

MERGER MANIA HITS JOBS

BY DAVID LEWIS

Desperate moves by global corporations to beat the economic slump are leading to massive job losses around the world.

Multi-nationals are rushing to merge with or take over rivals in a bid to cut costs and corner markets.

They are desperate to reduce over-capacity and production, which is the key feature of the world-wide slump. But the first victims are the work force in country after country.

- Deutsche Bank's take-over of Bankers Trust of America will create the world's largest financial company and cost 5,000 jobs in London and New York.

- Exxon, which trades in Europe as Esso, and Mobil oil have merged to form the world's largest industrial company – at the expense of 12,000 jobs. The price of oil is at 1973 levels and the slump has cut sales.

Continued on page 2

SANTA SPARKS

Total solidarity by electricians, despite loss of pay, shut down work on the Jubilee Line extension in London last month. Now workers are concerned that the 12-point agreement which ended the dispute is being broken by management.



Pickets outside the Jubilee Line Extension site in Southwark

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MERGER MANIA HITS JOBS

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- More than 1,200 clothing workers are to lose their jobs two months after Courtaulds bought their company, Claremont Garments, suppliers to Marks & Spencers.

- Engineering firms BTR and Siebe are merging. Shares rose on the news but the new company will shed 5,000 jobs.

Other mega-mergers which are bound to result in job losses include the buy-out of Internet company Netscape by America Online and the merger of Petrofina and Total.

Meanwhile, other job losses announced include 48,000

redundancies by plane maker Boeing, 60,000 by Siemens, the German electrical giant and 2,500 by car maker Vauxhall.

The US healthcare giant Johnson & Johnson is to close nearly a quarter of its manufacturing plants with the loss of 5,800 jobs world-wide.

Philips, Europe's largest consumer electronics group, is shutting one-third of its factories world-wide. Plunging economies in Asia – including Japan and China – are bound to mean more job losses.

Big business has simplified the economy by creating fewer and fewer international firms in each sector. That makes it

easier to identify the targets.

There is a way out of the slump which does not require mergers and mass redundancies. It means working out a plan of action to impose social control and ownership on the giant firms.

The fate of millions of workers should not be decided by investment bankers and speculators on the basis of profit and loss balance sheets.

Production decisions should instead be taken by those who make and consume the products, not fat-cat chief executives. **That is the aim of the Movement for a Socialist Future (see page 12).** ■

Hobsbawm to the rescue

The former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet has few friends in Britain. Even the Law Lords decided by a 3 to 2 majority that he could be extradited to Spain.

To the rescue comes Eric Hobsbawm, the establishment's favourite "Marxist" historian. He has urged Home Secretary Jack Straw to let Pinochet go back to Chile.

In our last issue, we exposed Hobsbawm and his fellow political fraudsters at *Marxism Today*. Having helped to usher in Tony Blair, they now bleat about the political Frankenstein they helped create.

Hobsbawm made his call for Pinochet to be returned to Chile in a letter to the *Guardian*. He says it would be in the true interests of Chilean "democracy".

He justifies his bizarre position by claiming that he is expressing the view of unnamed "leaders of the Chilean left". Hobsbawm's allies in Chile have learned nothing. They and Salvador Allende followed the advice of Moscow and made a pact with the Chilean military, including Pinochet, in the vain hope this would prevent dictatorship. Many of them paid for this mistake with their lives.

Now they suggest that Pinochet is allowed back to appease the military once more. By supporting them, Hobsbawm shows that he is an historian whose Stalinist training prevents him from learning anything, even from the recent past. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

BLAIR APPOINTS TORIES

New Labour has appointed three former Tory ministers to a new government body promoting trade with Mexico. No Labour MP will sit on the British-Mexican Business Network launched by Prime Minister Blair.

Kenneth Clarke, the former Chancellor, will act as British co-ordinator, along with Lord Walker, the former Welsh Secretary and Lord Garel Jones, the former Foreign Office minister. Michael Heseltine, the former deputy Prime Minister was recently appointed to a Chinese-British trade body. ■

MANUFACTURING JOBS SLAUGHTER

UK manufacturing faces a "blood bath", if present trends continue. Levels of output, orders and the price of goods fell to new lows in November, said a survey by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing Managers.

Director Peter Thomson described the situation as a potential "slaughterhouse". The level of employment in manufacturing fell for the ninth month running, with more than 20% of companies said to be sacking staff. ■

CHEMISTS FACE THE AXE

More than 2,000

community chemist shops could be forced out of business as superstores and the big chains capture the market. Supermarkets have built up a 40% share of toiletries, cosmetics and over the counter medicines, says a new report. ■

GROUP 4 GETS ARREST POWERS

New Labour is planning to give private security firms like Group 4 and Securicor the power to arrest people for failing to pay fines or breaching orders.

The Association of Magisterial Officers warned that private firms often had a high turnover of staff who were usually low

paid. It said that responsibility for enforcement of fines and other court orders should remain in the public sector. Even the Police Federation criticised the plan contained in a new Bill. ■

AID TO POOR STATES SLUMPS

Aid from the richest countries to the poorest has slumped to the lowest levels ever. Last year the 21 richest countries gave \$47.5 billion compared with \$55.4 billion in 1996, a drop of 7.1%. As a percentage of rich countries' output, aid has fallen to 0.25%, the lowest proportion on record, according to Action Aid. ■

Asia crisis hits millions of victims



“A human disaster on this scale is shocking to behold.”

ILO report author Eddy Lee on unemployment in South East Asia

A penetrating study by a top analyst at the International Labour Office in Geneva shows dramatically the vast scale of the crisis in South-east Asia.

At the London launch of his report* he said that “the social problems which have arisen in South-east Asia are far worse than people thought”.

Eddy Lee documents how “initial perceptions greatly underestimated the potential severity of the crisis” and its contagion effects, both within and beyond the region. “The real situation was not understood in its severity and urgency, in particular how it has affected South Korea.

“There were wildly optimistic hopes for recovery, for example in Malaysia, with predictions of positive growth, because Malaysia did not have the same degree of external debt.”

Easy access to capital as a result of financial liberalisation led to an influx of foreign capital. This capital was “misallocated”, in Lee’s view, into speculative adventures on global stock markets. The growth rates for the so-called “Tiger economies” therefore had a fictitious element.

Latest figures show that the major banks withdrew more than \$55 billion from the region in the first six months of 1998.

Lee compares today’s crisis to the Depression of the 1930s, and says it requires unprecedented emergency and long-term measures, including unemployment insurance for the

mushrooming number of newly-unemployed.

“Since April,” the report says, “the actual turn of events has belied the initial optimism. First, the economic downturn in the three worst-affected countries was deeper than expected... This led to downwards adjustments of the earlier Gross Domestic Product.”

Negative growth rates are forecast for the current year (1998) not only in Thailand but in Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Japan. Indonesia tops the list with a stunning drop by 13.5%.

“The range of probabilities lies between a cascading decline of the stock markets and a more drawn-out process of deterioration...”

Financier George Soros

Lee’s report concludes that the sudden unravelling of the South-east and East Asian economic miracle has caused widespread misery and has imperilled social and political stability in the region.

“Millions who laboured to forge the miracle have become innocent and bewildered victims of the unfolding economic collapse. A human disaster on this scale is shocking to behold.”

Meanwhile, top financier George Soros has warned again that the world capitalist system is heading for disaster.

In a new book called *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, Soros warns that “the range of probabilities lies between a cascading decline of the stock markets and a more drawn-out process of deterioration”. Soros believes the second possibility is more probable.

Ironically it was Soros who, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, believed that a kind of liberal capitalism could be introduced into Russia and Eastern Europe. He backed up his dream by injecting large amounts of money into educational projects through super-profits from his Quantum Fund.

His funding was seen by many as encouraging Western free market ideology to oust the old academic bureaucracy which had been dominated by Stalinist dogma. But he is now worried about the disastrous fall-out from the crisis of globalised capital.

Astonishingly, he is now accused of being a “socialist” by some of the media, because he is suggesting that a global regulator is needed for capital markets and that credit should be provided to countries who apply free market policies.

Soros’ warning, regardless of his motives and personal wealth, should be taken seriously. He himself had to escape from Nazi persecution. Fascism and world war was the way in which capitalism “resolved” the financial crash of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930s. The danger signs are there again. ■

**The Asian Financial Crisis: The Challenge for Social Policy* by Eddy Lee. International Labour Office, Geneva 1998. £10.80. Available from ILO office, London.

Big business scuppers Kyoto II

Major countries failed to take forward the Kyoto global warming agreement because economic interests were put in the way, says Greenpeace. A meeting in Buenos Aires in November discussed the implementation of the agreement signed in 1997 but failed to agree on anything substantial.

"This is turning into a trade and economic negotiation – climate is getting pushed further and further down the agenda. Science is being replaced by carbon trading markets as the driver for the talks," said Bill Hare, climate policy director of Greenpeace International.

"Consideration of the issue at the very heart of the climate convention – whether existing commitments to cut emissions are sufficient to protect the climate – was aborted – no decision on this vital issue was made. This is of very deep concern."

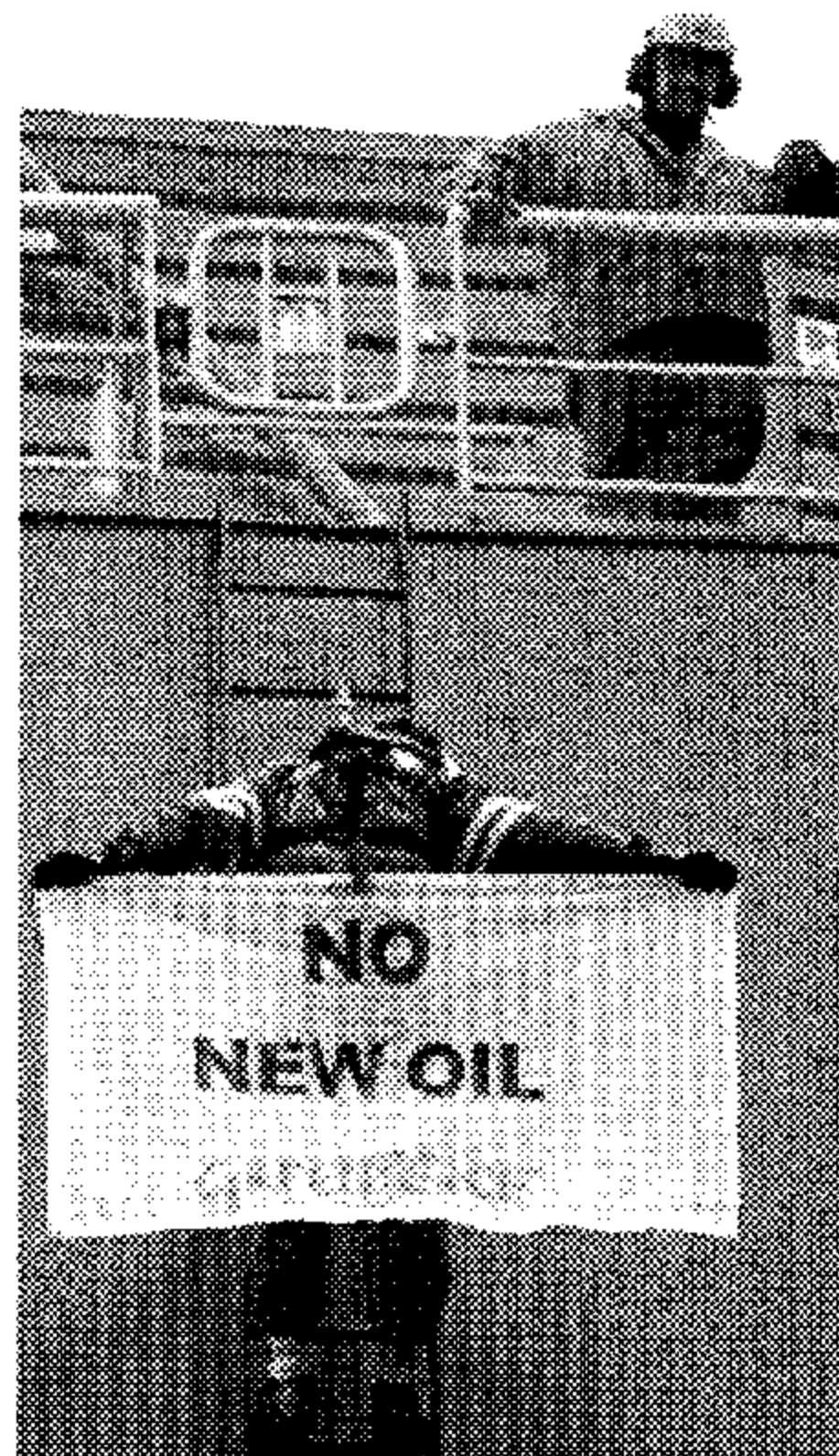
The final agreement after two weeks of negotiations and an all-night session was just a plan for further work. Hare added:

"The most consistent thing about these talks has been the thick fog of jargon.

"This has obscured the real issue – escalating greenhouse gas emissions. The real work remains to be done at home: fossil fuel investment is expanding, subsidies to polluting industries continue – that is what governments can act on immediately."

It was agreed to establish a process to negotiate a legal regime to ensure that parties meet their agreements under the Kyoto protocol and the penalties for failing to comply. This will determine whether the protocol has real teeth, said Greenpeace.

During the Buenos Aires talks, the Americans announced that they would sign the Kyoto protocol – after an eight-month delay. But the US delegation, said nothing about ratification, and made no real commitments. The Republican-dominated US Senate is expected to oppose ratification. ■



A tribute to Gerry Healy

December 1998 marks the 85th anniversary of Gerry Healy's birth and nine years since his death. *Socialist Future* salutes the memory of a great fighter for socialist revolutionary change in Britain and internationally.

Son of a poor farmer from the west of Ireland, Healy became one of the most outstanding Marxist leaders of the post-war years. He never abandoned his principles and died as he had lived – constantly seeking new ways of taking on capitalism in order to put an end to it.

He knew that the only way to do this was to train himself and others in a different outlook to that fostered by the system. Although he had no university education, he took seriously Lenin's emphasis on theoretical training.

Alone amongst his contemporaries he sought to synthesise the contributions of Marxist thinkers in the West and the East, ranging from Christopher Hill and E.P.



Thompson to Soviet theoreticians such as Evald Ilyenkov and M. E. Omelyanovsky.

Healy had an entirely global approach to revolutionary politics. He and his comrades followed closely the anti-imperialist liberation movements in Africa, the far and Middle East, as well as the anti-Stalinist struggles in Hungary, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia

and the Soviet Union.

Building a revolutionary organisation is a complex task, requiring great dedication and sacrifice and Healy accepted this without reservations. He was single-minded, ruthless and uncompromising in his work. This firmness allowed him to master the art of working with a very wide range of people, from young workers and students to skilled professionals in industry, science and the arts. He built up close relationships with those in Labour Party fighting the right wing.

The editorial board of *Socialist Future* looks to the new generation now coming into politics. We are confident that they can take forward Gerry Healy's life-time of revolutionary work.

Gerry Healy was born in Ballybane, County Galway, on December 3, 1913, and died in London on December 14, 1989. His ashes are buried in Highgate cemetery, near Karl Marx's grave. ■

Time for left MPs to speak out

By Paul Feldman

A burning question for left-wing members of the Labour Party is what future they have in an organisation which has precious little to do with the one they joined.

Many members, including MPs, will acknowledge in private that the "modernisers" led by Tony Blair have destroyed the essence of what was Old Labour. Both the form and the content of the party that the trade unions founded almost a century ago have undergone dramatic change.

The Blairites have put an end to the old way of doing business through constituency parties, conference resolutions, elections to the National Executive, the trade union block vote and open discussion.

In its place has come an all-embracing authoritarian control from Millbank with no dissent tolerated. There is a sinister form of "consensus" – acceptance without discussion of what Blair says.

The Blair clique has effectively shut down the old party and replaced it with a sort of New Labour/New Britain PLC, with directors and managers rather than members.

No mechanisms remain for changing party policy or exerting any control over the leadership.

In London, the Blairites are pulling out all the stops to prevent Ken Livingstone from standing for mayor; in Wales, No.10's candidate is being imposed on the assembly.

Just to make sure no left-wingers are sent to the European parliament, the party and not the voters will choose who is elected. These apparently administrative changes were needed to bring New Labour into line with what interests it has come to represent. The Blair clique has effectively shut down the old party and replaced it



The Blairites are pulling out all the stops to prevent Ken Livingstone standing for mayor of London

with an organisation, a sort of New Labour/New Britain PLC, with directors and managers rather than members.

This is because Blair and his courtiers are indeed the management team for global capitalism's presence in Britain. They identify completely with the demands of big business to the extent that the government is riddled with its representatives.

Martin Taylor, who recently resigned from Barclays after the bank ran up huge losses, is advising on "welfare to work". Lord Sainsbury of the supermarket chain is a minister in the Lords. The head of Prudential is advising on state benefits...

In other words, the old compromise between the trade unions and capital that Labour once represented has disappeared.

Now we have an imposed **identity** of interests between the classes. All this is disguised by endless references to "community" and "social exclusion".

The logic of this false identity is, of course, dictatorship. What Blair has done to his party today is in store for the rest of us tomorrow.

So where does this leave socialists who remain members of the party? Clearly they cannot hope to change New Labour back to what it was. In any case, the period when a reform-minded government could deliver disappeared over 20 years ago.

Silence is no longer an option or acceptable. It is leading to a slow death for socialists inside New Labour.

Financial institutions and a handful of multi-national corporations have created a global economy which is increasingly outside of anyone's control or influence.

A return to Keynesian-type policies of higher taxation and public spending is simply not possible under these conditions. It really is the end of an era, something which the left in the Labour Party find difficult to acknowledge.

There is, therefore, no future for socialists inside the Labour Party. The party they joined and helped build has turned into its opposite. But they could help create the conditions for a socialist alternative to Blair. That means speaking out sooner rather than later, and acting against Blair in an organised manner, warning workers what lies in store. There are many trade unionists and professional workers who would rally around such a campaign.

Silence is no longer an option or acceptable. It is leading to a slow death for socialists inside New Labour. They could find themselves outside without having raised a voice in anger.

The Blair project will hit the rocks as the global slump bites. It is a superficial government based on image and presentation and has no answers to the crisis.

If the left finally challenge Blair over London and all other issues, the *Movement for a Socialist Future* will offer complete support in the struggle to defeat New Labour. ■

Mortgaging the future of public services

Kate McCabe looks at the Private Finance Initiative rip-off

The New Labour government, elected by millions of voters to halt the Tories' privatisation policy, is instead pushing it to new extremes.

They have handed every major new public project over to the private sector, by means of the Private Finance Initiative. This was started by the Tories but never took off until New Labour showed their friends in business how they could use it to really cash in.

Blair's New Britain is based on the PFI:

New Labour believes there is no difference between public and private because profit rules everywhere.

If a new hospital, school, road or rail system is needed, a private company carries out the work and then leases the end product back to the public.

PFI is currently being applied within the following areas: air traffic control, building refurbishment, computer installation, magistrates courts, office accommodation, prisons, railways, roads, student accommodation, the London

Underground and waste disposal. Meanwhile, the state not only pays the contractor but is saddled with long-term interest and leasing costs to the private owners. Over 100 PFI projects are already under way, and more are in the pipeline.

Even services, like computer networks, building maintenance and cleaning are also being handed over wholesale to the private sector under PFI.

The private companies take no risks. They make sure there is a cast-iron agreement guaranteeing them big profits

Fighting PFI

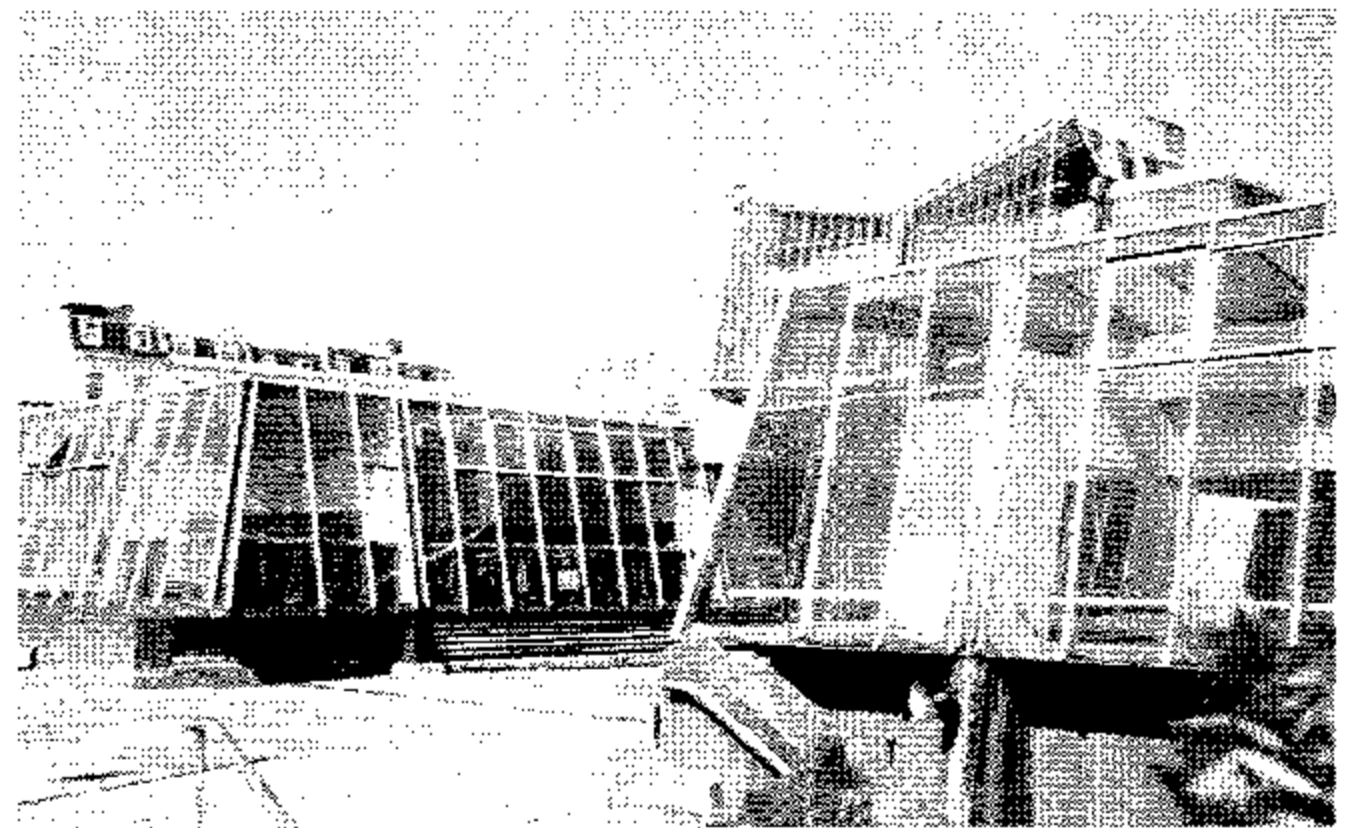
In Haringey, north London, all secondary schools are to be handed over to a private contractor in December, who will manage the cleaning, maintenance and catering.

Gillian Lee, governor of a Haringey school, says: "If the facilities are being run by a private company, we have no idea what use they might want to make of the school to bring in money. Because the company was guaranteed its revenue, if cutbacks are made in the education budget, cash will have to be found to pay the contractors by cutting other aspects of education."

In Westminster, the famous Pimlico comprehensive school is to be demolished and the site cleared by a private company. They will build luxury flats on part of the site and a new school on the other, causing cramped conditions and chaos for students and teachers, but making a great deal of profit. Most teachers, governors and parents oppose the scheme, and pupils took strike action last month against the plan, which is backed by Home Secretary Jack Straw, the former chair of governors.

"New Labour is the opposite of what Labour used to be," says Michael Ball, chair of the parents' association. "Everything is decided from the top down and it is profoundly undemocratic. They pretend there is no conflict between rich and poor."

In Scotland, the public sector union Unison has joined forces with the British Medical Association to fight a PFI initiative that will replace the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. A



Pimlico School, Westminster

BMA study shows the plan will damage acute services in the city.

Unison Scottish Secretary Matt Smith said: "Our opposition to PFI has not changed because there is a new government in power. We will continue to oppose this damaging policy that hands the services of the people of Scotland over to private contractors."

In Wales, Unison members at University Hospital Cardiff are considering industrial action to stop the hospital's central sterile supply department from being sold off via a PFI scheme.

Derek Gregory, Unison Welsh Secretary, says PFI is more dangerous to jobs than Compulsory Competitive Tendering because it amounts to 20-60-years of privatisation for staff and buildings.

before they even start. When projects are designed, the need to generate income is top priority, not the quality of the service that will be provided to the public.

When a PFI is considered, the service is divided into "core" and non-core". The "core" service is provided by staff employed by the health or local authority, for example in a hospital, medical and nursing care. But the "non-core" services, like auxiliaries, cleaners, porters, maintenance and catering, will be employed by the PFI contractor.

PFI gives bosses the opportunity to cut wages and undermine national agreements on pay and conditions. Staff employed in the new projects will get lower wages and when public spending is slashed, services will be cut to the bone, so the lease rental and interest can be paid on time.

The PFI will cost the public purse more in the long term than ordinary public spending. Society is put in debt to rapacious capitalist companies, and public services are mortgaged into the future. ■

The real PFI "winners"

Tony Blair's close associate, the Paymaster General Geoffrey Robinson, is in charge of pushing PFI ahead. Robinson had to apologise to the Commons for misleading MPs about his own private business interests. He remains accused of failing to declare directorships and faces calls for his resignation.

Under Robinson's leadership a "task force" has been set up. It consists almost entirely of employees of companies who stand to gain from PFI projects.

As well as the profits for the building, engineering and service contractors who build the project or run the service, there are also plenty of fat fees for management consultants and lawyers.

Literally billions of pounds worth of business is being generated in this way, at the expense of the taxpayer.

The alternative to the Privatising "Filching" Initiative

Global companies are adept at avoiding paying tax in the countries where they operate. That means governments have less money to spend on public projects.

New Labour claims PFI is a way of boosting the public sector by "bringing in private money". In reality it means that companies who themselves pay little or no tax, can now get their hands on the taxes and national insurance contributions of individual workers.

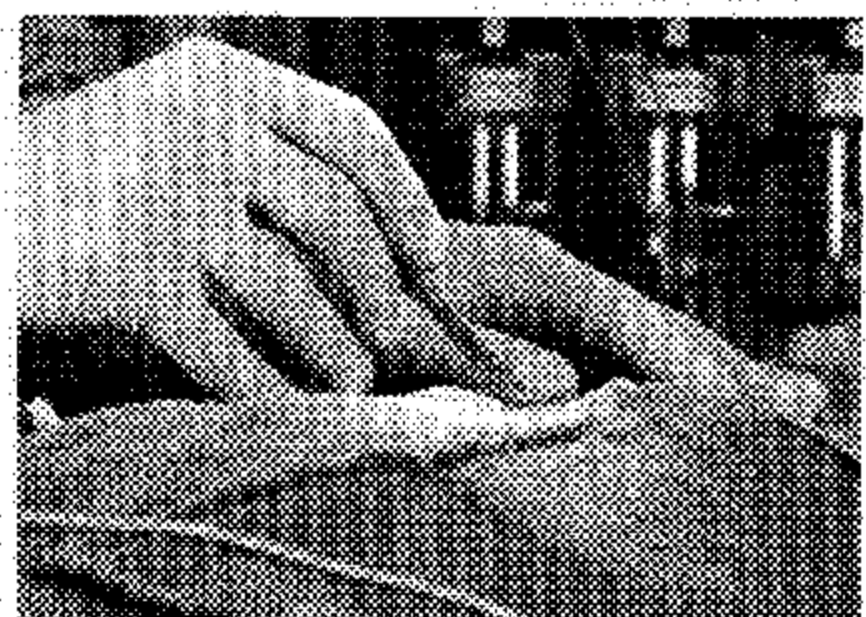
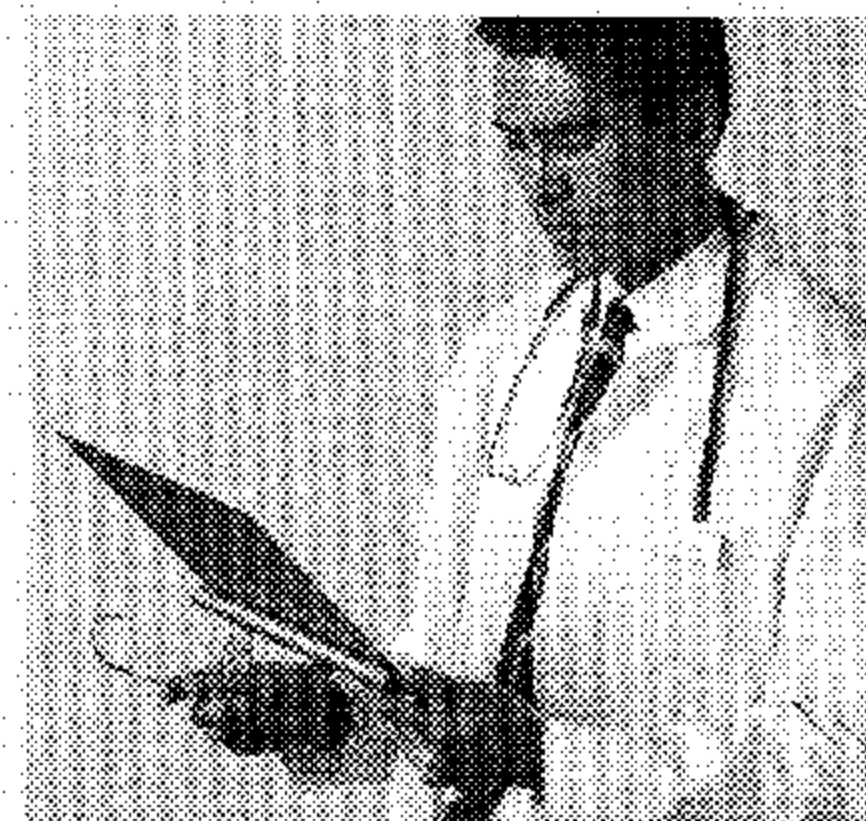
There is an alternative to PFI, which it is to get rid of the New Labour government and replace it with a government of workers' representatives, which operates to benefit the majority.

Public sector projects should be put in the hands of the people who work in the public sector, and they would decide what new services to provide, in consultation with the community.

The existing resources of society, such as pension funds, would be used for such projects instead of being gambled in the stock market as at present. In the long-term, a socialist society operating on the basis of production for need, not profit, would remove the cost imperative from public services altogether.

The trade unions should step up their opposition to PFI from just words and petitions and take action against it. It is the job of a trade union to defend members' rights and conditions with all the means open to it, including strikes and occupations.

They should challenge New Labour and dare Blair to use the Tory anti-union laws against public sector workers. ■



No area of the public sector is immune from the profit-seeking PFI

Journalist David Remnick, author of *Lenin's Tomb*, and presently editor of *The New Yorker* magazine, provides a detailed account of the attempt to restore capitalism in Russia.

He vividly depicts the attempt of bourgeois forces to create a free market capitalist economy in the five years following the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is an authoritative survey of post-Gorbachev Russia.

Events analysed include the December 1991 break-up of the Soviet State and the bombardment of Moscow's White House, seat of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, ordered by Yeltsin in October 1993. The brutal abolition of Parliament which still operated under the Soviet Constitution, was recognised by most Russian citizens as the end of Yeltsin's "democratic" credentials.

Remnick shows the scale of the murderous attack upon the small Chechen republic in the North Caucasus where Yeltsin later admitted 80,000 people had died at the hands of the Russian army.

He chronicles the events of the campaign to re-elect Yeltsin in 1996, when billions of dollars of the state budget were spent or promised so that Yeltsin would remain president.

There are profiles of all the main political characters involved in these momentous events. He shows how Gorbachev's struggle to build a new Soviet Union was undermined by Yeltsin, who in order to get rid of Gorbachev had to destroy the Union itself.

We are given profiles of Alexander Rutskoi and Ruslan Khasbulatov, the leading defenders of the White House in September and October 1993 as well as Zhirinovskiy and the rise of the fascist Liberal Democrats, who in December 1993 won 23% of the national vote.

Another pro-capitalist, General Lebed, hero of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Moldova, also became a presidential candidate in 1996. A supporter of General Pinochet, he admires the Chilean dictator's method of killing "only 3,000 people" to prevent Chile going communist, then later handing over power to a democratic government. This is the role he is prepared to play in Russia.

Lebed gained 15% of the votes in the

The nightmare of Yeltsin's Russia

Resurrection: The Struggle for a New Russia,

by David Remnick, Picador £20.

Reviewed by John Eden



Russian soldiers taken prisoner in Chechnya

first round of the election, mainly at the expense of Zhirinovskiy. In the second round he withdrew and supported Yeltsin, guaranteeing him victory. Lebed was rewarded with a post in the Yeltsin government, but was removed three months later.

Genady Zyuganov, the leader of the nationalist, anti-Semitic Communist Party of the Russian Federation, is seen as so pro-capitalist by the West that he was wined and dined by President Clinton at Davos in Switzerland in 1996 at a meeting to discuss the world economy.

The title of the book, *Resurrection*, seems an odd one to anyone remotely familiar with the actual course of events in Russia. For most Russian citizens the past few years have brought hunger, poverty, joblessness or jobs that simply do not pay wages. Millions have experienced homelessness, barbaric wars, Mafia and business gangsterism. Elderly people are forced out of their homes, or even

murdered, so that legal and illegal "businessmen" can sell them off.

To many "liberal" and not so "liberal" promoters of capitalism in Russia, this is acceptable in the long run, because the country has to "endure" the stage of the primitive accumulation of capital before it can progress.

It is certainly the best book dealing with all the intrigues surrounding the attempt to restore capitalism led by Yeltsin, including the war in Chechnya.

Though brilliant in his investigation, the "resurrection" of Russia is more of a wish by the author than a reality, something based in the far distant and rosy evolutionary future.

In fact, it boils down to an incident described by Remnick in his afterword. Two of the gangster capitalists competed in a "civilised" way, something that previously would have been done through the violent removal of business rivals.

Vladimir Potanin head of the

How our bodies work

The molecules within us: our body in health and disease,

by Dr Charles A Pasternak, Plenum Publishing, \$28.95. Reviewed by Colin Sandiford

This book is a study of the "new" science of molecular biology. It is not intended as a text book for medical students but as a starting point for anyone interested in this rapidly growing field of medicine.

The book is fully explained with often helpful examples and similes. For those without a medical doctorate but who are willing to take in new concepts it is an excellent medical reference and is far better than the vast number of "what is wrong with me" popular science books and magazine articles that are currently in publication. And with the many funny and yet informative anecdotes that are to be found on almost every page this book is actually a good read.

As a starting point the book gives an overview of the workings of a healthy human body. It then goes on to explain how the normal function of the body can be interrupted, not only by traditionally accepted disease but by factors of the environment such as stress.

With traditional medicine the view of the body is somewhat simplified and indeed can be thought of as the science of how the body should work. However, molecular biology is more the science of how it does work. Due to this the book shows

the scientific basis for many homeopathic and "alternative" practises which are rejected by traditional medicine despite their effectiveness.

For example take the practice of acupuncture. It is known that in the case of debilitating injury the human body produces endorphins which are natural painkillers. These numb the pain for a brief period, often referred to as the initial shock.

It is believed that the production of endorphins is triggered by certain nerves throughout the body when they are damaged. These nerves do not cover the whole body but are clustered in key areas.

Professional acupuncturists train for years so that they can find certain key points on the body to insert their needles. A correctly placed set of needles can, therefore, trigger the production of endorphins for a given area, dulling pain far more effectively than any commercial painkiller and targeted specifically in the area required.

Also unlike with most commercial painkillers, you are not likely to get addicted to endorphins and they have no unfortunate side effects. ■

Uneximbank (a banking, real estate, oil and gas conglomerate) was determined to defeat his rival, the entrepreneur Vladimir Guskinsky. With help from Soros' Quantum Fund and two Western banks, Potanin succeeded in taking control of a huge state-owned corporation called Svyazinvest in 1997.

The non-violent take-over was considered by some, like first deputy premier Boris Nemtsov, as a sign that Russia was at last becoming a "civilised regime".

Events have moved rapidly since Remnick wrote his afterword. The rouble crashed disastrously in August 1998, and there has been a further collapse of the economy into deeper slump.

The only resurrection for Russia will be achieved by the masses, absorbing the lessons of the past and present. It requires the building of a new revolutionary leadership to end capitalism and create a socialist democracy in the former Soviet Union. ■

Socialist future

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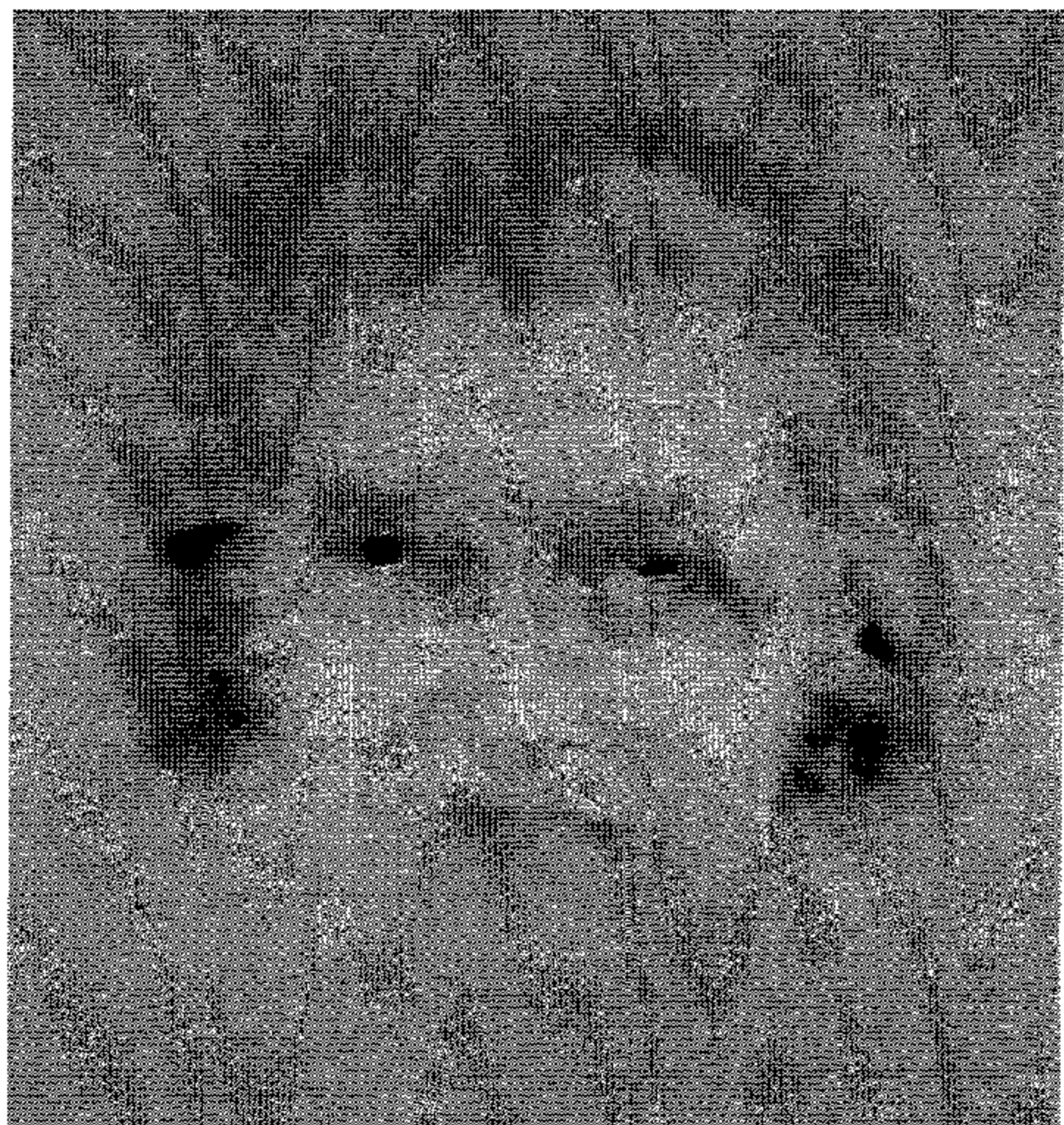
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At first glance Glenys Johnson and Masakatsu Kondo seem to have little in common, apart from having studied at London's Slade School of Art. Kondo makes sharply defined, almost photo-realist mountains. Johnson is preoccupied by faces.

But they do share a common ground. They begin with a photograph. This is then projected, painted or manipulated to create a multi-layered structure with a wealth of associations.

Johnson's 17 canvasses, each called *Not Yet Titled*, look down at us in an uncluttered rectangular space. We are invited to give the work time to act upon us, encouraged to linger on the bench around the edge of the room.

The original photographs, which she has drawn from newspapers, give these images a contemporary feeling. Because the canvasses are hung high up, the space becomes almost like an underground temple. These are icons of our times. They are indistinct, anonymous, ordinary people – mothers, workers, just as one would see in a crowd.

We see disembodied faces. They float towards us in a frontal view, magnified five times life size. The faces are harsh and unglamorised. There is no background, no body, only an undefined space.

At the edge of perception

Corinna Lotz reviews a joint exhibition by Glenys Johnson and Masakatsu Kondo at the Wigmore Gallery, London

They have a ghostly look due to the pale surface and softness of the contours, which appear to be emerging from the unknown. Although contemporary, they are at the same time distant, trying to reach us out of another area.

The direct line of vision from the eyes of these people follows on from Johnson's *Indigomonochrome* series, shown earlier this year in London. That group of heads was distinctly frightening. The faces were in a process of decomposition, like bodies uncovered after a massacre.

These images are softer. Johnson has compared them with the moment of identity when a child might see its mother for the first time. The contours seem to emerge rather than disintegrate.

The gentle treatment, the hazy quality

gives them an intimacy. They are fragile and fragmented, but simultaneously have a powerful effect as highly individual identities which express the personal and social tensions of the present.

Masakatsu Kondo shares with Johnson an exploration of the very edge of perception, the periphery, the transition from an undefined moment to a specific image.

His heroic pictures of mountains are highly detailed renderings of massive rock formations. On closer viewing, they become abstract swirls of paint.

Suddenly, the myriad of brushstrokes seem to have little connection with the subject being depicted. Marks are made to suit the formal rhythm of the painted work, rather than to describe a natural

detail. Kondo, in his own words, likes to exploit the contrast, the interaction, "the very fine line between abstraction and figuration, between photograph and painting". He shows both simultaneously in his work, and that is its great attraction.

The original photograph of a mountain is modified to suit the concept the artist wants to put across. It is simplified to give a pure, dramatic image of a "high mountain", and deep blue sky, as one "sees" it in the mind's eye.

Kondo's love of mountains goes back to his youth, when he lived in a town from which Sanageyama mountain rose to the east and Ibukiyama to the west.

"There was a small hill," he recalls, "which contained a footprint-like indentation. Legend had it that a goblin called *tengu* used to use it like a stepping-stone to jump from one mountain to the next."

He enjoys investigating how the changing condition of the mind affects the perception of the object. "When you begin to grasp this process, it becomes very interesting, because things are always changing due to your viewpoint or the condition of your mind."

"The mountain in itself is a strong subject. That's why I use it. I put my view, but each person can bring his or her own story to the mountain."

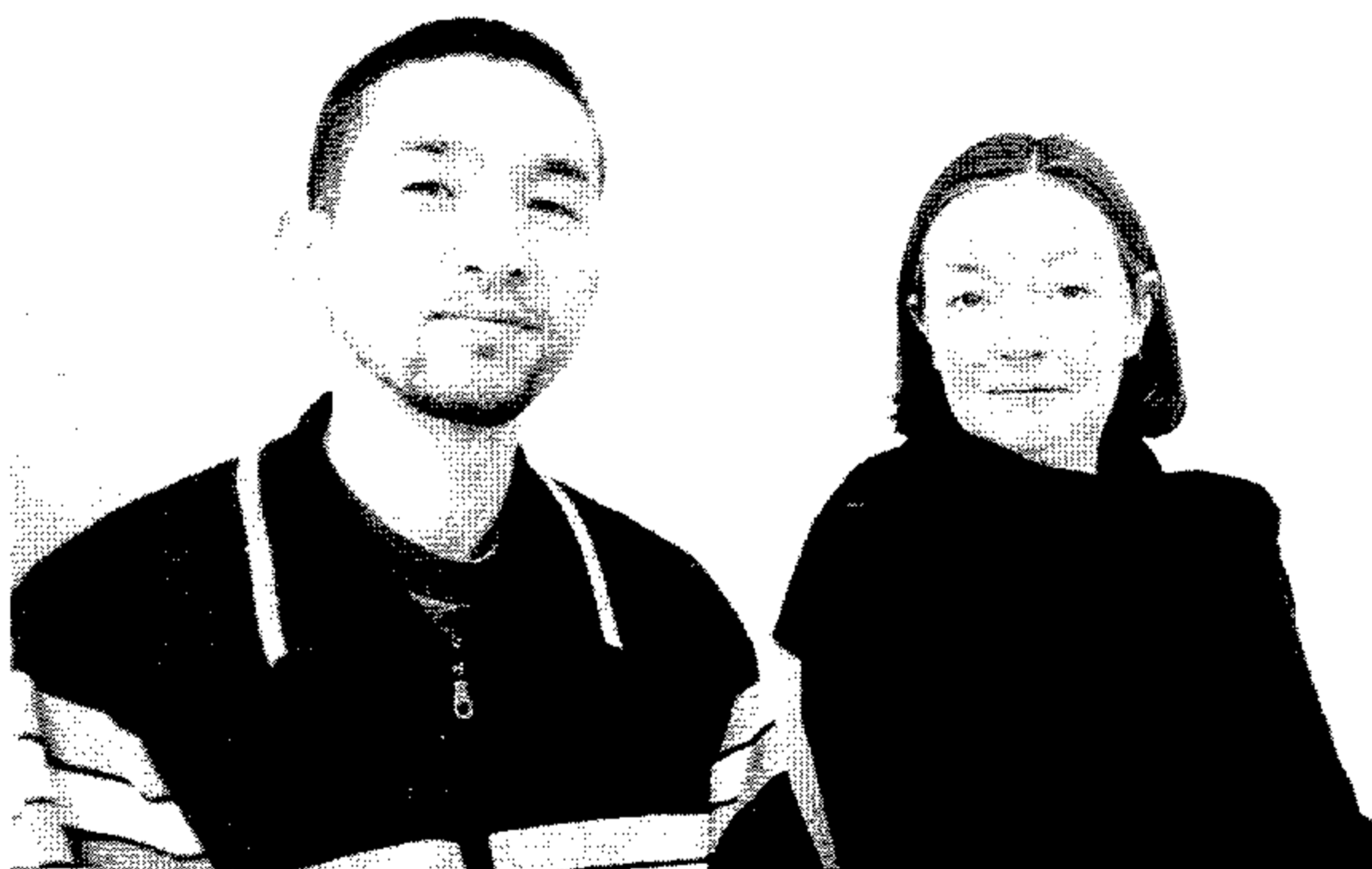
Kondo sees his work as bringing together Japanese and European traditions. Oil painting in Japan began only about 100 years ago.

"We had our own techniques, which we suddenly threw away. But I feel that our own traditions need to be developed. We copied in order to get the technique. We tended to be derivative, simply copying styles from America and Europe.

"But we have had our own strong periods of sculpture and painting, at the same time as the European Renaissance, especially in Kamakura sculpture which was recently shown here at the British Museum. But this remained isolated and never crossed over to Europe.

"I want to pick up the thread of that strong period. It comes out of me now, even though I have lived here in Britain for ten years.

"I like to use a Western basis in order to show the strength of the Japanese tradition, not in a nostalgic superficial way, but in an essential way." ■



Glenys Johnson and Masakatsu Kondo, until 8 January at Wigmore Fine Art, 204 Wigmore Street, W1. Open Tuesday-Friday, 10-6, Saturday 11-5. Closed 24 Dec- 4 Jan. Free admission. From 15 January: Vistas Kiera Bennett, Rowena Dring, Pedro Lopez.

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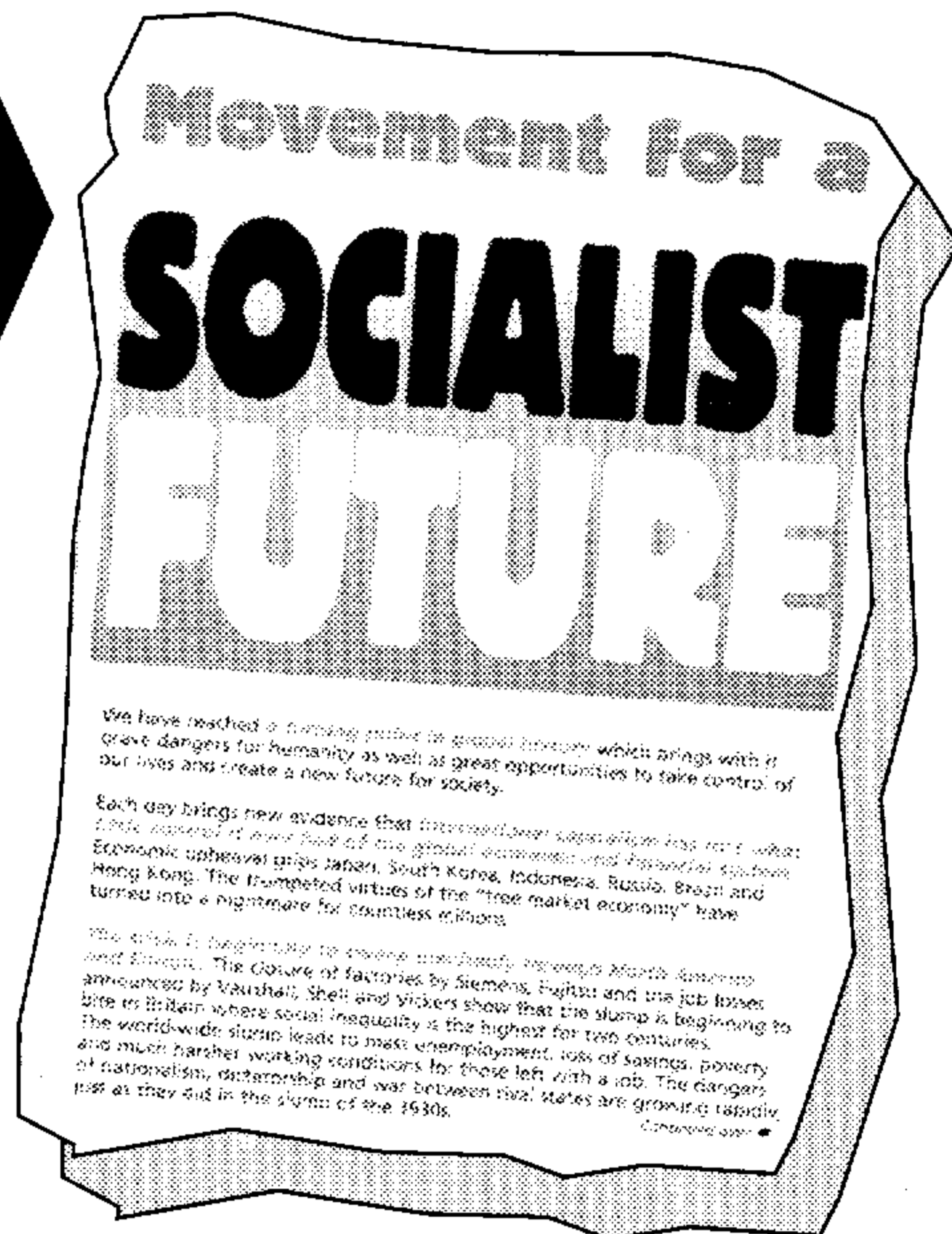
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