

Workers Aid launches second convoy

CHRISTMAS APPEAL FOR BOSNIA

WORKERS Aid for Bosnia has launched an appeal for a Christmas convoy.

This is the first step taken by the campaign's steering committee which met in Manchester on 20 November. With the enthusiastic support of the 31 members at the meeting, this action launches the drive to open the northern route to Tuzla.

The TUC has responded to discussions with Edo Asceric, director of the Tuzla Logistic Centre in Zagreb, by supporting the demand for this route to be opened, along with the opening of Tuzla and Sarajevo airports for the delivery of aid.

The campaign's appeal leaflet says:

THREE million Bosnians are facing starvation, as Christmas approaches.

Over 60 children are dying every day from lack of food and medical attention.

Help

We appeal to everybody in the labour movement to do everything to help Workers Aid for Bosnia send an aid convoy this Christmas.

We ask all those who stand against fascist barbarity and for the right of Bosnia to exist as a nation to back this convoy.

It plans to leave Britain on 15 December and arrive in Zagreb, the Croatian capital, on 18

December. It will consist mainly of young people who have already taken part in the first Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy.

This second convoy will be part of the campaign to open the road from the Croatian border town of Orasje to Tuzla, in Bosnia.

This 75km highway, although a designated UN-approved 'blue route', is being blocked by that organisation because it wants to starve the Bosnian people into submission and force them to accept the Vance-Owen plan, which will mean the break-up of Bosnia.

Workers Aid for Bosnia is planning a larger convoy for February as part of its demand

that this route be opened.

Every penny you raise, every item of aid you give, will let the workers of Tuzla know that their courageous fight is not in vain.

They are fighting to survive in temperatures now 10 degrees centigrade below zero.

Lack

Because of a lack of diesel oil for the pumping stations, electricity is available for only one-and-a-half hours a day.

Doctors are operating in hospitals with no running water or anaesthetics.

Under constant attack from Serbian fascist bands, the Tuzla region remains the outstanding bastion against 'ethnic cleansing'.

This workers' region is on the front line of the fight against fascism in Europe. Its miners

and steelworkers are the backbone of this fight.

When the European Community's mediator Lord Owen said that it would be counter-productive to open the aid routes he was speaking on behalf of the great powers and the United Nations.

The people of Bosnia are digging in for a long, hard winter. They must not stand alone!

They will not stand alone! Their fight is our fight!

Please give everything you possibly can to the Workers Aid for Bosnia Christmas Appeal.

Send your donations and offers of help to: Workers Aid for Bosnia, PO Box 9, Eccles SO, Salford M30 7FX. Or you can phone the Christmas convoy hotline on 071-582 5462.

How you can help

- Ask your trade union branch or community organisation to make a donation to the Christmas appeal.
- Take one of our collecting sheets among your friends and workmates.
- Ring and let us know if you have any goods — food and medical supplies are the things needed most urgently.
- If you would like to join a local Workers Aid group or help set one up contact us.

You can reach us at:

Workers Aid for Bosnia, PO Box 9, Eccles SO, M30 7FX.

Or Telephone: 071-582 5462 (London) or 061-707 1584 (Manchester).

New plot begins against Bosnia

A NEW plot against Bosnia is being hatched by the great powers. Foreign ministers from the European Union (EU) were meeting in Geneva this week, with representatives from Russia and the United States invited.

They were to discuss their latest so-called 'peace plan'. This would lift sanctions against the aggressor Serbia if it returns a paltry 3.5 per cent of the territory plundered from Bosnia in its war to establish a Greater Serbia.

Meanwhile the starvation of Bosnia would continue, sanctioned by the United Nations.

Foreign secretary Douglas Hurd made a scarcely-veiled threat to Bosnia when he said last week that 'aid to Bosnia cannot continue indefinitely'.

Blistering

The French-based aid agency Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) is the latest organisation to launch a blistering attack on the United Nations.

Speaking on behalf of MSF, Anne-Marie Huby said:

'The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is a fraud. It doesn't protect anybody except itself. Every decision is taken in regard to possible implications for the UN troops on the ground.'

These sentiments were repeated by MSF's head of legal affairs, Ms Bouchet-Saulnier, who said: 'We are wondering what they are doing there. . . . They don't help humanitarian organisations, they don't help civilians, and they don't help peace.'

The meeting in Geneva comes a week after Bosnian Serb and Croat leaders promised that their forces would not shoot at convoys, but would allow them through to areas needing aid. Within 24 hours the pledge was broken.



Twenty thousand marched in London last Saturday protesting against the cuts in the NHS. The march was TUC-organised

Photo: Alan Clark

Budget will mean benefit robbery

THE unemployed and the sick will be the main targets in the latest attack on the welfare state to be announced in the budget on 30 November.

Entitlement to unemployment benefit is to be cut from a year to six months. After that all benefits will be means-tested. Those with over £8,000 in savings would lose all benefits after six months.

Curbs on sick pay and housing benefit are in the pipeline, together with a longer-term plan to encourage people to opt out of the state pension scheme and make their own arrangements for private insurance when they fall sick.

The government is getting ready to tax child benefit, and to force wives to

BY PETER JEFFRIES

make separate pension arrangements.

The Treasury also intends that pensioners should be forced to use their homes as assets before they can claim money from the state.

As one cynical Tory MP

said, this is the 'eat your house' strategy.

So much for Major's 'property-owning democracy'!

David Willets, former director of the Centre for Policy Studies, a right-wing body founded by Baroness Thatcher, has outlined a six-point plan which has already been discussed in the Treasury.

Work

Willets wants to see a tightening up of rules for receipt of invalidity benefit, including more stringent medical tests; single parents made to work once their children reach school age; those on unemployment benefit forced to sign on more

often; and people encouraged to buy their own food and rent their own rooms when in hospital.

Part of his plan is the idea that pensioners should be forced to sell their assets.

Labour called these measures 'assault and robbery'.

This is just words. For Labour has set up its own commission to look at how the system of welfare benefits can be 'rationalised', that is cut.

However much the Labour leaders attack the Tories in words, their deeds are something different.

Last week John Monks, new general secretary of the TUC, revealed that he had been in private discussions with Tory

ministers over the last several weeks and was now looking forward to better relations with the government.

This is the same government that is about to launch more devastating attacks on the vulnerable people in Britain, casting tens of thousands more people into destitution.

This is the same government that for a decade and more has launched a vicious legal attack on trade unionism.

All those threatened in the latest attacks must unite against the Tories, and at the same time take up the fight against all those in the labour movement, such as Monks, who in practice join hands with the Tories against the working class.

Hours limit regularly ignored on roads

THE DEATHS of 13 school students on the M40 in a minibus crash, and of ten American sightseers on their way to Canterbury on the M2 in Kent, give rise to serious doubts about the length of time people spend driving.

The schoolteacher who was driving the school's minibus had been at work for 15 hours. Even if only five hours were spent driving, the whole working day must have had an impact on the alertness of the driver.

The M2 crash took place at 9.30am, but police are now believed to be conducting a detailed inquiry into driving hours records of all drivers employed by the company.

The legal limit of ten hours driving per day — which does not apply to private vehicles — is regularly ignored by bus and lorry companies. A west London bus company found to have broken the driving hours law 270 times in one month had the cases dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service, not because of lack of evidence, but because they had 'not been criminally negligent'.

More flexible use of vehicles and drivers, through the abolition of regulations that restrict profits, is given as the reason for endangering drivers' and passengers' lives.

The increase in stress and fatigue caused by driving even the existing legal hours is now blamed for a steady increase in health problems and accidents. Deregulation or longer driving hours will mean more deaths, but more profit.

Ford pay deal is pushed through

BY SCOTT KENDAL

MOST Ford plants in Britain have voted to accept a two-year pay deal for a 2.5 per cent wage rise in the first year and 3.5 per cent in the second. Marginal increases in pension payments were included, but no concessions were won on shorter hours and longer holidays, nor on equal terms with white-collar staff on items such as bereavement leave.

The unions' negotiating team, led by James Airlie of the AEEU engineers' union, recommended acceptance at only its second meeting. They said they did not think any more could be got out of the Ford Motor Co.

Reject

That many stewards and workers thought otherwise was evident at plants such as Dagenham's assembly plant, where 70 per cent voted to reject, and its engine plant, where one-third of the stewards opposed the recommendation, and the workers voted to accept by 773 votes to 772 — a majority of just one!

Dagenham stewards believe that if the call from the negotiating team had been for rejection the vote would have gone the other way.

The leaders could then have been sent back with a strong mandate to demand more. Instead they were landed with a deal that sees them falling behind in the car industry on pay and conditions.

Resist attack on safe driving laws!

IDEAS to increase the use of vehicles, and implement more flexible use of drivers, have been asked for in a Department of Transport circular to employers' organisations and the TUC.

Among the suggestions by the government are increasing the maximum daily driving time of ten hours, reducing the minimum daily rest breaks, and reducing the minimum time off between each day's work.

This is in direct opposition to the demand of bus and lorry drivers for shorter working hours and longer breaks because of an increasing amount of sickness. This is caused by the poor design of driving seats and cabs, and the growing stress of driving on congested roads.

Clearly drivers will be forced, in the interests of their own health and safety, as well as of the safety of all other road users, to organise to prevent longer hours behind the wheel. This battle must begin now.



Marchers on last weekend's London demonstration organised by the TUC against the attack on the NHS. See page 1 Photo: Alan Clark

Buyers stranded in council con-trick

Fighting fascism and racism

ONE of the Tory government's biggest con-tricks was its promise that Britain was soon to become a 'property-owning democracy'.

As part of this fraud, council house tenants were encouraged to buy their homes and flats at rock-bottom prices. The government has just started another round of publicity to encourage more sell-offs.

Disowned

Now about 120,000 people living in former council property find that they have been effectively disowned by the building societies.

Their property has fallen sharply in value, part of the general slump in house prices of the last three years and more.

They are faced with astronomical service charges

the result of the need to repair what are often delapidated or even structurally unsound blocks of flats.

More and more cases are coming to light of people who bought their flats on the basis of service charges of £6 a week — and who are now faced with charges six or seven times that level.

Many building societies have now decided that they will not lend money on former council property, thus making thousands of flats and houses unsaleable.

In some cases, owners of property they thought would fetch £40,000 on the market have been offered £5,000 for their flats.

Many owners have decided to simply leave their property and throw away the keys.

ATTACKS on black and Asian people, and the ineffectiveness of many anti-racist campaigns launched by the left, have led to the second Fighting Fascism and Racism conference, to be held in London on 4 December.

The trade union and Labour leaders have either ignored the problem or seen it in only electoral terms, say Bexley Trade Union Council, one of the conference organisers.

The TUC wants anti-racist activities to be 'broad-based' — it wants to include the Liberal Democrats and Tories in the planned demonstration in east London. Yet it has been told by local trade unions and community groups that these parties are unwelcome.

The first conference in July grew from a handful of local activists in south-east and east London to become London-wide

And the campaign has the mandate to become a national one.

The 4 December conference — which is for delegates only — is supported by the Greater London Association of Trades Councils and the South East Regional Council of the TUC.

Local

But it is still based on delegates at the local level — from the Anti-Nazi League, the Anti-Racist Alliance, Youth against Racism in Europe, and the Anti-Fascist Alliance, as well as trades unions and the Labour Party.

The Fighting Fascism and Racism conference is on Saturday 4 December from 10am-5pm, at the TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. (Nearest tube Tottenham Court Road.)

WORKERS PRESS IS THE PAPER OF THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Please send me information about the WRP

Name date

Address

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

Send to: PO Box 735, London SW8 1YB

Inside left

Missing name

CLAIMING the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign is just a 'front for the WRP', Steve Myers and his comrades have taken the name 'International Workers Aid for Bosnia' for their breakaway, which is backed by their organisation, the sectarian 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International' (Usec).

The Workers Aid report-back meeting for its convoy to Tuzla, Bosnia, on 30 October decided to support the campaign to open the northern corridor route to that town. A minority, including Myers, did not support this, and the breakaway campaign was formed the next day. He has now adopted the worn-out trick of right-wing Labourites, by claiming meetings where he lost the vote were 'hijacked' (see these pages).

Has Myers also learnt a trick from the Stalinists? His International Workers Aid report has an appendix of news cuttings, etc., including Workers Press items like our front-page lead of 7 August, 'Timex to Tuzla — convoy ready to roll!' In each case, his photocopier seems to have missed the name of our paper. What will he do next, use an airbrush to remove comrades from convoy photographs?

UNFORTUNATELY, I couldn't make Lambeth trades council's November meeting. According to the minutes, a delegate who supports 'Socialist Outlook' — paper of the International Socialist Group (ISG), the British section of Usec — reported that the Workers Aid convoy meeting in Manchester on 30 October had been 'marred by sectarianism', but 'International Workers Aid' looked better.

Whether he told the trades council anything about the convoy's report back, what Bosnians advised, or what was decided, the minutes don't say. If the omissions are the minute-taker's, perhaps the delegate will correct them, lest we get the idea his report was sectarian.

Will 'Socialist Outlook' explain why leading ISG member Alan Thornett, addressing Lambeth trades council's October meeting, didn't mention the 'international conference' — which launched the breakaway International Workers Aid — planned for the day after the Manchester meeting, nor did his comrades on the trades council? Like the Bosnian supporters of the Workers Aid convoy, Lambeth trades unionists weren't invited!

Where we were

'WHERE were you when President Kennedy was assassinated?', is a popular parlour-game in some circles (although a BBC discussion the other evening condemned 'conspiracy theories' rather than the killing).

I know where I was. On Friday 22 November 1963, Willesden East Young Socialists met at Alderman (later Labour MP) Reg Freeson's house, in Kilburn, London.

Ashen-faced, reformist Bernard Reaney announced a disaster: Labour deputy-leader and shadow foreign secretary George Brown had shambled onto TV, in what newspapers called his 'tired and emotional' state, slurring out something about his 'old pal, Jack Kennedy'.

As 'his lot' trembled at possible electoral consequences for Labour, 'our lot' fell about laughing with a comrade who quoted Radio Peking's comment: 'Yet another Yankee imperialist bites the dust!'

Just over a year before JFK had taken the world to the brink of nuclear war with his blockade of Cuba. Lifted from the protesting crowd in Whitehall, I and another comrade spent the night in police cells.

Otherwise, we'd have been out that morning distributing leaflets from the Socialist Labour League (forerunner of the WRP) calling for industrial action and solidarity with Cuba. I'm reminded of this whenever some people accuse our party, because it never bowed to Castroism, of not defending the Cuban revolution against imperialism

Charlie Pottins

DOT GIBSON looks at some lessons of the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign, in particular at the charge made by one of its former participants that the campaign has been 'hijacked' by the Workers Revolutionary Party.

IN A REPORT in 'Socialist Outlook' (13 November), paper of the International Socialist Group, Alan Thornett claims that the result of the Workers Aid for Bosnia convoy's report-back meeting, which was held in Manchester on 30 October, is that this organisation is now 'a front for the WRP'.

Some of our readers say that we should simply refuse to take part in a discussion on this issue because it is just another example of opportunism and sectarianism in 'left' groups which try to control campaigns and other actions in the workers' movement.

However, this opportunism and sectarianism threaten the endeavours of the many people who have joined the campaign to come to the aid of the Bosnian people. That is why we must discuss Thornett's statement.

Principles dropped

AMONG the points in the programme of action agreed when Workers Aid for Bosnia was founded at a meeting in London on 6 June was: 'The immediate lifting of the British-backed United Nations arms embargo on Bosnia and the withdrawal of UN troops.'

The experience and struggle of the convoy reinforced and brought into sharp relief the correctness of this original aim. The convoy established beyond any doubt that the UN — which prevented it from reaching its destination of Tuzla, the working-class capital of Bosnia — is the main instrument for the isolation of the working people of Bosnia from the rest of the European workers, and is the main force imposing the infamous Vance-Owen plan to break up Bosnia.

Steve Myers and other supporters of 'Socialist Outlook' voted on 6 June for this founding principle. At Manchester in October they dropped this, turning away from a fight against the UN, hoping to find favour with their associates in Europe.

'Democratic structures'

'THE lack of elected structures is always in fact a formula for control by an unelected minority who control the apparatus — the office, the bank account, the telephone number, the addresses and the knowledge of what is going on,' says Thornett in 'Socialist Outlook'.

Taken outside of the real-life development of the campaign, this sounds like a call for working-class democracy. But is it?

In a campaign like Workers Aid for Bosnia it is understandable that the most active and the most articulate become the organisers. This is normal, but not something which should continue. There are plenty of examples in our own past history when the Workers Revolutionary Party put its own immediate and narrow interests before the interests of the working class as a whole.

The rebuilding of internationalism in the workers' movement requires the self-organisation of the working class. It is on this basis

'The convoy established beyond any doubt that the UN . . . is the main instrument for the isolation of the working people of Bosnia from the rest of the European workers, and is the main force imposing the infamous Vance-Owen plan to break up Bosnia.'

that we now participate in the workers' movement. That is why we led the fight for sponsors for the convoy and continually broadened out the campaign inside the labour movement.

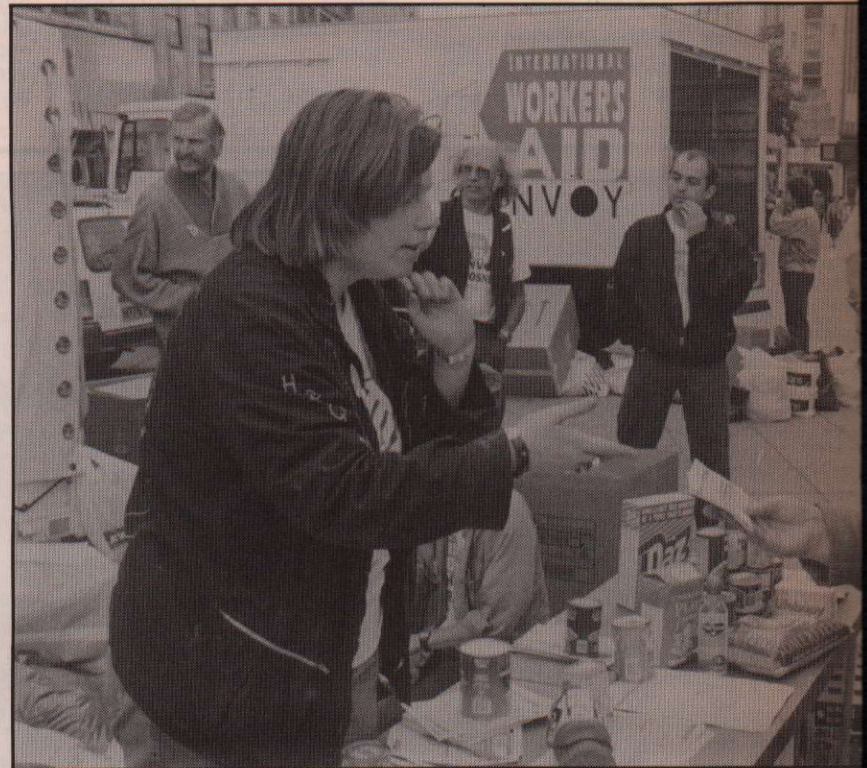
There were differences between ourselves and 'Socialist Outlook' on the type of gathering International Workers Aid for Bosnia should have on 30 October:

■ 'Socialist Outlook' said that this should be a conference to elect a leadership at which delegates from labour movement organisations would be allowed to vote and others would be visitors.

■ We said that it should be a report-back meeting from the convoy, attended by the widest possible number of people who had taken part in the convoy campaign as preparation for a properly prepared conference at a later date.

It is clear that 'elections' at an

Democracy and the workers' movement



Campaigning for Workers Aid: the most active and the most articulate become

early stage in campaigns such as this usually mean that the leading committee is dominated by those who have been at the centre of it. Bosnians, young people, and others not in trades unions or any organisation who had been very active in support of the convoy would be deprived of an effective voice.

In fact, from the experience of this type of control in the anti-poll-tax campaign, the Anti-Nazi League, the miners' support groups, etc., we are anxious that Workers Aid's successful initiative does not become the 'property' of one political group, or even several.

The 9 January conference called by the National Miners' Support Groups Network in Sheffield was a graphic example of the sort of 'democracy' Thornett talks about.

People around 'Socialist Outlook' were key elements in organising this conference. Most of the day was spent discussing 'structures'

and organising 'workshops', so effectively preventing the meeting as a whole from considering the way in which the fight alongside the miners should be carried forward.

Before last Christmas, a meeting of the National Miners' Support Groups Network had been called which voted strongly in favour of the Sheffield conference being open to all, who would be able freely to discuss the next stage of the fight in defence of the miners.

But those running the conference — including members of the International Socialist Group — trampled on the decision and organised a stage-managed event which gave pride of place to MPs Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, so that those who were active in the miners' support groups were left out in the cold.

We believe that there must be discussions amongst a broad layer of people in the trades unions and community organisations to decide what kind of organisation is needed to develop Workers Aid for Bosnia. Thousands of individual workers and their trades unions gave their solidarity, time, money and humanitarian aid to the convoy. Seven trucks were bought.

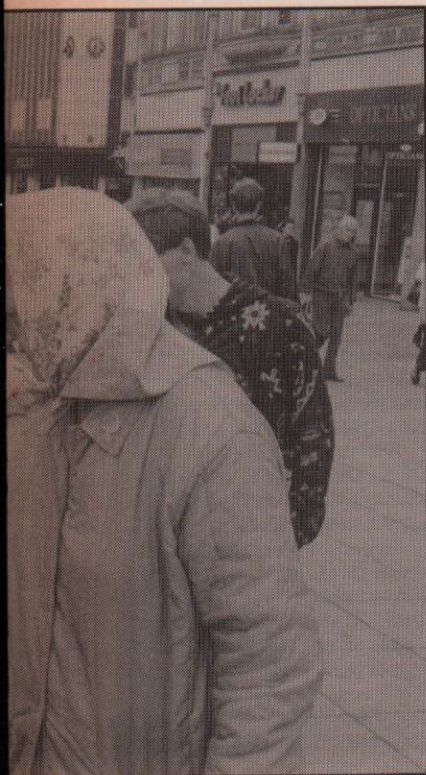
The campaign over a period of only five months was so intense, the job so big, and the work at the centre of it carried out by so few, that it was not possible to have a proper membership and affiliated organisations list.

Nor was it possible in the short time since the convoy returned from Croatia to compile the financial and organisation report. But those reports must be presented, not only to a conference but to all those organisations who



As in the anti-poll-tax campaign, those active in Workers Aid must not be deprived of an effective voice

Democracy about movement



organisers Photo: Anthony Myers

contributed to the work of the convoy.

In the course of the weeks before the report-back meeting, we were able to observe the 'democracy' of 'Socialist Outlook'. All those who have been through any of the so-called 'left' organisations' struggles for control of campaigns know exactly what I mean.

Leading up to and after the founding conference of 'Workers Aid for Bosnia' on 6 June there were regular Thursday evening meetings in London of all those wanting to participate in the campaign. But, as the campaign developed, local committees were established in a number of towns throughout Britain, including Leicester, Leeds and Manchester.

The Manchester committee was particularly significant because so many Bosnians took part in its discussions and work. That was the reason for the decision by both the London and Manchester committees that the report-back meeting should be held in Manchester. This was advertised on leaflets distributed by the convoy team on their way through Britain from the starting-point in Dundee.

'Socialist Outlook' suddenly brought about 12 members to one of the Thursday night meetings in London and pushed through a resolution that the report-back meeting should become a 'conference'. The campaign had become 'successful', and the fight for control had begun!

We brought 20 people to the following meeting and reversed the decision, not only proving in practice how destructive this 'power-seeking' is, but also trying to ensure that a form of organisation

is derived from the experience of everybody in the campaign and which enables real participation.

Meanwhile, in the spirit of the way the campaign had been conducted up to that point, the Manchester committee enthusiastically went ahead to organise the report-back meeting in their city.

However, at a time when the convoy was in Croatia fighting for the right to take its aid to the people of Tuzla, instead of its political and organisational problems and tasks being at the centre of discussions at the London meeting, there were agitated outbursts from 'Socialist Outlook' members about 'democratic structures'.

Then, having conceded on their call for a delegate conference, they insisted that there must be an elected committee at the report-back meeting. We opposed this. Organisations (like ours and theirs) at the centre of the campaign would know in advance and could prepare to nominate for such a committee, but what about everybody else? Also surely, we said, those of us who have taken a lead in the campaign, particularly I and Steve Myers, must account for our actions?

Our financial and organisation reports, plus proposals and amendments from local groups, individual members, and affiliated organisations should, we said, be circulated in advance so that everybody has the chance to prepare questions and put down amendments.

Every effort was made to avoid a beargarden. In the final week before the report-back meeting agreement was reached on the agenda and chair. Steve Myers and I would give reports and make proposals that would be voted on by the whole meeting. It was when

their proposals had been defeated that 'Socialist Outlook' decided the campaign had become a front for the WRP!

'International Workers Aid'

NOW Thornett states that 'Socialist Outlook' 'refuses to recognise the legitimacy' of the decisions of the 30 October convoy report-back meeting. He says that instead the paper's supporters 'will continue to build Workers Aid through supporting the initiatives of *International Workers Aid*'.

What is this? A meeting on the day following the convoy report-back was turned into a meeting to set up 'International Workers Aid' by 'Socialist Outlook'.

For the same reasons that we wanted not a 'conference' but a 'meeting' for the convoy to report back, we also opposed this type of 'international' meeting organised by 'Socialist Outlook'. The original decision had been that those who participated in the convoy campaign in other parts of Europe, and who were able to attend the report-back meeting, should have the chance to report and discuss their experiences on the following day.

But the type of meeting organ-

'Alan Thornett and his supporters have now split with the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign in Britain. They try and present the convoy as their personal property, against all those others who built it and took part in it...'

ised by 'Socialist Outlook' to take decisions about the campaign gave no possibility for proper preparation; many who carried out important work for the convoy knew nothing about it. In fact those present were forced to acknowledge this by deciding that they would have only 'indicative' votes.

Under cover of the 'decision' to set up 'International Workers Aid', Alan Thornett and his supporters have now split with the Workers Aid for Bosnia campaign in Britain. They try and present the convoy as their personal property, against all those others who built it and took part in it, and they have set out to confuse the workers' movement by circulating leaflets calling for workers' organisations to pay affiliation fees to their 'International Workers Aid'.

I wonder what kind of democratic rights Thornett is offering? I wonder what the others who 'indicatively' voted for 'International Workers Aid' think of 'Socialist Outlook's' actions?



Workers Aid marchers in London in September

Photo: Alan Clark

City Lights

Germany's welfare crisis

A BITTER row is brewing in Germany over the country's contributions to the European Union (EU).

Edmund Stoiber, prime minister of Bavaria and a member of the regional CSU party, which is allied to the ruling Christian Democratic Party, recently angered the government with a series of statements criticising European integration.

More than half of Germany's balance of payments deficit for last year, amounting to 39.5 billion Deutschmarks, was accounted for by payments to the European Community.

At the end of October unemployment in west Germany, even accepting official figures, stood at 2.45 million, up more than 530,000 compared with a year ago. In east Germany the number out of work rose by 70,000 in the year ending October, to 1.17m.

Over the same period earnings of west German companies slumped by 16 per cent, while their liquid assets were down sharply and their overseas investment were a fifth less than the previous year.

The slump has led to higher social security and unemployment benefits bills for the government. Increases under these heads account for over half the increase in total government spending this year.

Thanks to these extra costs, and the continuing high transfer of capital to eastern Germany, the central government's cash deficit more than doubled to DM48.5 billion, compared with DM22bn in the same period last year.

The German system of welfare benefits, part of the much-celebrated 'social market economy' of the post-war years, is under increasingly intolerable strain.

A month ago 100,000 building workers descended on Bonn to protest at the scrapping of 'bad weather money', a state subsidy given to the building industry to ensure workers are not simply sent home when it snows.

A few days earlier it had been the turn of the steelworkers, who had taken to the streets over the government's introduction of new rules on unemployment benefits.

In future, earnings-related payments — currently at around two-thirds of previous income — will no longer be available for the rest of a person's working life. They will be restricted to a four-year period, after which workers will have to get by on subsistence-level social assistance.

The government is now considering a proposal for a 3 per cent cut in unemployment benefit.

Both these demonstrations are an index of the anger in the working class against the destruction of the welfare payments system.

Those still in work are being hit, with Volkswagen threatening to sack 30,000 if the labour force does not accept a four-day week.

THE discussion about the crisis of the German welfare system centres on a series of 'unfavourable demographic trends'.

Today a fifth of the population is aged 20 or under, with the same proportion being over 60.

By the year 2000 the over 60s will come to one in four. By the year 2030 those over 60 will be 38 per cent, and only 16 per cent of the

population under 20. Now the conservatives, and their liberal partners in the ruling coalition, are looking at ways of making cuts in existing provision, and they are being joined by the social-democratic opposition.

■ The country's unification added 17 million potential new claimants to the system. Total social spending rocketed from DM744bn in 1991 to DM1,001bn in 1992 because of new demands on the pensions and unemployment funds.

■ Unemployment in both halves of the country will reach 4 million by next year. As in Britain this has reduced payments into the social security fund, just as the costs of maintaining benefits have shot up.

■ A third factor is the promise made by the government to introduce a third element — nursing care insurance — into the welfare system. The scheme is intended to provide guaranteed residential care for some 1.65 million elderly and handicapped people who need constant nursing.

Chancellor Kohl has staked his reputation on getting the plan made law before the elections next October, partly to try and allay mounting anger in the working class at the cuts already made.

But nobody knows how such a scheme — running to DM13bn a year — can be financed.

Combined social insurance costs have shot up from 26.5 per cent of gross wages to a forecast 40 per cent next year. German employers complain bitterly that these 'ancillary costs' are driving them out of world markets.

The government is considering the abolition of two of the ten national holidays or a cut in holiday pay of 20 per cent.

The social-democratic opposition agrees with the government that the present level of benefits cannot be sustained. It proposes that the taxation burden to finance welfare benefits should be switched away from the employers, thus imposing even greater burdens on working people.

Calamity Ukraine

THE economic situation in Russia is calamitous; it is even worse in Ukraine.

With national income shrinking at a rate of 20 per cent a year, a balance of payments deficit out of control, with the country having virtually no oil or petrol, a string of new decrees has been issued by President Leonid Kravchuk which bid fair to make matters worse.

■ The Kiev currency market has been officially closed — a crude attempt to hide the deterioration of the national currency (the coupon) which is presently inflating at over 70 per cent a month.

■ Enterprises are to be forced to sell half their hard currency earnings to the state at a fixed rate. This is to be fixed by Kravchuk at about a fifth of the black-market coupon to dollar rate, so the decree amounts to confiscation.

But managers have long experience of evading such instructions.

■ Parts of the old central planning system are being revived. Prices will be partly fixed by allowing wholesalers to raise prices only in line with their input costs, and producers of 'strategic goods' will have to hand over some 40 per cent of their output to central ministries.

The government justifies the last move because it wants to see the population housed and fed. The more cynical suggest it is designed to increase scope for bureaucratic corruption.

Review set to attack health and safety

WHAT should be done about health and safety regulations that aren't applied? The government's answer to this question is: abolish the regulations!

A review has been set up which is costing the Health and Safety Executive £100,000 to carry out. This comes, says a Department of Trade and Industry report, as the result of '50 letters of complaint to MPs from individuals and from business which had been received by [the Health and Safety Executive] and by [DTI] Ministers from April 1992 to the end of February 1993, and which were mainly concerned with health and safety legislation'.

On 11 May the Health and Safety Commission — the government department which is advised by the HSE — launched this review of about 400 sets of regulations 'to ensure that they do not impose unreasonable burdens on business'. The review is to be completed by April 1994.

Meanwhile the government is proposing to revoke 30 sets of regulations before the review is even finished.

The review consists of seven 'sectoral task groups' (STGs), which will have two Confederation of British Industry nominees, two TUC nominees, a small business representative, and are chaired in addition by a businessman. So that's four employers' representatives to two from the trade union bureaucracy. An HSC steering group is co-ordinating the review.

The chairs of the STGs are hand-picked and the review is carried out with them already 'briefed' on the 'burdens' on business that the DTI claims to have found. The work is based on a pre-set proforma that makes the considerations biased towards finance.

The GMB general union has produced its pamphlet, 'Freedom to Kill?', on the review which points out that on average 42 of its members are killed each year in industrial accidents. In the construction industry there are about 140 deaths per year.

So for one letter from a businessman to the DTI as against at least three workers' lives, the safety laws come under attack for profit.

And what was the substance of these letters? 'In many cases the concern of business about the burdens which the new legislation is placing on them is due to a misunderstanding of the requirements of the regulations,' says the government's report

A new all-round attack on health and safety in Britain has been launched by the government. MIKE COOKE comments with the help of the GMB general union's pamphlet, 'Freedom to Kill?' — the case against deregulation'.



A wreath being laid at a Construction Safety Campaign protest

on the scrutiny review of the implementation and enforcement of European Community law in the UK.

It is this report that talks about the 50 letters. It was set up in January 1993 by Michael Heseltine, the president of the Board of Trade, in response to complaints that the HSE had been over-zealous in enforcing EC directives. Heseltine stated: 'This report shows conclusively that recent EC health and safety legislation has been implemented in the UK without the addition of unnecessary requirements.'

Direct action

IT IS a complete myth that the HSE is over-zealous in enforcing health and safety regulations. In most cases it is workers themselves, with or without the help of their trades unions, who have to carry the burden of ensuring that health and safety laws are enforced.

The Construction Safety Campaign had to fight for years against a corrupt right-wing leadership to get recognition from the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT).

It took, and continues to take, direct action against employers — by going down to building sites where a death has occurred, bringing workers together with bereaved

mediate halt to work. They considered prosecution in 122 cases.

In 1985, 191 out of 300 clothing factories visited were not even registered with the HSE — this is a legal offence. In these 300 factories the HSE raised 1,257 points of health and safety, 16 improvement notices and four prohibition notices were issued, and two prosecutions made.

But as the 'Independent' has pointed out: '[In 1992], only 16 out of the Executive's 2,254 prosecutions were taken against directors or managers. Only six of these resulted from investigations into the year's 538 fatal injuries or 30,684 major injuries. This is despite the HSE's own figures showing that in more than 65 per cent of workplace deaths, responsibility lay with senior management.'

It's easier to prosecute working people, especially when many are not in unions and the pressure is to destroy working-class organisation.

Welfare attack

'FREEDOM to Kill?', the GMB pamphlet, complains that it is not in the interests of business to ignore safety since this costs them in compensation, insurance, etc.

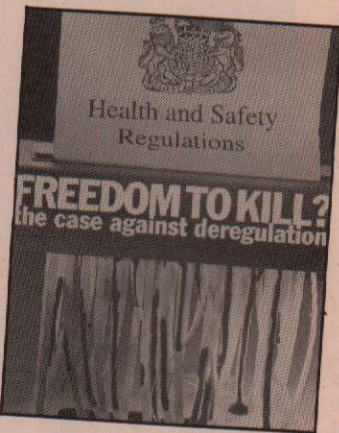
But if there are no regulations they won't be negligent. If there are no regulations the government can cut the minimal protection provided by the Health and Safety Executive.

The GMB argues that the government 'speaks with forked tongue' — it talks about relieving safety costs to business and yet is now proposing that it takes up the cost of sick pay, etc. But these transferred costs to business will not be paid in many cases. It is mainly small businesses that will suffer if the costs are enforced.

What the GMB can't see because of its politics — which are to make capitalism work — is that it's not about 'checks and balances', democracy and all that. It is an attack on welfare gains by the working class.

The British state is in crisis. It has a £50 billion debt — the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, the difference between state revenues and expenditure. It can no longer afford these welfare crumbs from imperialism's table.

■ The GMB pamphlet of 33 pages contains much useful information about what is happening but is not exactly 'a snip' at £10 (free to GMB members).



vealed that only 23 per cent of employers were complying with the new EC directives. Only 56 per cent were complying with COSHH.

In 1992, at 600 out of 2,500 roofwork sites visited, HSE inspectors demanded an im-



Construction Safety Campaign protest vigil in Westminster against the Health & Safety Executive

Bronwen Handyside reports

Two nations



Accidents will happen

FORMER radical Keith Waterhouse, author of 'Billy Liar', is to be found these days writing a column in the 'Daily Mail'.

His latest piece gives praise to the Tory government's proposals to abolish much of the safety legislation which has — to some degree — protected workers' lives and limbs from the unrestrained greed of employers.

Waterhouse says: 'I doubt whether the number of work-people falling off ladders, tripping over cables, inhaling noxious fumes, dropping hammers on their toes or sitting on tin tacks will rise significantly — with the possible exception of the tin tack sitters — as a result of this legislation, or rather this anti-legislation.'

'There will be accidents of course... But accidents WILL happen — and they're noted for it... no amount of regulation can stop them happening.'

It's kind of Mr Waterhouse to share with gutter press readers his musings upon fate and life, and the imponderable way that accidents have of happening.

I am sure his attitude will be comforting to such people as Maureen Brennan — who has fought a bitter battle for five years against the company directors who sent her 19-year-old son on his first day on a building site to drive a dumper truck to his death.

Not only had her son no training in driving such a vehicle, he did not even have a driving licence — and there were no protective stops on the edge of the trench into which the truck overturned.

Maureen has received no justice, no compensation, no redress — not even an apology. But the philosophical Mr Waterhouse's ability to take such events as this death in his stride will, I am sure, be some consolation.

In the meantime Maureen has won the right to a judicial review over the dropping of the case against J.F. McMahon Ltd, which avoided prosecution by going into liquidation after her son's death. The directors opened another company afterwards, under a different name.

Bureaucracy and the NHS

WATERHOUSE praises the abolition of safety regulations as a victory over red-tape and bureaucracy.

It is interesting, therefore, at this point to turn our eyes on the National Health Service — which will have to pick up the pieces (and I do mean pieces) after the health and safety regulations have been swept away.

Ten days ago John Redwood, the Welsh secretary, exploded into print protesting at the fact that the government's NHS reforms in Wales have so far added 1,500 new managers to the payroll, but only 20 more doctors.

The Welsh secretary's discoveries are as nothing to the situation in the rest of Britain. The NHS now employs — and pays for — more than 13,000 managers, costing last year £384 million. Ten years ago there were none — costing nothing.

In the same decade, the number of doctors has increased by just over 7,500.

Accidents and the NHS

WATERHOUSE might also be interested in a letter from the

staff of the accident and emergency ward at Charing Cross hospital, London, sent to the 'Guardian' newspaper last week.

They write: 'Plans have been announced to close the eight-bedded Accident and Emergency ward of Charing Cross Hospital in December, redeploying the 11 nursing staff... Closure of this short-stay ward will apparently contribute towards a £350,000 cut in the Emergency, Trauma and Orthopaedic budget of Riverside Hospitals. There is, we are told, no alternative.'

'Since 6 April, 1,375 patients have been cared for on the ward, most being discharged after 24 hours due to the facilities we have for prompt treatment of referral to other appropriate services. When required, a side-room can be allocated for the dying patient where they and their relatives can be given privacy and dignity...'

'Many of our patients are homeless or living in bed and breakfast accommodation... Our patients are some of the most vulnerable members of society and have little say in decisions made about their welfare.'

'Without the Accident and Emergency ward, these patients would have been admitted to other under-staffed and financially stretched wards, remained on trolleys in casualty, or been discharged prematurely to an unsafe environment.'

'Closure will be a false economy. The financial burden will fall elsewhere, either into other areas of the hospital or the community and voluntary services. So where is the saving really made?'

Let me see... if you sacked seven managers on £50,000 a year...

Because the lady lives in my flat

UNDER the category of: there is a moral here, but I'm not quite sure what it is.

The man who acted in the Milk Tray advertisements — gallantly climbing mountains, plunging into oceans and parachuting out of aeroplanes to bring his lady love a box of chocolates — is in danger of going to prison after admitting to a vicious campaign of harassment on a woman tenant living in his flat.

He-man Graham Rogers, who decided to sell the flat to settle his debts, admitted a 14-month regime of terror including writing threatening letters, and smashing the bath, toilet bowl, wash-basin, cooker and sink.

He also owned up to making a threatening phonecall, removing personal belongings and some of the furniture, and boarding up the doors and windows.

Rogers was recently paid £15,000 for ten days filming in Jamaica for the Milk Tray adverts.

Single parents and prime ministers

IN the same category, did you know that 15 out of the 24 prime ministers since 1809 lost a parent in childhood, and one was illegitimate — thus making a grand total of 63 per cent of them the products of single-parent or no-parent families?

If you have any material for this column, please send it to me at Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW8 1VR

RUSSIAN MINERS IN RIFT WITH YELTSIN

THIRTY thousand workers, mostly miners, went on strike in the northern Siberian city of Vorkuta on 11 November. The strikers demanded payment of two months' wages owing to them. Before the one-day stoppage 15 workers' leaders staged a ten-day hunger strike.

The strike was the first sign of a political break with President Yeltsin by miners' organisations, whose leaders have until now supported him wholeheartedly. Such a break would be a major turning-point for the Russian workers' movement.

BY SIMON PIRANI

The Independent Miners Union of Vorkuta has now called for a national political strike against Yeltsin starting on 1 December.

The president of the Vorkuta

Moscow union leader opposes strikes

AS WORKERS prepare for action against the Yeltsin regime, the leader of Russia's largest trade union federation, Mikhail Shmakov, has spoken out AGAINST strikes.

Shmakov — who emerged from the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions which has close links with Ken Livingstone MP and other British 'lefts' — is calling for trades unions to work in 'partnership' with the government.

Shmakov became head of the Federation of Independent Unions, the old 'official' union structure, which claims a membership of 57 million, just after Yeltsin crushed the Ruskoi-Khasbulatov revolt.

The previous Federation leader, Igor Kluchkov, condemned Yeltsin's action as a 'coup d'état'. As it became clear the parliamentary group were losers, he switched his position and denounced them. Too late.

An emergency congress of the Federation was called and he was removed. The Moscow Federation of Trades Unions, which posed as a 'left' opposition to Kluchkov, made their move. Shmakov was elected.

Shmakov criticised his predecessor not only for supporting Ruskoi — but also for threatening strikes over the government's failure to implement pay increases agreed in March.

'The former leadership concentrated on direct and open pressure on the authorities without considering the economic realities', he said, according to the 'Guardian'. 'It thus disrupted partnership with the government.'

Shmakov said unions should concentrate on defending wage levels instead of putting politic-

al pressure on the government — but adopted the 'no strike' line at the same time.

With the change of policy, a government threat to the Federation's apparatus has receded.

Yeltsin had already issued a decree abolishing the unions' control of the national social insurance fund which pays sickness and injury benefits. He was preparing to go further, ending check-off collection of union subscriptions and confiscating the unions' property holdings including holiday camps, sanatoria, etc.

Since Shmakov's election, these measures have been put on the back-burner.

The British workers' movement cannot remain neutral in Russia's 'winter of discontent'.

Advocate

We must help to defeat Shmakov and all who advocate 'partnership' with Yeltsin — whether they claim to be 'official' or 'independent' trades unionists.

We cannot take the word of those posing as 'lefts', like the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions leaders, that they deserve support.

Internationalism means supporting only those workers' organisations ready to pursue the struggle against Yeltsin to the very end.

■ **Moscow building workers are up in arms at the government's decision to bring in Turkish building workers to repair and refurbish the gutted White House in the Russian capital.**

The Turkish workers are being paid £400 a week, ten times the wage of the average Russian worker.

independent union, Nikita Shulga, called for the government to resign, and for the presidential elections — postponed by Yeltsin to 1995 — to be brought forward.

Of the 12 December election of a new parliament, Shulga said: 'The politicians in the government are too busy in the election campaign and pay no attention to our needs. We will boycott their parties and lists.'

In the Kuzbass mining belt, leaders of the Council of Workers Committees, who previously pursued a policy of unashamed collaboration with Yeltsin and international private mining firms, have issued an open letter of protest to the president about the threat of pit closures.

Workers' assemblies in Kuzbass have reportedly resolved to join the 1 December strike — as they have in Chelyabinsk and Rostov.

Telegrams have arrived in Vorkuta from miners' organisa-

tions in Donbass, eastern Ukraine. They propose to take action against their own government, co-ordinated with the Russian strike on 1 December.

Byelorussian miners, merchant seafarers and air-traffic controllers have also indicated support for Vorkuta. A meeting of 'left communist trade union forces' in Nizhni-Novgorod is reported to have declared solidarity.

The Independent Miners Union leadership has provided an important pillar of support for Yeltsin, but a miners' revolt could pull it down.

The confrontation is fuelled by an economic crisis that Yeltsin cannot solve.

Ravaged

The mines, like most Russian industry, are being ravaged by the government's attempts to integrate Russia into the world market as a col-

ony. Industrial production is plummeting. There are 10 million workers effectively laid off who could soon be unemployed.

As prices are increased and subsidies cut, industries can neither market their goods, nor buy raw materials or equipment from each other. Everyone owes everyone else vast amounts. The Vorkuta coal company is owed 72 million rubles by the government and the banks.

Every time miners in the former Soviet Union have struck this year, the issue of this debt has been raised. It means, among other things, that their wages are left unpaid.

On 6 September, a strike called by the old official miners' union over the issue brought out tens of thousands of workers at about 120 pits.

The response came in spite of the indifference miners feel towards the official union — which did not support their his-

toric strikes in 1989 and 1990. Also, in spite of the Independent Miners Union leaders, who said no-one should strike 'until the World Bank's decision on the refinancing of the mining industry is known'.

Demanded

The 11 November strike in Vorkuta also concerned the non-payment of wages. It further demanded implementation of a law, passed by the now-dissolved parliament, granting an 80 per cent wage increase and retirement at 45 for those working north of the Arctic Circle.

■ **Workers everywhere should send messages of support to the Vorkuta miners. NPG/Strike Committee, Leningradskaya 5, 169 907 Vorkuta, Komi Republic, Russian Federation.**

■ *With thanks to Pavel Slutski, and comrades in Belgium, who sent information used in this article.*

Vultures feed on China

BY MIKE COOKE

DREAMS of a new prosperity for ordinary people in China through the authoritarian reintroduction of capitalism in special economic zones have gone up in smoke in factories throughout the country.

International vulture capital has gone in to find the cheapest possible labour and totally ignores any restrictions on investment. The lives of workers are sacrificed to the striving for greater and greater profit.

The deal has been that the Chinese Stalinists maintain their political oppression and allow capitalism to be reintroduced with virtually no rights for workers.

Strikes

Strikes have been the response of some workers to the driving down of wages and conditions in China, where previously industrial action was unheard of. Workers at the Han-bee Shoe Company went on strike for three days in February and several hundred went on strike there again in June.

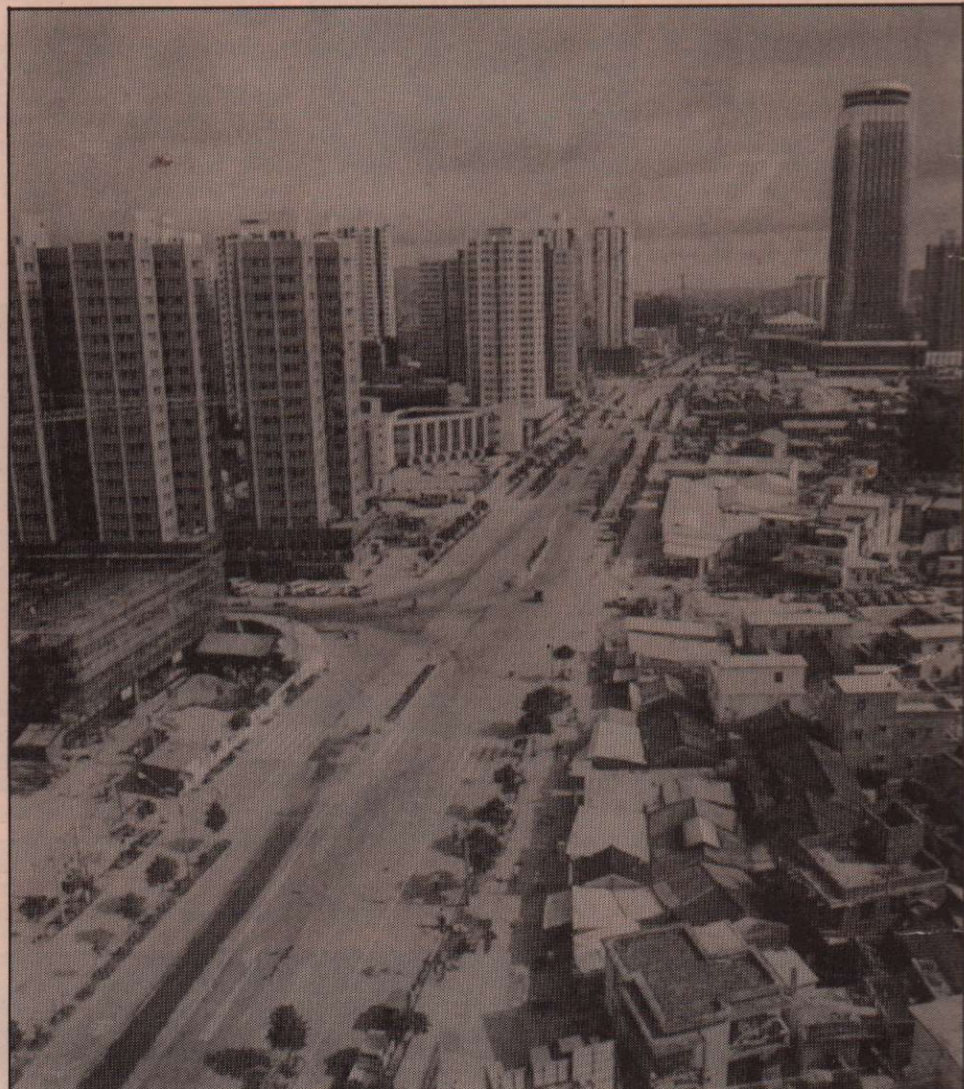
Workers in one South Korean-owned shoe factory in north-east China were earning 9p an hour and worked a 12-hour day from 8am until 9pm, with an hour off for lunch.

And Chinese workers are often treated shamefully. In one incident last year, three South Korean managers ordered three Chinese women to kneel in a row with their hands around their heads as a punishment for supposedly working too slowly. When the women refused the managers kicked them until they were on their knees.

Some foreign companies delay payment of wages.

In China the major investors are from the British colony of Hong Kong and from Japan, the US, Taiwan and South Korea. Foreign investment in the country was \$4.2 billion in 1991 and \$11 billion in 1992. It is estimated that it will hit £23 billion this year.

Chinese law says that all foreign-owned enterprises should establish unions and pay workers 25 to 50 per cent more than in state factories — this is a sham. Before the influx of foreign capital, workers in state factories received housing and medical benefits along with job security. The new capitalist enterprises will have none of this.



A particularly graphic expression of the ravages wrought on the Chinese working class by capitalist exploitation is in the area around the boom-town Shenzhen (above) where, in August 1992, there were riots on queues to get shares.

A few weeks ago, 81 workers were killed and 36 injured in a fire that swept through a doll factory. Many were trampled to death in the crush to escape.

It was the third major fire in the town in four months.

'Thick black smoke was all around me, it was like hell,' Deng Jiyin, from a poor village in Sichuan, told journalists. 'I crawled down the staircases floor after floor, holding my breath until I touched an exit door.'

The windows and doors of the factory were locked to keep the workers inside. The victims were mainly migrant women attracted, like

many, to labour-hungry Shenzhen by the promise of a better life.

Firefighters arrived half an hour after the blaze started — probably through an electrical fault in the machine room. Strong winds fanned the flames and smoke swept into the second and third floors where most of the 240 workers were making the dolls.

The firefighters ran short of water and had to hunt around for hydrants.

The fire department sent a notice last March asking for safety improvements at the factory — but they were never carried out.

More than 170 workers have been killed by factory fires in the area since May 1991.

Overseas investors in Shenzhen, as in this case, mainly come from the British colony of Hong Kong. The partner of the Hong Kong investor is, in the time-honoured phrase, 'helping the authorities with their enquiries'.

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