing critical attitude to capitalism is the first step on the road to searching for an alternative to the sys-



tem.

This movement has to be analysed in its development over the last period. It is a genuinely global phenomenon. Even though it has been mainly based in the advanced capitalist countries, it is not exclusively so. Since 1985, for example, there have been over 100 demonstrations in the Southern hemisphere alone against the IMF/World Bank. There has been a process of fraternisation between campaigns, movements, organisations and individuals around the world. Activities and campaigns against the effects of global capitalism in the advanced capitalist countries and in the ex-colonial world communicate with each other. The internet has played a role in the last couple of years in facilitating activists in planning campaigns and protests.

Of course, despite the global nature of the movement, the focus has generally been the US. The development of youth consciousness has been an important factor. Middle class and working class youth in the US are generally more critical of the status quo than in the recent past and a minority have developed an anti-corporate consciousness. It should also be pointed out though that others besides youth, including trade unionists, have become involved in the movement at some points, especially in Seattle.

The components of the movement

The dynamic of the anti-globalisation movement, so far, has been the bringing

together of three distinctive types of activists and protesters. The first group is the relatively experienced activists who have been involved on a wide range of issues such as the environment, workers rights (anti sweat-shops), third world debt/development, civil liberties (anti-censorship etc.), human rights, etc. This group has moved away from the single issue consciousness of the 1990s and embraced the idea of a diverse yet united movement. Naomi Levin, a leading light in INPEG, an organisation at the centre of the build up to S26 in Prague last year, commented on this: "They say we lack focus - you'd better believe it - we're everywhere - no more single issue politics." Most of these activists have come together out of a common medium - the internet - and a shared background and shared animosity to organisational structures like political parties.

The second group mainly consists of newly radicalised youth, particularly in the US. They are extremely open to different ideas about how to get rid of the inequalities they see around the world. Many see the sinister way in which big business attempts to bombard young people with its all pervasive presence. "We do not have Coca-Cola for blood and Microsoft for brains" as one young protester put it. Ralph Nader's 2.7 million votes in the US presidential election was partially made up of votes from young people who have made a step forward from apathy to genuine interest in radical politics.

The third group is leftwing political organisations and groups. Generally speaking, political organisations have

been the followers rather than the leaders in the anti-globalisation protests. Some left wing groups have conceded to much of the attitudes of the activists and the radical/liberal baggage that goes with it. The Socialist Workers Party, for example, have consistently argued that the most important feature of the anti-globalisation movement is the coming together of so many different forces and have bent over backwards to present themselves as organically linked to the "anti-capitalist movement".

Of course, much has been made by the media of the role of anarchist groups and the tactic of direct action. It can be difficult to generalise because different types of anarchists have been involved in different ways and because sections of the media have often labelled non-violent direct action groups such as Reclaim the Streets as "violent anarchists".

Porto Allegre

Efforts are underway to co-opt parts of the movement into the liberal mainstream by advocates of a more "inclusive" and "compassionate" globalisation. The real and constantly shifting centre of gravity of the movement is an uneasy alliance between groups and individuals who preach this pale reformism on the one hand and on the other side more left wing activists. The World Social Forum in Porto Allegre in Brazil in January was revealing in this respect. It was organised as an alternative to the World Economic Forum meet-

ing that was taking place in Davos. The WEF is a yearly "think tank" type gathering which involves government representatives, corporate executives and various bourgeois "experts".

The forum in Brazil was attended by over 12,000 people from all over the world. The theme was "another world is possible". Highpoints included a 15,000 strong demonstration on the first day. During the forum the movement of landless peasants (MST) from Brazil organised a protest and destroyed a GM soya plantation owned by the Monsanto multi-national. Activists from the MST burned the crops and a US flag. During the forum there was a live television debate through a satellite hook-up between delegates from the WEF in Davos (including George Soros, the well-known financier who also likes to pose as a bit of a critic of globalisation) and the delegates in Porto Allegre. The WEF representatives were put on the defensive by the debate. The *Financial Times*, when referring to Soros, said "Such uncomfortable experiences seem temporarily to have scrambled his ability to deliver pithy soundbites".

The Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had an influence on the debates in Porto Allegre about the future direction of the anti-globalisation movement. There has been an explosion, a veritable "biblical plague" of NGOs over the last number of years. They now number in the millions. Their ideas of how to tinker with the system have a powerful influence which should not be underestimated. Many have taken up the IMF and the World

Bank's offers of "dialogue".

Other large organisations in the movement are also agitating for particular reforms. The Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC) is a French based anti-globalisation organisation which has taken up the old reformist slogan of a "Tobin Tax". This would be a tax on the profits made by financial speculation that would supposedly finance a more equal distribution of wealth. This is a good example of how some of the ideas that emerge from debates inside the anti-globalisation movement have the distinct appearance of old wine in new bottles. But not all the debates in Porto Allegre were so utopian. In the forum's Youth Camp debates took place (in less plush surroundings) about how to fight global capitalism. The Youth Camp was politically chaotic but there was much less tolerance of the liberal bourgeois ideas that emerged in the main forum and most were eager for action rather than words.

Where to now?

Many activists and influential figures like Naomi Klein emphasise the new features of the anti-globalisation movement. Klein in her book *NoLogo* says, "What emerged on the streets of Seattle and Washington was an activist model that mirrors the organic, decentralised, interlinked pathways of the internet - the internet came to life". She refers to the movement as having "no central leadership or command structure, it is



The movement has become truly global.



Banner of the Committee for a Workers' International in Prague, September 2000.

multi-headed, impossible to decapitate". An example of what this means in practise occurred at the demo in Washington last April. A section of the protesters blocked off all the streets to the IMF meeting but were too late to stop the delegates going in. Two options remained, they could stay and prevent the IMF delegates from leaving or go back to the official march. Kevin Danaher from Global Exchange (one of the main organising groups) addressed the crowd saying, "Each intersection has autonomy. If the intersection wants to stay locked down, that's cool. If you don't, that's cool too." The outcome was inevitable confusion.

At this stage what predominates politically in the movement are different types of radical liberalism and anarchism to a lesser degree. Some think effectively that the system and its institutions like the IMF and the World Bank can be improved or changed while others say the system must be abolished. We obviously agree with the latter perspective. But ironically, the main organised trends in the movement, from the most moderate to the most "extreme", share a crucial common assumption, namely that the working class, especially in the "advanced" countries, is no longer a decisive force in the fight to change society. These are ideas that Marxists have to combat.

However, the real significance of this movement is that it is a necessary stage in the development of anti-capitalist consciousness. But the process of changing consciousness will not inevitably develop of its own volition. The Committee for a Workers

International to which the Socialist Party in Ireland and Socialist Youth are affiliated has intervened in the key protests from Seattle and Washington to Prague and Nice. We aim to win the best activists and youth to a revolutionary working class perspective.

Numerous further demonstrations and actions are being planned. On 21 April in Quebec City the Summit of the Americas will take place to discuss the FTAA, a new extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which has been a charter for big business. The IMF/World Bank will meet in Washington again on 30 April. A wide range of large protests will mark May Day. The other major protests will be at the EU summit Gothenburg in June; the G8 meeting in Genoa on 20 July; and a protest in Brussels later in the year.

A working class perspective

The anti-globalisation movement can continue on its own steam for some time to come, but not forever. The real question is how the more generalised class struggles in the next period will be influenced by the anti-globalisation movement and how the class struggles will be a factor in influencing the direction of the movement.

The Battle of Seattle had significant working class representation but many other protests didn't. Anti-capitalist consciousness is not an abstract issue. The attitudes that will develop among millions of workers and youth under the hammer blows of the bigger struggles that are yet to come will show its

real meaning. This is particularly the case with youth.

It is task of Marxists, at this stage in the development of anti-corporate and anti-globalisation sentiments, to intervene to win the best fighters to a working class anti-capitalist perspective. As the crisis of capitalism deepens, the weaknesses of the dominant radical liberal ideas in the movement will be fully exposed and it will be possible to win far larger numbers to our banner.

It is worth recalling what happened to the international movement of radicalised youth in the 1960s. In its early stages there were many different and often very confused ideas that competed under the broad heading of the "new left". As with many of the groups active today, there was a widespread view that the working class, especially in the West, was not the key force in the fight to change society.

Then came the events in France in 1968 when the workers shut the country down for a month and socialist revolution was on the agenda. This was followed a year later by equally convulsive events in Italy. For the best sections of the youth movement these developments answered many questions about how capitalism could be defeated in practice.

In the next period, the working class will again stamp its authority on events. The joyless boom is over and the capitalists won't waste much time in making a slump even more joyless. They have little choice – that's the way the market system works. Millions of workers and youth will come to see that the only alternative is socialism.

NoLogo

by Naomi Klein

NoLogo has taken the anti-capitalist movement by storm, being hailed as "The bible for anti-corporate militancy" by *Select* magazine and gaining its author accolades such as "a young funky heiress to Chomsky" from alternative zines such as *i-D*.

By Eleanor Rodgers

Naomi Klein is a Canadian journalist with a background in the feminist movement of the early 90s, who like many others has moved in the direction of this new and wider movement. *NoLogo* is her attempt to chart what has brought all the disparate single issue groups of the nineties together into one movement.

The first section "No Space" deals with the growth of advertising, corporate sponsorship and the development of the brand concept.

For Klein the changing face of big business is the key reason for the coalescence of the anti-corporate movement. It is a reaction to the growth of the power of the multi-nationals to the point where they seem all enveloping, and nowhere more so than in their public presentation.

Marketing is nothing new but Klein argues that in the 80s and 90s a fundamental change took place with the development of branding and logos. As a result, a pair of sneakers worth \$30 dollars could sell for \$120 if they had a Nike swoosh on the side.

Advertising is an expanding business. In 1981 total ad spending in the US was \$60 billion; by 1997 it was closer to \$180 billion. Nike alone went from spending \$100 million in 1989 to \$500 million by 1997.

Much of this money was spent on making sure that no matter where you go the ads are there first. Adverts in toilet stalls and slotted into the middle of cheap phonecalls are just two examples.

A is for Apple (Mac)

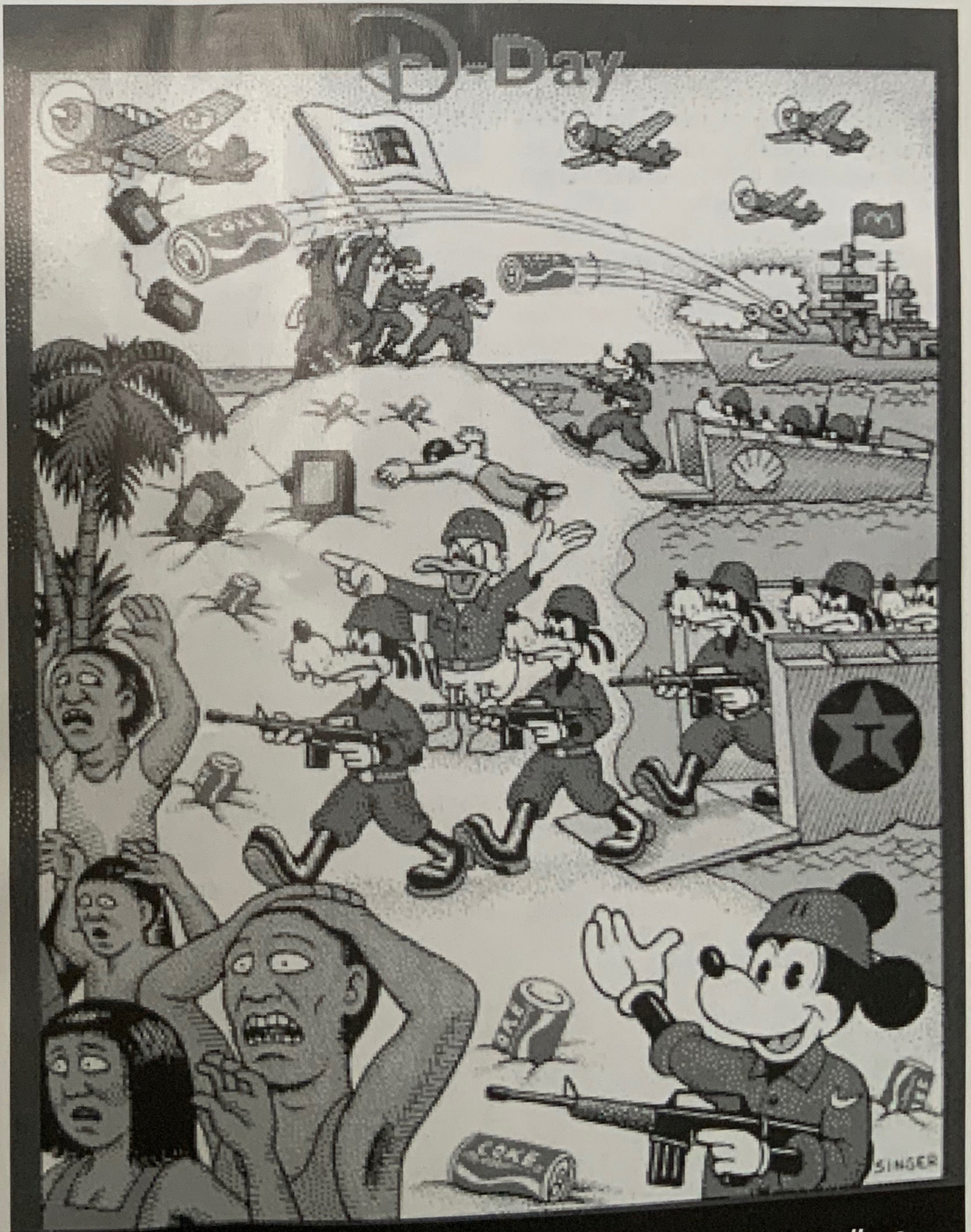
One of the most hard fought territories in this battle for space has been America's public schools, with Pepsi and Coke fighting to have the right to place vending machines on campus and McDonald's and Burger King to provide alternative school meals. Hungry for space, the advertisers push the boundaries even further, infringing on the curriculum so that school projects can include building a Nike sneaker or designing the new McDonald's advertising campaign.

As Klein puts it, advertising has invaded our space and it is natural to want to create a dialogue - to talk back.

At its lowest level this is the student who was suspended for wearing a Pepsi t-shirt to a school-organised official Coke day. At its highest level it is the worldwide anti McDonald's campaign. It is the power of these logos, carefully built and maintained by their companies, which attracts the activists to attack them. Their attempt to build a worldwide hegemony where every young person watches MTV, drinks Coke, and wears Levis and Nikes means that the logos themselves have become an international activists' language, crossing borders and language barriers with ease. It also means that young people feel personally involved with the logos, a press story about a sweatshop

in Indonesia will rouse little interest if the product being made is unknown, whereas if it is Nike trainers that makes the issue more immediately relevant to first world youth.

The biggest problem with this analysis of advertising and the reaction to it is that it's the truth, but not the whole truth. In the two middle sections of the book, "No Choice" and "No Jobs", Klein does deal with the expanding size and economic power of the multinationals, and the movement of traditional manufacturing jobs from the first to the third world, but these to her are almost adjuncts of the new marketing strategy - as CEOs the world over lose interest in manufacturing and concentrate on



“It doesn't matter whether it comes in by cable, telephone lines, computer or satellite. Everyone's going to have to deal with Disney.”
Disney Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Michael Eisner

advertising, and companies merge to become the biggest, most powerful advertising machines.

As she says "offering employment – the steady kind, with benefits, holiday pay, a measure of security and maybe even union representation – has fallen out of economic fashion."

The effect of these changes for her is that we lose our loyalty to companies that previously provided good solid manufacturing jobs and now offer us only empty slogans and McJobs. In chapter 11 entitled "Breeding disloyalty" she laments the fact that "Today it's hard to find a contented company town, where citizens do not feel they have in some way been betrayed by the local corporate sector."

Actually she had already given an example of such a place earlier on in the book, namely Celebration, Florida, built, maintained and owned by Disney, where the council of contented town-folk is appointed by the Mouse rather than elected by residents.

The choice of a new generation

The final section of the book, "No Logo", introduces us to the people fighting back, from the "culture jammers" (who change adverts to attack the companies who designed them) to Reclaim the Streets, to the NGOs and labour affiliated organisations that try to raise awareness of the sweatshops run by Multi-nationals in the third world.

All these groups are linked only by their common target – multi-nationals and globalisation.

Klein makes two points about this choice of target. One is that youth rebellion has always targeted institutions which restrict it, traditionally the church or the state. But as both those institutions appear to be increasingly irrelevant, the rising star of multi-nationals – that try to tell you how to eat and how to dress; that censor music (big American stores do so frequently with targets ranging from Nirvana to Eminem); and control freedom of speech by controlling the media – naturally become a target.

Her second point is the failure of traditional political agitation. She says, "Many citizens movements have tried to reverse conservative economic trends over the last decade by electing liberal, labor or democratic-socialist governments only to find that economic policy remains unchanged or caters even more directly to the whims of global corporations. ... these failures to regulate capital left many reform and

opposition movements in a state of near paralysis: citizens it seemed had lost their say."

For Klein the paralysis ended with the beginning of the "anti-capitalist movement".

She quotes an activist who says "Activists always target people who have the power...so if the power moves from government to industry to transnational corporations so the swivel will move onto these people."

Marxists have always understood that politicians are the puppets of the real powers that be – those who own – the controllers of capital.

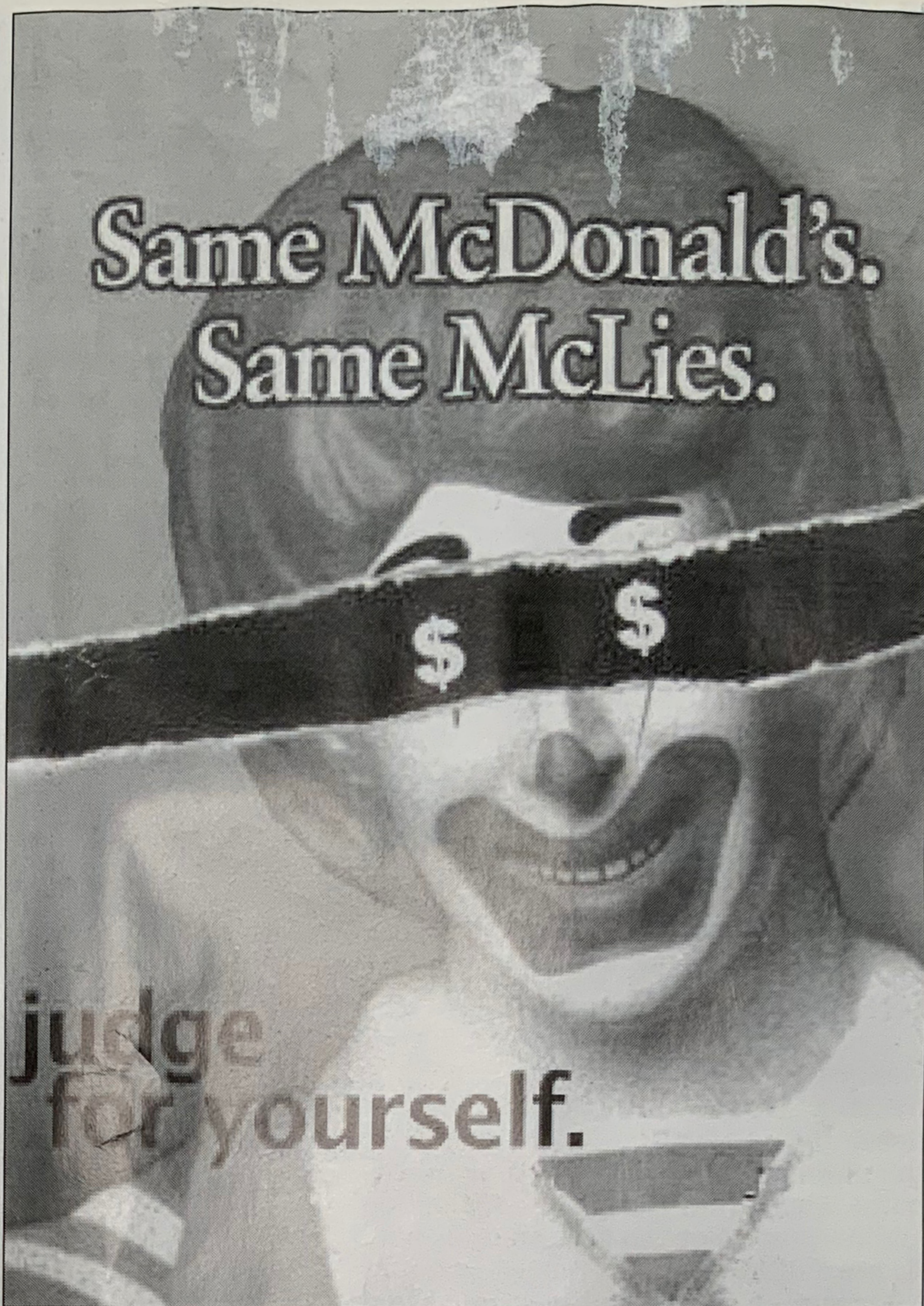
For Naomi Klein this is a new discovery. Her biggest mistake is to assume that this is a new development. She doesn't define the moment of transition but it is implicit in the book that the 80s, the era of Reaganomics, reversed a situation where previously governments controlled and businesses were merely part of the structure. As a result, a deep change has taken place since then giving control of the world to the multinationals.

NoLogo, like many things labelled anti-capitalist, simply isn't. It is anti-corporate, in fact the phrase anti-capitalist is not mentioned once in the book.

The analysis it offers is woefully lacking in any idea of the nature of the system in the first place and second what needs to be done to get rid of it. Underpinning the book is the idea that if only we could go back to the post-war consensus, those heady days of the 50s and 60s when there was near full employment, a high level of unionisation, decent welfare etc. and somehow include the third world in this economic bliss, that would solve our problems.

The future is bright

In her conclusion Klein admits uncertainty as to where the movement is



"Culture busters" take on McDonald's.

going, and what effect it will have. She describes it as "at the early stages of demanding a citizen-centred alternative to the international rule of the brands. That demand ... is to build a resistance ... that is as global, and as capable of coordinated action, as the multinational corporations it seeks to subvert." This vagueness about the nature of the forces that can bring decisive change is a fundamental weakness of Klein's analysis. In reality, as the global struggles of the next period will make clear, the international working class remains central to the struggle to change society, a struggle that must point in the direction of world socialism.

Nevertheless, despite its flaws, *NoLogo* is a good study of many of the roots of the anti-globalisation movement and it foreshadows some of the debates within the movement so well that it is hard to believe it was written and researched before the Battle of Seattle in 1999. It contains a lively collection of examples of youth rebellion and statistics and information about the corporations they are rebelling against. For any budding young anti-capitalist activist wanting to arm themselves with basic material and ideas for campaigns, or for anyone wanting to understand this movement better it is therefore an invaluable source.

Ten years since the Gulf War **BLOOD FOR OIL**

THE TENTH anniversary of the beginning of the Gulf War has been marked by a promised escalation of bombings and tightening of sanctions by newly inaugurated US President, George W Bush; growing opposition around the world to the continuing of the sanctions and a serious split amongst the major world powers about how to deal with Saddam Hussein's regime.

By Michael O'Brien

The Gulf War was the first opportunity for US imperialism, then presided over by George Bush senior, to put into practise what he meant by the "new world order". This was in the context of the then-recent collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which left the US as an unrivalled super power, free to brazenly intervene anywhere in the neo colonial world without fear of meeting any significant opposition. Indeed, the war received the unprecedented backing of all five permanent members of the UN Security Council as well as most of the other regimes in the Middle East. The intention was to reinforce this "new world order" ideology with unprecedented media access to the "smart" bombings and daily media briefings from leading/celebrity military personnel which would serve to impress the western viewer and warn anybody else of the futility of resistance.

While in no way diminishing the misery Saddam Hussein had heaped upon the peoples of Iraq as well as the ordinary working people of Kuwait the Socialist Party's predecessors in Militant and our sister organisations in the Committee for a Workers' International came out against this war.

In opposing the war, socialists at the time had to first point out the hypocrisy of the allies in claiming that this was a war to defend democracy. Hussein's grip on power in Iraq was owed in no small measure to the backing he had received from the US and Britain in particular in terms of arms supplies and military training. He was feted in western circles in the 1980s for the war against Iran, the then bogeyman of the region, in which over a million died. His pilots were trained in Britain and his elite Republican Guard were trained at the Sandhurst military academy. By the time of the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq could boast the fifth

largest army in the world.

Such was the cosiness of the relationship between Saddam Hussein's regime and the West he didn't anticipate opposition to the annexation of Kuwait. This assumption was not entirely without reason. Only three months before the invasion he signalled his intent to the US ambassador in Baghdad. Her response was that "the US has no opinion on an Arab/Arab dispute like your border disagreement with Kuwait".

However the invasion gave him control of 20% of the world's oil supplies, which was too much for the US to bear. That, and the fact that the US military industry's two biggest clients, Saudi Arabia and Israel, began to feel threatened by Hussein's ambitions in the region was reason enough to exact retribution.

The West's hypocrisy

The claim that the West was upholding democracy and freedom was also hollow from the point of view that many of the regimes in the region backing the war effort were as oppressive as Iraq when it came to human rights, the use of the death penalty, public floggings and the oppression of women. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates were and still are absolute monarchies or oligarchies (run by more than one royal family) who use their countries natural resources to enrich themselves.

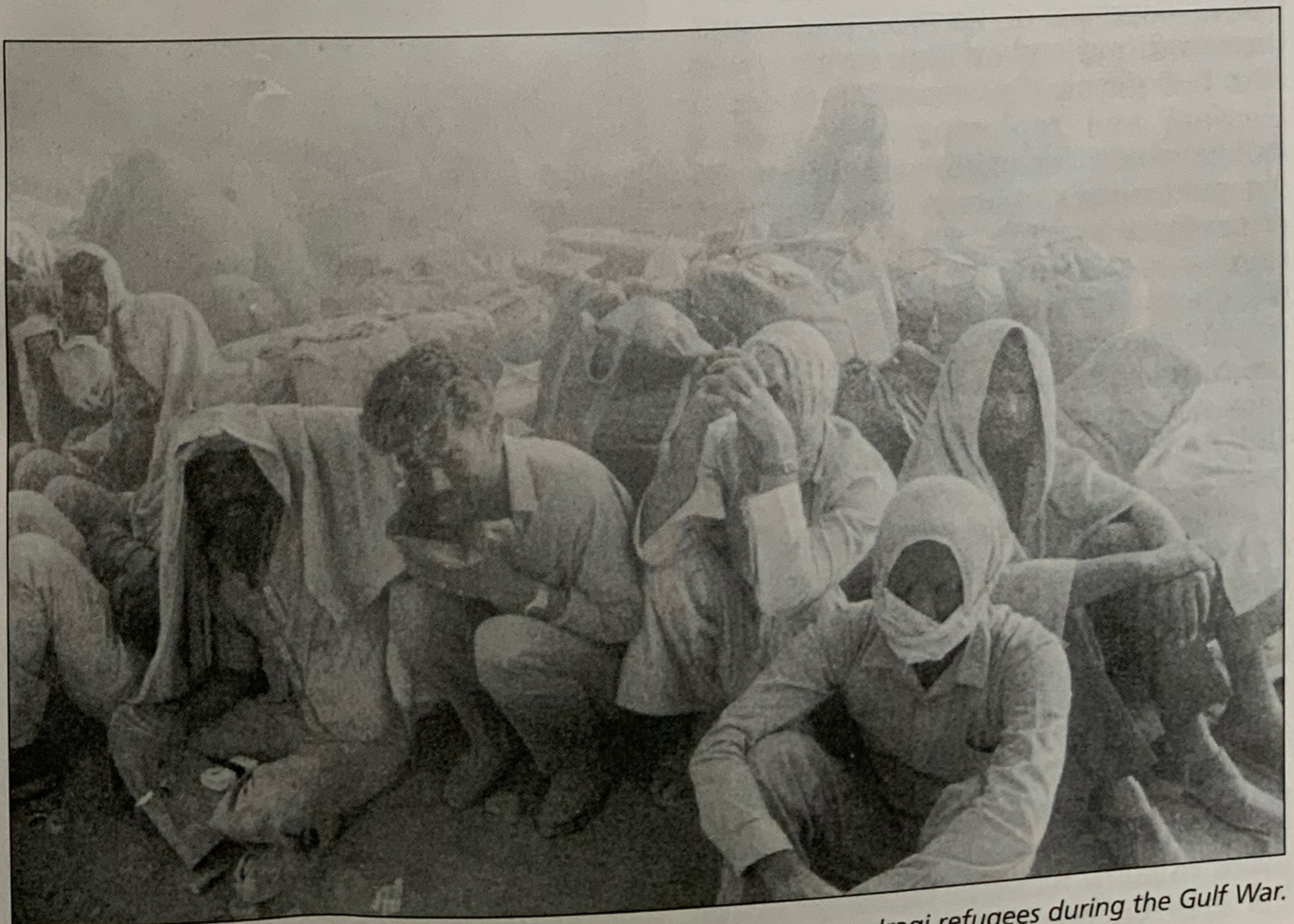
Kuwait's population was made up mostly of immigrant workers from Palestine, North Africa and the Asian subcontinent whose cheap labour serviced the local wealthy elite. The Emir of Kuwait was later restored when Iraqi troops were pushed back by the allies.

Likewise the treatment the Kurds received from the Iraqi regime was no different to what they endured in Turkey, a NATO member, without any objections from western leaders. In both cases, whole villages were razed and people massacred with nerve gas and other chemical weapons.

The argument that this war was not over upholding democracy but rather control of the world's oil supply was readily accepted by many workers and youth in the West. However, it begged the question of how the Iraqi regime was going to be overthrown.

An outright allied victory on the ground and Saddam Hussein's removal would have likely led to his replacement by sections of the military more pliant to US interests with no net benefit for the Iraqi poor. Furthermore it would serve as a warning to masses throughout the neo-colonial world not to choose a path that diverged from US interests. Conversely a military defeat for imperialism would have weakened it and emboldened the masses around the world in the fight against neo-liberal policies throughout the 1990s.

From that point of view the Socialist Party and the Committee for a Workers'



Iraqi refugees during the Gulf War.

International called for critical support for Iraq militarily while calling for the overthrow of the regime. We identified the oppressed Iraqi workers and peasants, the Kurds in the north, the Marsh Arabs in the south and the Shia minority centred around the city of Basra as being the best placed to overthrow the regime (the ethnic minorities together actually make up a majority of the population).

Iraqi working class

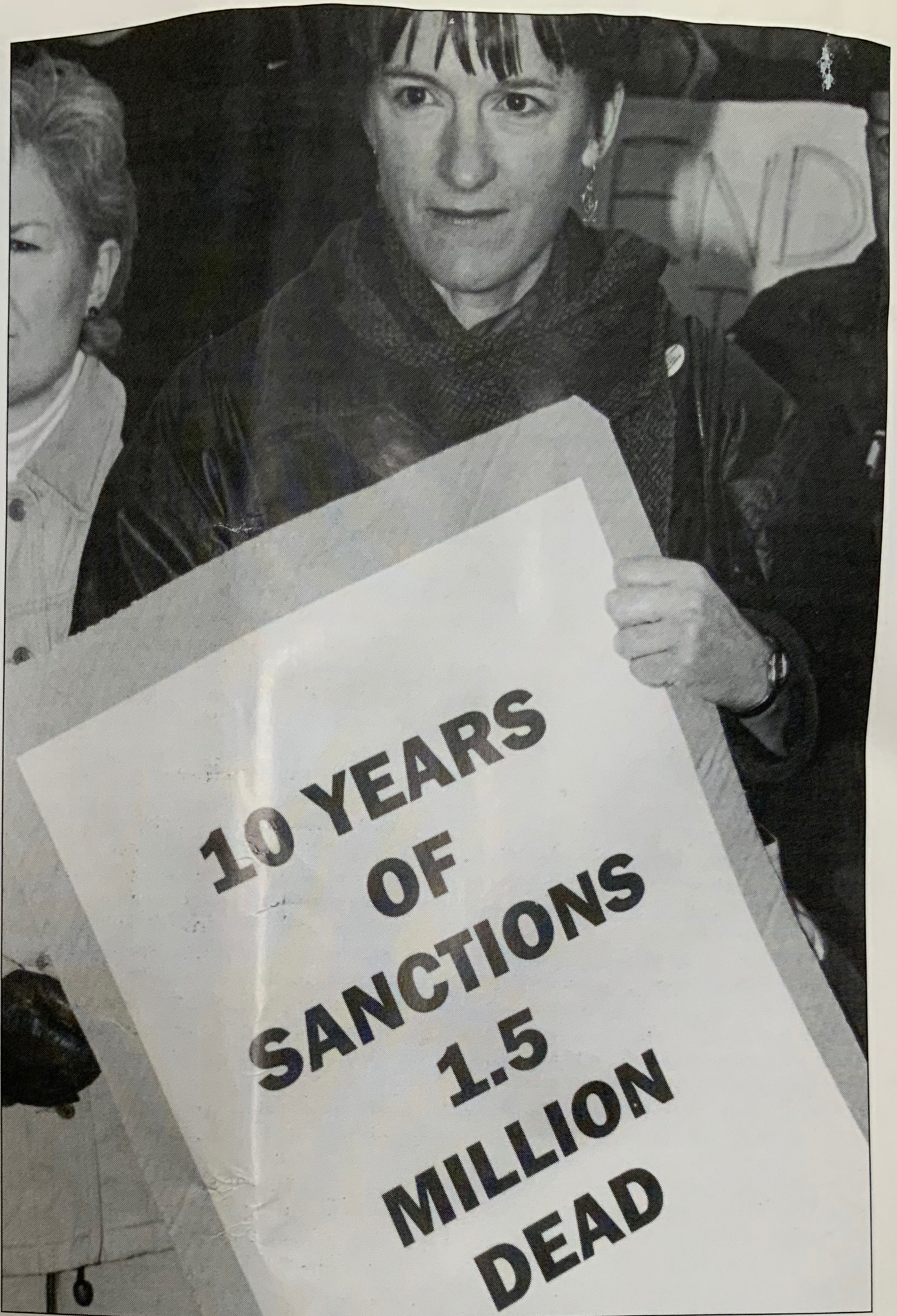
In fact, the Iraqi working class, and especially the oil workers, have very militant traditions. In the 1940s there were massive strikes against the presence of British military bases in the country. In the late 1950s there was another upsurge that could have led to a social revolution. The Communist Party which had a mass base in the working class and among the Kurdish population betrayed this struggle thus opening the way for the bloody takeover of the Baath party which has ruled ever since.

For many who otherwise agreed with us, our position on the need for revolution in Iraq required a leap of imagination during the cut and thrust of the Gulf War. However, after six weeks of fighting in what turned out to be a rout for the Iraqi army, a spontaneous insurrection against the regime by the ethnic minorities began. Bush senior had publicly paid lip service to the idea of ordinary Iraqis and Kurds rising up against the regime during the war, he could hardly do otherwise.

In practice the insurrection created a problem for the allies. They could force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, they could bomb military and civilian targets from afar but physically removing Saddam Hussein and replacing him with a stooge would take the commitment of ground troops and heavy losses instead of the mere 300 killed. The "broad coalition" assembled by the US would have disintegrated and support at home would have evaporated. Already during the course of the war there were mass demonstrations in the Arab world, especially in Jordan, against their countries' participation.

At the same time the allies exercised no control over the insurgents. From the point of view of the allies, their victory could serve as an impetus for other oppressed peoples in the area, the Kurds in Turkey in particular, to rise up in defence of their rights.

As one US official put it "it's easier to deal with a tame Saddam than an unknown quantity". So the allies connived to allow Saddam Hussein regain his grip on the situation by actively



The international opposition against the sanctions is growing.

facilitating the movement of the Republican Guard through allied lines to Basra where they put down the Shia opposition and stifled the uprisings elsewhere. This double-dealing got a degree of exposure in the film Three Kings. Since then various pro-western Iraqi "opposition" groups in exile have been kept alive with lavish budgets and have had zero impact on the regime.

The war itself was a totally one sided affair which lasted 43 days and resulted in at least 250,000 Iraqi dead (civilian and military), the decimation of civilian infrastructure including water supply and hospitals, and 1.8 million being left homeless. The glorious finale was the horrendous "road to Basra" or "turkey shoot" as the US military described it.

This was a reference to the retreat from the war zone by immigrant workers from Kuwait, civilians, and conscripted soldiers, including Kurds, who

had been deserted by their officers. It resulted in a defenceless traffic jam twenty vehicles wide, being bombed from the air and contributing to a large portion of the final death toll.

The use of depleted uranium during the war has meant that its legacy is not just felt in the region. An estimated 120,000 former allied combatants are suffering from "gulf war syndrome", a debilitating disease linked to heavy metals.

No to sanctions

Since the war, sanctions, "no fly zones", and weekly bombings have been posed as a method that will result in the eventual compliance with weapons' inspections and possibly even Saddam Hussein's overthrow. Instead, his grip on power is as firm as ever and the sanctions have resulted in the death of 1.4 million people including 500,000 chil-

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dren, from a combination of curable diseases, malnutrition and bad sanitary conditions. When asked, former US Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, said that this was a price worth paying if it led to Saddam Hussein's downfall. However Saddam and his cronies are still living in the lap of luxury thanks to a thriving black market.

The conditions faced by ordinary Iraqis has led to the high profile resignations of UN personnel like Denis Halliday who was employed to oversee the "food for oil" programme whereby Iraq is permitted to sell oil on the world market if the proceeds are used to purchase food and medicine. In practice, there has been the withholding from import of all sorts of innocuous goods from pencils to kidney dialysis machines on the pretext that they could in some way be adapted for military use.

The alleged reason for the continued bombings is the non-co-operation with UN weapons inspection teams and the insistence that Hussein has the potential to build weapons of mass destruction. This is despite of the view given by a former American weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, who was expelled along with the others in 1999. In 1997 he said, "Iraq has been disarmed. Iraq no longer possessed any meaningful quantities of chemical or biological agent... the same was true of Iraq's nuclear and ballistic capability" (*Observer*, 25 February 2001).

Beyond Iraq Saddam has used the suffering of ordinary Iraqis and the overall situation in the Middle East to bol-

ster his standing in the region. As one correspondent in the area put it: "The belief on the Arab street is that President Bush, has used the pretext of Iraq upgrading its air defence to punish Saddam for the vocal and material support he is providing to the Palestinian intifada. The Iraqi leader has repeatedly declared that only a 'jihad' [holy war] will lead to the liberation of Palestine" (*Observer*, 18 February 2001). By material support he is referring to food and medicine convoys as well as \$10,000 cheques given by the Iraqi regime to the families of those killed by the Israeli state forces. These actions are not altruism on Hussein's part but rather are designed to have an effect on moving other Arab regimes to take a stand against the sanctions.

Anti-imperialist mood

An aspect of the recent demonstrations in the Arab world against Israel and against the bombing of Iraq has been the criticism of other regimes in the area for being pro-US. It should be pointed out that Saddam has in no way softened the nature of his regime in Iraq. Recently there have been reports of mass shootings in the prisons as well as ethnic cleansing in some of the major cities.

The whole Gulf War experience and its continuing legacy has demonstrated the limitations of world imperialism in this period. As was shown again during the NATO war against Serbia the major powers cannot bank on the support of the people back home for ground inter-

ventions that yield high casualties despite the best efforts of media propaganda. The prevailing mood amongst workers and youth in the West is to end the sanctions on Iraq. Even among right wing commentators there are grumblings that the strategy being pushed by the US is going nowhere.

The "new world order" of having all the major powers, East and West, speaking with one voice has proved short-lived. Divergent strategies have emerged in terms of how to deal with Iraq. On the one hand, the new US administration feels it can reassert its dominant role on the world stage if it can escalate the bombings and sanctions with a little help from their lap dog, Tony Blair.

On the other side, Russia, China and the EU, especially France, all have an eye on the parlous state of the world oil industry and are seeking to develop a connection with Iraq and bring sanctions to an end. They have even used the suffering sanctions has caused to drum up support for this strategy as well as quoting chapter and verse of international law and UN resolutions as if to say that only when these rules are observed is it OK to bomb a country!

The Irish ruling class have a foot in both camps with people like Niall Andrews MEP clearly supporting the EU strategy but the Department of Foreign Affairs not wanting to offend US interests. Thus Brian Cowen declared his "understanding" for the reasons behind the latest escalation of the bombing.

The differences between the various rulings classes got more exposure than ever after the recent spate of bombings and this is likely to be the music of the future given the impending economic crises and the struggle to protect and expand markets.

Socialists meanwhile should call for the immediate ending of sanctions and bombings. No support can be given to the so called "opposition" groups in exile who want to create an Iraq in the image of the other US client states the region.

Instead the working class and oppressed nationalities of Iraq should take their cue from the Indonesian and Serbian masses and overthrow the regime. If the poverty, destruction and disease are to be overcome, however, it will take a socialist programme that can harness Iraq's vast natural resources to meet the needs of the ordinary people. A socialist Iraq would be a massive step towards a socialist federation of the Near East, the only solution to the horrible conflicts and poverty that plague this region.



Ten years after the Gulf War, the bombing is still going on.

The Buru Quartet

by Pramoedya Ananta Toer

The novel as a form was developed in Europe with the rise of the capitalist class. However, most of the world is not white European. As a form, it has been exported, and can tell us a great deal about the rest of the world.

By Anton McCabe

The *Buru Quartet* by the Indonesian revolutionary Pramoedya Ananta Toer is one of the great achievements of world literature.

The four books *This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps* and *House of Glass* are set in the early years of the last century, as revolt was stirring against the Dutch colonial rulers of what was then the Dutch East Indies.

The conditions under which the quartet was written make it an even more extraordinary.

Toer was arrested in 1965 during a right-wing coup, when up to 1.5 million people were slaughtered. During his arrest, he was struck on the head with the butt of a rifle. The blow has left him deaf.

He was not freed till 1979. He was sympathetic to, but not a member of, the Communist Party, PKI.

The Indonesian military regime feared words and ideas. On his arrest, Toer's manuscripts were destroyed, some deliberately, some by a mob.

The conditions under which the *Buru Quartet* was composed are a tribute to the resilience of man. Buru is a remote jungle-covered island. Even a prisoner escaping from the prison camp had no chance of getting off the island. Toer watched guards murder fellow-prisoners for sport.

Toer composed the *Buru Quartet* verbally, as a serial he told to fellow-prisoners every day to keep their morale up. Only in the last years of his confinement did he have access to pen and paper. On release, he re-assembled the stories in his head and wrote them down. Even then, his work could not be published in Indonesia. For twenty years he was confined to Jakarta, the country's capital.

Prison has played a big part in Toer's life. From 1947 to 1949 he was imprisoned by the Dutch colonial authorities for his part in the anti-colonial revolt.

The first three books – *This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations* and *Footsteps* had at their centre Minke, a young radical nationalist leader.

Jacques Pangemanann, the central character of *House of Glass*, is a policeman working for the Dutch colonial authorities. Part-Indonesian, part-Dutch, he has risen as high as a non-European can go in the police force. He is married to a white Frenchwoman.

He is 50, and in a privileged position. A big theme in *House of Glass* is how revolutionary ideas are attractive, and can win over the most unexpected recruits. Pangemanann is sent to spy on Minke: but he sympathizes with him. The policeman feels disgusted at his role - but is caught by his need to provide for his wife and children. That conflict at the heart of him makes this a most memorable novel.

Toer is now an open member of the PRD, the main socialist party in Indonesia. Though Marxists would have differences with its programme, it is a party of self-sacrificing revolutionaries, and sees itself as having broken with Stalinism.

The entire *Buru Quartet* is available in Penguin, *This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps* and *House of Glass*. *House of Glass*, the most recently published, costs £7.99 sterling.

The Socialist Party in Ireland is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). The CWI has affiliated parties and organisations in 35 countries on all continents.

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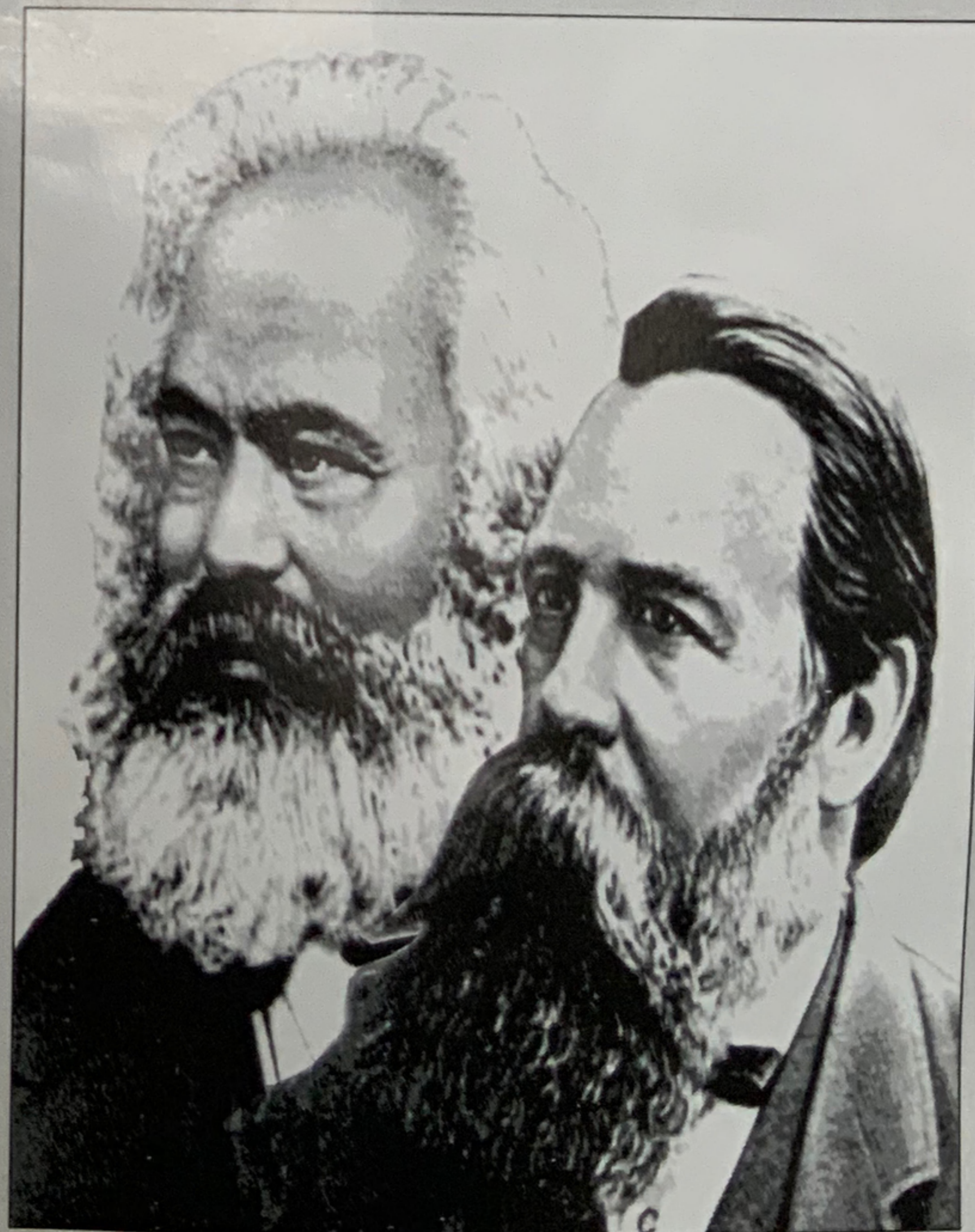
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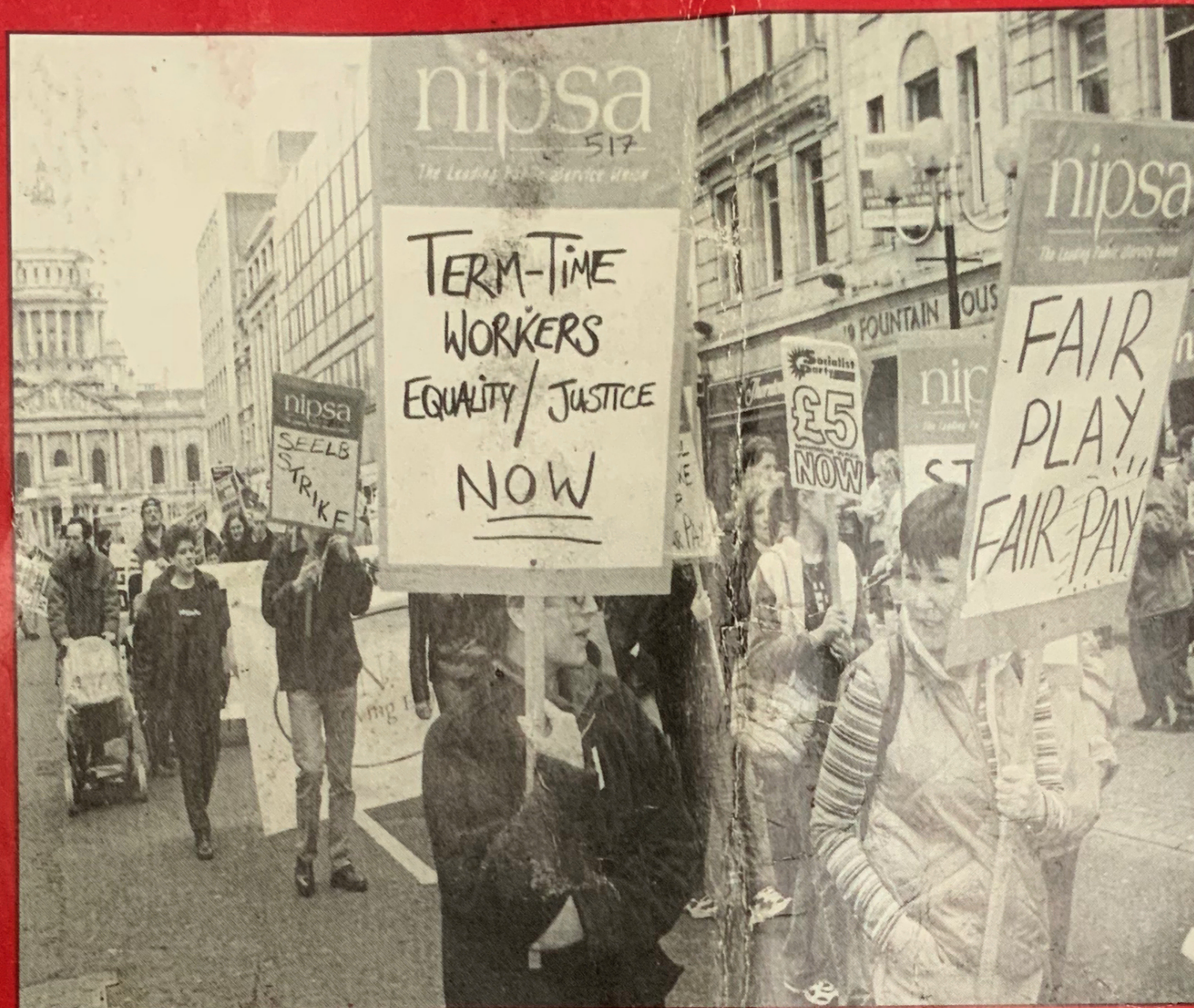
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