

# permanentrevolution

Issue 6 / Autumn 2007 / £2.50 €4.00

## Respect staring into oblivion

### INSIDE

#### Russia /

Putin flexes his muscles

#### Anti-capitalist movement /

At an impasse

#### United States /

The anti-war movement

#### Credit crisis /

Heading for world recession?

[www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)



# From the editors

## **Permanent Revolution 6**

Autumn 2007

A quarterly review of  
revolutionary politics and theory

### **Co-Editors**

Clare Heath, Keith Harvey and Stuart King

### **Editorial team this issue**

Alison Higgins, Bill Jefferies and Mark  
Hoskisson

### **Production Editor**

John Dennis

### **Production team**

Linda Wilde, Dave Gay and Dave Esterson

Signed articles do not necessarily  
represent the views of the organisation

### **Annual Subscription**

UK £15.00 (four issues)

### **Supporting subscription**

£25.00

**Payable by PayPal on our website,  
or please make cheques payable to**  
PR Publications

### **Send to**

PR Publications,  
BM Box 9180,  
London WC1N 3XX

Please contact us for rates outside UK

### **Email**

contact@permanentrevolution.net

### **Website**

www.permanentrevolution.net

ISSN 1755-6937

### **Printed by**

RAP Spiderweb Ltd  
Commercial Centre, Clowes Street,  
Hollinwood, Oldham OL9 7LY

Welcome back from the summer break. This issue of Permanent Revolution leads on an analysis of Respect. It was commissioned before the current crisis in that organisation but, as we point out, all the seeds were present at its formation. We have tried to unearth the roots of the political method that informs the SWP's practice in Respect and how it leads to them adapting to reformism. We hope the article produces feedback, as our dossier of the revolutionary youth movement did. We invite current and former members of Respect and the SWP to write in with their comments on the article and their experiences as well.

Before the summer break Permanent Revolution 2007 took place on 29 June – 1 July in London. As our first national summer event it was very successful. More than 70 people came over the weekend to take part in the debates and discussions, browse the book stalls and, as it turned out for three comrades, to join our organisation! Many more came to enjoy a lively fundraising event at the Bread and Roses pub in Clapham on the Saturday to help out the Bolivian Solidarity Campaign in fundraising. We intend to have another day public event in early December focussing on women and fighting oppression. Keep an eye on the *Action Notice Board / PR meetings* page on our website. As soon as we have final details we will put them up.

We have been asked by readers where they can buy the journal if they don't come across a Permanent Revolution seller, so we have provided a list of bookshops here in Britain below. We are currently negotiating with a distributor so hopefully this list will expand by the next issue. If there isn't a bookshop near you, you can always send for one from our box number; even better why not subscribe and help encourage theory and debate on the left.

Finally, for the "IT crowd", you will notice our ISSN has changed following a request from the British Library. We just thought you would like to know!

### **The Editors**

#### **Edinburgh**

**Word Power:** 43 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh  
EH8 9DB, Scotland

#### **Glasgow**

**Barrett Newsagents:** 267 Byres Road, Glasgow G12 8TL

#### **Liverpool**

**News from Nowhere:** 98 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY

#### **London**

**Foyles:** 113-119 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EB

**Bookmarks:** 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QE

**Housemans Bookshop:** 5 Caledonian Road,  
Kings Cross, London N1 9DX

#### **Southampton**

**October Books:** 243 Portswood Road, Southampton  
SO17 2NG

# permanent revolution

Issue 6 / Autumn 2007 / [www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

## Contents /

### Briefings /

#### 2 / World Review

Will credit crisis lead to recession? /  
Iraq – Brits scramble to get out

#### 4 / Briefings

Gordon Brown: meet the new  
boss / Metronet dispute: struggle  
against PFI / TUC – off your knees /  
Health workers: reinstate Karen  
Reissmann / Haggerston: victory  
for T&G catering workers / Postal  
strike latest / “Lifers” target  
abortion rights / Prostitution /  
Australian APEC protest /  
Australian Labor Party heading for  
victory / Chile: mass protests  
against poverty wages

### 16 Respect / Not the best of times

The SWP has refused George Galloway's demand to get rid of SWP leader, John Rees, as national secretary. Now, like two cobra's in a sack, they are spitting venom at each other. How did it come to this? Stuart King looks at where Respect came from and how its populist politics failed to deliver the “breakthrough” that its leaders promised.

### 25 Russia / Putin flexes his muscles

Is Russia gearing up for a new cold war as the media and western leaders tell us? Or is it just responding to NATO's encirclement and US aggression? Bill Jefferies looks at how Russia went from economic prostration to aspiring great power today.

### 31 USA / The anti-war movement

Tied to the Democrats and deeply disillusioned. George Binette assesses the current state of the movement and compares it to a previous generation's anti-war movement.

### 35 Debate / The anti- capitalist movement

The World Social Forum and its European offshoot are at an impasse. The decision by Rifondazione Comunista to enter Italy's anti-working class government has knocked the stuffing out of the ESF. Keith Harvey looks at how the movement ended up like this.

### Backspace /

#### 42 / Feedback

“Revolution – independent youth organisation” debates party fractions in youth movements / Revolution's theses on youth organisation

#### 46 / Reviews

The Islamist by Ed Husain / Iran on the Brink by Andreas Malm and Shora Esmailian / A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini / George W Bush and the War on Women by Barbara Finlay / Eco-socialism or Barbarism Editors Jane Kelly and Sheila Malone / Marx, Lenin and the Revolutionary Experience by Paul Le Blanc / Fantasy Island by Dan Atkinson and Larry Elliott / Buda's Wagon by Mike Davis

Our website contains fuller versions of some of these articles and background documents. Visit the website to download back issues, discussion documents and recent statements and leaflets [www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

# Will the credit crisis lead to world recession?

OVER THE summer a sub-prime butterfly flapped its wings in the US housing market – by early autumn savers were queuing round the block in Nottingham to draw their money out of the Northern Rock bank.

But “chaos theory” is not the best explanation for the sudden crisis in the money markets despite its chaotic appearance – globalisation is. The lending problems in the US housing sector were caused by successive interest rate rises which prompted a spike in defaults on sub-prime mortgages (those offered to the poorest buyers with little or no security). This, in turn, caused the bankruptcy of some hedge funds and several dozen US mortgage companies who were over exposed to this sector.

Shares in banks and firms closely related to the housing market fell sharply in July and August. Even worse, a system-wide financial crisis of liquidity has been triggered due to the fact that the precise scale of these worthless mortgage assets and exactly who holds them is still unclear.

While most analysts suggest these debts probably amount to no more than \$100 billion (negligible compared to the \$30 trillion of debt in the non-financial sector), banks are not prepared to lend to each other (or rather are willing to do so only at punitive short term rates) until these assets are “priced to market” and the holders of them declare them on their balance sheets.

This specific credit crunch is a unique crisis of capitalist globalisation. Over the last decade investment banks have created a variety of new financial instruments that have allowed them to chop up, mix and parcel out bits of sub-prime mortgages across the world in order to diversify risk. The hope was that this would ensure no one institution would be left holding too many dodgy debts, thereby threatening their solvency. This little piece of magic has been so clever it means no one can follow the debt trail, hence the liquidity crisis.

So far the impact of the financial crisis has been limited. The central banks have stepped in and provided short term cash to banks that need it. Most large banks have enjoyed huge profits in the last few years and are very unlikely to be made insolvent when they own up to the scale of their mortgage losses. In addition, the Federal Reserve will almost certainly start the process of lowering interest rates to ease the cost of borrowing. Meanwhile, the major industrial firms are awash with cash after years of double digit profits and are not critically dependent upon bank borrowing to finance their investments.

The major risk of lower growth or outright recession this year and next stems rather from the effect the bursting of the housing bubble will have on US consumer demand and in turn what effect this has on other countries' exports to the US. The US housing bubble burst in 2006 and the stock of unsold houses hit a 16 year high this summer;

prices are continuing to fall and mortgage defaults are set to rise further.

Since 70% of US GDP is made up domestic consumption and much of this has been driven by rising house prices, borrowing against them and the positive boost this has given to demand, a sharp fall will hit demand with spin-off effects on jobs and investment. Unemployment edged up slightly this summer and will continue, and if the fall in demand is large then it could have a spiral effect on profits and prices.

The main countervailing trends to this scenario are first the intervention of the monetary authorities which, as in previous crises, will lower interest rates to boost demand and ease debt burden. Second, global growth is very strong, especially in Asia and Latin America and global growth is less dependent than during the last cycle on US domestic growth. Moreover, a growing number of top US companies are enjoying high overseas earnings as a result of strong growth abroad which compensates for lower domestic earnings and helps to prop up the stock market.

In short this crisis is a test of the political-economic leadership of the US financial authorities and the strength of the long upturn in global capitalism which has been sparked by the restoration of capitalism in China and the ex-USSR, as well as strong productivity and profit gains in the USA in the last ten years.

The US financial authorities have been reluctant to cut interest rates to help out distressed hedge funds and banks; the Federal Reserve chief and the Bank and England head insist those who invested in high risk ventures must take a hit. Commentators like *The Economist* welcome a credit squeeze as a way of forcing a market “correction” in order to forestall a possible crash.

The Federal Reserve knows that pouring cheap money into the system could simply lead to more feverish speculation, a bubble and a crash like 2000. But on the other hand, failure to relax monetary conditions – as the Fed failed to do in 1929 – could lead to a major slump.

Even so, the most prescient and timely capitalist intervention may not be enough to forestall the recessionary effect of the bursting of the housing bubble. The question is: would this signal an end to the global upturn or will the dynamics of the latter prove capable of limiting the fall-out from the present crisis? On balance we tend to think the latter and that while US growth will flatten over the next year or so the global economy will grow strongly.

The current bout of panic in the markets however underlines the fundamentally reactionary, blind and anarchic character of capitalism. The desperate search for higher and higher returns that is at the heart of capitalism necessarily leads to greater and greater risk-taking.

Speculation is usually at its most feverish and dangerous after periods of rapid growth, where a rising mass of profits are looking for an outlet that cannot be secured in production.

After the 2000 Wall Street stock market crash the Federal Reserve lowered interest rates aggressively to limit the recession. As a result borrowing money was very cheap and this fuelled a private equity takeover boom financed by debt as well as prompting dubious lending practices to sectors of the population. Something similar happened between 1997 and 2000 after investors fled from south Asian economies and sought a "safe haven" in US and European stock markets. The excess liquidity fuelled speculation in mergers and above all in high risk, hi-tech stocks - eventually collapsing in March 2000.

Already the hypocritical media is awash with soul-searching. How could this happen? Why was there no government or industry regulation to prevent this wave of foolish mortgage borrowing? Why was the US housing market not cooled down much earlier? No doubt commis-

sions will be set up to ponder these matters and the hedge funds will think up a new batch of financial instruments to render any future controls meaningless. Horses, stable doors and bolts come to mind.

Over the years we have seen our pension funds pilfered by boardroom crooks, we have been conned into endowment policies that failed to cover the cost of our mortgages, we have been encouraged to "get on the property ladder" and as a result many in the US are about to lose the roof over their head.

That's why socialists and the workers' movement must demand that the banks and finance houses be nationalised under the control of the workers, so that investment, borrowing and lending policies are subject to rational allocation according to people's needs not speculative profit making. If not, banks will always find a way to channel cash into tulipmania, South Sea bubbles, gold, shares, housing or whatever the next great money making scheme is - with all the destructive consequences that inevitably follow.

## Iraq: Brits run for the exit

IN SEPTEMBER after months of waiting, General Petraeus, commander of US forces in Iraq, told a disbelieving Congress that the deployment of 30,000 extra troops to stem a growing civil war in Iraq has been a "success".

It is not only US senators who doubt the "surge" has worked. The UN reports that 60,000 Iraqis a month are fleeing their homes, joining the 2-3 million internal and external refugees. In a BBC poll 70% of Iraqis believed security had actually deteriorated in areas covered by the surge. The great pacification in Anbar province was achieved by arming Sunni militias against supposed al-Qaida fighters.

This was the method used by the British in their area of operations in the south of the country, handing over policing to local Sheiks and militias. The results were not just the suppression of democratic rights (and particularly the rights of women in the area) but a growing turf war between the forces supporting Muqtada al-Sadr, his Mahdi army, and the forces supporting the government and leading clerics in Najaf, the Badr Brigades.

Over the summer the British announced they were leaving their last base in the centre of Basra, retreating to the airport and reducing troop numbers. Even this retreat, declared not quite a victory but "a job done", had to be negotiated with the militias. Large numbers of Mahdi army militants were released in order to extricate the soldiers from Basra Palace peacefully.

The last thing that Brown wanted was TV images of troops retreating under fire. The media and the army knew only too well that the reason the troops weren't withdrawn last spring was to help George Bush politically. Under pressure from the Democrats the last thing Bush wanted was to have to explain why his most loyal ally was

scrambling to get out, leaving chaos behind. It was left as late as possible, to coincide with Bush declaring the surge "a success". Several thousand British troops will remain, hostage to Bush's political fortunes and the militias who can bomb and mortar the base at will.

Soon after Petraeus' visit to Washington, George Bush promised to withdraw 30,000 US troops by next summer (prefaced by the words "might be able to"). This will still leave 130,000 US troops on the ground and huge US bases still under construction. The Republicans and the Democrats have no intention of just withdrawing from Iraq, they need to establish some sort of stable puppet regime (or regimes) before they pull back to their bases.

They have to ensure the oil supplies are firmly in the hands of the US multinationals and properly protected. The only way US troops will leave Iraq for good is if they are driven out by the resistance. This was the lesson of Vietnam and no-one in the anti-war movement should forget it.

Gordon Brown goes to parliament on 8 October to finally make a statement on Iraq. Opinion poll after opinion poll shows two-thirds of the electorate wanting UK troops to get out of Iraq. Yet, with the exception of a few honourable anti-war voices, Parliament remains spinelessly silent. Meanwhile the Brown government is beefing up troops in Afghanistan, the next, but this time we are told, "winnable war".

The labour movement should rally at parliament on 8 October behind Stop the War, denouncing this Labour government's imperialist adventures and demanding the withdrawal now of all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

See Page 31: "The US anti-war movement; the 'Democratic deficit'"

## LABOUR PARTY

### “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss”

THE WHO song suggests that “we won’t get fooled again”. However in the case of many Labour activists, including some on the left, this appears optimistic. The readiness of the previously self-described “awkward squad”, union leaders like Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson, to embrace Gordon Brown as leader indicates where the problems lie in building a serious fightback against the neoliberal policies of the new Prime Minister.

On 5 October, Brown completed one hundred days in office. Even before this anniversary he had invited the whiskey-sodden Margaret Thatcher to Downing Street. The symbolism of this – New Labour as a continuum of the anti-working class offensive she began – provoked Paul Kenny, the GMB General Secretary to say “This is a huge political mistake which will cost the Labour Party credibility with their core supporters in communities which in many areas

trajectory is there for all to see. Indeed if there had been any confusion, Brown has tried to help us through it. In early September this “son of the manse” outlined how he was in fact a son of Thatcher, going out of his way to praise her “conviction politics” with the mild admonition added that “perhaps more could have been done to deal with unemployment” but that she was “right to carry out the changes Britain needed.”

Defenders of Brown will doubtless say this is just a clever piece of “positioning” to undermine Cameron and keep control of the “centre ground”. But the truth is that Brown believes this stuff and is involved in a continuation of Thatcherite policies. A look at his record in office so far demonstrates this.

We need look no further than the question of public sector pay. Brown is sticking to a 2%, or at most 2.5% limit, on rises across the public

the battle against inflation adding: “We have succeeded in tackling inflation and having a stable economy because of discipline in pay over the last ten years. That discipline will have to continue. We will do nothing, nothing, to put that at risk. It is an essential element of maintaining discipline in the economy.”

Note the use of “discipline” four times. This is the Iron Chancellor speaking and the people he wants to discipline are the workers. Labour is imposing the discipline of the capitalist market on the poorest people in society.

There has been absolutely no discipline on pay in the boardrooms – there pay is booming. Mark Serwotka, speaking at the TUC, pointed out that his members were being faced with a pay offer that left some staff in Jobcentre Plus with nothing while Lord Browne, the former BP chief, earned £11 million (that’s million!) last year. “Public service workers are not the cause of inflation, they are its victims” as Serwotka put it.

After all, when was the last time you met a company director at your local Cash Converters trading in his lad’s PS2 to get through to the end of the week? The real inflation in the economy – the rise in the cost of the basic items that we need to live – is hammering the working class.

A recent survey revealed that one in four working class families are struggling to pay for school uniforms. Council tax has risen, food and petrol prices have risen and house prices now mean buying your first home is impossible for most young working class families.

If you are on £100,000 a week you wouldn’t notice these rises. If you are on £15,000 a year then they can mean the difference between getting through the month without having to go into debt. And Brown has the nerve to talk about discipline.

The truth is that inflation in the economy is not caused by pay increases, it has risen steadily over the last year despite pay increases for workers being pegged at below-inflation levels.

Average earnings in the public

### But the truth is that Brown is involved in a continuation of Thatcherite policies. A look at his record in office so far demonstrates this

of the country still bear the scars from the damage that she did when she was Prime Minister.”

He’s not wrong. Thatcher was one of the Tory party’s most right wing leaders and the woman who described the miners’ union as the “enemy within” during her year long war against them in the mid 1980s. But just as when Blair had her round for tea in the 1990s, Brown is sending the bosses another message of reassurance.

The evidence of Brown’s political

sector. This is not just a pay freeze. With the retail price index – an imperfect but more accurate measure of inflation than the government’s own indices – veering between 3.8% and 4.4% over the last several months, the 2.5% ceiling on wage rises is a pay cut. He has signalled this freeze will continue next year and the one after.

This attack on public sector pay is being carried out in the name of curbing inflation. Brown described his policy as “an essential part” of

sector grew by 3.1% (excluding bonuses) in the year to May (3.6% in the private sector), yet the Retail Price Index had grown to 4.3% in that month. World commodity prices are rising, mushrooming credit is driving up house prices, a poor summer is hitting vegetable prices. Pay has had nothing to do with it.

Whether or not this policy leads to a "winter of discontent", as suggested after September's TUC congress, remains to be seen. What is clear in all the pay disputes in the public sector is that Brown, if he can't do a deal with quiescent union leaders, will impose wage cuts and redundancies to satisfy the demands of the money markets and big business.

If the issue of pay doesn't make things clear enough as to what we can expect from Brown, just look at one of his first acts as Labour Leader. On 24 June, at the party's NEC he tabled a 12 page document entitled "Extending and reviewing party democracy". This is New

Labour-speak for restricting the few shreds of democracy left in the party.

The main intention of Brown's paper was to further reduce the role of Conference and the affiliated unions in determining party policy. This is to be done by removing "contemporary" i.e. emergency

party politics, with the unions reduced to the role of lobbyists rather than policymakers. A fine reward for those union leaders and the Compass group who said there was no need for a left candidate to stand against Brown! His proposals have been put out to consultation until December. We should demand

## When was the last time you met a company director at your local Cash Converters trading in his lad's PS2 to get through to the end of the week?

resolutions, from conference and shunting them into the long grass, otherwise known as the National Policy Forum, where the unions have only 16% of the vote compared to the 49% they have in Conference.

The effect of this will be to turn Conference into even more of a rally based on the US model of

they be rejected in their entirety and not negotiated as the union leaders seem to be suggesting.

In office, Brown has tried to present himself as representing "a new politics" and as a break from Blair. Again much of this is spin and positioning. It is one of the ironies of the current period of British

### METRONET DISPUTE

## Struggle against PFI now

THE RMT is easily the strongest trade union in Britain today. If you don't believe me, take a look at recent strike action over the Metronet mess. Even though the other two unions, TSSA and Unite, which had planned strikes called them off, the RMT went ahead and managed to paralyse two thirds of the Underground.

If that's not power, then I don't know what is. It is also more than just a strike against any possible threats to job security and pension rights. It is a strike against the chaos the privatisation of the tube has caused.

Although Red Ken branded the strike "incomprehensible" it is actually very understandable when you consider what caused it. Since Metronet was pushed into administration by Transport for

London (TfL) for failing to deliver despite the millions of pounds thrown at it, more than a few vultures have begun circling. One of these is the Swiss bank UBS, which has been called into "advise" TfL over the administration of the rotting corpse that is Metronet. Also circling are a number of private equity firms.

If any of the various companies bidding for the remains win, then the assets will be stripped, costs will skyrocket, wages will plummet and pension agreements will be torn up. What will happen to health and safety doesn't even bear thinking about. These are the elements of a modern day looting exercise. So it becomes perfectly understandable why the workers were striking for guarantees from the liquidator and TfL.

But there is another struggle. Forcing Metronet into bankruptcy was clearly part of an attempt to bring Metronet contracts back inhouse, that is, inside TfL. In the months before it went into administration, it was clear that Metronet was losing millions.

Gordon Brown, it should not be forgotten, is the architect of these PFI deals on the Underground. He refused all attempts to allow TfL to run the contracts, issuing bonds to finance them. Livingstone is now trying again, using the mess that is Metronet and PFI to force the government to agree.

Whatever the outcome of this struggle RMT members have shown that they are not prepared to be pawns in the wheeling and dealing of private finance. They have laid down a marker which will need to be followed with more strike action if their conditions are threatened in the future.

**By a London RMT member**

politics that Brown has managed, via spin, to pass himself off as a prime minister of substance and gravitas compared with the previous emphasis on public relations and personality so beloved of Blair.

For example, on Iraq, courtesy of timing and nothing to do with policy differences, he is able to pose

as the British leader who has removed troops from Basra, preparatory to bringing them home. Also anyone listening to his inauguration speech on the steps of 10 Downing Street couldn't fail to notice the number of times he uttered the word "change" in his awkward, clumsy speech.

He desperately needs to present

himself in this way because he recognises that voters want a clean break from Blair. He is anxious to cast Cameron in an "heir to Blair" role, in the belief that the electorate would prefer his brand of dull, competent, "unspun politics". This strategy may well prove successful. It may result in the calling of an early election, but it is based on

## TRADE UNION CONGRESS

# Anger shakes officials out of their torpor

FOR YEARS now the TUC Conference has only ever been the day time TV choice of people with sleeping disorders.

In the 1980s the TUC helped to inflict major defeats on the working class by running scared every time Thatcher challenged them to a fight. In the 1990s the bureaucrats welcomed humiliation in order to get Blair elected. In the early 21st century they reaped the dividends of Blair's victory by allowing themselves to be sidelined on every vital issue, by a Labour government determined to prove to the bosses that it was no longer controlled by the unions. Its role diminished with the mergers that produced the super unions like Unite and Amicus who saw little use for the TUC.

As a result, the TUC Congress became a non-event. Ponderous debates on policy, guest speakers from the CBI and the annual resolution to do nothing reflected the extent to which the TUC had become irrelevant. Or rather, the extent to which it had made itself irrelevant.

Gordon Brown's accession to power looked fair set to see this process continue. The leaders of the big unions, Dave Prentis of Unison and Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson of Unite, believed that Brown was their firm friend and so long as they carried on doing nothing a few favours might come to them.

But the TUC's miserable existence as an institutional non-

entity was the product of a low level of class struggle. So long as workers were not demanding action from their leaders the leaders were quite happy to snooze their way through the annual seaside bash. A change in the class struggle would change this as workers woke up to the fact that the TUC was supposed to be an organising centre to fight for their interests.

And this is what made the 2007 TUC more interesting than any during the last 20 years or more. Public sector workers, who represent the core strength of TUC affiliated unions in Britain today, are faced with a pay cut by Brown's Labour government. A growing mood of defiance began to build up amongst low paid workers who rightly resent being told by Brown to be "disciplined" over pay while watching not only private sector bosses but also their own chief executives take home gold-plated pay slips.

All protests fell on deaf ears. Brown made it clear that he was going to stick by his pay restraint policy. When it was challenged by the Prison Officers Association his government took that union to court within hours of the action being called: hours later the action was called off.

The PCS, which has, under the leadership of the left winger Mark Serwotka, been carrying out a guerrilla war on pay, jobs and cuts, has been offered a three year pay deal - 2% one year, 0% in the

second year and 1% in the third year. Postal workers face not only pay cuts but a restructuring of their industry that will see 40,000 jobs go, services cut and privatisation introduced. Teachers, nurses, local government workers - not exactly a roll call of high earners in anyone's economic yearbook - were all told that they too could only have 2%, or possibly 2.5% providing it was staggered over a couple of years.

And it is the anger that workers feel in the face of this pay cut that made this year's TUC interesting. It was forced - probably despite the wishes of its leaders - to debate this pay cut and decide to do something about it. A resolution from the PCS supporting co-ordinated strike action was passed and the TUC has been charged with organising a timetable for such action.

There may well be many twists and turns in the road before a day is named and the last thing that militants should allow their leaders to do is to hold them back on their own struggles while "waiting for co-ordinated action". Militants in every union will have to take action in order to stop the TUC smothering this initiative, no doubt in the name of "keeping the Tories out" or some other such rubbish. But for now the decision of the TUC does represent a real shift in the political situation that could result in a major collision between Brown and the unions. Our task is to seize the opportunity and make sure something comes of it.



deception because on major policy issues Brown is not a break from Blair in any way.

In the coming months we need to focus on building a campaign which will force union leaders to stop Brown in his tracks. It suits Brown that there is uncertainty about the timing of the next election. The profoundly undemocratic right to call an election at a time that suits the sitting prime minister should be abolished. We are in favour of fixed parliamentary terms. As consistent democrats we say this should be the norm.

Brown's right to determine the date of the election will afford him two obvious benefits. First, it makes

it difficult for the Tories to get their timing right; their need to overcome internal divisions and announce new policies is seriously hindered by election date uncertainty.

From a working class view Brown's right to call an election enables him to put pressure on the union leaders not to "rock the boat". Our response is clear: there must be no holding back to keep Brown in power - this undemocratic blackmail should be rejected by the labour movement and we should press forward to bin his neoliberal agenda and all those who defend it.

**Mark Hoskisson**

to make £3m in cuts and that it was only strike action in January and February of 2007 that had stopped most of these cuts for now. "When I qualified as a nurse six years ago, " another striker added, "there were loads of jobs, but now I know lots of student nurses who can't get work. Where's the money gone? It's gone on salaries for top executives like Sheila Foley, who got a £24,000 pay increase this year, and to PFI schemes where beds cost nearly twice as much, so they say they're having to make cuts. But it's all about the market reforms and softening us up for privatisation, and it's the patients who suffer. That's why we're out to defend the union and fight the cuts."

We asked what the mood is like among the workers:

"I do think management are under a lot of pressure. There's a lot of anger about how they've transferred vulnerable patients over 100 miles to Yorkshire. I think they thought it would be a propaganda victory for them but it's just caused a lot of anger and many people are supporting us.

"You learn a lot being out on strike about who supports you and how to organise. We've been really impressed with the range of support and different union banners coming in. We got £3,000 just the other day and now a couple of MPs are taking an interest. I

**REINSTATE KAREN REISSMANN NOW!**

## Health workers strike against victimisation

SOME 700 nurses and other healthcare workers in Manchester have staged two series of strikes to defend Karen Reissmann. In a clear-cut case of victimisation by her employer, Karen, chair of the UNISON branch at the Mental Health and Social Care Trust, has been suspended from her job as a community psychiatric nurse and is facing dismissal.

Permanent Revolution spoke to Karen and other strikers among the 100 and more picketing across four sites.

"The charges are 'bringing the Trust into disrepute.' The precise allegations actually consist of a file of articles from the internet and magazines and papers where I spoke out against cuts to jobs and services. I have said, and will continue to say, that it is the Trust bringing itself into disrepute by trying to make these cuts. I not only feel I have a right to speak out against privatisation, but a duty to," said Karen.

There was solid support for Karen

and the branch on the picket line. "The charges are nonsense," said one of the strikers, "she's an excellent trade unionist and nurse. She got a promotion on the day they suspended her! It's about a fundamental issue, about being able to speak out and organise. I

**"When I qualified as a nurse six years ago there were loads of jobs, but now I know lots of student nurses who can't get work. Where's the money gone?"**

came into nursing in 1980 and I never thought I'd be facing losing my job but many of us standing here today would have been out of work if it wasn't for us going on strike earlier this year to defend services and jobs. That's why they're after Karen. It's about being able to have an active union."

The strikers explained that they'd been told that the Trust has

think the support is there in the wider movement, but we know it might take a long time. Some of us are talking about [an] indefinite strike because we know that's our main weapon. We're trying to get as many people as possible to come to the mass meetings."

"We need people to support us," said another striker, "to keep the messages of support coming in,

# Briefings

because it does make a difference, and the money! We need money and support from different unions.”

Nearly 300 people attended a demonstration on Sunday 9 September with over 20 union banners, from a variety of unions and towns. A mass meeting the following Wednesday agreed to take further days of strike action and to demonstrate outside the Labour Party conference in Bournemouth.

► The attack on Karen Reissmann is one of several recent cases of victimisation of left activists in UNISON by increasingly aggressive bosses. In Newham, East London the

local council has suspended branch chair, Michael Gavan, for leading resistance to the privatisation of refuse collection and street cleaning services. Elsewhere in London the private sector homecare company, Fremantle, has sacked shop steward Andrew Rogers, who has been a key figure in an increasingly bitter dispute involving Barnet UNISON members. Meanwhile in Newcastle, long-standing UNISON branch secretary, Yunus Baksh, remains suspended by his NHS employer and is also under attack by a witch-hunting union bureaucracy.

**Jason Travis**

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in the school helped publicise the strike and the issues behind it. On the day of the June strike 35 NUT members and two UNISON technicians refused to cross picket lines. This was despite NUT members being sent three letters before the strike – from their own management and both the T&G and the NUT- demanding they cross picket lines and repudiating any such action as illegal.

As a result of the united action, despite management's best efforts, most of the school students had to be sent home and the school effectively closed – indeed many of the school students joined the lively picket line.

A second strike was planned, but before it took place Sodexho asked for negotiations and agreed to pay to the London living wage from September, with further increases to bring pay up to £9 an hour within a year.

The school management threatened to discipline all 35 NUT members, and the technicians. However, at the first disciplinary meeting the local NUT Branch secretary asked to see the disciplinary procedure. Despite a desperate hunt through many filing cabinets they could not find it! Nor any evidence that it had been put before Governors and adopted, so the attempted victimisations collapsed.

All this of course was no thanks to the national NUT officers. Shortly before the disciplinaries the General Secretary, Steve Sinnott, wrote again to the 35 NUT members who had not crossed the picket line, warning them that if they did it again they would be sacked! Members received copies of the letter at school and at their home addresses.

Haggerston has a long tradition of militancy: staff and students came out on unofficial strike the day the war against Iraq started and marched to the demo in Trafalgar Square. During the current dispute the NUT and T&G received lots of support from NUT and other trade unionists up and down the country.

The dispute shows how a

## LINKS

Permanent Revolution supporters have been raising Karen Reissmann's case in unions and workplaces, collecting money and urging support for the strikers.

**Send messages of support, donations, requests for speakers etc to:**

Manchester Community and Mental Health Unison Branch Office  
70 Manchester Road, Manchester M21 9UN

**Email messages of support to:** [unison@zen.co.uk](mailto:unison@zen.co.uk)

**For more information about the campaign visit:** [www.reinstate-karen.org/](http://www.reinstate-karen.org/)

**Download petitions:** [www.brickman.dircon.co.uk/reissmann\\_petition.pdf](http://www.brickman.dircon.co.uk/reissmann_petition.pdf)

## HAGGERSTON SCHOOL STRIKE

# Victory for T&G catering workers shows the way

► WORKERS AT Haggerston school won a significant victory over the French multinational Sodexho just before their summer break. The catering workers, members of T&G (Unite), went on strike against poverty wages – they were working in the school's canteen under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme.

Last year Sodexho reported sales of €12.8 bn and their current market capitalisation is €8.9 bn. The company operates in 80 countries and has 332,000 employees. They state on their website that Sodexho's mission is to “improve the quality of daily life”

and one of their four ethical principles is “respect for people”.

A massive turnover and such lofty principles – yet, Sodexho was paying its canteen workers at Haggerston £4.51 and hour! How did Sodexho get away with paying below the minimum wage? Because workers were paid a retainer in the holidays, which the firm claimed brought term time pay up to £5.35 an hour. The canteen staff decided to take action over this poverty pay after they discovered that down the road at Hackney Free and Parochial School, workers doing exactly the same job were being paid £9 an hour.

determined workforce can take on PFI employers and multinationals even if it means challenging the anti union laws to do it. Other canteen workers across London are now looking to the Haggerston example to improve their wages. The next step is to launch a campaign in other schools and colleges in London where poverty wages are paid because of PFIs. Using the Haggerston experience a joint campaign by the T&G (Unite), the NUT and the UCU could strike a blow against low wages in this sector.

**Kate Ford**

## ABORTION

# “Lifers” target abortion rights

▶ THE RIGHT of women to take the decision of whether to go through with a pregnancy or not is once again under challenge. This autumn the Commons Science and Technology Committee is conducting an inquiry into scientific developments relating to

the 1967 Abortion Act. The inquiry will focus on the upper time limit, currently 24 weeks for most abortions, and whether medical advances mean that most fetuses are viable before that date.

It is this aspect that has excited the anti-abortionists; while the

## POSTAL STRIKE

# CWU workers must fight to the finish

▶ THE CWU is set to announce more strikes after talks with Royal Mail ended without agreement. Strikes were suspended in August after Royal Mail agreed to talks. These talks were extended and continued to mid-September.

Although a commitment was made that no one would be informed of the progress of the talks (presumably to stop postal workers putting pressure on the union negotiators), this gave the impression that agreement was close. In fact, at the final session Royal Mail simply withdrew anything that had been agreed to date and asked the CWU to sign up to essentially what had been their initial proposals.

These proposals amount to very little change on the (“self-financing”) below-inflation pay offer, “total flexibility” of the workforce (both in jobs done and times of attendance) and changes the pension scheme which were denied when leaked by the *Mirror*. It would mean working five years longer, paying more into the final salary scheme, which then would be closed to new workers, in effect creating a two tier workforce in regard to pension rights.

At the root of all this lies Royal Mail's insistence that it needs to

increase the productivity of the workforce, by holding down wages, stepping up the workload and by large scale job losses. This in the face of competition encouraged by the government.

A problem from the start has been the illusion of the CWU leadership that they can convince Royal Mail management of an alternative course, rather than recognising that there are no shared interests and they will have to be forced to back down. This despite management making clear that it was digging in for a fight.

Thus there was a reluctance to call the first strikes despite a very high vote for action. Then it was a one-day strike every two weeks. Eventually this was escalated to rolling action, with different parts of the system coming out for different days. This was beginning to have a massive effect, creating a backlog of mail, but then the strikes were suspended simply because management agreed to talk.

The drawn-out talks have enabled management not only to clear the backlog, but also, despite a “period of calm” being part of the agreement to talk, to take action against the workers in several

areas. The CWU executive discouraged any response from the workforce to the provocations despite the fact that management had effectively broken the agreement. No doubt the bosses have also been refining and preparing their response to future strikes.

Further strikes are essential, and ones that really bite are needed. But workers are bemused as to why the previous action was called off when we appeared to be winning. This time around we need our leadership to show the same determination to win as the management. This must be a fight to the finish – and the finish must be victory for the workers.

At stake in the post is not only the pay and conditions for the workforce, but also the service to the public. Changes already in the pipeline (such as later deliveries and the end of Sunday collections) mean a downgrading of the service.

All trade unionists and socialists should do everything they can to support the postal workers, bringing the issues involved into their unions and Labour Parties, and getting involved in local support work.

**By a London postal worker**

# Briefings

committee will be considering reductions to 22 or 20 weeks, the right wing are lobbying for a reduction to 13 weeks. These "pro-lifers" are against all abortion, and usually contraception as well, but they know this is a position that has little support in the country or parliament. Therefore they have to

that most women seeking later abortions did not realise they were pregnant until relatively late, and a significant proportion were scared young women – women who were scared about the reaction of their parents (29%) or partners (18%). No doubt some of them feared vicious and even violent reactions. It is

moment two doctors are needed to approve abortions at any stage, including those that are carried out primarily for "social" reasons. This can lead to delays. In fact over recent years access to abortion has become easier in most parts of the country, with the NHS funding 87% of the 193,700 abortions carried out in England and Wales in 2006. This could be further improved if the law were changed.

The inquiry will look at recent research on the safety of early abortions and on the negative effects of restricting access. It will consider the improved safety through using medical rather than surgical methods, and whether nurses should be allowed to carry out medical abortions.

In addition to this inquiry, parliament will consider a Human Tissue and Embryos Bill in November/December. While the draft does not contain any provisions relating to abortion, and the government has repeatedly said it has no plans to change the law on abortion, it is likely to be used by the anti-abortionists to try and reduce the time limit. It was the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act in 1990 that led to the first amendment to the 1967 Abortion Act, reducing the time limit from 28 to 24 weeks.

So once again defending abortion rights could be to the fore in the winter. The recent poll by the "pro-life" brigade shows that the tactics used will be aggressive: MPs and others will be bombarded with pictures and videos of cute foetuses, opinion polls will be rigged and spurious figures bandied about. The pro-choice side needs to be clear: it should be up to a woman to decide if, and when, to have an abortion, and this should be as early as possible, through open access, safe and widely available services, and as late as necessary. The woman's right to determine her future is paramount.

**Clare Heath**

#### LINKS

For more on abortion in the UK see: [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=900](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=900)

## It is essential that we defend the right of women to have abortions at whatever stage – it is the lives of these women that must be the first priority

aim to chip away at women's rights. They argue that 13 weeks is "when the embryo itself is seen to be almost fully developed and begin to see movement, the eyelids fluttering, yawning and touching." (Jim Dobbin, Labour MP and chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Pro-Life Group of MPs and Peers)

While this would only affect the 11% of women who having abortions after 13 weeks, it would be a major set back. Recent research has shown

essential that we defend the right of women to have abortions at whatever stage – it is the lives of these women that must be the first priority rather than the foetus whose fluttering eyelids do not represent feelings or consciousness whatever Jim Dobbin may think.

The Science and Technology Committee will also look at early abortions – considering a liberalisation of the law to make them easier to obtain. At the

### PROSTITUTION

## Keep your noses out!

THE RIGHT wing feminists of New Labour, including Home Secretary Jacqui Smith and Leader of the House Harriet Harman, are intent on sticking their noses into yet more private matters for no good reason. They are considering introducing legislation to make it a criminal offence for men to pay women for sex, similar to the law introduced in Sweden a few years ago.

What consenting adults do in private should be of no concern of the state, unless there is harm or coercion going on. Of course they argue that prostitution is, inevitably, violence against women, and will point to the problem of trafficked women

being forced into selling sex. But that is a minority of sex workers, and those issues should be dealt with directly using laws against false imprisonment, for example.

If this proposal ever became law all sex work would be criminalised and therefore forced further underground, making it less safe for the women and men involved. We think that prostitution should be decriminalised not further criminalised.

#### LINKS

See "Prostitution; Marxism or moralism" in Permanent Revolution 3: [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1556](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1556)

## AUSTRALIAN APEC PROTEST

# Workers' militancy squandered by leaders

**BUSH** RECENTLY flew in to check everything was alright "down-under". As usual he was welcomed by thousands of protesters on the streets, and, as usual, they were threatened and battered by the police. Bush had arrived for our region's own meeting of heads of state – the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). APEC consists of 21 member countries, but while it decides the fate of many of the small Pacific nations, they have no representation. Countries like Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Japan and Russia make decisions for them, decide how their resources and those of their oceans will be divided up between the big regional powers.

For this year's APEC Summit the Australian government saw fit to effectively lock down Sydney – a city of four million people – for over a week. This included closing parts of the freeway, surrounding 5 kms of the Central Business District (CBD) with a three metre high fence, and providing unprecedented levels of policing and surveillance. All this was directed against a 10,000 strong march aiming to protest the system that APEC represents – exploitation for the poor, super profits for the rich.

All the security, which came with a price tag of over A\$300 million, failed to stop an Australian satirical TV programme "The Chaser's War on Everything" smuggling through an Osama bin Laden look-alike to protest at not being invited to the summit outside George W Bush's hotel! Having demonstrated their incompetence at dealing with any real threat, the police set about their actual role of bashing innocent demonstrators off the streets.

On 8 September the 10,000

people mobilised on the streets of Sydney were surrounded by the most intimidating police presence Australia has seen – equipped with harsh legislation and even harsher toys, like their new water cannon. The rally at the Town Hall was joined at one point by a contingent of "excluded people" which included anarchists as well as many members of the Melbourne based Alliance for Civil Disobedience Co-operative (ACDC). This group was "protected" by members of the Maritime Union of Australia and the Fire Brigade Employees Union. It was an important step in co-operation between the two most militant, yet disconnected, wings of

## On 8 September the 10,000 people mobilised on the streets of Sydney were surrounded by the most intimidating police presence Australia has seen

the movement. On one hand, there were the two unions, who had defied the Unions New South Wales call to avoid APEC, and had built and attended the demo, and on the other there was a collection of anarchists, socialists, and activists, many of whom had been on the pointy end of the ten month strong police campaign of fear. It brought home the point that activists are workers and trade unionists too.

The contingent was met with a roar of support from the demonstration as it joined the rallying point for the main march, forcing police lines to open up and allow the thousands already massed at Town Hall onto the closed-off road. This level of union support and solidarity emphasised the

necessity of these two movements working together, and particularly the intertwining of union and "activist" issues.

But this militant approach was not reflected in the platform. In the speeches that preceded the march, protestors were regaled with the words "peaceful" and "non violent" from the platform, words squarely aimed at the ACDC and anarchist contingents of the demonstration. There was no way these "leaders" were going to militantly protest the denial of the democratic right to demonstrate in the capital city. But it wasn't just the top table that played the "keep it peaceful" card. When the demonstration carried out a previously agreed sit-down protest at police lines blocking the route of the march the Socialist Alternative (SA), one of the larger groups on the Sydney far-left marched away knowingly leading the bulk of the demonstration away from the sit-down. Having effectively split the demonstration, they left the speakers and activists

at the sit-down totally open and vulnerable to police attack.

This police attack did indeed come, in the form of several "snatch-squads" of riot police who abducted activists from the protest. These activists were later released with charges dropped against them, after a beating and the scare of their lives – in one case a 16 year old boy was stripped naked in a police "prison" bus and badly beaten. This is something that may have been prevented if the rally had not been divided by the SA and had instead used its numbers to defend activists from the police.

Many of those arrested on the day were processed and then released, with charges against them dropped. Unfortunately, the

remaining activists arrested were further punished in bail hearings: a Brisbane activist was sent to a maximum security prison when denied bail, and a Melbourne activist was granted bail, but only after a night of torture in an isolated lock up, and with a set of conditions that would make

10,000 people turned up expecting, but instead they were forced into a neutered alternative that did not reaffirm anyone's civil rights, but served to celebrate losing them. Regardless of the outcomes of the demo, the crowd it drew and the discussions that emerged from the mass meetings during the week are

people on the street, who have turned out, prepared for to confront violent police action, ready to assert their rights and fight back against injustice, it is surely a crime to divert them into passive protest. This can only become more relevant in the coming years, where we are likely to be presented with an enormous fight under a Rudd government to repeal the draconian anti-worker, indigenous and civil liberties laws Howard has been putting in place over the last eleven years.

The APEC weekend has left no clearer message than that it is not just union leaderships and reformist organisations holding back our class from the actions it needs to take to win - it is also those sectors of the left whose opportunism means they refuse to argue for what is necessary in the face of police intimidation and media attacks; the very people who should be providing a leadership beyond the bureaucracy. This is a mistake that must be acknowledged and addressed so that genuine revolutionaries are taken seriously by our class and real fightbacks can be organised.

**Permanent Revolution  
Australia**

## We can no longer afford to "dumb down" protest - we can no longer settle for the "walk around the block and picnic" approach to mass demonstrations

returning to Melbourne and her job impossible in the short term.

But there were some positives that came out of this week in Sydney, not least of which was the final public meeting of "Stop Bush" prior to the rally on the Friday night. This meeting drew a massive crowd, and in an amazing vote, saw the majority of the 500 plus meeting vote in favour of confronting police barriers, against the proposal pushed forward by the bulk of the organising committee itself. It was later proposed that this question be placed to the rally itself, and this was voted for unanimously. While this vote was never in fact implemented it indicated that, given a lead, there was a willingness to confront the "police state" imposed on Sydney that week. This was reflected in the thousands of people who turned up to the demo, many of whom left, not proud that they had walked the streets of Sydney in the world's largest peace-time lockdown, but disappointed, because the leadership had failed to challenge police intimidation.

How different this could have been if the rally organisers had made a genuine attempt to confront these undemocratic restrictions, and to stick with what they had been so strongly saying until two days before the march - we will not be silenced, and we will fight to march our chosen route. A march into the declared zone is what

something to be proud of.

This is an important lesson for the left, and one we must not forget or gloss over. We can no longer afford to "dumb down" protest - we can no longer settle for the "walk around the block and picnic" approach to mass demonstrations. Like the 2003 anti-war and 2005 WorkChoices demonstrations, these sorts of actions leave people feeling powerless - fewer and fewer show up, more and more become cynical about what we can achieve as a movement. When you have 10,000

### THE ALP AND THE ELECTIONS

## Australian Labor Party shifts to the right

▶ WHILE MOST people in Australia are wondering when John Howard will finally call the Federal elections, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) is romping away in the opinion polls and looks like it will win a fairly decisive victory.

The ALP have been around 14% ahead of the Coalition government in the polls for some while and this popularity shows no sign of wavering. For the first time in many years the ALP will be going into a Federal election with a leader who

actually looks like a winner - Kevin Rudd. This is despite what could have been a major scandal when it was revealed that four years ago Rudd visited a strip bar. Rudd demonstrated what excellent spin doctors the ALP have by appearing on national TV the next day to confess he had been a "bit of a goose". He was able to steer the discussion back onto issues of policy rather than his private life and has since been able to up-stage Howard on many occasions, including by speaking fluently to the Chinese

delegation to APEC in their own language!

But all this popularity has come at a price in terms of ALP policy. The ALP have been quite clear that although they will re-examine the Coalition government's anti-union Workchoices legislation, they are unlikely to change it significantly. In fact Deputy Leader Julia Gillard, once the darling of the left in the ALP, has declared that Australian Workplace Agreements (effectively individual contracts) signed now, will remain in force for the full term of the contract even with an ALP victory.

In effect this could mean that the demobilisation and disorganisation of the labour movement will continue for years into a Labor government. The situation looks even worse when we consider what is happening in the stronghold of the organised workers' movement, the building trades. Here, legislation removed the legal right to silence – it is now an offence for a building worker not to report planned unlawful industrial action.

In fact the ALP have been paving the way to abandon repeal of these anti-union laws by expelling from their ranks key union officials who are seen as too militant. On two occasions officials who have made defiant speeches at union meetings arguing for a continued fight against the bosses have been branded as thugs and then asked to leave the party. This is the real indication of what the ALP under the Rudd/Gillard leadership will look like.

We have had a further taste of this in the weeks leading up to the Leaders' meeting of the APEC Summit in Sydney. Among unprecedented security measures – including a 5 km, 3 metre high fence surrounding the meeting, and thousands of armed and hostile police on the streets, Rudd went along completely with the government with its talk of the need for high security. In fact the excessive security and police brutality on the streets has backfired terribly on Howard, yet Rudd made it clear that his party would have behaved no differently

had they been in government.

The same has been the case for almost every other issue that should have been dividing the political spectrum in the last months. Rudd backed the government when it locked up a Brisbane doctor on trumped up terror charges after the Glasgow airport car-bombings. He

to be a disaster of Titanic proportions.

All that said, to many the ALP looks like an increasingly poor option. It's not so much a positive choice as a "best of a bad lot" situation for the more militant sections of the class. While some, even in the union movement, have

## Legislation removes the legal right to silence – it is now an offence for a building worker not to report planned unlawful industrial action

has said little about troop deployment in Iraq, made no moves against the Howard government's continued refusal to acknowledge same-sex relationships and indicated a whole raft of other conservative social policies will be exactly the same under the ALP.

This leaves us in a fairly grim situation. It's clear that Howard's time is up, his own Liberal Party is in the middle of a shit fight over who will lead the sinking ship into the next election – it's a job that no one but Howard seems to want and yet with him at the helm it's likely

flirted with the Greens who are certainly better at posing left than the ALP, they are clearly not an alternative for the working class.

What the more militant sections of the class are saying is that we have to vote for the ALP and we also have to be ready and organised to fight. This time it is not just a case of holding them to promises they are making pre-election – it will be a case of making them abandon their stated policy once they are in power.

**Permanent Revolution  
Australia**

### CHILEAN WORKERS' MOVEMENT

## Mass protest against growing inequality

NATIONAL PROTESTS and strikes have rocked the Chilean government of President Bachelet in the last couple of months. Millions of workers are outraged that they are being left behind as the country's economy booms on the back of high export demands.

Anger came to a head on 29 August in a series of planned demonstrations throughout the country. State violence was especially marked in the capital

Santiago as police used tear gas, water cannons and clubs against demonstrators, nearly 400 of whom were arrested.

The Socialist Party led Concertación government has pursued free market economic policies, including a free trade agreement with the US. This agreement opens up the environment of the country to destruction and exploits Chilean workers, who earn some of the lowest wages in the region.

# Briefings

The protests centred on demands for pay increases, higher pensions and better education, health and housing services. Workers demanded the government use some of the soaring profits Chile's industries have enjoyed in recent years to pay for these improvements. Chile, the biggest copper producer in the world, has benefited from high prices for the

chose instead to set the riot police on peaceful demonstrators, who had little option other than to defend themselves by erecting barricades to block the traffic at key streets intersections and repel the police attacks with stones and hand made batons.

The nation is considered a model of neoliberal economics in Latin America and has one of the highest

whom joined the marches. One of the SP deputies was clubbed and badly hurt by the police.

Several SP legislators and thousands of members of the party were in attendance at the demonstrations after the SP announced its official support for the "day of action" by the CUT - the Chilean TUC - earlier in the week. This support by her party, however, contrasted with the criticism of the protests by Bachelet.

"I am not going to accept that my dedication to social justice is not recognised," she moaned. Bachelet dismissed the marches as unnecessary, claiming her government could handle all social justice issues:

"There are demonstrators who are looking for social improvements that are necessary. I say to them that we in the government can do it. In my government, the workers can always express their demands. It is necessary to engage in a dialogue, and not to use pressure tactics and violence. There is space in our democracy for peaceful expression."

But the workers thought differently when they were brutally attacked by the repressive police corps inherited from the Pinochet era and maintained by the Concertación government.

"When you squeeze a balloon, sooner or later it explodes, and in this case the people are the balloon," said Luis Perez, a 32 year old employee at a law office in Santiago, after joining the protest. "The country has money in its pockets but it doesn't help poor people."

"With state revenue benefiting from the two year surge in copper prices the government should be spending more", said Roberto Daza, a 41 year old taxi driver in Santiago. "We have a terrible health system, hospitals are crammed with patients," he added. "Chile has lot of resources from higher copper revenue that should be distributed more equitably among the people."

And growing inequality is fuelling a series of wage struggles. Nearly 15% of Chile's workforce earns a salary that is less than the

## Workers demanded the government use some of the soaring profits Chile's industries have enjoyed in recent years to pay for these improvements

metal and the central bank has forecast economic growth of about 6% for this year.

"People see the money and they say to themselves, 'Why don't they spend it,'" said Julio Espinoza, an analyst at brokerage BiCE Corredores de Bolsa in Santiago, in an interview with a Chilean newspaper. But the government

growth rates in the region, but President Michelle Bachelet's government has faced frequent protests from students and workers who want a share in the prosperity. The discontent of the workers has shaken the ruling Socialist Party (SP). Bachelet's government "is doing things very badly", said Socialist Party members, many of



# DEMONSTRATE TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ

Monday 8 October, Parliament, 2pm  
The day MPs return

Called by the Stop the War Coalition  
0207 278 6694. [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk)





legal minimum wage, according to the latest Survey of National Socioeconomic Composition (CASEN). The study also demonstrates that the nation's female workers earn significantly lower wages than their male counterparts.

Figures from the study highlight dramatic inequalities between the nation's rich and poor populations. At the time of the CASEN analysis – November 2006 – Chile's minimum wage was set at US\$208 a month. The figures show that, of nearly 6.4 million workers, almost one million did not make that legal minimum salary. Over the winter dozens of strikes for pay increases erupted throughout the country. Bishop Alejandro Goic implored government leaders to address inequity in Chile for, "if we do not resolve this problem, the demonstrations will continue."

Chile, with 15 million inhabitants, is the world's biggest producer and exporter of copper, ahead of the US and Australia. The economy expanded 6.1% in the second quarter, fueled by higher investment, domestic consumption and exports. Copper prices have risen 16.7% this year.

Codelco, owned by the Chilean government and the world's largest copper producer, announced that it added a record \$4.67 billion in

profits and taxes to government coffers in the first half of the year.

And it is in mining that one of the most important struggles erupted on the day the nationwide protests took place. High in the Andes mountains subcontracted workers blocked production at the Canadian-owned El Peñon gold and silver mine. This action represents the first full occupation of a private mine in Chile's history. The mine's workers are demanding to negotiate directly with the company about improvements in ten areas, including higher bonuses, health insurance cover, the construction of a cafeteria and rest quarters, and improved salaries.

Many workers have a three hour commute to the mine and have raised demands for flexible work hours. Given the high profits in the current boom they feel their demands can be met.

All these strikes and workers'

mobilisations clearly show that finally the Chilean workers are moving to a new stage in their march to recover from the terrible attacks at the hands of Pinochet dictatorship, and are beginning to reorganise again.

But one day of protests will not force Bachelet deliver on the workers' demands. Mass anger must be channeled towards the leaders of the CUT, to mobilise for a general strike and build strike committees in every locality to deliver it. There must be no giving up until key demands are met:

- ▶ Down with Pinochet's anti-working class labour and electoral laws
- ▶ A minimum wage of \$350 and full collective bargaining rights for all workers
- ▶ Higher social spending on health, housing and education

**By Diegor Mocar  
Revolución Proletaria, Chile**

**LINKS**

**For more on the El Peñon strike go to:**

[www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1626](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1626)

**For a report on the 9 September march to commemorate the 1973 coup against the Allende government go to:**

[www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1634](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1634)

**For more from Revolución Proletaria (Chile) in English and Spanish go to:**

[www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=category&cat=63](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=category&cat=63)



# Not the

*Respect is in crisis. Only four years after its foundation its prime movers, the Socialist Workers Party and George Galloway, are at war. In a recent document, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times", Galloway has warned that Respect faces the possibility of "oblivion" unless it shakes itself free of SWP control. Stuart King looks at where Respect came from and why it has failed to deliver the "breakthrough" that its leaders promised and is facing a break-up instead*

THE LAST ten years provided promising opportunities to develop and strengthen a revolutionary and anti-capitalist movement to the left of Labour. Sadly, little has been achieved. The organised left is probably numerically weaker, and is certainly less well rooted in the working class, than it was a decade ago.

As the twentieth century ended things looked very different. Labour was in power but hundreds of thousands of workers and youth were disillusioned with its neo-liberal programme. Its privatisation policy in health and education, refusal to repeal the anti-union laws, introduction of student loans and fees, attacks on striking fire fighters and other workers, imperialist adventures in former Yugoslavia, Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq: all these led to a growing discontent with New Labour.

Amongst a wide layer of activists Blair was distrusted and even despised. This was a period when the far left should have been able to win large numbers to a revolutionary alternative. Or at the very least it was a period when significant organised breaks from Labour to the left could have been achieved.

In Scotland the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) was formed and challenged Labour with some success. Arthur Scargill created the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), but he quickly drove out the left wing and the SLP became a shrivelled Stalinist sect. After this debacle the Socialist Alliance (SA) was re-vamped and re-launched in the late 1990s.

It gathered together almost the entire far left, including its two biggest components, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP). It drew in hundreds of non-aligned militants, disillusioned Labour Party members and former members of the far left. The SA was able to make a good showing in the first Greater London Assembly (GLA) elections and stood ninety candidates in the 2001 general election. It organised a trade union conference of 1,200 militants to establish a campaign to democratise the political funds of trade unions and change the union constitutions that had ensured a monopoly of union money and affiliation to Labour.

Many of those in the SA saw these interventions as steps

# best of times

towards the formation of a new working class party. But its majority, the SWP and the SP, had different ideas. They did not want it to become a party, which would have to decide on a programme: revolution or reform. They saw it as a purely electoral coalition – a means of pooling the left's resources to challenge Labour at the polls. For the SWP and the SP this meant that the SA was active during elections but put into "cold storage" when elections were not on the agenda.

This was a disastrous mistake. Good election results are rarely the product of three weeks' door-to-door campaigning. They are a test of how popular a party has become in the whole preceding period. Bourgeois parties build up this popularity by influencing public opinion in the media, via control of councils and so on. Working class organisations have to do it by sinking roots in the class they claim to represent. They have to be at the forefront, as parties, of the struggles of the class. This is impossible if the SWP majority decide, as they did, that the SA has no role to play, for example, in the mass anti-war movement. Come the election who will vote for an organisation that has had an invisible cloak placed over it during the previous years? The SA inevitably withered.

But the electoral solitary confinement that the SWP prison officers imposed on the SA was not the only problem it faced. It was also denied the opportunity – by a self-styled revolutionary organisation – of saying to the workers whose support it sought, that the alternative needed to Labourism was revolutionary communism. The SWP, supported in this instance by the SP, and the International Socialist Group (ISG), argued that it was impossible to win the workers who were breaking from Labour to a revolutionary alternative.

Of course the only legitimate way to have tested this was in practice. Could an election campaign, waged on a revolutionary programme that was articulated in an accessible and effective way, win support. Permanent Revolution supporters (then in Workers Power) argued that it should be tried because there was no divine

rule that said workers needed to be won over by left reformism first and only later taken one by one into a back room and shown the dirty books of revolutionary communism. Like Marx we disdain to conceal our views.

The SWP argued that such concealment was the order of the day. Their excuse was that they wanted to keep genuine reformists within the ranks of the Socialist Alliance and not split it by imposing their own views. The fact that their wretched bureaucratic manoeuvres drove out almost everyone who was not a member of their organisation, including the reformist comrades, rather exposes this pretext for the sham that it always was. After all, revolutionaries were prepared to accept the democratic decisions of SA conferences even when they voted down revolutionary proposals. Reformists within the SA would

## **The real reason for the SWP's coyness about advancing a revolutionary programme is that they do not believe it can win support from the working class**

surely have done the same. And if they would not then frankly they are not people with whom we would want to build an organisation in any case.

The real reason for the SWP's coyness about advancing a revolutionary programme is that they do not believe it can win support from the working class. They have a stage-ist schema that says a mass left reformist movement must be created first, and out of that they can get one-by-one recruitment to revolution in the shape of the SWP. The schema cannot be disrupted. To fit in with this schema they limited the SA programme (People Before Profit)<sup>1</sup> to a series of left reformist demands that studiously avoided the question, reform or revolution. During elections the SWP regularly watered down this platform even further

to a handful of reformist proposals.

People Before Profit was quite left in its socialist policies – thanks to the input of revolutionaries in the SA. But the policy conference that decided upon it was dominated by the SWP and it deliberately fudged the question of reform or revolution. For example, the SWP voted down proposals to call for the capitalist state to be overthrown, for the army and police to be dismantled, smashed, in the course of a revolution, and replaced by workers' militias and organs of workers' self-government – workers' councils.

This idea of building a purely electoral bloc on left reformist politics was a complete departure from revolutionary electoral tactics. The purpose of revolutionaries standing in elections is not to perpetuate the myth that by winning majorities in parliaments or local councils we can implement "a socialist programme". Unlike reformists we do not believe real power lies within these institutions. If any serious measures were taken in parliament that undermined the capitalist state, the ruling class would use its real bastions of power – the unelected judges, mega-corporations, army and police – to remove the government or parliament itself in extremis.

Elections provide revolutionaries with a good arena of political work inside the class, one in which workers are discussing major political issues – how should the country be governed, what policies should be adopted on the economy, inequality, health, war etc? Elections give us the opportunity to advance communist answers, put forward a different vision of society, not in an abstract way but relating the everyday problems that workers face – poverty, low wages, lack of housing, lousy transport, racism and discrimination – to the fight for socialism.

Electoral activity should be geared to convincing people of your ideas, organising them for action and building the revolutionary organisation and its periphery. If a party does not come out of an election campaign having strengthened its roots and organisation in an area, however many votes it gained, it has failed.

The SWP's approach to the SA (and now to Respect) turned this principle on its head. No revolutionary argu-

### **The idea of building a purely electoral bloc on left reformist politics was a complete departure from revolutionary electoral tactics**

ments were heard in election campaigns, only left reformist ones, the only measure of success was "how many votes were won?" Using these campaigns to build an organisation became virtually impossible. The SA branches that were the staple diet of every SWP member's work during the election were wrapped in cling film and flung to the back of the freezer once the votes had been counted.

Only where the SWP were weak did SA branches build themselves into significant permanent organisations. Abstract left reformism combined with organisational

manipulation was the hallmark of the SWP's period of leadership of the Socialist Alliance. And it led the SA from being a promising opportunity to revitalise the left and build a revolutionary alternative into, to use Galloway's phrase, oblivion.

### **United fronts of a special type**

The SWP theorised this right turn towards espousing left reformism as a stage with the novel idea of the "united front of a special type". This underpins the SWP's later turn to Respect. SWP leader Alex Callinicos summarised it in an article "Unity in Diversity"<sup>2</sup>, where he argued that "broader" united fronts had emerged with the development of the anti-capitalist movement (ACM) after Seattle in 1999 which had led to a higher level of "political generalisation". Internationally these united fronts of a special kind could be seen in the World Social Forum/ACM and in ATTAC in France. In Britain they could be found in the Socialist Alliance and Globalise Resistance. These united fronts were politically broader, encompassing more issues and struggles than the narrower, "classical" ones like the Stop the War coalition or Anti Nazi League. Callinicos declared: "Most obviously, the programme of the Socialist Alliance, while it leaves open the decisive strategic question of reform or revolution, is an explicitly socialist one that demands the comprehensive transformation of British society."

The SA, he argued, responded to the "decay of Labourism by providing an alternative to New Labour especially, though not exclusively, at elections, in England and Wales, and thereby to offer disaffected Labour Party members and supporters a new political home." And he went on to say: "To adopt an explicitly revolutionary programme, as some groups within the Alliance argue [he couldn't bring himself to name us!], would be to slam the door on Labour Party supporters who have rejected Blairism but who have yet to break with reformism."

John Rees was to add in a debate with Murray Smith of the SSP, "in its political construction [the SA] is a united front because it brings together former Labour Party members who are not revolutionary socialists and those, like the SWP, who are revolutionaries. Its programme, broad as it is, represents the minimum acceptable to the revolutionaries and the maximum acceptable to the former Labour Party members."<sup>3</sup>

So the purpose of what Callinicos called this "hybrid" organisation, not quite a united front not quite a political party, was to corral defecting Labour supporters into an alternative organisation to new Labour. There the SWP, as the "revolutionary organisation", could win them over by being the best activists and leaders – but not by arguing the need for revolution, which would have only put off these still reformist workers.<sup>4</sup>

It was part of a political schema that the SWP, ISG, SP and SSP all shared, that is workers, even those breaking with reformism, could not be won directly to revolution. They had to pass through a "halfway house", through a left reformist or centrist phase in their development.

Members of Permanent Revolution, then part of Work-

ers Power, argued in the SA for a different strategy. We were in favour of a new revolutionary party of the working class and were in favour of the SA setting out to build one; not of declaring the few thousand members of the SA a new party but using the organisation to break tens of thousands of disaffected Labour Party members, plus local, regional and national trade unions away from Labour and to the project of forming a new party.

There was no need to hide the need for revolution when the SA stood in elections, nor to push revolutionary politics under the carpet to lure them in. The campaign for a candidate in Greenwich fighting on such an open call for revolution was not in any way harmed. Quite the opposite, new forces were drawn in, new campaigns were launched and real steps towards building a large and vibrant SA in the area were taken. More generally, in the unions workers regularly vote for revolutionaries in trade union elections even if they don't agree with all their politics. But they withhold those votes, quite rightly, if they think the revolutionaries are pretending to be reformists in order to - let's use the right word - con people into voting for them.

In the case of the SA, fighting the election in this way would have been a campaign for a new workers' party, not a finished product. We did not present our policies as a take it or leave it platform. Indeed we encouraged workers' organisations to enter the Alliance and debate out what sort of programme a new party should stand on, how it should organise and fight. We merely refused to hide what we thought the answers to such questions were.

This was the method and tactic the then exiled Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky suggested to his supporters in the USA and which they used after the upsurge of workers' struggles in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Trotsky, however, was clear that there should be no fudging on the need for revolution in the building of a movement, a united front, for such a party. By contrast, in the SA we had so-called revolutionary organisations arguing with the ex-Labour Party members and workers that revolutionary politics was premature, too advanced and only being put forward by ultra-left sectarians. This was a policy guaranteed to deepen the attachment of left reformist workers to their existing ideas, not break them from such ideas.

**Launching Respect**

By 2003 the SWP had decided to wind up the SA. It had served its purpose. Their members had received a good training in electoral work from it and many of the left reformist allies that it had politically pandered to had been unceremoniously dumped by the SWP the minute they had expressed concern at its bureaucratic practices. And the wheel clamps the SWP fastened on the SA outside of election times had antagonised the independents. They wanted the SA to be more like a party and started campaigning to say so.

Accountability and criticism is not something that the SWP leadership hold in high regard. They operate a decision-making process that is elitist, behind closed doors and undemocratic. They had had their fill of the SA's tradition of robust democratic accountability. Moreover,

despite the left reformism they had imposed on it, the magical electoral breakthrough had not come. It seemed that their schema wasn't working. Or was it that even left reformism was too strong a medicine for the great British voting public?

Furthermore, the growth of the SA had stalled. The SP had left, taking with them their handful of councillors. The SA had only one success in council elections, with the victory of Michael Lavalette in Preston. Despite a successful union political fund conference this did not translate into unions, or even union branches, voting to support the SA. This was in contrast to the SSP where the RMT in

**Accountability and criticism is not something that the SWP leadership hold in high regard. They operate a decision-making process that is elitist**

Scotland had affiliated, resulting in the whole national union being expelled from the Labour Party.

Of course this was largely because of the way the SWP treated the SA as an electoral vehicle. But at the very same time the Stop the War movement was going from strength to strength - reaching its high point in 2003. Two million marched against war in London on 15 February that year and 500,000 protested against the outbreak of war on the Saturday after the invasion on 22 March. In September 100,000 marched and an estimated 500,000 poured onto London's streets after work to protest against George Bush's visit on 20 November. In October George Galloway was expelled from the Labour Party for denouncing the war, calling Bush and Blair "liars and wolves" on an Arab TV station, questioning the war's legality and arguing that troops should therefore not obey illegal orders.

This was a golden opportunity for the SWP. It could launch something bigger and better than the Socialist Alliance. It entered into discussions with Galloway, leading figures in the anti-war movement and Muslim organisations like the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) to launch a new political party.

At the July 2003 National Council of the Socialist Alliance the SWP presented its proposals on a take it or leave it basis. It had already driven out working class militants like Steve Godward of the FBU, from the SA in Birmingham where it was test-piloting its new style alliance. It was clear the SA was on its way out.

At Marxism that year Lindsey German presented the new initiative, announcing that the aim was to unite the millions who had marched against war in a new political party. It was here, in reply to a criticism by one of our members of the idea that you could unite such forces, including the MAB, in anything resembling a socialist party, that she infamously replied that she was not going to allow gay rights to become a "shibboleth" in the way of such a project.<sup>6</sup>

The new party "Respect: the unity coalition" was

launched in January 2004 at a 1,400 strong "Convention". This was a conference packed with the SWP and Galloway's allies in which opposition amendments to the "founding declaration" aimed at making it in anyway socialist were quickly voted down. Lindsey German for the SWP central Committee made clear from the platform that they "did not want a repeat of the Socialist Alliance programme" and were looking for something "broader, wider, less explicitly socialist".<sup>7</sup> SWP members illustrated this by opposing attempts to put opposition to all immigration controls in

### **In the GLA elections Lindsey German headed up a list of Respect candidates and put out a ten page manifesto which did not mention the word socialism once**

the declaration as being "too advanced for the ordinary people we are trying to win."

This indeed was a neat reversal of their position of only three years before when they had denounced the SP for wanting to do the same thing at the SA conference that adopted People Before Profit!

The declaration of 11 points was a socialism-free zone. It contained important campaigning demands like ending the occupation of Iraq, stopping privatisation policies, re-nationalising transport and repealing anti-union laws, but remained vague on any issue that might alienate its new hoped for constituency. The formulation that dealt in passing with lesbian and gay rights was left so vague and underdeveloped that it managed to completely avoid using the words lesbian and gay: "Opposition to all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs (or lack of them), sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin or citizenship." Abortion and a women's right to choose were left out completely.<sup>8</sup>

In place of socialism as a goal, Respect declared: "We want a world in which the democratic demands of the people are carried out: a world based on need not on profit: a world where solidarity rather than self-interest is the spirit of the age." Or as we put it at the time, "a world in which the words socialism, revolution, capitalism, the class struggle and the working class are not mentioned."

It was a programme designed to appeal to a cross-section of groups and classes: workers disillusioned with Labour; Muslims (both workers and small employers) outraged at the attack on Iraq and Afghanistan; the middle classes radicalised by the anti-war movement; even, for George Galloway, disaffected "conservatives and liberals". Respect was to be a populist movement, not a socialist one. It was to be radical but not class-based. And the SWP were at the heart of this non-socialist project. George Galloway sent the convention away to raise a million pounds, "get a million votes" and win seats in the upcoming GLA and Euro-elections. Votes were everything, socialist policies were nothing.

The election campaign in 2004 revealed both how

Respect intended to build itself and the strains within it that would eventually lead to its current crisis.

George Galloway was the leading figure and public face of Respect. His courageous attacks on Blair's government and against the war on Iraq made him a figurehead for Muslims and it was he who drew the support of organisations like the MAB. But the MAB was a small Islamist organisation associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and had in the recent past argued for an Islamic state. As an organisation it did not formally support any political party, its leaders "standing down" to run as Respect candidates. But it also supported Ken Livingstone for mayor of London (not Lindsey German) and Greens and Liberals in various parts of the country. In Birmingham, Respect struck an alliance with a Peace and Justice Party, a grouping with local councillors who supported Kashmiri independence. Similar support amongst sections of the Muslim community was being won in East London.

John Rees, National Secretary of Respect, was quite open about the nature of the Respect coalition, declaring: "Respect rests on three foundation stones - the socialists, the left in the unions and Muslims who have been radicalised by the wars in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq."<sup>9</sup> It is not clear what Hindu, Sikh and Afro-Caribbean (Christian or otherwise) workers thought of this emphasis in the West Midlands constituency where Rees stood. Clearly they were not considered radical enough to be part of the foundation stones!

In the GLA elections Lindsey German headed up a list of Respect candidates and put out a ten page manifesto which did not mention the word socialism once. It restricted itself to mild left reformist promises - reliable, cheap and safe public transport, more council housing and an end to sell offs, "rethinking crime" by calling for better street lighting, more transport staff at night and more caretakers in council blocks.

But it was Galloway who dominated the headlines and was interviewed regularly in the national press and it was here that the lack of control over "the Respect MP" really mattered. Revolutionary socialists have made it a matter of principle that their elected representatives are controlled by and accountable to the party. Too many times workers' representatives have been elected to parliaments only to betray their parties and working class voters, adapting to the lifestyle, and in the end the politics, of these bourgeois debating clubs.

Yet at Respect's foundation Galloway made it clear he was not going to be controlled by Respect conferences or committees. Not for Galloway the traditional agreement to live on the average worker's wage and donate the rest of the parliamentary salary to the party. He made clear he needed at least £100,000 a year to live on - indeed he earns much more with his journalism and TV appearances. This the SWP readily agreed to, block-voting down an amendment to the Respect constitution on the question. It is a scandalous position when many of Galloway's East End constituents have to exist on wages below the GLA decency threshold of £8.00 an hour, but the SWP went along with it rather than lose their "star" leader. They knew that without Galloway Respect was nothing.

Galloway's one man show approach to Respect was

revealed again right in the middle of the campaign when he gave an interview to the *Independent on Sunday*, where he explained his deeply held religious convictions meant he opposed abortion on principle: "I'm strongly against abortion. I believe life begins at conception and therefore unborn babies have rights. I think abortion is immoral." He added: "I believe in god. I have to believe that the collection of cells has a soul." Galloway knew this interview would win him support amongst his religious allies and sure enough the MAB immediately issued a press release praising Galloway's stand. The SWP's leading Respect figures remained silent on the question - clearly women's rights were another "shibboleth" that were not allowed to get in the way of this coalition.

Galloway's remarks should have come as no surprise to the SWP leadership, he was well known for his anti-abortion stance in Parliament (where he has also opposed embryo research). He is regularly praised on right to life anti-abortion web sites for his voting record in opposing any attempt to loosen the restrictive 1967 Abortion Act and supporting measures aimed at restricting it further. This activity continued even after Respect formally nodded through a policy document that included opposition to further restrictions on abortion, with Galloway putting his name in support of an October 2006 early day motion proposed by Geraldine Smith, Vice Chair of the pro-life all-party group in Parliament.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly Galloway decides his own policies on such questions whatever his party says. He is the unaccountable "celebrity leader", a position that led to his notorious appearance on the Big Brother TV programme, a decision again taken without any consultation with Respect or its leadership and that caused the organisation major problems.

Yet through all of this the SWP zipped its lip. Galloway was allowed to be unaccountable, for the sake of votes. Galloway was allowed to dress up as a cat on Big Brother, for the sake of votes. Galloway was allowed to vote against Respect policy on abortion, for the sake of votes. Galloway gets what he wants. And the SWP stay in control of the organisation in return. The problem comes when what Galloway wants is an organisation - effectively a party that is an election machine for him - that will destroy the SWP's control of Respect and create something that will be an obstacle to them because it will be a rival party to them.

This is what is now happening and it is what threatens to tear Respect apart. And despite the occasional electoral success, these problems have been evident in Respect for some time.

## Respect's electoral results

Initially Respect did a lot less well than Galloway and the SWP expected - in the June 2004 Euro-elections it got 252,000 votes, averaging 1.75% per constituency (the BNP received over 800,000 votes). In London Respect got just over 87,000 votes - just under 5%. The best spin was put on these results, with talk of an "astonishing breakthrough" for a party in existence for a few months. Indeed the party had made some considerable gains in the per-

centage of votes in the largely Muslim inner city areas of Birmingham, East London and in Preston.

In the May 2005 general election Respect stood in only thirty constituencies, a third of the number the SA had stood in at the previous election. Its one great success was George Galloway ousting Labour MP Oona King in Bethnal Green and Bow. Oona King was an MP of Afro-Caribbean descent, who was Jewish and a staunch supporter of Blair's war against Iraq, representing a constituency that was overwhelmingly Muslim and anti-war. Galloway had picked

## Galloway was allowed to be unaccountable, to dress up as a cat on Big Brother and to vote against Respect policy on abortion for the sake of votes

his target seat well. But only in a few other constituencies did Respect gain significant support - Salma Yaqoob in Birmingham with 27.5% of the vote, East Ham 20%, Poplar 17% and West Ham 19% were the few respectable results. This did not stop the SWP bringing out a *Socialist Worker* (SW) special with the modest headline "Birth of a new power", a bit of an exaggeration as Respect had tallied 85,000 votes in total in the general election!

Further gains were registered in local elections the following year. In May 2006 twelve councillors were elected in Tower Hamlets, three in Newham and one, Salma Yaqoob, in Birmingham. This achievement of gaining 18 councillors nationally (including one in Preston) needs to be seen in the context of local elections where the Tories gained over 300 seats from Labour and the fascist BNP more than doubled its number of councillors from 20 to 46. Certainly there was disillusion with Labour but it was not leading in any mass way towards Respect or other left parties.

All these claims of "stunning victories" and "major breakthroughs" (in fact quite minor electoral gains) hid an awkward fact - none of this electoral support was being turned into an active membership base across the country. Between its second and third conferences Respect lost a third of its members and with it much of its ability to campaign as a political organisation. It remained chronically reliant on the footsoldiers of the SWP to dish out its leaflets and knock on doors and not all the SWP membership were that keen. All the SWP's talk about how this was a "new type" of organisation that did not need the traditional membership meetings, that could rely on barbecues and social events, was proving hollow when it came to real political campaigning.

These growing problems were covered over at Respect conferences. The SWP leadership needed to keep up the pretence that its new tactic was successful and going from strength to strength. Galloway knows the media hates a loser. So at the 2006 conference he told the delegates that 10,000 students had joined Respect, only to be corrected next day when it turned out that 2,000 had "signed forms". This did not stop Galloway and Respect putting out a press

release headed "Third annual conference silences doubters", claiming "a staggering 10,000 students had joined Respect over the last few weeks" (SW that week limited itself to "thousands" of students joining). In fact membership figures dragged out of the leadership revealed that membership had declined from 3,040 in 2005 to 2,160 in 2006.<sup>11</sup> This is an organisation that Lindsey German had promised would draw in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, who had marched against war. Its membership was smaller than the SWP, itself in steep decline.

There comes a point when such a situation can no longer be covered up and the result of the Ealing Southall by-election in July this year brought the matter to a head, sparking Galloway's document and proposals for change. Respect received 1.6% of the vote, its 588 votes being less than it received in a single ward in the constituency in the 2005 local elections. In contrast the BNP scored nearly 9% of the vote in the simultaneously held Sedgfield by-election. In a Shadwell ward by-election in Tower Hamlets held on the same day Respect held onto its seat in a contest with the former Labour leader of the council, but even this victory was tempered by the fact that Respect was forced into a by-election because one of its councillors had resigned, denouncing the party to anyone who would listen.

This revealed some of the problems even in Respect's most successful areas. Respect in Tower Hamlets was recruiting local Muslim small businessmen who often stand as councillors to further their interests in the community and have good links to the Mosque elders. They are attracted to Respect because of Galloway, its opposition to the Iraq war and because it stands against attacks on Muslims; they are just as likely in some areas to support Liberal Democrats for similar reasons. But they are also themselves petty exploiters, in Marxist terms small capitalists, who exploit their extended families and other workers as employees. In principle – or at least until the

### **It has led to unseemly squabbles over winnable council seats, with John Rees being opposed by groups of Muslims as a candidate in East London**

present dispute with Galloway – the SWP saw no problem in welcoming such individuals into Respect. After all it is a non-socialist, cross-class coalition in these areas.

But while the SWP have long since ceased being principled socialists they have not stopped being socialists. And the growth of what are effectively communal-based political factions in the ranks of Respect has started to threaten them. They were even obliged to expel a long-standing full time worker in Birmingham when he refused to support an SWP-backed candidate on the grounds that a community-based candidate (and businessman) stood a better chance of winning.

And this has made the coalition very unstable. It has

led to unseemly squabbles over winnable council seats, with John Rees being opposed by local groups as a candidate in East London. Recently in Birmingham five Muslim men were adopted as candidates for Respect in Moseley and Kingsheath. When the SWP put up Helen Salmon as the sixth candidate another Muslim male challenged and defeated her for nomination, with apparently sixty people being enrolled in Respect the week before to ensure his victory. Not for Respect any notions of positive action for women, let alone all-women shortlists!

### **The SWP and Respect**

Despite throwing considerable resources into building this populist organization the SWP has not grown out of it. The annual Marxism event is a measure of the SWP's size, periphery and influence – it is getting smaller by the year.

The rightward turn is also reflected in the SWP's attitude to religion and religious groups. The SWP leadership argues that the Muslim community has been the most radicalised by the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine and therefore emphasises the importance of this community in building a radical alternative in Britain. In relation to building an anti-war movement there is an element of truth in this. But in relation to broader political issues, the evidence that Muslims have somehow become a vanguard in society, let alone a vanguard in the working class does not exist.

What the SWP downplay is the Islamist influence in much of this politicisation and radicalisation among young Muslims – the idea that the state and civil society must adapt to, or be dominated by religion.<sup>12</sup> The growth of this religious ideology is related to developments in the Middle East, especially the failure of the secular nationalists movements – PLO/Fatah, Ba'athism, Nasserism – to deliver freedom from imperialist and Zionist oppression and exploitation.

Islamist movements, with reactionary views on women's rights, education, sexual orientation and working class rights, have gained political influence across the region – the Islamic regime in Iran, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, Al Qaida – and have had an impact here. These ideologies, apparently offering a sense of identity and struggle, and in the end "salvation", have an important influence on a young Muslim population discriminated against in jobs and housing, threatened on the streets and alienated from British capitalism as a result.

Muslims and their organisations joined the mass anti-war protests of 2003 in huge numbers and this was an enormous and positive development. It was a situation where the "classical" united front was absolutely crucial, where it was possible for socialists and revolutionaries to march and protest with groups and organisations that they had little in common with in other areas. Agreement on limited demands – stop the war, withdraw the troops now – could be combined with disagreement and open political criticism on all other issues. But by trying to build Respect, a so-called united front of a "special type", into an organisation embracing such groups on a broad range of political issues, the SWP found themselves compelled



to adapt to the politics of their would-be partners. Their new allies could not be subjected to criticism for fear of driving them away, and the politics and actions of the SWP had to be changed accordingly.

The SWP's adaptation towards the growing assertion of religious rights against secular society has been breathtaking. It supported the "Incitement to Religious Hatred Act" which was an anti-democratic measure that potentially restricts the right to attack religions and their ideas, effectively extending the blasphemy laws, which previously only applied to Christianity. And it did this in a period where religious fundamentalists had already asserted their "right" to close down plays that offended their religion and were leading attacks on abortion rights.

Instead of campaigning against the existing laws which restrict the right to criticise the Christian religion, the SWP joined those who wanted to extend this "protection". The supposed reasoning behind this Act, the BNP slandering of Muslims and Islam which was inciting racial hatred and attacks on the Asian community, needed to be dealt with, not by further restrictive laws on freedom of speech, but by denying the BNP a platform to spew out its racist filth and driving it off the streets.

The SWP has also played a terrible role in campaigns to defend secular education from the influence of organised religion. It says it opposes religious schools in principle, but in practice it supports the establishment of hundreds of new ones. It does this on the grounds that having large numbers of Church of England and Catholic Schools but few of any other religions is discriminatory. Therefore in every instance where there are proposals for new religious schools, for Muslims, Sikhs, Jews or other religious groups, it supports them and denounces as "racism" or "Islamophobia" any opposition. It even took this fight into the teachers' union the NUT, where its delegates opposed resolutions calling for secular education and an end to religious schools.

Respect says it stands for "fully state run education with all children in the same school where they are free to observe whatever faith, or none, they choose." This remains a hollow declaration when it supports every new initiative for a religious school from a "minority faith", schools which by their nature discriminate against other religions in selection, and impose religion on children through the curriculum and school structures.

### The current crisis in Respect

In its "What the SWP stands for" column in *Socialist Worker*, it says that we need "revolution not reform", that the workers need an "entirely different kind of state – a workers' state based on councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia", that a revolutionary party needs to be organised by proving "in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests." Yet the SWP's actions and policies in Respect and elsewhere do not take us one step nearer to such goals. They take us away from them. It fudges the question of revolution and reform, argues reformist politics to workers in elections and campaigns via Respect,

and is quite willing to ditch its commitment to lesbian and gay rights and a woman's right to choose.

The SWP is not the first party, and will not be the last, to leave its principles in its "Where we stand" column like an old family heirloom – to be looked at and admired but never used. But it is the main party doing this in Britain today and this should cause every one of its thinking members to question the overall political method of its leadership. If your principles are so out of kilter with your

## where there are proposals for new religious schools, it supports them and denounces as "racism" or "Islamophobia" any opposition

practice, something has got to be very wrong with your organisation and its political method. The current crisis in Respect poses that as an inescapable question now.

Problems arise when, despite the opportunist adaptations and the throwing overboard of ever more principles, the "get rich quick scheme" fails. And clearly Respect is failing. Galloway would never have risked producing a document like "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times",<sup>13</sup> with its radical re-organisation proposals to put the SWP in a minority and break its control of the machine, unless he thought the situation was at crisis point.

After pointing out the disappointing results in Ealing Southall, Galloway links this to the declining membership saying: "Despite being a rather well known political brand our membership has not grown. And in some areas it has gone into a steep decline. Whole areas of the country are effectively moribund as far as Respect activity is concerned. In some weeks there is not a single Respect activity anywhere in the country advertised in our media." But he does not make the link between this and Respect being an electoral coalition – it has no "media", no paper or magazine to organise its members, few branches organised to carry on day to day political campaigning, a tiny national office and small staff. Indeed in every way the SWP is a stronger organisation precisely because it has all these things.

Instead Galloway focuses on "amateurishness", lack of fundraising, lack of following through decisions. What is significant is the areas of activities he criticises – for example Respect's float at the Gay Pride parade and "high handed instructions" to those in "elected office" to take part. Such events, he thinks, should be covered by lesbian and gay members and youth. He is clearly protective of Respect's elected representatives because he knows full well few of them have much sympathy with lesbian and gay events – Galloway knows "a test of commitment", as he puts it, and doesn't like it.

He also raises the amount of time and financial resources spent on the Fighting Unions conference and campaign, criticising the fact that four months of office time was spent

on it rather than following up on the "breakthroughs at the local elections". This is a problem for the SWP because they see the left in the unions as one of the "foundation stones" of Respect and here is Galloway basically saying it's a waste of time.

If anything the Fighting Unions campaign should be criticised for being little more than a series of rallies for left trade union leaders to make radical speeches at. Its conference was a typical SWP-dominated affair with lots of platform speakers and SWP members reporting on their workplace and the great gains of Respect. It had no resolutions from the floor or from union branches, and it invited none. It had no discussion of the problems of the left in the unions and no plans to begin building a fighting rank and file organisation. It is not surprising that most non-SWP militants think that the RMT's shop stewards' network, for all its faults, offers a more serious attempt at organising left trade unionists.

But this is not Galloway's reason for criticising the Fighting Unions initiative. He thinks such work is a distraction from more important activity. At its heart Galloway's document is a call to make Respect a real "election" party, in the classic reformist sense of being an effective vote-gathering machine for the chosen ones like himself. He wants it to give up on anything that gets in the way of this, like building in the unions or supporting gay pride.

The aim, he says must be "a focus on recruitment, fundraising, establishing the profile of our candidates and unashamedly promoting Respect as the critical force in

the wider reconstitution of the progressive and socialist movement." To do this he proposes a new "high powered elections committee" of nine (only three or four are to be SWP) and a full time National Organiser to "sit alongside" the National Secretary, John Rees. These proposals are designed to cut down the organisational control wielded by the SWP in Respect.

The SWP always attempts to organisationally dominate and manipulate its "united fronts of a special type", which is why it regularly falls out with its independent allies and is always in search of new ones to promote. This time it is in confrontation with the leader of Respect and they will either have to submit to the proposals or admit to the SWP members that the last four years' work has gone down the pan. Their response to Galloway suggests that they are still aiming for a compromise. His demand that John Rees be sacked suggests that he is going for broke. We do not know what the outcome of this unprincipled spat will be.

What is not at issue in this dispute is the reformist and populist politics of Respect – both sides agree that it has to be built as an electoral coalition on the broadest possible basis, including drawing in local businessmen. Respect remains a political organisation that no workers or members of the left should give support to in elections or otherwise. It is high time ordinary members of the SWP called their leaders to account for this dreadful right wing tactic, which offers only a political dead end for the British working class and the SWP itself.

### NOTES

1. The original platform People Before Profit can be found at: [www.sademocracy.org.uk](http://www.sademocracy.org.uk)

2. All quotes from Unity in Diversity, Alex Callinicos, *Socialist Review* 262, April 2002.

3. John Rees, "The broad party, the revolutionary party and the united front", *International Socialism* 97, winter 2002

4. Despite the reams of paper expended in the debates between the SWP and the SSP leaders on this question, both in Frontline and in *International Socialism*, the only significant difference was that the SWP wanted to keep its separate "revolutionary organisation" in a special united front that was not quite a party, while the ex-Militant, Tommy Sheridan-led ISM was willing to become a tendency in a party organisation. They both agreed these would be organisations that avoided "the decisive strategic question" of reform or revolution. Or as we say in plain English: they were building left reformist not revolutionary organisations.

5. See *Permanent Revolution* No1, (first series), pp 73-79.

6. German's exact words from the transcript were "Some Muslims are anti-gay and this is perfectly true, but it is not a question we pose to Christians who join the Socialist Alliance, is it? Now I am in favour of defending gay rights, but I am not prepared to have it as a shibboleth." Actually it was a question we posed directly to all who joined the SA because the programme People Before Profit, unlike Respect's eleven point declaration, was crystal clear on the defence of gay rights, and members joined on the basis of agreeing with the programme.

7. A report of the first conference can be found at [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1629](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1629)

8. The ISG, which plays the role of providing left cover for the Respect leadership, produced a policy pamphlet for Respect sometime in 2006 which contains better positions on abortion and lesbian and

gay rights than the founding declaration. On abortion it still does not call for extending a woman's right to choose but limits itself to defending the existing restrictive 1967 Act. On lesbians and gays it calls for an end to discrimination and homophobia. This pamphlet "Another World is Possible – policies of Respect, the unity coalition" plays little role in the electoral campaigning of Respect and is not available on their website. Policies on abortion and gay rights can be found relegated to "other policies".

9. *Where Next for Respect*, Respect pamphlet 2004.

10. The EDM calls on the Government "to set up a joint committee of both Houses to consider the scientific, medical and social changes in relation to abortion that have taken place since 1967, with a view to presenting options for new legislation". This committee was due to report this session of parliament and was, at the time of the EDM, predicted to set the scene for attempts to tighten still further abortion time limits.

11. See a report of the conference in *Weekly Worker* 645 October 19 2006. The CPGB joined Respect at its inception from the SA and has been beavering away ever since to move it leftwards.

12. Of course this is an idea not limited to Muslims. The past period has seen a growth of political fundamentalism across the spectrum from the religious Christian right and its anti-gay bigotry, in the US and Britain, to Sikh and Hindu extremists. Radical Sikhs have demanded the right to censor plays, and closed one by force in Birmingham because it "offended their religion". An unholy coalition of "faith groups" is fighting to extend their control over the education system by fighting for ever more religious schools and opposing government attempts to moderate the religious and racial discrimination and segregation that goes along with them.

13. See: [www.liammacuaid.wordpress.com](http://www.liammacuaid.wordpress.com)



## PUTIN'S RUSSIA

# Gearing up for a new cold war?

*The Russian bear is on the march again, or so the media would have us believe. The resumption of long range bomber patrols, sabre rattling over missiles, use of the gas supply weapon – all have alarmed the west. How has Russia emerged from its economic prostration in the 1990s to its advancing position today? Bill Jefferies argues that Putin's policy is a response to NATO's encirclement of Russia*

OVER THE summer the press was full of photographs showing Vladimir Putin bearing his muscular chest in various hunting poses. These photos weren't just an amusing insight into the vanity of Russia's macho president. They were a symbol of the new Russia's political muscle flexing.

Vladimir Putin is spoiling for a fight. Having reconstructed the Russian state since 1999 over the bodies of billionaire oligarchs, countless Chechen dead and the Russian opposition, Putin is now projecting Russia's power abroad.

He has made it clear that Russia is no longer the economically and politically prostrate country of the 1990s, a state to be ignored or pushed around by the great powers, in particular the US. As he said in February 2007: "The United States has overstepped its borders in all spheres – economic, political and humanitarian, and has imposed itself on other states."

Using oil and gas supplies to exert pressure on surrounding states, threatening to redirect missiles towards Europe if the US puts "star wars missiles" on its borders, re-starting its long range bomber patrols and increasing its arms expenditure, Russia is showing it is a force to be

reckoned with, one that NATO has to take into account.

Now western governments and academics are wringing their hands, saying it was not meant to be like this. Russia was defeated in the cold war and was meant to be integrated into the new world order as a co-operative and subservient state. Now Putin and Russia are the new bogeymen casting a shadow over the EU and the West. How did such a state of affairs come about? How did Russia manage to transform itself from basket case to reassertive power?

### **The restoration of capitalism**

The restoration of capitalism in the USSR after 1989 was the logical result of various attempts by the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy to energeise and rescue the system of command planning. The bureaucracy had tried various schemes for revitalising bureaucratic planning from the 1960s onwards, mimicking market mechanisms to improve productivity at home while using the KGB to steal and apply western technologies to do it.

As head of the KGB in the 1980s Yuri Andropov was

uniquely placed to see the shortcomings of this tinkering policy throughout the whole of the USSR. He fashioned a new doctrine that recognised a strategic reconciliation with western powers was necessary in order to get their explicit help to revive the planned economy. His plans were cut short when he died shortly after becoming leader of the USSR. It was left to Gorbachev from 1986 to apply the vision of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). But in surrendering geo-political control over the Eastern Europe bloc to the west, Gorbachev unwittingly

## By the mid 1990s 31% of the population existed below the poverty line. Mortality rates ballooned while life expectancy declined

unleashed forces at home that brought him and the Stalinist reformers down and opened the road to pro-capitalist forces around Boris Yeltsin, who ascended to power in August 1991.

Two months later Yeltsin's economic team around Yegor Gaidar established a programme of radical economic reforms to destroy the planned economy and the economic basis of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Supreme Soviet extended decree powers to the president for a year to implement the programme and in December 1991 the USSR was abolished and the Communist Party dissolved. The assets of the state were ruthlessly looted by the "oligarchs" – well-connected business associates of the economic strata of the ruling bureaucracy. As George Friedman put it:

"These men appeared to be the cutting edge of capitalism in Russia. They were nothing of the sort. They were simply people who knew how to game the chaos of the fall of communism, figuring out how to reverse Soviet expropriation with private expropriation... Western financial interests saw it as a tremendous opportunity to tap into the enormous value of a collapsing empire. The critical thing is that the creation of value, the justification of capitalism, was not what was going on. Rather, the expropriation of existing value was the name of the game. Bankers loved it... and the Russians were crushed by it."<sup>1</sup>

The nationalised property of the state was sold for a fraction of its real value. Between 1993 and 1995 20,000 out of 27,000 enterprises were privatised. They were either taken over by their former managers or stolen from the workers by their nominal partners in the privatisation process. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny group of oligarchs was the inevitable result. By 1994 under the government of Viktor Chernomyrdin, a clique of about 36 billionaire oligarchs owned the key industrial and raw material firms. Meanwhile the lives of ordinary Russians became unbearable. According to Boris Kagarlitsky:

"Ambulance services, hospitals and regional polyclinics were left completely without funds. Consumption of meat fell by 23%, of fruit by a quarter and of milk by 28%. In the

pre-reform years, the average Russian family had spent a third of its income on food. By 1993, it was necessary to pay 70% of earnings for a significantly worse diet."<sup>2</sup>

By the mid 1990s 31% of the population existed below the poverty line. Mortality rates ballooned from 10.4 per thousand in 1986 to 15.7 by 1995, while life expectancy declined for males from 65 years in 1987 to 57 years in 1994.<sup>3</sup>

This was a function of the economy's collapse. Between 1989-98 output fell by 45%. Inflation reached 85% in 1998.<sup>4</sup> Industry fell even faster than the economy as a whole, declining by an average of nearly 15% a year in the decade between 1985-95, reducing it to a mere 20% of its former size by 1995.<sup>5</sup> Investment collapsed by more than 80% in the eight years after 1990. Tax collection plummeted and crime soared in the 1990s.

During this period of chaos and "gangster-capitalism" the oligarchs were able to establish their economic power under the benign gaze of President Yeltsin but were unable to establish a firm social base for their rule. Capitalism may have promised democracy and consumer durables, but it delivered neither. In time the reckless, gargantuan scale of their theft and establishment of economic fiefdoms virtually outside of state control undermined the viability of the future of a Russian state and of the capitalist class as a whole.

The appalling disintegration of social and economic life for tens of millions of Russian workers – the rank poverty and mounting lawlessness that accompanied this transition to capitalism allowed Putin and his followers to create a social base for a successful bid for the presidency. His promise to a people in despair was to resurrect a "strong" and assertive Russia. In the words of Stratfor "Putin and his FSB [successor to the KGB] faction realized in the late 1990s that, however lucrative the economic opening process might have been for some, the net effect on Russia was catastrophic. Unlike the oligarchs, many of whom were indifferent to the fate of Russia, Putin understood that the path they were on would only lead to another revolution – one even more catastrophic than the first. Outside of Moscow and St Petersburg, there was hunger and desperation. The conditions for disaster were all there."<sup>6</sup>

### The siloviki take on the oligarchs

In 1999 when Vladimir Putin became, in short succession, the prime minister of Russia and then president, there were few signs that he represented a break with his predecessors. He was a regular guest of the oligarch Boris Berezovsky, owner of oil conglomerate Sibneft. His support for the second Chechen war in 1999 enabled him to adopt the mantle of law and order and Great Russian chauvinism and guaranteed Berezovsky's support in the March 1999 election.

Yet Putin's background gave a clue to his evolution in power. He hailed from Andropov's KGB and had shared the latter's vision for Russia, he had reconciled himself to capitalism but held to the view that Russia needed a strong state and economy; to get both, Putin recognised the government must bring the old oligarchy to heel.

Prior to his election Putin was director of the FSB and

hence at the centre of the siloviki – the ranks of the military and security services. Under Putin this layer has increased its prevalence in the state administration. In 2003 it was reckoned that nearly 60% of the Security Council were siloviki compared to 33% in 1993.<sup>7</sup>

The main task was a massive centralisation of vertical power into Putin's hands. Almost immediately on assuming office, Putin moved to limit the power of the regions and their oligarchical governors. Putin reformed the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian parliament and appointed seven presidential viceroys to oversee the regions. In time he would double the numbers of bureaucrats (to 1.3 million) compared even to the height of the USSR in order to impose his rule over the entire federation.

In 2000 he began a series of legal manoeuvres designed to break the political power of the oligarchs and renationalise key sectors of the Russian economy. The destruction of the industrial base of the Russia economy meant that Russia could not compete as an exporter of manufactured commodities with the newly emerging economies of Asia. Its decades' long exclusion from the global division of labour and the cutting edge of new technologies meant that in any case even its most advanced sectors, like aeronautics, could not compete with the far superior output of the west. Putin had to rely instead upon using Russia's energy resources to rebuild the economy.

To execute his state capitalist strategy Putin began a series of renationalisations, beginning with Gazprom:

"... in 2001, after the American businessman Bill Browder, the chief executive officer of the investment fund Hermitage Capital Management and a minority Gazprom shareholder, exposed the extent of the fraud, asset stripping and insider dealing at the heart of the energy giant. The Gazprom chief executive, Rem Vyakhirev, was shown the door, and Putin brought in a new team."<sup>8</sup>

Gazprom was to become the holding company that Putin would use to gobble up the assets of the oligarchs.

This became particularly urgent as the oligarchs, realising their vulnerability to the newly assertive Russian state, sought alliances with international oil companies. Khodorkovsky was reported to be in negotiations with ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco about the ownership of Yukos, when the state prosecutors moved against him in April 2003.

The trigger was the proposed merger of Yukos and Sibneft. The merged company would have held the second-largest oil and gas reserves in the world with 19.5bn barrels of oil and gas. If it had fallen into US hands it would have made it exceptionally difficult for Putin to reassert Russian national interest against the oligarchs and their foreign allies. Khodorkovsky was arrested, charged with fraud and tax evasion and in 2005 sentenced to nine years in jail. Berezovsky fled to London in October 2003. And Roman Abramovich, Berezovsky's partner, preferring the safer route, sold his stake in Sibneft to Gazprom for \$13bn and bought Chelsea football club with the loose change.

The state's assault on the oligarchs was by no means an anti-capitalist measure. By renationalising the assets of the oligarchs the state has been able to use the profits of the state sector to oversee a growth in investment in the

Russian economy. This was essential to repair the rapidly decaying means of production inherited from the USSR. Fixed capital investment has grown to around 20% of GDP since 2000, passing 25% in 2007, not on a par with China's astonishing 40% (or the USSR's level in 1989 of 40%), but a significant rise compared with the destruction of the early 1990s. Likewise, the banks remain largely in Russian state hands:

"Concentration of ownership is high and the sector is dominated by state ownership... State-owned banks

## Although many of old oligarchs were sidelined or dispossessed, Putin's regime is far from being at arms length with big business

control around 35% of total banking sector assets, while no private bank controls more than 5% of total assets... Note that the four largest state-controlled banks hold almost 50% of total deposits as well as loans (around 35% of deposits and 30% of loans are administered by Sberbank alone)."<sup>9</sup>

Although many of old oligarchs were sidelined or dispossessed, Putin's regime is far from being at arms length with big business; on the contrary. The fusion of the new capitalist class and Putin's state has deepened the interpenetration, but involving a new sector of the capitalists and on Putin's terms. Many of Putin's loyal Duma deputies are business figures; many of Putin's ministers occupy key places in the major state companies. For example, deputy prime minister (and possibly the next President) Dmitri Medvedev is also chairman of Gazprom. And certainly under Putin the new capitalist class has both grown and seen its wealth increase immensely. Profit growth surged in 2003 by 38%, in 2004 by 39%, in 2005 by 47% and in 2006 by 42%.<sup>10</sup>

According to one report in 2006, "Russia witnessed the highest growth in HNWI populations [High net wealth individuals – those with liquid assets of \$30mn plus]"<sup>11</sup> It went on to say:

"Russia's market capitalisation took off in 2006, on the heels of several IPOs and the liberalisation of the country's banking market. Shares of several Russian banks experienced triple digit performance growth in 2006-7, benefiting the country's wealthiest individuals and swelling their ranks by 15.5%.<sup>12</sup>

## Russia's economic weakness

Russia's growth this millennium largely reflects high economic rents from natural resources rather than a sustained upward swing in investment in industry or services. Nevertheless, as the world economy recovered from the brief US recession of 2001-02 and then boomed for the last five years Putin's natural resources have been in demand and high energy prices have swelled the state's

coffers through ownership of the major companies and banks. GDP grew 10% in 2000 and has averaged around 6% pa in 2001-06.<sup>13</sup> The Kremlin's foreign exchange reserves have mushroomed to \$460 billion.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of this economic recovery and despite the repression of opposition, Putin – unlike the oligarchs – has been able to create a social base for his rule – if largely plebiscitary in character. The economic upturn was even reflected in a mild improvement in social and economic indicators. The numbers of murders peaked in 2002,

## Washington's overarching global foreign policy under the George W Bush's neo-con regime demanded nothing less than subservience from Putin's Russia

mortality rate declined after 2004, marriages increased, divorce rates fell. Average incomes reached \$350 a month in November 2006 compared to \$80 in 2000. The poverty rate declined from 29% in 2000 to 17.6% four years later, and even income inequality dropped marginally.<sup>15</sup>

However, the seeds of weakness are firmly implanted in the lop-sided character of Russia's economy. Even in 2007, after nearly a decade of recovery, it remains the case that:

"The fuel sector (oil and gas) dominates the Russian economy. It accounts for about 25% of GDP, 30% of foreign direct investment, 50% of stock market capitalisation, 50% of fiscal revenues and 60% of exports."<sup>16</sup>

Therein lies its immediate strength and its medium term weakness. On the one hand the business cycle has promoted the growth of some major global companies – Gazprom has been transformed into one of the richest and most powerful companies in the world employing 432,000, with 2006 annual earnings of 1,633bn roubles (£31.55bn) and a current market value of more than \$300bn (£150bn). It is the world's third largest corporation, after Exxon Mobil and General Electric, accounts for 92% of Russian gas production and controls 17% of the world's gas reserves. The European Union receives 25% of its natural gas from Gazprom while the Russian Federation owns just over 50% of its shares. On the other hand, an international recession, or even marked slow down could cause a fall in global demand for raw materials and oil which would soon draw down Russia's foreign reserves and tear the heart of the kernel of economic dynamism of this "resource imperialism".

### Russian imperialism asserts itself

The new capitalist Russia has always looked with alarm at any attempt by NATO to expand its membership eastwards. Even Yeltsin tried to obstruct the integration of Poland and the central European states into NATO, but to no avail. An attempt to get some control over actions of the Alliance through a special Russian status in "Partnership

for Peace" (a NATO organisation consisting of Russia plus all the former Warsaw Pact countries and soviet republics) was rebuffed by NATO. Instead NATO proceeded to surround Russia by integrating former republics and Warsaw Pact countries into NATO's military machine. The Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined in 1999 and seven more states joined in 2004, the Baltic states (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania) and Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania and Slovenia. All these new members supported US actions in Iraq, leading to Bush and Rumsfeld's praise of the "new Europe" states more willing to do its bidding than France and Germany.

Russia, correctly, views the expansion of this military alliance on its borders as encirclement, an organisation preventing it from exerting influence or hegemony over what it refers to as its "near abroad" or "post-Soviet space". In a recent article which failed to gain entry into the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, Sergey Lavrov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared:

"Various attempts are being made to contain Russia, including through the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in violation of previous assurances given to Moscow. Today, supporters of NATO enlargement harp on the organisation's supposed role in the promotion of democracy. How is democracy furthered by a military-political alliance that is producing scenarios for the use of force?"<sup>17</sup>

Such open criticism of the US and NATO were not always present in Putin's government. In the first term of his presidency he hoped he could continue Yeltsin's partnership with the west; he signed up to Bush's war on terror after 9/11 in return for a free hand in the crushing of Chechnya's struggle for independence and in the intimidation of the independent mass media in Russia.

But Washington's overarching global foreign policy under George W Bush's neo-con regime demanded nothing less than subservience from Putin's Russia. In the 1990s Putin's attachment to working with the USA was sorely tested by the Kosovo crisis, when the US treated fundamental Russian imperial interests in the Balkans with indifference and contempt. But it was the "loss" of Ukraine in the US-backed Orange Revolution that was a decisive moment for Putin and his followers in their shift away from the Andropov doctrine. It raised the spectre of a US attempt to unseat the Putin regime via a "democratic" oppositional movement.

Russia's concessions to the US and NATO, its participation in the Bosnia intervention force for example, has got nothing in return. Indeed the US took this as a sign of weakness. Not content with integrating the central European states into NATO, the Alliance was expanding its military role in the east, into Afghanistan. The US took the opportunity of this intervention to open military bases in other areas of "post-Soviet space" in Kazakhsstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgystan. It set about trying to counter Russian attempts to route oil and gas pipes from the Caspian through its territory. And it set about arming Georgia, offering it NATO membership in the near future (its "membership action plan" is likely to be issued in 2008). Then it announced that it was going to site the radar facilities for its new "star wars" anti-missile system

on Russia's border in Poland and the Czech Republic.

This offensive by the US and NATO led to a counter-offensive by Russia. In the east Russia supported breakaway statelets in Georgia and Moldova, aided as bargaining chips in any future agreement. In Europe Russia played hardball on the question of Kosovo, backing its one still loyal ally Serbia in denying Kosovo independence. During the first half of 2006, Moscow temporarily shut off natural gas supplies to the Ukraine (and consequently to parts of Europe) formally in a dispute over prices but actually in an attempt to force EU powers to assist Russia in reining in portions of its near-abroad that Moscow viewed as rebellious.

Then in February 2007 at the Munich Conference on Security Policy Putin announced a sea change in foreign policy. According to Putin the collapse of the USSR was the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the twentieth century. He said:

"The United States displayed an almost uncontained hyper use of force in international relations . . . [so] no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them. Of course such a policy stimulates an arms race."

And true to his word Putin has ordered a £97 billion refurbishment of Russia's armed forces, increasing its defence budget four fold since 2001 to £16 billion. On 17 August Putin ordered strategic bombers to resume patrols over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans for the first time since 1992. The US of course never stopped such patrols. Russian and Chinese troops have been recently rehearsing "anti-terrorist" operations in central Asia and on 21 August, Putin announced the formation of United Aircraft, a state holding company combining MiG, Sukhoi, Ilyushin, Tupolev and Irkut with the aim to restore ". . . our leadership in the production of combat aircraft".

Of course, at this stage Russia's ability to pose a serious threat to the US remains limited, according to Robert Hewson, the editor of *Jane's Air-Launched Weapons*:

"In terms of military threat they are a joke . . . everything is a relic from the Soviet era. The level of technology you see in the UK, Sweden and the US is much higher."<sup>18</sup>

While Douglas Barrie of *Aviation Week* added:

"Before Russia returns to Soviet military levels you are looking at a decade-plus of sustained, high-level military investment."<sup>19</sup>

The difference is that now, through the use of gas and oil resources, it has a powerful strategic weapon to influence its near neighbours and with a reviving economy, the ability to develop its domestic military/industrial complex, such that in a decade it may indeed represent a renewed threat to the US.

## Opposition to Putin

Derailing Putin's plans for an aggressive imperialist turn – with all its reactionary implications for suppression of independence movements like Chechnya and bullying of its "near abroad" states – requires a strong progressive, working class movement at home. From the ruthless destruction of the movement for Chechen independence, claiming tens of thousands of lives, to the brutal

suppression of small, low key demonstrations in Moscow, Vladimir Putin has left no one in doubt as to the size of the task of overthrowing the Russian siloviki state.

Yet for now the progressive forces ranged against the regime are slight and on the defensive. The working class suffered a historic defeat in the 1990s with the destruction of the USSR and its planned economy, its self-confidence shattered by the economic slump and destruction of its rights.

Despite the economic revival of the last years, the class

## Despite the economic revival of the last years, the class struggle – political, ideological and trade union – remains very depressed in Russia

struggle – political, ideological and trade union – remains very depressed in Russia. Since the late 1990s general strike for payment of back wages there has been very little activity. The main trade union federation (FITR) is controlled by a pro-Putin leadership and is corrupt and ineffective. It is seen as having moved from being a tool of the old Stalinist bureaucracy to being the tool of the Putin regime.

In 2003 the Duma passed a law that makes unions dependent on employers and virtually abolished the right to strike – a miners' hunger strike in spring 2004 for payment of back wages was an indication of the desperate tactics forced upon workers. The smaller, genuinely independent trade unions are largely without influence on a national scale, though they have some presence in the newer car plants. The only significant protest of the last few years was the street protests in early 2005 in many

permanentrevolution.net

### The Degenerated Revolution

#### Theory and ideas archive

Re-read Workers Power's groundbreaking analysis of Stalinism, first published in 1983. It re-examines the post-war overturns in eastern Europe and Cuba in the light of Trotsky's historic critique, providing an account of the failure by his latter-day followers to recognise the true nature of these states and the need at that time for political revolutions to restore the working class to its rightful place.

Read this key document of our tradition on our website now

cities, involving a few thousands in each case, opposed to the monetisation of benefits – part of the raft of attacks on welfare benefits.

The last couple of years have also been marked by the rise of far right racist/Russian chauvinist groups and violent attacks on minorities. The anti-capitalist movement meanwhile numbers in the mere thousands while the small progressive intelligentsia is largely isolated from the working class. On 14 April this year Russian opposition forces rallied in Moscow's Pushkin Square.

The so-called Dissenters' March was organised by Other Russia, a disparate coalition that includes everyone from hardline Stalinists and free-market reformers to far right ultranationalists. Its figurehead is former world champion chess player Gary Kasparov. The coalition is united only by their opposition to the centralisation of power under Putin's administration. Barely 2,000 gathered, only to be mercilessly beaten by 9,000 riot police in full view of the international media – a deliberate warning

to those who may be thinking of actively challenging the government.

Putin's promise of a strong and assertive Russia to make the people proud again, is a reactionary chimera. It is cover for naked imperialist ambition and presages the crushing of further nationalist movements and domestic opposition, which will no doubt be labeled "democratic pawns" of the USA.

The revival of the Russian working class movement from the counter-revolutionary period through which it has lived this last decade and a half must include the formation of a revolutionary, socialist and democratic party, drawing in the hundreds and then thousands of class conscious workers. Such a party must firmly turn its back on the idea of reviving the discredited and failed legacy of Stalinism while seeking to destroy the siloviki state and take control again of Russia's resources, to re-establish a real soviet democracy where workers democratically control their state.

#### NOTES

1. *Stratfor Global Intelligence Report 29*, November 2006
2. *Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin*, Boris Kagarlitsky, p99
3. "Russi Redux", by V Popov, *New Left Review* 44 March-April 2007, p 48
4. *ibid*, p37
5. World Bank 2006
6. *Stratfor Global Intelligence Report 29*, Op cit
7. "Contours of the Putin era", Wood, *NLR* 44, p59
8. *The Independent*, 3 September 2007
9. "Russia's Financial Sector", Deutsche Bank Research Bureau (DBRB) August 2007. In comparison foreign banks' share of banking assets was 12.3% in April 2007

10. *ibid*
11. Morgan Stanley Capgemini World Wealth Report 2007
12. *ibid*
13. Wood, op cit, p55
14. DRB, op cit
15. Popov, op cit, p 42
16. DBRB, op cit
17. "Containing Russia: back to the future?", Sergey V. Lavrov. Available at: <http://www.un.int/russia/>
18. *The Guardian*, 25 August 2007
19. *ibid*





# The anti-war movement's "Democratic deficit"

*It is almost one year since the Democrats gained control in the 2006 Congressional elections. They won on the back of mass anti-war sentiment and the promises of withdrawal of US troops. Since then troop numbers have surged and the anti-war movement's hopes in the Democrats have been dashed. George Binette assesses the state of the current anti-war movement and compares it to an earlier generation's opposition to the imperialist conflict in Vietnam*

THIS AUGUST two thousand demonstrators, led by anti-war figurehead Cindy Sheehan, marched on the road leading to the Bush family's summer residence in Maine. They demanded the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere protesters, some clad in Guantanamo-style orange jumpsuits, captured the attention of motorists in a Boston suburb on a muggy Monday evening. They called for the impeachment of George W Bush and Vice-President, Dick Cheney.

And earlier this May dockers in the port of Oakland, California, honoured unofficial picket lines mounted by teaching union activists and other anti-war demonstrators. They demanded that the US get out of Iraq and called on other trade unionists throughout the US to mobilise in action to stop the war.

While the slogans may not be especially radical (if there are any slogans at all), vigils, static demonstrations and petitioning in opposition to the continuing war in Iraq now take place in cities and towns across the US almost every week. Some 300 city councils and/or mayors have adopted motions in support of swift troop withdrawal and a redirection of government spending towards social welfare and a crumbling infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

On the surface at least, there is a vibrant, if not especially coherent, anti-war movement in the US, attracting far more participants than were involved in the Vietnam conflict at a comparable stage.

By February 2006, opinion polls had started to show a distinct shift away from the war, which has been sustained in the ensuing 18 months. Public opinion is now dead set against the Iraq war and Bush's popularity ratings

frequently plunge below those seen in the final stages of Richard Nixon's administration unravelling amidst the Watergate scandal.

So why does veteran left wing journalist, Alexander Cockburn, decry the "inertia" of the movement and its inability to turn mass sentiment for withdrawal into an irresistible force to make it happen? He argues:

"The campuses are sedate, the labour movement is reeling. To describe the anti-war movement in its effective form is really to mention a few good efforts – the anti-recruitment campaigns, the tours of Military Families Against the War, particularly of those who have lost children in Iraq, the efforts of some returning vets, the stands taken by some enlistees refusing deployment to the Middle East – and three or four brave souls."<sup>3</sup>

Cockburn's negative balance sheet of the current anti-war movement has certainly provoked replies (most notably from Phyllis Bennis<sup>4</sup>), and his critique is a somewhat nostalgic take on the 1960s movement, laced with some sobering facts about today's movement. Chief among them is that the anti-war movement has not only proved unable to force the withdrawal of troops but was quite helpless to prevent Bush's deployment of thousands more troops in the first half of this year.

### Contrasts with the Vietnam era

During the early escalation of the US military assault on Vietnam during 1964-67, the Johnson administration retained substantial popular support across US society. But by the spring of 1967 cracks were beginning to show – cracks which would become gaping fissures by 1968, leading to Johnson's decision not to stand for a second term in the White House.

Nevertheless, in the period up until spring 1967 the country had experienced nothing remotely comparable

## The surge went ahead with modest Congressional opposition and there are few signs that an end to the carnage arising from the occupation is imminent

in size to the protests that anticipated the launch of the March 2003 blitz against Baghdad.

On 15 February 2003, despite frigid weather and brutal tactics by mounted police, hundreds of thousands gathered on the streets around the United Nations in New York to denounce the drive to war on Iraq.

Since then, substantial sections of organised labour in the US have given at least official backing to resolutions opposing the war, once more in sharp contrast to the Vietnam years when the unions were largely absent as a component of the movement against the war until very late in the day, and for the most part officially supported the war.<sup>5</sup>

Given the cumulative legacy of defeats for trade

unionism in the USA over the last 25 years,<sup>6</sup> the emergence and growth of US Labor Against the War was a surprisingly positive development.<sup>7</sup>

And, yet, the occupation persists. The notorious surge went ahead with modest Congressional opposition and there are few signs that an end to the carnage arising from the occupation is imminent. Large-scale protests are planned for this autumn, but to date the biggest marches have failed to equal 15 February 2003, or match the largest of the Vietnam era, when an estimated 750,000 gathered in Washington and another 300,000 in San Francisco on the same April day in 1971.

Five key factors go a long way towards explaining the impotence of the current movement compared with the apparent success of its predecessor. These are:

➤ The absence of conscription ("the draft") that created the basis for sustained student opposition on university campuses, which was such a prominent feature of the Vietnam years, with its teach-ins, occupations and demonstrations outside military recruitment offices. By comparison today's colleges are quiescent, with the anti-war left invisible or completely marginalised.

➤ The relatively low level of fatalities among US forces – the total of US dead remains under 4,000, in contrast to the height of the 1968 Tet offensive when over 1,000 US soldiers died in the space of one month. This time there is an active movement among the bereaved relatives of US soldiers killed in Iraq, groups of war veterans in opposition to the occupation exist, and there are serious concerns about low morale in the army. But there is as yet nothing remotely comparable to the rebellion in the ranks witnessed among US troops during the Vietnam War, when the "fragging" of officers in the field with grenades became almost routine.<sup>8</sup>

➤ A much more compliant US media exists today than in the 1960s. Embedded journalists on CNN and Fox convey little of the horror inflicted and endured by US forces. On the other hand, the Bush administration has faced a barrage of criticism across the media for conditions in hospitals treating war veterans. The lingering impact of the 9/11 attacks on popular consciousness, still confers a shred of legitimacy on the Bush administration itself and on the "war on terror" in general. Meanwhile, the energies of all too many investigative journalists have gone into concocting or debunking crazed conspiracy theories about "who really" destroyed the Twin Towers on 9/11.

➤ The nature of, and response within the anti-war movement to, the armed resistance in Iraq itself has inhibited a mass solidarity movement. The fragmented array of confessional groupings, promoting reactionary social programmes, suffers by comparison with the Stalinist-influenced nationalism of the Vietcong and National Liberation Front.<sup>9</sup>

➤ In the US in the 1960s there was a more generalised social and political ferment, associated largely with the civil rights and black power movements, which had far more profound effects than the nascent anti-capitalist movement. The repressive post-9/11 climate helped derail the US movement and the still more recent movement for migrant workers' citizenship rights has been distant from the organised opposition to the war.<sup>10</sup> As Cockburn

rightly notes,<sup>11</sup> the war barely registered as an issue amid the extraordinary protests that brought hundreds of thousands on to the streets of Chicago, Los Angeles and several other US cities on more than one occasion in 2006.

And perversely the fact that the Iraq invasion and occupation were perceived of as the work of a Republican administration has meant the leadership of United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), the single biggest component of the anti-war movement, has proved incapable of breaking from a reliance on the Democratic Party. Indeed, Cockburn describes UFPJ as "captive to the Democratic Party" and in the US progressive weekly, *The Nation*, he described the movement as a whole as "subservient to the Democratic Party and to the agenda of its prime candidates for the presidency in 2008, with Hillary Clinton in the lead."<sup>12</sup>

### The Democrats since November 2006

Events on Capitol Hill since the Democrats regained control of Congress in January prove all but a tiny handful of Democratic politicians to be culpable for allowing Bush to get his way on troop deployment. Indeed, the realities of "pork barrel" politics in a situation where the Democrats now hold the purse-strings for myriad local federal-funded projects, has evidently softened the anti-war stance of several Democrats in the House of Representatives. Meanwhile, the influence of the most vociferous rhetorical opponents of the war in the Congressional Black Caucus has been marginalised in the substantially enlarged Democrat Congressional presence.

The Democrats have repeatedly capitulated to Bush. The leadership of Nevada "moderate" Harry Reid in the Senate and Californian liberal, Nancy Pelosi, in the House of Representatives have wilfully sought to deceive their electoral base into thinking that Congressional Democrats were on the brink of denying the White House funding to continue waging the war beyond March of next year.

Similarly, the Democrats have done nothing to roll back the tide of attacks on civil liberties embodied in the Patriot Act, originally steamrollered through a pliant Congress in the wake of 9/11.<sup>13</sup>

So why have the Democrats, despite the occasional outburst of rhetorical fury, done next to nothing to effectively challenge the administration? As one veteran of 1968, Tom Hayden, noted in a college lecture delivered immediately after the 2006 mid-term elections, "neither party is prepared to admit that the war is a lost cause."

More explicitly, in the words of anti-war columnist, Joshua Holland:

"At the end of the day, Washington's strategic class is frozen, unable to concede defeat because to admit that the US project in Iraq has failed is to admit that in the 21st century, the most powerful country in the history of humanity can be humbled by a small dysfunctional state whose armed forces it destroyed more than a decade earlier, a country that it spent twelve years slowly and leisurely strangling under some of the harshest sanctions in history before shocking and awing it a second time, dismantling its government and hanging its erstwhile dictator in the process."<sup>14</sup>

As Mike Davis argued earlier this year: "the Democratic leadership . . . has exploited domestic sentiment against Bush policies in Iraq to consolidate, not debunk, the underlying Washington consensus."<sup>15</sup>

The reason Democrat politicians have failed to oppose the war is simple: they support it. Their clear and unashamed aim remains the retention of US military hegemony in order to maintain reliable supplies of comparatively cheap raw materials – first and foremost oil – and an overarching political environment that provides a safe operating sphere for US-based global capital.

## The Democrats have done nothing to roll back the attacks on civil liberties embodied in the Patriot Act steamrollered through Congress in the wake of 9/11

While the Democrats may tend to represent different factions within corporate America (entertainment, high-tech and some financial service sectors as opposed to the oil, extractive and heavy engineering industries, so strongly associated with Bush and Cheney), they largely endorse the Bush "war on terror" even as their various would-be presidential candidates emphasise shifts in the primary geographical focus away from Iraq and towards Iran or Afghanistan – or even, in the case of Barack Obama, to Pakistan.

The available evidence suggests that, if anything, the Democrats are more reliant than ever before on funding that comes directly or otherwise from big corporations, which accounted for more than half of all funding raised for the organisation's campaigns in both 2004 and 2006.

**permanentrevolution.net**

**On-line dossier: the world economy**

<b>Marxist economics and globalisation</b>	A distinguishing feature of Permanent Revolution is our understanding of the world economy. Visit our website for refreshingly honest and informed analysis, debate and reviews. Articles include:
	<b>Callinicos vs Harman on the world economy</b>
	<b>The restoration of capitalism and the growth of the world market</b>
	<b>Marxism and long waves</b>

This was approximately five times the figure contributed by organised labour in these two election years.<sup>16</sup>

While all the Democratic presidential candidates now pay lip service to withdrawal from Iraq, the timetables are usually vague and Dennis Kucinich, a member of Congress from Ohio remains the lone candidate to advocate an immediate pull-out and to associate with the anti-war movement.

Failed vice-presidential candidate and former senator, John Edwards, who has assiduously courted leading union bureaucrats in recent months, has recently upped the rhetorical ante against his fellow contenders. Meanwhile, as the Democratic contenders exchange polite jibes on television, the Bush administration has another 16 months to run and despite its internal disintegration the Bush White House is now under remarkably little pressure from the Democrats or for that matter the extra-parliamentary forces of the anti-war movement to withdraw from Iraq before 20 January 2009.

## Glimmers of hope

At the same time there are promising initiatives, not least of them a conference called by the West Coast dockers' union, the historically militant Local 10 of the ILWU, on the theme of building resistance, including strike action, to both the Iraqi and Afghan occupations.<sup>17</sup> While the immediate audience may not prove large this is a bold step from a local with an impressive track record of international solidarity action.

Meanwhile, Cindy Sheehan has effectively declared her candidacy for the 2008 round of Congressional elections.

### NOTES

1. *Boston Globe*, 26 August 2007
2. Phyllis Bennis, *alternet*, 31 July 2007
3. A Cockburn, "Anti-War Inertia", *New Left Review* 46 July/August 2007
4. Cockburn op cit
5. See Jonathan Neale, *A People's History of the Vietnam War*, New Press, 2003
6. For a recent discussion on this see interview with US labor activist and writer Kim Moody, "The superpower's shopfloor", ISJ 115 in which he notes, "The point is that the situation for the organised working class has been one of decline and retreat for quarter of a century." (p128)
7. Of course, none of the major unions have made a political priority of seeking withdrawal from Iraq, whatever their paper policies.
8. On the question of US military morale and revolt see among others, Fred Halstead's exhaustive account of the whole period, *Out Now!*, in particular the chapter, "The Crumbling of US Military Morale" Anchor Foundation/Pathfinder Press, 1991.
9. The question of support for the Iraqi resistance is a bona fide topic for debate among anti-imperialists and the anti-war movement is certainly open to the charge of 'social patriotism', though Cockburn's initial critique attributed an exaggerated importance to this in seeking to explain the movement's apparent weaknesses.

She is intending to stand as an independent anti-war candidate against the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. Sheehan certainly embodies a progressive mission, and has made an open and quite possibly permanent break from the Democratic Party. But one activist, however well-intentioned, determined and tireless does not make for a fundamental break with the Democrats and thus the duopoly of bourgeois politics that has for so long characterised the United States.

Despite the widespread sentiment against the war, Bush's America remains rather quiescent when compared with the period of the late 1960s through mid-70s. Partly because of the obsessive focus on "terror" and a period of Republican control of Congress that Reagan's administration never enjoyed, the Bush years have witnessed a stealthy escalation of legislation overtly beneficial to oil and pharmaceutical capital as well as the richest segments of the population.

It is to be hoped that the combination of the unmitigated disasters in Iraq and Afghanistan, further mobilisations for migrant citizenship rights and the widespread pain caused by the final bursting of the housing bubble will rekindle a sustained mass resistance to Bush's administration.

The past 25 and more years of neoliberal offensive, which have left some 46 million people without any form of health insurance and real wages stagnating for as much as half of the working population, have generated much combustible raw material in the working class. The challenge would then become how to channel the subsequent fire beyond populism in its many guises and towards a revolutionary struggle against imperialist capitalism itself.

10. "9/11 more or less kicked two of the three legs from under the impact of Seattle." Kim Moody, op cit, p135
11. Cockburn, op cit, p38
12. The piece in *The Nation* by Cockburn was entitled "Support their troops?" and appeared in the 30 July print edition of the magazine, originally posted to online subscribers 12 July.
13. Ironically, though the politicians might privately cite electoral considerations to justify their refusal to act decisively against Bush over Iraq, the Democrats appear to have derived no profit from this stance with the electorate. Recent opinion polls suggest that it is as discontented with the Congress as with the lame duck occupant of the White House.
14. Joshua Holland, *alternet*, 6 September 2007
15. Mike Davis, "Democrats Return", *New Left Review*, no 43, January/February 2007 p.15, emphasis in original
16. See Robert Brenner, "Structure v Conjuncture: the 2006 Elections and the Rightward Shift", *New Left Review*, January/February 2007, p57
17. See [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1613](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1613)



# Anti-capitalist movement at an impasse

*What happened to the militant anti-capitalist movement that was able to rally twenty million people on the streets against the planned invasion of Iraq? Keith Harvey assesses the twists and turns that led to the anti-capitalist movement adopting a fundamentally wrong strategy*

THE EUROPEAN anti-capitalist movement is in serious crisis. Despite the militant demonstrations at Rostock against the G8 in June, the movement has failed to break through to the working class and is saddled with a leadership that has consistently failed to organise the movement to take on the imperialist offensive and its international institutions.

In Italy the movement is suffering from a crisis brought on by the turn of the Rifondazione Comunista (RC) away from the anti-capitalist movement in 2004 and towards a parliamentary accommodation to social democracy, culminating in its entry in to the Prodi government last year. The anti-war movement is split three ways over how and whether to oppose Italian troops in Afghanistan. In France the militant grass roots movement that succeeded in getting the proposed EU constitution rejected in the May 2005 referendum collapsed into electoral in-fighting. Moreover, one of the leading elements of the French movement – Attac – spent most of 2006 in a demoralising internal dog-fight over election-rigging by its right wing leaders, culminating in them decamping and setting up a rival – Avenir d'Attac.<sup>1</sup> In Britain, the London Social Forum provided a bureaucratic epitaph to an anti-capitalist movement already in decline, while the anti-war component of it has shrunk dramatically.

As for the European Social Forum itself, the last one in Athens in May 2006 was the smallest to date, although it had a prominent radical left wing due to the class struggles in Greece that preceded it. Nor were there any unifying, plenary events at Athens, reflecting the drive of the WSF to fragment the social forums into a series of diverse themes. The subsequent European Preparatory Assemblies (EPA's) have got smaller, crippled by a growing obsession with "methodology" which has "made the decision-making process even more opaque and unaccountable."<sup>2</sup> For

example it took more than a year to decide where the next one will be – in Malmo, Sweden in September 2008.

So what accounts for this state of affairs, just five years since the first and the most successful of the ESFs was held in Italy in Florence, November 2002 – an event that ended in a million strong demo and issued a call for the biggest global anti-war protest in history on 15 February 2003?

### The pre-history of the movement

The roots of the anti-capitalist movement lay in the jungle of southern Mexico with the rise of the Zapatistas (EZLN), fighting for indigenous rights against the federal government and to counter the effects of neoliberal trade agreements with the USA on their communities.

The People's Global Action arose as an international solidarity movement with the EZLN bringing its message and its way of organising to a larger audience. At the same time in the mid-1990s the rise of the internet and availability of air travel meant the material possibilities for enhanced political networking were being established, something the movement was quick to grab hold of.

The eruption of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis was the next link in the chain. The devastation of the jobs and lives of millions in south Asia and its subsequent impact on Latin America, as its effects spread to Brazil, heightened the incipient movement's awareness of the destructive capabilities of capitalist globalisation.

But it was the intervention of the multilateral institutions of the IMF and World Bank into these crisis torn countries that focussed the anger of North American and European activists. These institutions were dominated by their governments, and their interventions and prescriptions only deepened the misery of the people whose lives had been blighted by the anarchic character of the financial markets and the depredations of the multinationals. An insistent and sharper critique of these multilateral agencies emerged, leading many campaigns to focus their protests on the planned 1999 IMF ministerial

## In Prague the discussions, the networking, the unity in action, the comradeship experienced by workers and youth from many different countries was inspiring

meeting in Seattle.

The historic demonstration was a pivotal event that announced the arrival of a global movement that contested the legitimacy of the institutions and not just the style of their interventions. The mass movement demanded the IMF et al be destroyed – "nix it don't fix it" – a major step forward in anti-capitalist consciousness. Seattle was militant, democratic and fused a new generation of young activists with members of established working class organisations such as trade unions.<sup>3</sup> The bureaucrats of the IMF and their international masters were caught unprepared, their

hotels blockaded, their meetings disrupted and abruptly cut short, as a militant alliance, "from Turtles to Teamsters", battled with the cops in the streets of Seattle.

### From Seattle to Genoa

The effect in Europe of the brilliant mobilisation at Seattle was to bring into existence a broad pan-European movement committed to extending the summit sieges to Europe. The first success was the demonstration at Prague in September 2000. Prague was a historic event – the first truly pan-European, militant, anti-capitalist demonstration. It disrupted and cut short the meeting of the 14,000 bankers and bureaucrats from 182 countries. They packed up their bags and left a day early in a planned three day meeting. The *Washington Post* observed:

"In scenes reminiscent of protests outside a meeting of the two institutions in Washington in April, delegates from 182 countries found themselves trapped for six hours inside a downtown convention centre as demonstrators blocked all exit routes."<sup>4</sup>

In Prague the discussions, the networking, the unity in action, the comradeship experienced by workers and youth from many different countries was inspiring. The major defect of Prague was the failure to enlist significant trade union forces to the event, something that had been achieved at Seattle and which accounted for the ability to close the IMF meeting down.

Prague was swiftly followed by a mobilisation in Nice on 7 December against the EU inter-governmental conference, where several thousand anti-capitalists engaged in running battles with 15,000 French CRS, as the former sought to break through to the EU delegates' meeting. A new generation of youth and the socialist left were learning to collaborate with each other and steel themselves in defending and destroying barricades.

But once again Nice revealed a dangerous divide in the fledgling anti-capitalist movement. On 6 December 80,000 working class trade unionists from Europe took over Nice for the day to press for social reforms from the EU. The next day they were largely gone, the bureaucrats spiriting the workers away from the influence of the anti-capitalist minority. That left only 6-7,000 conscious anti-capitalists – whether socialist or anarchist – for the battles of the next day. They were young and mainly working class but for the most part not oriented to the organised labour movements.

This early phase of the movement culminated in the first World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre Brazil in January 2001, which gathered together some 20,000 activists from about 127 countries to Brazil to debate strategy and tactics, visions and programmes in hundreds of workshops and seminars. It was an immense step forward at the time, providing an opportunity for networking, laying the foundations for a multiplicity of solidarity initiatives and planning for future actions. It was the first truly international meeting of forces coming together against neoliberalism, imperialism and its institutions. It reflected a world radicalisation amongst youth, a mass protest against the actions of imperialism against the poor, a desire to radically change the world system, summed



up in the slogan "Another world is possible".

Whether this movement would develop from a fairly diverse and incoherent protest movement into a real coordinating fighting organisation depended on its leadership. It depended above all on whether its revolutionary and anti-capitalist wing could develop a coherent strategy and programme of struggle and whether it could triumph over the reformist forces aiming to control the WSF and its regional offshoots.

The WSF would prove the inspiration for a succession of continental Social Forums to be established over the next five years. It added an absolutely essential component to the summit sieges; a debate within the anti-capitalist movement about how and whether to fight aspects of capitalist oppression and exploitation or the system as a whole and with what tools and what objective; in short what was the exact character of the "another world" we were fighting for?

But 2001 was to prove a crucial turning point for the movement in two regards. First in Gothenburg in June and then Genoa in July, the state decided to unleash its repressive forces onto the movement on the streets, rather than simply contain it. This was to give rise to a huge and bitter debate within the anti-capitalist movement over the use of violence in resisting this repression.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, after the initial WSF (organised by largely Brazilian trade unions, political parties and NGOs on an ad hoc basis) an International Council was set up in June 2001 with a WSF secretariat. It drafted the *Porte Alegre Principles* to guide the WSF and regional spin-offs. It was a major backward step in that it imposed rigid reformist limits on the ambitions of the global movement and effectively bureaucratised decision-making, while shielding its "leaders" from accountability.

This self-selected leadership adopted principles that banned regional Social Forums from taking decisions and initiatives and formally banned political parties from participation. They were "principles" that could not be democratically challenged or changed. Instead of openly challenging and flouting this undemocratic straitjacket in the regional and world forums, political parties from RC to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) went along with them, attempting to subvert them without incurring the wrath of the WSF. Thus parties re-invented themselves as ACM front organisations (*Globalise Resistance*) and their leaders appeared representing journals rather than their parties. Regional forums like the ESF tacked on "meetings of the social movements", of parties, groups and trade union organisations, which voted on initiatives but took place formally outside the "WSF process".

## Repression

"There cannot be any dialogue with these desperados" These words of the Social Democratic German chancellor Schröder provided a warning that a new repressive tactic was about to be launched against the movement. In Gothenburg between 14-16 June 2001 the Swedish authorities set out to suppress democratic rights, break all the agreements they made with the organisers, and use violent repression – up to and including the shooting

of demonstrators. Their aim was to weaken, demoralise and disperse the movement.

On the morning of 14 June riot police laid siege to the convergence centre before any action had taken place, later storming the centre and arresting all those who were not able to escape. The next day the Swedish police stopped the march against the summit after a few hundred metres. After setting dogs on the marchers the police charged with mounted riot cops, lashing out with batons and whips. In the evening the cops – and some fascist thugs – provoked a street party into another confrontation, which culminated in the shooting of three demonstrators.

## In Gothenburg the Swedish authorities set out to suppress democratic rights, break all the agreements they made with the organisers, and use violent repression

Nothing like this had been seen in Sweden for sixty years, but the decision to repress the movement had been taken elsewhere. The president of France, the German chancellor and the British prime minister were its prime instigators when they called for the strongest measures to "defend" their summit against unarmed and, at the outset, entirely peaceful demonstrators.

By Gothenburg the growth of an international anti-capitalist movement was a real threat to the bosses and their governments. That is the reason why they started to criminalise its activists, to try to isolate the most radical parts of it from the broad working class masses. Blair, Bush and Schröder feared that as it became better organised, and developed links with the working class, a conscious anti-capitalism would come to the fore in the workers' movement. So they decided to try and crush or at the very least isolate the movement by violence and the removal of elementary democratic rights to travel, march and organise.

Gothenburg was merely a dress rehearsal for the anti-G8 mobilisation at Genoa in Italy in July. From the movement's perspective Genoa represented a great advance in so far as 200,000 people – the biggest demo so far – took to the streets on the last day of the protests. Genoa saw significant mobilisations of the rank and file of the main Italian trade unions plus the radical syndicalist federations like Cobas. In this sense it was a step forward from Prague and Gothenburg. It also saw delegations of trade unionists from other European countries. Thousands of supporters of *Rifondazione Comunista* were present too, reflecting the turn towards the anti-capitalist movement by the largest left party in Europe, lending its strength and credibility for the left within the European movement against an ever rightward moving *Attac*.

But for all these reasons the protest in Genoa that day was the bloodiest and most violent yet. Unarmed protester Carlo Giuliani was shot dead as Berlusconi gave the green light to the *Carabinieri* to repress the demonstrators.

Mass, peaceful marches were deliberately attacked with batons and teargas, the Indymedia centre was attacked, as was a school full of sleeping protesters, with many hospitalised. During the post-demonstration "sweep" by police, systematic use of extreme violence and even torture took place.

The effect of the repression was twofold. On the one hand, it further conservatised the reformist and autonomous wing of the movement, such as Attac, who railed against the violence of the anarchists and preached passivity in the face of the state's repression. Worse, Casarini and other leaders of Ya Basta, the largest Italian "autonomous" grouping, made a full-scale retreat from confrontation and street militancy, precisely as the Italian state had sought. On the other hand, the police actions gave a massive boost to the spread of the social forums in Italy, which had helped bring about the G8 protests in the first place. In the weeks following the murder of Carlo Giuliani new social forums came into existence in small towns and everywhere marches and protests took place demanding action against Carlo's killers.

The spread of the social forums in Italy provided a template for other countries, a model of how to build active, ongoing campaigns against all manner of attacks that could cohere the anti-capitalist movement and take it beyond planning for demonstrations. It held out the possibility of bringing the organised working class and anti-capitalist youth into organic contact with each other. However as it turned out in few other countries was the anti-capitalist movement strong enough or the workers' movement radical enough to replicate the Italian experience.

### High point of the ESF

On the back of the strong social forum movement in Italy the first – and most successful – European Social Forum was held in Florence in November 2002. About 35,000 attended the three days of the ESF (more than twice the anticipated number) participating in more than 400 ses-

## The developing anti-capitalist movement grasped the essential motivations for the promised invasion of Iraq, which was to secure oil supplies for the US and EU

sions of debate and discussion. It was strongly infused with a radical anti-war mood as the occupation of Afghanistan unfolded and the impending invasion of Iraq drew nearer. But the fight against Bush's "war on terror" and invasion plans sharply divided the movement at Florence, with Attac leaders Bernard Cassan and Susan George insisting there was no essential link to be made between the anti-war movement and the movement against corporate globalisation. They fiercely resisted attempts to identify the ESF with a call to oppose war and occupation. The leaders of Italian reformism, the Democratic Left refused

even to attend the ESF, so hostile were they to questioning support for the war.

But the developing anti-capitalist movement fully grasped the essential motivations for the promised invasion of Iraq, which was to secure its oil supplies for US and EU governments and corporations. On the last day of the ESF up to one million trade unionists and others from around Italy joined those at the ESF in a massive demonstration against war and neoliberalism, proving the movement had been galvanised by the war plans of Bush, Blair and Berlusconi rather than cowed by the brutality of Genoa the previous year. On the following day the Assembly of Social Movements skirted the ban on calls to action made by the ESF hierarchy and issued a declaration for a global protest against the war on 15 February 2003. When it took place more than twenty million took to the streets to protest, including an unprecedented two million in London.

When the second ESF was held in Paris in November 2003 the movement stood at a crossroads. Would the ESF capitalise upon the radicalisation and expansion of the anti-war movement that took to the streets in February? Would it respond to the mounting co-ordinated attacks of the EU to organise against privatisation, cuts in social gains, student grants, pension rights? Would it act as the conscious organising centre of this movement, drawing in the millions of workers behind it, even against the resistance of their bureaucratic leaders?

The Paris ESF was about the same size as Florence but with less participation by the organised workers' movement. It was also less vibrant and dynamic than Florence and the platforms were dominated by the older, more academic, NGO and reformist wing of the movement, as befitted an event in which Attac had a key role in organising and controlling. There were many plenaries with long lists of platform speakers and little room for debate.

At Paris the reformist wing took the offensive against the left. In key debates on the future of the movement Bernard Cassen criticised the militancy of the ESF in Florence. He criticised the ESF's annual nature, bemoaning the over-concentration on "action", etc. He repeatedly argued that the movement should focus on winning over public opinion, and seek to persuade those in power to change course.

For Cassen there was no question of the movement embracing the cause of the Iraqi resistance to the US and British occupation. This would only alienate those in power that Cassen sought to convince of the need for a miniscule tax on short term speculative capital flows, the Tobin Tax, a tax he believes could humanise capitalism!

The outcome of the Assembly of Social Movements was also a victory for Attac. The final brokered statement it issued marked its victory – they prevented the movement from even calling for and organising a Europe wide day of action in 2004 against EU-wide attacks, let alone fighting for the general strike that was needed. This at a time when the German and Italian trade unions were heavily involved in struggles to defend conditions and wages. It completely ignored the class struggle in Europe and did nothing to aid the necessary fusing of the anti-capitalist movement with the labour movement. Indeed



militant sections of the German trade unions like IG Metal, which attended the Paris ESF in some strength, not surprisingly felt let down by this decision, and played little role in future ESFs. The ESF had shown itself incapable of drawing in the European workers' movement and becoming, through its leadership, an organising centre for its struggles.

The Paris gathering, then, represented a backward step from which the ESF did not recover politically. The London ESF in October 2004 was much smaller than the previous forums and although the Assembly did endorse a number of calls to action for the year ahead (including against the G8 in Scotland in July 2005) it rejected calls to set up a steering committee which could organise for action in between ESFs, thus condemning the ESF to remain a talking shop – and one which in the future would only meet every two years.

### Political crisis of the movement

Outside of the framework of ESF's themselves developments within specific countries where the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements had been strong set the movement back. In Italy a crucial national meeting of the social forums in Bologna took place in February 2004 with one thousands delegates from local forums. It met against the background of a series of one day wildcat strikes in the public services, including militant protests by parents and school students against Berlusconi's attempts to "reform" the public school system. While the official leaderships, both political and trade union, were doing all they could to obstruct or defuse the situation, the social forums came up with no ideas on how to take forward and give political focus to the incredible militancy of rank and file workers. Not a single clear call for a national indefinite general strike was issued by any of the speakers, nor any call to make the social forums the organising centres for the wildcat strikers themselves, as well as for solidarity with them.

From this point on the Italian social forums declined (even though one million marched in Rome against the war in Iraq a month later). In part this was a result of the right wing turn by the leading left force in Italy – Rifondazione – turning away from the anti-capitalist movement it had done so much to bolster in 2001-03. The leadership around Fausto Bertinotti campaigned in 2004 to commit it to pacifism and opposition to political violence in order to prepare it for entry into any future centre left government led by Romano Prodi. The effect of this turn on the Italian movement has been described as "nothing short of catastrophic."<sup>6</sup>

In France the altermondialist movement, led by Attac and the PCF, and including the LCR, focussed on campaigning for a No vote in the May 2005 referendum on the proposed EU constitution. A large network of local 29 May collectives organised a massive political campaign and secured a No vote. But the leading forces in the campaign chose not to keep this movement together and direct it towards combating other attacks, instead they fell out over organising separate election campaigns around rival candidates for president in 2007.

The anti-capitalist movement has not disappeared over the last two years. It has held summit protests and social forums, but it has not achieved the same degree of political consciousness as before or crucially, taken root in the working class. Symptomatic in this regard was the mobilisation "against" the G8 in July 2005. Whereas four years earlier in Genoa 250,000 marched to oppose the G8 gang of criminals as a whole, in Edinburgh a 240,000 strong

## The anti-capitalist movement has not disappeared over the last two years. But it has not achieved the same degree of political consciousness as before

anti-debt mobilisation on 2 July was actually encouraged by one of these criminals – Tony Blair – to put pressure on his bourgeois partners in the G8 to sign up to his debt-relief agenda. It was a mass demonstration dominated by the churches and the NGOs with little organised trade union presence.

The G8's right to exist was not questioned but rather the G8 was seen as a potential tool to improve the lives of Africa's poor. In Genoa the G8 was seen as the main problem, along with the WTO and IMF/WB. If Genoa represented a high point of systemic critique by the anti-capitalist movement, then Edinburgh represented an unwinding of the anti-capitalist critique back towards single issue reform politics. In this sense the Edinburgh Make Poverty History (MPH) march was a rerun of the 1998 Birmingham G8 summit, only this time much bigger because government joined with business in backing it.

The small size of the demonstrations attempting to lay siege to the Gleneagles summit on 6 July, consisting of a march of 5,000 past its gates and a few hundred anarchists and youth who attempted blockades, confirmed the fact that the anti-capitalist movement was no longer able to mobilise militants on the scale that it had at Prague, Nice,

permanentrevolution.net

### The ABC of Communism

**A-Z of Marxism**

A is for Alienation, B is for Bolshevism, C is for Capital ...  
 Re-read this excellent series of articles, first published over ten years ago in the newspaper of Workers Power. I is for imperialism ... R is for Reformism or Revolution ... T is for Trotsky ... W is for War ...

Available on our website now



Gothenburg, Genoa or Florence.

For the committed tens of thousands of mainly young anti-capitalists in Europe the G8 remains the problem not the solution; but for the millions of ordinary working class and progressive middle class people this is not

## The anti-capitalist movement as it developed from Seattle offered the possibility to unite a youthful and radical movement with mass workers' struggles

the case. And in part this is due to two factors that pertain now but did not in 1999-2003. The first is that under pressure from the anti-capitalist movement, the multi-lateral agencies, which had been the target of the movement's actions, went onto the counter-offensive. The IMF

and World Bank spent a lot of time and money seeking to rebrand themselves, to demonstrate that they could "listen" to the concerns of those affected by its policies. In particular they have had some success in co-opting a number of NGOs around the world into participating in their policy reviews. They have established forums for dialogue with their NGO critics. One only has to contrast the NGOs' stance towards the Prague anti-IMF mobilisations in 2000 and their stance towards the Scottish G8 in 2005 to see the effect this has had.

But in turn this "rebranding" exercise would not have worked but for something else that has happened since 2003; namely, that global capitalism has not been in ever deepening crisis but has experienced a significant upturn. At the very least this has had the effect of allowing the IMF and World Bank to take a back seat - they simply have not had to impose a string of structural adjustment programmes upon crisis-ridden countries of the global south. Meanwhile the G8 had the luxury of doing something similar around debt-relief, even though it turned out to be more talk than action.

### SWP'S GLOBALIST RESISTANCE

## A rush to rewrite history as the mask slips

LEADING SUPPORTERS of the ESF in Britain have begun to question its utility. Alex Callinicos and Chris Nineham have been permanent fixtures among the "English delegation" at ESFs and EPAs for the last five years. They are leading members of the SWP in the UK and its anti-capitalist front organisation Globalise Resistance, now apparently either defunct or "parked".

In *International Socialism* 115 this summer they take stock of the ESF. They are openly critical of the ban on political parties enshrined in the Charter of Principles, and criticise the damage that the autonomist wing of the movement has done in preventing effective decision-making. But they are silent of course on their own record in contributing to the failings of the ESF. They fail to mention for example, that although they did not agree with the ban on political parties they did not openly contest it; rather they abided by it and did not support those attempting to get it overturned. Instead they chose

repeatedly to hide behind their Globalise Resistance masks.

More importantly, from the outset of the WSF and ESF process the SWP opposed, even sabotaged, the setting up of local social forums in every major town and city, drawing in local, rank and file trade unionists and other activists. Even when in 2002-04, following the Italian examples, this was realistic and essential if the mobilisation for the London ESF in 2004 was to reach new layers of militants.

For their own sectarian reasons they could not countenance that Globalise Resistance should lose its monopoly as the British face of anti-capitalism. In one EPA, in the early stages of planning the London ESF, Alex Callinicos opposed and mocked the suggested amendment from Workers Power (our former organisation) that the Organising Committee should promote and support such local social forums.

They preferred the UK movement to remain without any organised mass base so the SWP could concentrate on its populist

electoral adventure with Respect up until June 2004 elections, relying on the GLA, NGOs and union leaders to build for the ESF.

And while the SWP may now choose to criticise their opponents in the anti-capitalist movement for their political limitations they certainly refrained from doing it on platforms during the ESFs themselves. Thus at the Paris ESF it was Chris Nineham who reined in his more enthusiastic international comrades when they argued forcefully for calling for a co-ordinated day of action by trade unionists across Europe. Nineham admonished them for risking a split in the movement and settled for a vague call on the trade union tops to do so.

It is now, only when the movement is obviously faltering, that Callinicos and Nineham have to rush to re-write history and absolve themselves from blame. The method of refusing to criticise your "special united front" partners and regularly acting as footsoldiers for them was as successful in the ESF/WSF as it turned out to be in Respect.

Since 2001 it has been the World Trade Organisation that has more or less had to carry the weight of the anti-capitalist movement's anger, which is also why the fulcrum of the global movement has shifted to Asia to some degree. But again, largely due to inter-state differences between the USA, EU and a coalition of strong third world nations, the Dohar Round and its threats to impose a new neoliberal round of attacks on the nations of the south in the name of "free trade", has run into the ground. Global growth over the last five years has boosted many economies in the south, and with it the bargaining position of their governments in negotiations. If anything this process has further strengthened the reformist wing of the anti-capitalist movement, since the NGOs have provided a small army of advisers to these governments.

## World Social Forum

The processes at work inside the ESF have also been at play inside the WSF, but with even more grotesque and reactionary features. The most right wing reformist and petit bourgeois forces now have a grip upon the leading committees of the WSF. The most recent WSF in Nairobi in January 2007 plunged to new depths in the politics on display and the organisation of the event.<sup>7</sup> Reflecting the political composition of a majority on the International Council, a high profile was given to those speakers (including reactionary ex-heads of state in Africa) who preached the humanisation of capitalism. The large NGOs and major trade union leaders dominate, and routinely give their support to the Lula or Prodi governments, despite their attacks on working people.

The NGO organisers of the Nairobi event set ticket prices equivalent to a week's wage for local people, excluding the voice of the poor. The food and security were run by businesses owned by a Kenyan government minister and cronies, with police locking up people for hours in on-site cells on suspicion of not paying the proper entry fee.

Walden Bello, a leading figure in the global south movement, was moved to note of the last WSF that "its politics was so diluted, and big business interests linked to the Kenyan ruling elite were so brazen in commercialising it. Even Petrobras, the Brazilian state corporation that is a leading exploiter of the natural resource wealth of Latin America, was busy trumpeting itself as a friend of the Forum. There was a strong sense of going backward rather than forward in Nairobi."<sup>8</sup>

After several years of successive WSFs refusing to take a lead in co-ordinating struggles, Bello says:

"The WSF as an institution is unanchored in actual global political struggles, and this is turning it into an annual festival with limited social impact ... The WSF's not taking a stand on the Iraq War, on the Palestine issue, and on the WTO is said to be making it less relevant and less inspiring to many of the networks it had brought together."

He concludes by asking: "is it time for the WSF to fold up its tent and give way to new modes of global organization of resistance and transformation?"

We can and should ask the same of the ESF. If there are no national networks of social forums on the ground

and the ESF leaders refuse and even obstruct the building of them, then what hope is there for holding leaders to account and changing the direction of the ESF or WSF? If the existence of the ESF promotes the illusion that it could exercise a co-ordinating and initiating function for class-wide struggles, yet in practice it obstructs it, should we not turn to other forms of united front co-ordination? The actions against the G8 in Gleneagles or Rostock show that it is possible, indeed necessary, to organise actions outside the framework of the ESF. Yet these actions are fragmentary and, despite being genuine protests against the lords of capital, they provide no strategic or political organisation that can mobilise millions in anti-capitalist action.

The anti-capitalist movement as it developed from Seattle offered the possibility for revolutionaries to unite a youthful and radical movement with mass workers' struggles against neoliberalism. It could have built a powerful movement joining the workers of the imperialist countries with the oppressed and exploited of the global south in a common struggle against neoliberal capitalism. It could have provided the road to building a new workers' international, a revolutionary and anti-capitalist one. It failed because of the strength of reformism in the movement and because of the unwillingness of its far left wing, the left of Rifondazione, the syndicalist trade union groupings, the SWP/IST and LCR/FI to struggle against the reformists and win the best elements of the movement to a revolutionary perspective. The ESFs and even the WSFs will remain a forum for intervention for revolutionaries, but only in the sense of trying to rally the anti-capitalist wing of the movement away from these leaders to the building of a new revolutionary international organisation.

## NOTES

1. See Susan George's account at [www.tni.org/detail\\_page.phtml?&page=archives\\_george\\_attacnewbeginning](http://www.tni.org/detail_page.phtml?&page=archives_george_attacnewbeginning)
2. "At an impasse: anti-capitalism and the social forums today", Alex Callinicos and Chris Nineham, *International Socialism* 115, p100
3. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with the subsequent evolution of the US anti-capitalist movement. However, 9/11 was a great blow to it and although the anti-war movement has had some impressive mobilisations, it has been beset with problems. See G Binette in this issue.
4. The *Los Angeles Times* acknowledged: "For a time late Tuesday afternoon, protesters achieved their goal of blocking access to and from the meeting hall for the opening session of the three-day gathering. Delegates eventually left by special subway trains, but evening plans for many were disrupted."
5. It was to put an end to the "utopian moment" of the first phase of the anti-capitalist movement, or as Attac leader Susan George put it in describing the period 1999-2001 - "the most beautiful hope for thirty years".
6. Callinicos and Nineham, op cit p97
7. See for example Hurt's report for the United Secretariat of the Fourth International: [www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1296](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1296)
8. "The Forum at the Crossroads", Walden Bello at: [www.focusweb.org/the-forum-at-the-crossroads.html?itemid=94](http://www.focusweb.org/the-forum-at-the-crossroads.html?itemid=94)



**THE YOUTH DEBATE**

## What constitutes a genuinely independent youth organisation?

To the comrades of Permanent Revolution:

At our international conference in July, we agreed on the “Theses on independent youth organisations” to explain why we are convinced that revolutionary youth organisations must be independent. I’d like to add some comments in response to the article by Stuart King in the last issue of Permanent Revolution (PR).

Our break with our former parent party and your former group, the League for a Fifth International (LFI), revolved around the famous “youth question”. During our fight within the LFI’s youth organisation, we objected to the LFI leadership making binding decisions for their members in *Revo*. Since LFI members made up a big majority at conferences, the discussions were purely theatrical – *Revo*’s documents were worked out by the LFI leadership and never seen by the group’s young members. The “leaders” of such a youth group were those that had the ears of the LFI apparatus, not those who could convince young activists of their positions.

We had a difficult time discussing this question with the LFI. Some of their members said that their leadership decided nothing beforehand. Others said that it was perfectly democratic that they decided everything beforehand. Recently, they all seem to have agreed on the airtight explanation “I can’t remember how we work in *Revo*” or simply “I don’t know”.

### Our alternative

To be fair to the LFI, it is a complicated question. We are trying to build up a youth organisation with a Marxist programme and independent structures, without succumbing to the danger of an “anti-party” or “anti-Leninist” attitude. We object to the practice

of a faction in a youth organisation which gets a line handed down from above. This practice is particularly ridiculous when it’s a majority faction that imposes this line on the youth without discussion. (The LFI have not yet defended this practice of theirs because they have not yet decided whether to openly admit it is their practice.)

So what is our alternative? We spent a long time discussing this, to make practical proposals to the LFI, and we have developed a number of guidelines, based on our own experiences and on the history of the communist youth movement. We have no objection with our members being “members of other Trotskyist groups with whom we share general programmatic agreement” (from our conference documents). But in order to maintain the independence of the

**If a revolutionary youth organisation is immersed in the struggles of the youth, it will be subjected to violent political pressures from young people in struggle who join its ranks**

youth organisation, we of course limit the number of these “party” members in any leading body to 40%. More importantly, we require that these party members do “not work as a closed faction within *REVOLUTION*, making all decisions beforehand” (ibid).

For us it is self-evident that the members of a revolutionary organisation defend basic principles on opposing imperialist war, fighting all forms of oppression, the independence of the working class etc. But must they agree on all documents for a revolutionary

youth organisation, before the youth themselves have had a chance to discuss these questions? Should they decide on what campaigns to carry out, on what to write in flyers, on where to hold meetings, and then present these “proposals” to the youth?

We don’t think so. We think this destroys the independence of the youth organisation, removes the possibility of young activists gaining experience in struggle and makes the whole project essentially useless for the class struggle.

Naturally, members of a revolutionary organisation must work as a disciplined faction within trade unions, reformist parties etc. However, we don’t think this applies to a revolutionary organisation’s own youth group, because it is not hostile terrain dominated by the class enemy, and a revolutionary organisation must not mobilise its members to fight its own young sympathisers!

For us the question emerges, how to fight centrism, anarchism, bourgeois nationalism and “anti-imperialism”, pacifism and other ideologies opposed to revolutionary



Please send your letters to: [contact@permanentrevolution.net](mailto:contact@permanentrevolution.net)  
 We reserve the right to edit and shorten all letters  
 Please indicate if you want your name and address withheld

name – it is generally supposed to decide on its own policies, but if some complicated question arises, the party (or small group that would like to think of itself as a party) jumps in and decides for them.

**The SWP's mistakes**

The US Socialist Workers' Party never got beyond the stage of a propaganda group, but it was certainly closer to a revolutionary party than any of the groups we're dealing with. You quote a resolution by the SWP on youth work from 1938, which seems to contain a number of problems.

This resolution can only be understood if we remember that just 17 months after it was passed, the SWP lost the entire Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) – or at least a big enough majority that the party couldn't even maintain a facade of the YPSL.

Unfortunately, we can't jet over to the New York University Library to study the, doubtlessly fascinating, original documents from the faction fight in the YPSL. So we are only speculating when we say this resolution's tendency towards a bureaucratic and essentially apolitical conception of a revolutionary youth organisation helped to drive the YPSL into the hands of the SWP opposition.

This resolution makes very clear that while the youth are to be "politically subordinated to the party", they are not "to make decisions for the party [!] or to participate in making these decisions with equal rights". Was anyone proposing that the YPSL make decisions for the SWP? This was merely a ridiculous exaggeration to cover up the fact that the resolution was demanding that revolutionary activists submit to decisions over which they have no real influence. So for all the talk of a revolutionary youth organisation as a school for members of the revolutionary party, democratic centralism is not to exist for the youth.

This resolution dismisses any kind of serious political debate within the youth organisation as

"budding youth vanguardism". In fact, the only action mentioned positively in the resolution was the YPSL's "colorful appearance": "the YPSL membership in uniform, with banners, with marching, and songs" apparently helped to boost the morale of SWP members!

Trotsky remarked at the same time that "The worst thing that could happen to us would be to establish a division of labour within

and went back from the Shachtmanites to the SWP. But the condition for this would have been an open and non-bureaucratic relation of the party leadership to the youth.

The SWP leadership offered these young people no real opportunity to decide on important questions – they could rubber stamp the party leadership's line or get out. Cannon was basically offering the youth the

**Trotsky remarked "The worst thing that could happen to us would be to establish a division of labour: the young rank and file play with colours and trumpets and the selected cadres attend to the politics"**

the youth organisation: the young rank and file play with colours and trumpets and the selected cadres attend to the politics", but this apparently didn't reach the SWP leadership.

**Political questions and the youth question**

In 1940, the SWP lost its youth organisation to Max Shachtman, and again in 1961, the SWP lost the bulk of its youth organisation, the Young Socialists Alliance, to Gerry Healy. In both cases, political questions were central: in 1940, the YPSL abandoned the concept of the Soviet Union as a workers' state that must be defended against imperialism, whereas in 1961 the YSA defended the concept of Castro's Cuba as a deformed workers' state against the SWP's increasing adaptation to Castroism.

These were not struggles around the "youth question". But in both these struggles, the concepts of youth organisations must have played an important role. We are convinced that at least a chunk of the YPSL membership in the 1930s could have been won for Trotsky's and the SWP's principled defence of the Soviet Union – for the simple reason that in the 1950s a large part of the YPSL adopted this position

role of a colour guard. Schachtman and his petit bourgeois opposition, on the other hand, offered them a political organisation with real debates and independent structures. It's no wonder that virtually all the SWP youth chose Schachtman.

If they had wanted to play around with flags they could have just as well joined the Boy Scouts.

[www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

**On-line dossier: archive on youth**

<b>History of youth organisations</b>	Historic documents on youth work available on line now
	1938 resolutions on youth work from the founding of the Fourth International and from the SWP(US)
	Martin Abern and Trotsky on youth work in the 1930s
	Documents from the Young Socialist Alliance and SWP 1957-61 – James P Cannon, Murry Weiss, Tim Wolforth and Shane Mage



### To end with a provocation . . .

Stuart King ends his article with a bit of a provocation. We've been called anarchists before (by the LFI, who have also called us Stalinists, economists, maximalists, bourgeois liberals and "just like Nazis"), but he writes that our opposition to a party faction in the youth movement is equivalent to the slogan of "soviets without Bolsheviki" (this of course being the slogan raised by counter-revolutionary agents in the Kronstadt rebellion).

So you will have to forgive us a provocative thesis as well: your position is identical to the LFI's. We certainly won't disagree that organisational questions are secondary to political ones – the LFI's bureaucratic methods with their youth organisation can only be explained by a perspective of world revolution "right around the corner", and in fact they do constantly justify their methods with the perspective of Revo as a "mass organisation", with their faction not actually having a majority but nonetheless representing the masses of young people who are about to join the tiny group.

However, you won't disagree that bad politics generate bad organisational forms. The LFI works as a faction within Revo, and they have as long as the LFI has done any kind of youth work (see the document by Arbeitsgruppe Marxismus at: [www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1056](http://www.permanentrevolution.net/?view=entry&entry=1056)), although they've never tried to justify this practice.

We've gone to great lengths to show how the SWP in the late 1950s and early 1960s explicitly rejected the practice of factional work in its own youth organisation (since it "destroys the unity of the youth organisation" – you published a document in your last journal so we won't repeat the quotes here). Another example we use is that in the 1930s the SWP youth organisation openly discussed questions on which the party was divided – for example the tactic of calling for a labor party in the US was supported by a majority within

the SWP, but SWP members in the YPSL argued against this tactic and for a time won a majority amongst the youth.

This is the only way a revolutionary youth organisation can work. If the party (or the small group that would like to be one) works out its line beforehand and imposes it on a closed faction within the youth organisation, the youth organisation becomes nothing more than a flag-carrying front with no internal democracy, and trains apparatchiks rather than revolutionary fighters. As you experienced yourselves, such a hyperactive youth front can also be used by an unscrupulous leadership to undermine democracy in a revolutionary organisation.

As our theses make clear, we believe a revolutionary youth organisation should be an organic part of a revolutionary party, "taking part in its decision-making on equal footing and complying with the common decisions." However, a party is not the same thing as a handful of activists, and

our understanding is that the Comintern's position on *organisational independence and political subordination* of the youth organisations was based on the emergence of mass communist parties. It would be ridiculous for a revolutionary youth organisation to a priori subordinate itself to a small propaganda group, as the LFI demanded of us, since such a small group has no possibility to demonstrate the correctness of its programme in practice.

The question is, how we can contribute to the formation of a revolutionary workers' party. We don't think it makes sense for six people to form the "party", for three of them to form the "Political Bureau" and then to wait for the masses to flow in. We think the best contribution we can make is training young activists through the experience of building up their own organisation, dealing with all political questions that arise.

Wlodek Flakin  
Revolution Berlin

### REVOLUTION INDEPENDENT YOUTH ORGANIZATION

## Theses on independent youth organisations

UNDER CAPITALISM, young people are subject to special forms of oppression. We get bad jobs with low wages, we suffer under the arbitrary rule of parents and teachers, are impeded in the development of our sexuality, we are not allowed to vote but can be sent to die imperialist wars, to name just a few examples. This oppression is a product of capitalism and therefore it can only be ended by the overthrow of this system.

This oppression is also reproduced within the left. In any reformist party one sees how adults decide on policies while young people go flyposting.

Today's anti-capitalist movement, which has been active around the world since the protests against the

WTO meeting in Seattle, is primarily a youth movement. The heads of the movement are from the NGOs or the reformist parties and trade unions, but the hands and feet of the movements are radical youth.

The traditional left, i.e. the reformist parties and the trade unions, is shockingly weak amongst young people. The anti-capitalist movement of today is an expression of the fact that young people are becoming active by going around this left and the workers' movement.

The most advanced parts of the anti-capitalist movement must be won for the class struggle, for the perspective of proletarian revolution. We fight for the young base of the movement to organise

itself independently of the "old" reformist leadership and take the wheel themselves.

To move forward, these radicalised youth need an independent revolutionary youth organisation. For a century the communist movement has advocated such an organisation. The Communist International wrote in 1921: "The entire history of the proletarian youth movement in every country shows that only independent, that is, self-governing, youth organisations develop bold and determined revolutionary fighters and astute organisers of the proletarian revolution and soviet power."<sup>1</sup>

The slogan of the "complete independence of the youth movement", which Lenin defended,<sup>2</sup> has two aspects:

1. breaking young people from the organisations of reformism, by strictly rejecting every type of tutelage and bureaucratism.

2. giving young activists the opportunity to take on responsibility and thus learn from their own successes and mistakes.

Therefore REVOLUTION works to build up a completely independent, revolutionary communist youth movement. Political and organisational independence means that young people must decide on their policies themselves and put them into practice independently. Young activists need more than just theory: they need a spirit of resistance and self-reliance that they can only learn in the struggle for their ideas. (They already learn blind obedience in the bourgeoisie's schools.) A communist youth organisation must be a school for revolutionary struggle, with constant political education to impart Marxist theory.

We want a broad youth organisation – in which all young people who want to fight against the capitalist system can participate, with a programme based on Marxist theory and the experience of the workers' movement. Every generation must approach socialism on its own paths, and therefore young activists today must work out new ideas

rather than just adopting ready-made formulas from their "parents". Therefore, a revolutionary youth organisation must not only intervene in the class struggle resolutely, but also provide an arena for the widest debates on all political questions.

Independence does not mean that we want to divide ourselves

would unite revolutionaries of all ages and – in contrast to a small propaganda group – lead significant actions in the class struggle. The youth must then be in the front lines of these actions. But even in this case the youth organisation would need to maintain its organisational independence, i.e. the participation in this party

## Concretely this means for us: we want suggestions for our work, but the youth must decide themselves what to do with these suggestions

from older activists. More experienced revolutionaries are extremely important to us as teachers and advisors. But as Karl Liebknecht declared a hundred years ago: "The youth must elect their leaders and advisors themselves."<sup>3</sup> Concretely this means for us: we want suggestions for our work, but the youth must decide themselves what to do with these suggestions.

We want to win other revolutionary groups and especially their young members to the project of supporting and building up independent youth groups. On this basis we will work together with other revolutionary groups where we share programmatic goals. These groups must accept, as a strategic project, that young activists need self-governing structures (and thus abstain from closed factions and "entryism" in their own youth organisation).

Building up an independent revolutionary youth organisation is not an end in itself. The point is to mobilise forces amongst the youth for the formation of a revolutionary party of the working class.

When a revolutionary workers' party with influence on the masses emerges, a revolutionary youth organisation must become an organic part of it, i.e. taking part in its decision-making on equal footing and complying with the common decisions. Such a party

would need to be constantly re-considered.

To win the broadest possible forces amongst the youth for a revolutionary programme and a corresponding organisation, we call for the formation of a revolutionary youth international. We do not see this as a short term project to be realised in the next months – for us this is a strategic orientation which we constantly aim for.

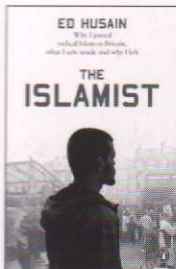
28 July 2007, Liberec

### NOTES

1. "Theses on the Youth Movement", passed by the Executive Committee of the Communist International in August 1920, in *Declarations of Independence*, p17
2. "Jugend-Internationale" by VI Lenin, in *Declarations of Independence*, p15
3. "Workers' movement and youth organisation" by Karl Liebknecht, in *Declarations of Independence*, p13

Further feedback, including "PR and the Kids" by James Turley, of Communist Students other replies to it can be found at: <http://csukblog.wordpress.com/> duplicated on our own website under the section on youth

iRevo has become  
**REVOLUTION**  
INDEPENDENT YOUTH ORGANIZATION  
[www.revolution.int.tf](http://www.revolution.int.tf)



## The saga of a disillusioned Jihadist

THE ISLAMIST

Ed Husain

Penguin / 2007 / £8.99

ARTICULATE AND well educated, Ed Husain has rapidly become the media's latest darling on issues relating to "radical Islam" in the UK. He speaks with authority on what it is that draws youth to the ideology, and what needs to be done to end its supposed grip. Calmly, almost reassuringly, he gives a message that would delight Blair and Brown, as can be judged from the praise heaped upon him by the likes of Melanie Philips and Simon Jenkins.

The strap line for the *Islamist* is "Why I joined radical Islam, what I saw and why I left" and the book pretty much does what it says on the tin. Husain describes his spiritual and political journey as a British born Muslim, from being a young teenager at the time of the first Gulf War up to the present day and the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings. It is the age and emotions of the protagonist and his circle of friends, all of whom are seeking answers in a world they did not create, that gives the book any interest, rather than its ultimately shallow political analysis or its sanctimonious conclusions.

Husain was born in Britain to parents from India and Bangladesh. His family are traditional and observant Muslims with a spiritual approach to their religion, eclectic in their appreciation of other religions and cultures. The young Mohamed enjoyed this atmosphere and was a keen listener at the feet of the charismatic theologians linked to his parents' Mosque. At the start of the first Gulf War he was encouraged to be aware of what was happening, but without any significant political analysis. For his family, religion and politics were separate entities, one based in and

around the Mosque and the other in the Labour Party. The dominant culture of his youth was of the benefits of a secular state with freedom of worship.

It was at school and college as a sixteen year old that Husain began to read texts in English and was first introduced to the idea that "religion and politics are one and the same in Islam" and that the ideal was a state based on the tenets of Islam. If Islam contained the best code of ethics, then how much better would a state be that was founded on and governed by the principles of Islam? This was a conclusion that had been rejected by his parents but one that would become increasingly attractive to this teenager.

### If Islam contained the best code of ethics, then how much better would a state be that was founded on and governed by the principles of Islam?

Over the next two years Husain describes his move away from the Brick Lane Mosque of his family to the East London Mosque as the first stepping-stone in his journey to radical Islam. At this Mosque he enjoyed the younger, more organised, politically educated and dynamic atmosphere. Here Islam was not merely a religion but based on the ideology of Jamat-e-Islam, a movement that sought increasing influence in politics and the law. It organised through the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO) and actively contributed to the Muslim community on a practical and social level. It promoted unity of purpose and a sense of belonging – a feeling that was passed on to other students through their

activism in local colleges. Husain describes the increasing influence of the YMO in Tower Hamlets College, establishing Islam as something that could give an identity and a focus whilst challenging the established order represented by college authorities and the older generation.

However this spirit of rebellion, harnessed through religion, contained within it the intolerance symptomatic of any literalist approach to religious texts. Anti-semitism, homophobia and sexism became part of their everyday language. It is in this section of the book that Husain begins an interesting debate with himself about the role of dress codes for women within Islam, their religious and political appropriation and impact on both men and women's attitudes and behaviour. It is a theme he returns to throughout the book as part of his internal dialogue about what represents the essence of the Muslim faith and what is a manufactured ossification

of behaviours that were merely cultural norms in the Middle East of 1,400 years ago. However as an eighteen year old, the increasing popularity of the hijab represented a visible sign of Islamism as an increasing political force.

In 1992 the war in Bosnia had a profound and radicalising impact on Muslim youth. Muslims, and significantly, white Muslims were being slaughtered on their European doorstep while the UN did nothing. Husain states that whilst going off to fight in Bosnia did not appeal to him, for many youth it was an instinctive act of solidarity that was also codified in Islam as an act of Jihad. Bosnia, even more than Palestine and Afghanistan, confirmed not only



the failure of capitalism and communism to provide solutions but also the belief that there was an international conspiracy of hatred against Islam and the Muslim populations. For some, Jihad was about to go global.

It was at this time that Husain met members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. This organisation rejected man-made democracy, national politics and the parochialism of other strands of Islamism. It supported the overthrow of Muslim regimes, all of whom were corrupt, and the establishment of a pure Islamic state (caliphate). Rather than endless calls for the lobby of parliament and the UN for a solution to Bosnia Hizb ut-Tahrir called for a true single Islamic state with a centralised political leadership, a programme based on the teachings of Mohammed, a powerful army and a willingness to declare state Jihad. Within the state, wealth would be distributed from the rich to the righteous, first to the poor Muslims of Africa and when other non-Muslim nations were won to the Islamic state through conquest and conversion, their poverty would also be alleviated. Where ummah had been considered a spiritual brotherhood of Muslims, this was declared as its political and practical embodiment.

For the young Husain, Hizb ut-Tahrir offered not only a solution to the starving, but a methodology of party building and overthrow as a means to achieve that solution. He states that he was attracted to its apparent intellectual vigour, clarity of purpose, committed activity, sense of belonging and superiority. Whilst Hizb ut-Tahrir rejected individual Jihad as a pointless exercise it did not reject it in principle. Husain believes that as a Hizb ut-Tahrir activist he encouraged Muslim fervour and "a sense of separation from others, a belief that Muslims were worthier than other humans" that ultimately led to the murder of a black Christian at his college, following an altercation over a pool table. Husain points to this event as the start of his journey away from radical Islam and his move to

calling for the proscription of Hizb ut-Tahrir by the British government.

Husain then went to university to study history, and also read philosophy, Arabic and the Koran. He became involved in discussions with other Islamic and Islamist organisations and experienced life in Syria and Saudi Arabia. These journeys bolstered his realisation that Wahhabism married to politicised Islam is at the basis of the current terrorist movements. He began to reject intolerance and division, came to realise that all political movements have a material basis and are steeped in historical and cultural developments, that the notion of a "pure spiritual" state is a myth and that all Islamist movements are based on programmes that have been developed by man. Through this acquired knowledge, he returned to his Sufist, mystical Islamic roots.

In his book Husain shows, quite rightly, how the vacuum created by a lack of secular answers to the profound injustices of the world can draw impressionistic youth to the ultimately reactionary programme of religious fundamentalism. It also highlights how the cultural ignorance of the non-Muslim population on the liberal and radical left can result in an unprincipled accommodation to intolerance.

So in this highly personal narrative, what are the political lessons that Husain draws? What are his answers to the starvation, injustice, exploitation, racial and

national oppression that so moved him as a youth and which existed before and contributed to the rise of radical Islam.

He highlights how movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir are predominantly [ITALIC]political rather than religious movements, but then remains rather quiet about the political rather than spiritual means to oppose fundamentalism. He sadly concludes that America and Britain are doing the best they possibly can and if anything are a bit too tolerant of these new movements.

For him it is radicalism that's the problem, not religion. Any blame for the rise in extremism is placed not at the feet of the warmongers or racists, but at the proponents of multiculturalism and moderates within Islam itself - for not speaking up vocally enough. Yet even on this last point, Husain is not entirely consistent, as it was the very fact that the Sufist scholars he read and spoke to did not try to specifically convert him that was a main attraction for him.

Consequently he has learned to live with the injustices of the world through prayer, the odd interview and the Make Poverty History campaign.

Although it is often a quite fascinating read, The Islamism ultimately offers us no solutions or real insights into the "mind of the fundamentalist", not that that will stop the flow of *Observer* articles on the difference between "good" and "bad" Muslims.

Nicola Evans

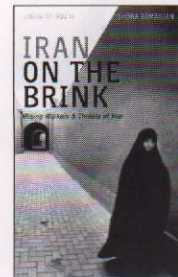
## The shape of a new workers' movement

**IRAN ON THE BRINK - RISING WORKERS AND THREATS OF WAR**  
Andreas Malm and Shora Esmailian  
Pluto Press / 2007 / £17.99

WESTERN COMMENTATORS on Iran rarely look past the shopping malls and affluent suburbs of

Northern Tehran where they meet young Iranians who talk of skiing, Coca-Cola and their love of America. For them this is the hope for the future of Iran.

Malm and Esmailian, in their account of "Iran on the Brink", pour scorn on this view and have a





different perspective, one in which future hope lies on the other, working class, side of the city and amongst the workers and poor in the rest of the country. Here a new workers' movement is springing up to take its first steps and make its presence felt.

The authors trace the democratic tradition of Iran as far back as 1906 when the Shah was forced to accede to the formation of a Parliament or Majles. Anjumans (local councils) in the cities were set up to oversee the process. The next twenty years saw a series of struggles between the democratic and emerging socialist

the next incarnation of the Iranian workers' movement. Malm and Esmailian show how the revolution was usurped by Khomeini and the mullahs, misled by left organisations like the Tudeh Party and Fedaiyan, and ultimately subordinated to the war effort against Saddam's Iraq.

They then describe in graphic detail the appalling consequences of the revolution's defeat on the lives of the vast majority of ordinary Iranians. Employment rights are virtually zero and the introduction of serial temporary contracts or even blank contracts

honour of their women."

If it can be described as such, those in employment are the lucky ones. Some estimates put unemployment as high as 30%, twice the official figure, and rising. Grinding poverty and despair has led to an "internalisation of misery" attested to by increasing rates of suicide, drug addiction and prostitution in large sections of the urban poor and working class. This was sickeningly revealed following the earthquake, which struck Bam in 2003. The first supplies, which arrived immediately, were methadone for the city's addicts and pimps looking for orphaned girls.

Simultaneously, alongside the unemployment, erosion of any workplace organisation, rights or safety, and the humiliation and deprivation of everyday life, Iranians have witnessed the rise of what Paul Klebnikov in *Forbes* magazine first termed "the millionaire mullahs". They were able to come to power with the financial backing of the bazaari (prosperous merchants) and the ideology of an anti-imperialist revolution. Once in power they set about establishing themselves as the replacement for the Shah's crony capitalists who were ousted by the revolution. Fundamentally this was achieved through oil. The industry was made a state monopoly; revenues were used to expand the Pasdaran and police forces, and crucially, via the banks, to accumulate capital. This fusion made the state "the engine for capital accumulation" in the Islamic Republic, and the mullahs became fabulously rich in the process.

There are now signs that the Iranian working class can no longer tolerate this situation. An "externalisation of misery" is taking place. Instead of sinking into self-destructive despair, workers are fighting back. It began with an infamous incident near Khatonabad in January 2004. Workers had been promised permanent contracts on completion of a project to build a copper smelting plant, but instead 250 were sacked and wages

### An "externalisation of misery" is taking place. Instead of sinking into self-destructive despair, workers are fighting back

forces and the conservative and reactionary ones based on the landowners and clerics. At one point a Soviet Socialist Republic was formed in the northern province of Gilan only to be crushed by the Shah's forces.

The ending of the Second World War provided the next opportunity for the working class of Iran to exert its influence. In 1946 there was the "largest industrial strike in Middle Eastern history... led by the largest union federation, and Tudeh, the strongest communist party." Democratic elections, on the back of mass demonstrations and strikes, brought Muhammad Mossadeq to power in 1951. His nationalisation of the oil industry outraged imperialist powers in London and Washington and plans were put in place to depose him in a CIA backed coup which duly took place in 1953. Once again the Iranian workers fell under the autocratic rule of an imposed Shah and they were not to break free from this imposition until the 1979 revolution.

The general strike wave which deposed the Shah, and the rise of the shoras (workers' councils), were

(where all rights concerning wages, labour time, holidays or anything else in the workplace are relinquished) are the norm. Wages are routinely withheld, often for months or even years. Wages that are paid are so low and eroded quickly by inflation that people are often forced to take on two or three jobs just to keep them on the poverty line. Floggings and summary detention, often including torture, are the chosen methods of discipline in the workplace. The only permitted workplace organisations are Shoraye eslami (Islamic council) or Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards). Health and safety is at best minimal, with projects often being measured in numbers of lives lost.

Women fare even worse. They are paid less for the same work by as much as 50% and are exempted from any labour legislation often by the nature of work in which they are employed, or because they are forced to work from home. They suffer sexual harassment in the workplace and oppression within the home from husbands and fathers whose only pride is often the ability to "control the

remained unpaid for the rest. After eight days of strikes and sit-ins the workers and their families were attacked by special police forces firing live rounds. Somewhere between four (official figures) and fifteen (unofficial) were killed and over 300 wounded. The massacre became a rallying cry across Iran. Workers' organisations of various kinds, from hiking associations (which never go hiking), to clandestine workers' committees and shoras proliferated. Strikes and sit-ins saw a dramatic upsurge in frequency. By necessity all figures are estimations but there were approximately "140 strikes in October 2005, followed by 120 in November" compared with around 90 in over two years from March 1998 to May 2000. "The frequency of strikes since early 2004 appears to be unparalleled in post-Mossadeq non-revolutionary Iran."

Malm and Esmailian go on to suggest that there is little or no scope for reform of the regime from within. Rafsanjani tried this in the 1990s and failed. The millionaire mullahs' control over almost every aspect of economic activity, including illegal ones, proved to be just too strong. They also cite evidence that the workers themselves have little interest in

reform of the regime under which they have suffered so badly for so long. In a society where the engine of capital accumulation is the state, protest quickly focuses on it and nothing short of regime change is seen as a solution.

What could also save the regime, in a strange irony, is its demonisation in the west and in particular the US. Bush needs an evil enemy and Ahmadinejad needs a diversion. The more bellicose Ahmadinejad becomes, the more Bush will attack him, thereby returning the gift. While the threat of outright war with the US seems unlikely due to difficulties in Iraq, Ahmadinejad can afford to play this game.

In the cycle of Iranian politics that Malm and Esmailian describe, an emergent workers' movement grows to establish itself as a force throughout the country, only to be cruelly and brutally repressed. As they say, "after spring comes winter". They offer little by way of prognosis for this latest emerging workers' movement, but we have to hope that the Iranian workers can this time achieve the necessary level of self-consciousness and organisation to enjoy a long hot summer.

**John Cooke**

## Inside the burqa looking out

**A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS**  
Khaled Hosseini  
Bloomsbury / 2007 / £16.99 (hdbk)

LIKE THE *Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini's new novel is the story of ordinary people whose lives are shattered by the political upheavals that have been Afghan society over the last thirty years. This time it is a view from inside the burqa, rather than from Afghan boys. It is a novel that takes one through the nightmare of Afghanistan's recent history, from Stalinism to warlord

gangsterism, reaching its nadir under the grim oppression of the Taliban, and ending in April 2003, just as Britain and the US invaded Iraq.

The story is a simple one that follows the fate of two women, Mariam and Laila, from different political times and social backgrounds, who are thrown together through the experience of war.

Mariam is the abandoned illegitimate daughter of a wealthy, businessman, who, rather than take

responsibility for her, allows her, aged 15, to be pressed into marrying Kabuli shoemaker Rasheed, a man three times her age and as many times her size. The first time she sees him is on her wedding day, when one of the first things he does is to insist that she wear the burqa

"The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange to see the world through a mesh screen... The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving."

Mariam soon learns that a woman's lot in Afghanistan is to endure at the hands of men "Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always."

And endure Mariam does. In fact she becomes very good at enduring her life in a society in which women are valued only for reproduction. As it becomes increasingly clear that she will be unable to bear children, Rasheed's coarseness slips over into contempt and brutality.

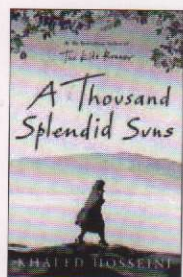
Laila, by contrast, has grown up in Kabul during the eighties, under the Soviet-backed regime. She comes from a liberal family with a father who believes in her education. However, when the Soviet troops retreat and the Mujahideen runs riot she is separated from her youthful lover and companion and her family is killed by a bomb, from the rubble of which she is rescued by Rasheed.

When Mariam realises that sixty year old Rasheed intends to make Laila his second wife she protests, but he dismisses her protests:

"How many days do you suppose she'll last before she's abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit?... she could keep warm in one of those Peshwar brothels. Business is booming there, I hear."

Laila quickly realises as she is recovering that she is pregnant and learns her lover is dead, so at 14 she becomes the second wife of a 60 year old pot-bellied wife-basher.

To the humiliation of both women, a claustrophobic situation rapidly becomes polygamous. Mariam is outraged that this beautiful teenager has wormed her





way into her household, but when the baby arrives – it is a girl, no comfort to Rasheed – Mariam begins to love the child and gradually softens toward the mother. After one of Rasheed's outbursts, "a look passed between Laila and Mariam. An unguarded, knowing look. And in this fleeting, wordless exchange with Mariam, Laila knew that they were not enemies any longer."

The women unite in their common hatred of their husband and his coarse, brutal ways.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the story of the terrible things that happen to Mariam and Laila as the consequence of living in a society where men wield absolute power, aided by religious fanatics. The guns and bombs on the streets and a brutal and authoritarian patriarchal culture inside the home create an atmosphere "of abasement, of degradation and despair."

Once the Soviet army was ousted, the Mujahideen turn from idealised freedom fighters to oppressors:

"It was dizzying how quickly everything unravelled. The leadership council was formed prematurely. The Mujahideen, armed to the teeth but lacking a common enemy."

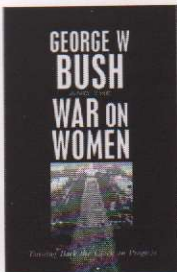
Afghanistan begins to resemble the circles of hell. There are the "bearded patrols," roaming the streets in Toyota trucks "on the lookout for clean-shaven faces to

as Afghan women are never permitted to travel without being accompanied by a man, they are quickly arrested and sent home. Rasheed reacts with a particularly savage beating over several days. Whilst he is in the process of strangling Laila he is extinguished with a shovel wielded by Mariam. Laila urges Mariam to run away with her but Mariam, after a lifetime of no expectations, knows that this will end in death for all of them. The novel ends in an act of

extraordinary generosity and self-sacrifice.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a very powerful and harrowing work that displays truths about the faces of some of the women "hidden" behind the burqa, and the strength required simply to live their lives. It is more tragic as one knows that despite the promises of Blair and Bush little has changed for the women of Afghanistan under NATO and UN control.

Linda Wilde



## Women hammered by bigotry and business

GEORGE W BUSH AND THE WAR ON WOMEN

Barbara Finlay

Zed Books / 2006 / £14.99

"IF YOU'RE not angry, you're not paying attention" reads a US bumper sticker spotted by Barbara Finlay. Her 2006 book is her expansion on this theme and an attempt to force her fellow Americans to do just that – pay attention. With the help of a compliant and pro-corporate media, Finlay charts how the Bush administration has lied to and deceived the American public and

Afghanistan and Iraq.

Finlay illustrates time and again that it's not what Bush says that's crucial, it's what he does. During his first presidential campaign, a key slogan was Bush's audacious claim that "W stands for Women" and Finlay argues that his "mildly feminist" rhetoric in support of "respect" for women at home and abroad, combined with his appointment of women to high profile public offices, (of course these have mostly been anti-abortion, religious right wingers), has "undercut most attention" paid to what Bush's policy decisions have actually meant.

Bush has won two presidential elections: the first because his cronies in Florida refused a full recount after the "hanging chad" fiasco, and the other by a slim majority after further complaints of irregularities in Ohio and Florida. Bush took office in 2001 assuring Americans that he recognised his mandate was not strong and pledging moderation and "compassionate conservatism". Of course, Bush has been anything but moderate. Finlay catalogues throughout the book his continual pandering to his two main constituencies: the conservative religious right (they have had his ear on social policy regarding sex

**This is the story of the terrible things that happen to Mariam and Laila as the consequence of living in a society where men wield absolute power**

bloody." Hospitals turn away women in labour because men and women have to be seen at different hospitals. Every Friday Ghazi Stadium showcases the spectacle of hands being severed, lashings, hangings and beheadings.

The two women decide to take the children and escape. However,

begun to seriously erode the social policy gains of the 1970s and after.

This has had profound consequences not just for women in the US but wherever in the world its government has foreign policy interests – most catastrophically of course for the women Bush has supposedly "liberated" in

education, reproductive rights and promotion of marriage, and received funds for "faith-based initiatives") and big business (who have been favoured with billion dollar contracts for reconstruction in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf coast post-Hurricane Katrina, and for whom labor and discrimination regulations have been attacked and weakened). Bush started off by immediately reversing or axing several of Bill Clinton's progressive policy decisions.

These included the Equal Pay Matters Initiative, which provided funds to the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau for education on discrimination law and information and resources to women workers. He cancelled ergonomics regulations designed to offer protection to assembly line and office workers at risk of conditions such as repetitive strain injury (mostly women). He also axed a paid maternity leave plan and made attempts to attack rules safeguarding gender equality in state funded education and cover for contraceptives in federal employees health insurance plans. The list goes on.

Bush's appointments to public office, advisory committees and the judiciary have been politically motivated in the majority, with judges appointed on the basis of abhorrent right wing, woman hating views and/or membership of conservative pressure groups - for instance John Ashcroft, Judge Samuel Alito. Other appointees have blatantly not had any appropriate qualifications other than being in Bush's gang of cronies and active Republicans - the most high profile example being Michael Brown, head of the Federal Emergencies Management Agency, who's previous position had been as a rules advisor for the National Arabian Horse Association! Many have been appointed to bodies whose mission they are actively opposed to. A case in point is Scott J Block, the Special Counsel to the Justice Department, a role designed to protect federal employees against discrimination. Once in post Block proposed the right to be able to sack

workers because they are gay! Or take Nancy Mitchell Ffotenhauer who was appointed to the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women but who is a member of the right wing Independent Women's Forum that opposed the Violence Against Women Act because it "urges women to distrust all men"! If these nominations or appointees are black or women, all the better for

existing advisory committees; by censoring and suppressing reports by the governments own scientists; and by simply not seeking independent scientific advice." The government has done this in order to push through policies on limiting stem cell research, restricting access to abortion by promoting spurious links with cancer and to roll back progressive policies on AIDS/HIV. The role of the

## **Policies around sex education have been particularly infamous. Under Bush the only state funded programmes allowed are now "abstinence only" ones**

Bush as Finlay comments that, pathetically, Democrats have been too scared to challenge them as they are afraid of being labelled racist or sexist!

Much of Bush's work to erode social gains has been behind the scenes or through managing information: facts are misrepresented, misleading information is presented as truth and material has been removed from government websites. The Women's Bureau website used to be a source of information on rights regarding equal pay, sexual harassment and other issues of concern for women workers. The fact sheets have now gone, to be replaced by initiatives with titles such as "Strengthening the family", which covers flexible working and promotes entrepreneurship, with one of the Bureau's stated aims now being to "increase the efficiency of women workers".

Such has been the concern of many scientists regarding the misuse of scientific information that sixty of them, including Nobel laureates, signed a statement in February 2004 condemning the Bush regime's approach to science: "... by placing people who are professionally unqualified or who have clear conflicts of interest in official posts and on scientific advisory committees; by disbanding

religious right in these attacks is clear, as it is in the government's attempts to redefine the foetus, to confer on it human rights, for example in the 2002 Unborn Victims of Violence Act.

Policies around sex education have been particularly infamous. Under Bush the only state funded programmes allowed are now "abstinence only" ones, with the state specifying that "a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of all human sexual behaviour", thus completely failing all young people who are sexually active as teenagers, gay or straight.

Many of the organisations providing this sex education are "faith based" and many programmes have been found to promote archaic stereotypes of male and female roles - with statements included such as "girls care less about achievements than boys... girls need devotion and men need devotion". Information about contraceptives and condom use is discouraged as they are discussed only in terms of exaggerated failure rates. The result is that sexually active young people often do not use condoms as they do not think they work. On top of this the licensing of the sale of "over the counter" emergency contraception



has been delayed since Bush came into office. And this in a country that has higher rates of teenage pregnancy and unprotected sex than anywhere in Europe. "Abstinence only" does not work – abortion rates are on the rise under Bush, despite the stigma against the procedure the regime is encouraging and the ongoing attempts to close down provision and challenge the Roe vs Wade ruling of 1973.

### **Finlay questions Bush's own ideological commitment to religious fundamentalism, locating his zeal in cynical manoeuvres to maintain power**

Even more notorious has been the reinstatement and extension of the so called "global gag" (brought in in a limited form by Reagan then overturned by Clinton) whereby projects receiving US aid around the world are banned from even using funds raised from other sources for providing abortions, providing information about abortions or even referring women to other agencies for abortions. Agencies in developing countries relying on US aid have often been so intimidated by the fear of crossing the line and losing funds that they have completely stopped mentioning abortion. If agencies don't abide by the gag they not only lose US funds, they are also denied donated equipment, medicines and contraceptives. This inevitably increases the number of illegal abortions in places such as Zambia, Nepal and Ethiopia, with high rates of maternal deaths from unsafe abortions already. Bush claims to be "pro-life" but he clearly doesn't mean the lives of women.

Bush's policies on sex education also have a worldwide reach, especially regarding the strings the US attaches to AIDS/HIV prevention funding. In Uganda, after US pressure, the government changed its policy of promoting condom use to that of abstinence as the way to

fight AIDS/HIV infection in 2003. As a result the supply of condoms dwindled and the price tripled. The government sponsored billboards promoting abstinence until marriage and stressing the supposed unreliability of condoms – completely failing the many women who are infected in marriage! Groups receiving US funds must also pledge opposition to prostitution, which means in practice no safe sex advice for sex

workers, no medical examinations, condoms, projects to help sex workers stand up to abusive clients or help them find paths out of prostitution. Many organisations have been denied funding under these rules including the UN Population Fund, the Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia, the Brazilian government and the World Health Organisation.

Bush has shamelessly used his pretend concern for the human rights of women in Iraq and Afghanistan as a cover for the ongoing wars and occupations in those countries: "more than fifty million people are free. And for 25 million women and girls, liberation has a special significance. Some of these girls are attending school for the first time. Some of the women are preparing to vote in free elections for the very first time" – a campaign speech reported by the *Boston Globe* in 2004. The State Department's Office of International Women's Issues website in 2003 stated, "The advancement of issues of concern to women has been a long-standing American goal. This administration has intensified that pursuit." These are clearly foul lies as Finlay illustrates. Women in both Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from rape, kidnapping, domestic violence

as never before, in the case of Iraq, and as much as under the Taliban in the case of Afghanistan. Iraqi women's rights actually benefited under Saddam's Baathist secular regime but now they are threatened and assaulted if they do not wear a headscarf and often cannot leave the house without a male relative. Religious interests have been allowed to shape the constitution and feminists and political activists have been murdered. A high profile media opportunity was seized by Bush with the opening of the rebuilt Rabia Balkhi women's hospital in Kabul in April 2003, claimed as a "topnotch health facility" and proof of the administration's commitment to the women of Afghanistan. In actual fact it was soon shown by an Afghan doctor returning from exile to be highly inadequate and underfunded, with 60-80 babies being delivered a day but with only three birthing tables provided – so many women have to give birth on the floor. Medical supplies are so limited that patients have to provide their own sutures, blood and antibiotics if they can afford them, or go without if they cannot. So much for the Bush regime's commitment to women.

Finlay's book is full of illuminating examples such as these and thus the book is a valuable contribution to the growing archive of the crimes of George W Bush. However, while bemoaning the erosion of a liberal agenda in the US under Bush, she has also become a victim of this herself. Finlay often seems to be almost apologetically justifying her views that Bush's policies are dangerous for women. On abstinence only programmes she goes to great lengths to explain that the programmes they replace still emphasised the need for abstinence; they just provided safe sex information as well. On the gag rule about prostitution she makes the assumption that the reader will automatically agree with the Bush regime that sex workers are undeserving of US funds. While she is clearly trying not to alienate a US audience living with these policies

and their associated propaganda everyday, her concern not to “frighten the horses” results in the weakening of her arguments – she is conceding ground that the feminists of the 70s and 80s she harks back to would never have done.

Finlay questions Bush’s own ideological commitment to the religious fundamentalism of many of his supporters, rightly locating his zeal in cynical manoeuvres to maintain power, but she also makes much of his “greater” achievements in terms of social policy roll backs compared to Reagan. She gives no explanation for this, leaving the reader with the only conclusion that Bush is much nastier than Reagan was. This of course fails to take note of the new world order following the collapse of Stalinism – Bush is able to be more right wing because there is no longer a cold war. It is also thanks to the defeats

forced on the US working class under Reagan without which Bush would not have the free reign he has. Finlay shows her colours as a liberal feminist throughout the book, constantly referencing the policies introduced by Clinton that Bush has scrapped, and seeing a return to Democrats and progressives serving on advisory committees and a liberal judiciary as the way forward for women’s rights. Clinton’s own attacks on welfare – introducing welfare to work, built on by Bush – are mentioned in passing, with no tone of condemnation. The limits of her feminist worldview are starkly revealed at the end of the book, when she considers how to “move forward” in the face of such a right wing regime. Her answers: get involved – mostly by writing letters to elected representatives, don’t give up and pay attention.

**Alison Higgins**

“bad” ecocidal capitalist to “good” green capitalists; it is the system itself, based on ruthless competition, the demands of profitability, and the race for rapid profit, which is the destroyer of nature’s balance . . . Partial reforms are completely inadequate.” (p6)

In common with left greens including Joel Kovel<sup>3</sup> and Derek Wall, the book includes visions of a future without capitalism where people live in harmony with the environment, a transition, “not only to a new mode of production and an egalitarian and democratic society, but also to an alternative mode of life, a new ecosocialist civilization, beyond the reign of money, beyond consumption habits artificially produced by advertising, and beyond the unlimited production of commodities, such as private automobiles, that are harmful to the environment.” (p7)

This green and pleasant vision is fine but why a new label, ecosocialism, to sum it up? It suggests that Marxist socialism per se is not “eco” and that ecologism is not “socialist”. The first article from Michael Löwy, an academic and long-standing member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) the French Section of the Fourth International, is called “What is ecosocialism?”:

“It is a current of ecological thought and action that appropriates the fundamental gains of Marxism while shaking off its productivist dross.” (p4)

The charge of productivism is the one constantly levied at socialists by Greens and ecologists. But is it true? Two examples are usually cited. First, that Marx described a fundamental contradiction in capitalism between the forces of production and the social relations of production, with the latter acting as a brake on the former; more specifically, that private capitalist property relations impede the rational, optimal exploitation of nature.

Marx argues for an expansion of the forces of production to be able to meet widespread need. This can clearly be interpreted as “productivist”, but that ignores

## Shaking off Marxism’s “productivist dross”

**ECOSOCIALISM OR BARBARISM**  
Eds. Jane Kelly & Sheila Malone  
Socialist Resistance / 2006 / £10

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES such as climate change have finally come to the top of the political agenda, with everyone from the Women’s Institute to George Bush putting forward their plans to save the planet. This book is the response from Socialist Resistance.

The timing of its publication is no accident. Both Socialist Resistance and their international organisation, the Fourth International (FI), are in the process of a radical re-think, with proposals to change their “political programme, perspectives and public profile towards being an anti-capitalist, ecosocialist organisation”.<sup>1</sup>

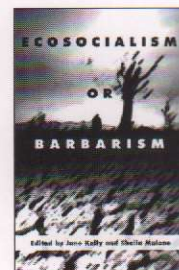
This move is based on a new perspective of catastrophic social

and ecological crisis that demands an urgent response. “At the core of this change is the contention that free-market, privatising neoliberalism has over twenty years arrived at a new and deadly phase – what we call ‘savage capitalism.’”

The book compiles a set of arguments for ecosocialism, ending with the eco-socialist manifesto drafted by Joel Kovel and Michael Löwy in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the book is a useful description of environmental problems, with a consistent argument that these are inherent in the capitalist mode of production and that they can only be resolved by a socialist solution rather than a series of reforms within capitalism. This argument is used to challenge the leadership of the environmental movement, in particular the various Green Parties.

“It is not a matter of contrasting





both the context in which Marx was writing, and his related discussions of the way production should be used to meet human need rather than constantly expand capital and profit.

Indeed, as Löwy himself points out, "For Marx, the supreme goal of technical progress is not the infinite accumulation of good ("having") but the reduction of the working day and the accumulation of free time ("being")."

## Many Greens think that Marxism has scant regard for the ecosystem, a criticism linked to the idea of productivism

Marx is also accused of conflating expansion of productive forces with progress, but taking his writings in historical context this seems an unfair critique. There was a desperate need to expand production to meet the very basic needs of humanity. We can see how expansion of productive forces under capitalism has been contradictory, with the production of goods for profit rather than need, the expansion of unnecessary things that advertisers then have to persuade us that we need, and the production of luxury goods for a

decadent layer of society. Nonetheless, the development of the productive forces, through computing, for example, does have huge potential for reducing the working day – but capitalist social relations obstruct this use of new technology.

The second example Greens cite of socialism's "productivism" is the Soviet Union, China and other "socialist" states. Yes, the Soviet Union was "productivist", with

maximum volume of the goods being integral to their planning system rather than quality or usefulness of these products. But we need to reassert that this was not socialist – it was a distortion in which the transition to socialism was blocked by a brutal and bureaucratic dictatorship.

It seems that this charge is one of the reasons for the adoption of the "eco" label. The second is the primacy of the ecological question attains for the FI in a set of catastrophist perspectives.

Löwy argues: "The ecological issue is, in my opinion, the great challenge for a renewal of Marxist thought at the threshold of the 21st century." This, taken together with the prediction of imminent environmental collapse, leads them to adopt the new turn, and the addition of eco- is a way of signalling a break with the past.

Many Greens also think that Marxism has scant regard for the ecosystem, a criticism linked to the idea of productivism. In fact Marx and Engels both had quite a lot to say about the way capitalism misuses non-renewable resources and degrades the environment. But for Marx it was capitalism itself – a system wedded to accumulation for its own sake – that was responsible for this state of affairs, and this

puts an unbridgeable gulf between him and those Greens who believe that a benevolent form of capitalism can be built that lives in harmony with people and nature more generally.

Forerunners of Socialist Resistance have often promoted a red-green alliance, part of a rainbow coalition, but now they propose a more strategic amalgam. "The convergence of these movements could form a new vision for society – ecosocialism". And failure to advance ecosocialism will, the book argues, lead to barbarism.

So what new strategy and programme is being advanced to avert the possibility of barbarism? There are some good sections outlining the need to link the struggle for immediate reforms to the goal of revolutionary social change. Jane Kelly and Phil Ward correctly criticise the Green Party, arguing that "... the Greens do not differ fundamentally from social democracy in the belief that capitalism can be reformed". (p51) They also recognise that the revolutionary programme for the environmental change is not well thought through – a position we would agree with, including in our own tendency historically.

In an attempt to start that programmatic re-elaboration, they look to ways to link socialist and green demands. At the heart is the idea that we strive for production for need rather than exchange – a basic socialist goal and one not possible to achieve under capitalism. But reforms are also needed in the short term: to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, insulate homes and so on. The key programmatic question is how to apply the transitional method to achieve these. Kelly and Ward agree that transitional demands are needed, arguing that immediate reforms cannot be fully achieved "without the control of ordinary working people; issues of workers' control, workers' democracy and socialist solutions are paramount." (p54) They also refer to the way that many socialist goals, such as



[www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

**On-line dossier: environment**

**Theory and Ideas Archive**

- Recent and archive documents on ecology and the environment available on line now. Articles include:
- The Environment and Socialism
- Marx and Engels on Ecology
- Impending Climate Catastrophe
- More nukes? No thanks!



socialisation of domestic labour through a revolution in the way we live, would be much more environmentally sustainable than the individualised consumption under capitalism.

But the laudable aim of developing a transitional programme is unfortunately not achieved either in the ecosocialist manifesto (pages 116-120), the resolution of the International Socialist Group from April 2006 (pages 68-73) or in the recent Socialist Resistance conference document.

All of these programmes and manifestos are actually limited to a progressive goal (socialism, or rather ecosocialism) and a series of mostly fine reforms, such as an end to airport expansion, "an international treaty that goes well beyond Kyoto", "global action to help third world countries in sustainable development".

But how? This is where transitional method should come in, but is lacking. At the heart of transitional demands is the linking of struggles for reforms with the struggle for power. The struggle for power is a fight against capitalism, which will be a vicious fight given the strength and resources of the state and international organisations that will defend their power to the death. This will take a revolution – a violent overthrow of the old order – to have any hope of moving to the goal of socialism.

A transitional programme embeds this struggle in the fight over reforms. For example, the correct demand for cheap and integrated transport systems needs to be elaborated to include the role of workers in transport industries taking control of the planning and investment of their companies. They should link to local workers and users of transport to determine priorities.

These action committees would come up against the owners of the transport companies and the state that backs them, to win the battle the workers would need to take on larger issues of ownership and planning and, eventually, control over the local state.

Revolutionary socialists differ from reformist Greens and even the most militant eco-warriors on two key questions. The first is the question of the state. We understand that the state is not neutral and will have to be smashed. The Greens want to reform it and the eco-warriors want it to go away but are not, in general, willing to see the need for another form of power to replace it.

The second is the role of the working class. The most left wing of the Greens see the workers' movement having a role in eco struggles, but also see the obstacle of workers with vested interests in many polluting industries. "Ecosocialists know that the workers and their organizations are indispensable for any radical transformation of the system," writes Löwy (p5). But that is not the same as understanding the primacy and centrality of the working class; the working class not as a constituent part of the ecosocialist coalition but as the leadership of it.

The lack of a discussion of the state in relation to revolutionary strategy, and of the centrality of the working class in any socialist movement, is a major weakness in the ecosocialist project since it is on these issues that there will be most disagreements with many Greens.

Any new international party or movement for socialism, with or without a prefix, needs to be founded on a shared understanding of the state and the working class, otherwise it will shatter at the first test of real struggle where a choice between the interests and organisations of the working class is pitted against the corporations and institutions of the capitalist state, be they neo-liberal or even reforming "Green" liberals.

Developing a practical, working class response to climate change and other environmental threats is one of the most important challenges facing the left today. But we are certain that if socialism needs any prefix, it should be "revolutionary" and not "eco".

**Helen Ward**

#### NOTES

1. Socialist Resistance. "Savage Capitalism – The Ecosocialist Alternative", IV Online magazine: IV392 – September 2007, at <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1311>
2. The manifesto is also available online [www.iefd.org/manifestos/ecosocialist\\_manifesto.php](http://www.iefd.org/manifestos/ecosocialist_manifesto.php)
3. Kovel J, *The Enemy of Nature: the end of capitalism or the end of the world?*, Zed Books 2002
4. Wall D, *Babylon and beyond: the economics of anti-capitalist, anti-globalist and radical green movements*, Pluto Press 2005

## Marxism saved from its bad side by religion

**MARX, LENIN, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE**

**Paul Le Blanc**

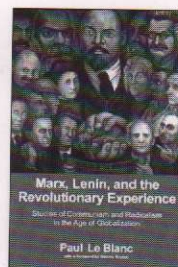
**Routledge / 2006 / £18.99**

PAUL LE Blanc, the Associate Professor of History at La Roche College, has written this book to demonstrate the relevance of Lenin (and Marx) for today's new generation of activists:

"The incredibly dynamic developments of our time . . . are generating new waves of . . .

youthful activists . . . [this book] is composed especially for them." (p13)

Le Blanc's work has often been exciting and informative. His book, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, is one of the most thought provoking studies of this question from someone sympathetic to Lenin's politics and methods. Le Blanc is a long time supporter of the Fourth International. Sometimes his writing transcends the limits imposed by this organisation's





flawed politics. Other times it doesn't.

This latest book is not on a par with his study of Lenin and the party. Rather, it reflects the Fourth International's accommodation to the reformist wing of the modern anti-capitalist movement. Worse, it is tinged with a spiritualist message that both Marx and Lenin would have been aghast at.

Early on, for example, Le Blanc compares current globalised capitalism to the world portrayed in Marx and Engel's "Communist Manifesto". He proves how divided, unequal and brutal the new world order of Bush and Brown is. While Marx showed how capitalism, through its relentless pursuit of profits, cannot reconcile the contending claims of the principal contending classes, the workers and the bosses. Marx argued for the socialist revolution to destroy the capitalist mode of production and its class system. Le Blanc, in contrast, thinks that the message today should be a campaign for a version of the Tobin tax:

"A tax of four per cent levied on these 225 richest people for basic and adequate health care, food, clean water and safe sewers for every person on the earth." (p38)

### **Both Marx and Lenin were democrats in relation to religion. They believed in the freedom of people to believe what they wanted. But they were materialists**

This may be arithmetically accurate but it is politically illiterate. It extracts the call for a reform – a progressive tax – from the context of a world in which neoliberal governments are cutting the tax burden on the super rich. Moreover the 225 richest people are unlikely to sit back and allow a major portion of their wealth to go down what they would regard as the sewers!

When the international class struggle reaches a level and tempo that places such demands on the

agenda, the first question workers and youth around the globe will ask is, why should we stop at 4%, why should the world's poor rest happy with better health care, food, clean water and safe sewers, which after all millions already enjoy in the advanced nations? Isn't there more to life than that?

The book's answer is an unconvincing attempt to marry socialism with religion, even seriously entertaining the idea of theologian Paul Tillich that Lenin and the Bolsheviks failed to achieve the emancipation of humanity because:

"they had nothing above themselves . . . The lack of a transcendent line is the reason for the tragic situation that the revolutionary movement that set out to liberate a whole social class has resulted in a new slavery, the totalitarian slavery we have . . . in the communist system." (p27 – quoting Tillich)

What Le Blanc calls, in the first of many religious references, "the evil within the good" was their lack of belief in God. Whilst Le Blanc elsewhere offers other reasons for the degeneration of the revolution such as "...a brutal and brutalizing civil war, a rapid succession of

foreign invasions, a vicious economic blockade and the collapse of industry and agriculture" (p 114), he spends too much of the book investigating how:

"there is an 'original sin' . . . maybe in humanity itself – the sin of pride, of self-righteousness, of arrogance, that enables one to do violence to others." (p69)

He concludes that:

"The challenge for people of faith, whether of Christian or Marxist or other persuasion, is to face the evil within the good –

inherent in all struggles worth waging, inherent in all of us – seeking to transcend that evil, time after time, while remaining deeply committed to the good fight." (p76)

Le Blanc's mawkish prose provides the backdrop for a tour of various sentimental arguments often seen through the prism of radical Christian and Christian Marxist spiritualities. Le Blanc consoles us that if not Lenin, then there is another great man to provide us inspiration . . . Martin Luther King:

" . . . we should follow this great and religious political leader into a consideration of the Kingdom of God." (p48)

Both Marx and Lenin were democrats in relation to religion. They believed in the freedom of people to believe what they wanted. But they were materialists. They spent their lives trying to counter the influence of religion, which they understood as, to use Marx's famous phrase, "opium" administered by the ruling class, because it lulls people into accepting serfdom in the kingdom of man with the promise of eternal happiness in the kingdom of God. The problem is we know all about the kingdom of man but no one has ever come back to tell us whether the kingdom of god is all it's cracked up to be.

Pandering to religion is not the same as defending its democratic right to exist, and Le Blanc crosses the line.

At times, Le Blanc presents a convincing picture of the Bolsheviks and the Russian workers' movement's creative and flexible tactics and of the soviets that spoke directly for the workers' needs:

"cab drivers, laundry workers, bath house workers, restaurant waiters, bakers, barbers retail clerks . . . office clerks and elementary school teachers – all now identified themselves as part of the working class, organized unions and sent representatives to the soviets." (p81)

Elsewhere he explains the absolute centrality of workers' democracy quoting Lenin's call from One Step Forward, Two Steps Back for "the full application of the

democratic principles in the party organization . . . guarantees for the rights of all minorities and for all loyal opposition . . . that all party functionaries must be elected, accountable to the party and subject to recall." (p96-97)

And again, "there must be wide and free discussion of party questions, free comradely criticism and assessment of events in party life." (p 97)

Fair points, certainly, but actually betraying his annoying tendency to select quotations divorced from the historical context.

And this curious mix of homilies, religious piety and the odd insightful remark, runs throughout the book. Its final words are a quote from Dorothy Day, a US catholic activist in the 1940s and an evocation from Le Blanc:

"We want to make 'the rich poor and the poor holy,' and that is a revolution . . . We don't want luxury. We want land, bread, children, and the joys of community in play and work and hardship.' That is a dream worth struggling for."

But the rich don't fear preaching; they fear the force of the class struggle, its uprisings and revolutions. Making the poor holy is not going to reconnect socialism or Marxism with the new generation of the global justice movement. Lenin's struggle proves something else.

For a generation of activists presented with what Le Blanc calls "the 'Leninism' that Stalin made" it

is urgent that we think through and think anew the real lessons from Lenin and the Bolsheviks, of a party with deep roots in the working class, and the absolute centrality of workers' democracy.

We are very much in favour of reviewing everything, questioning everything and rebuilding

untainted by the radicalisation of his contemporaries, who spent two decades waiting in the wings as the Labour Party lurched right, they rarely miss an opportunity to attack New Labour spin – while offering their own, resolutely earthy (of course) prescriptions.

Although the book is sub-titled

## The UK economy is teetering on the edge of a precipice, stability is a New Labour myth, and a financial crisis is waiting to happen

Marxism and Leninism in a manner that learns from the past. But Le Blanc's answer takes us away from this. We don't need old time religion to escape from the straitjacket of dogmatic Marxism. Dogma is not what Marxism is about. And we don't need prayers or hymn sheets to tell us this. We need a Marxism re-focused on the tasks of the hour.

So while Le Blanc at times confronts important questions occasionally, when not offering warmed up spiritualism, and hints at possible ways to re-create a workers' movement, the good book is buried beneath the bad. The evil within – if you like – overpowers the forces of transcendent goodness, so that his tome never reaches the kingdom of heaven. Pity.

"Waking up to the incredible economic, political and social illusions of the Blair legacy", the focus is on how the mounting burden of household debt will lead to economic crisis and the restructuring of the economy. Even their treatment of potentially catastrophic environmental crisis and climate change, for all its detail, is just an extension of their debt theory.

Atkinson and Elliott's book was published at the end of May 2007. Just two months later the world's stock markets entered a period of turmoil that saw the FTSE100 suffer its biggest one day fall since the beginning of the Iraq war. Rising interest rates had squeezed poorer workers in the US, leading to the sub-prime mortgage crisis. No one knew where the debt resided – which investment bank or hedge fund would be hit next – and the markets were gripped by a credit crunch. How would the central banks respond and could the financial crisis spill over into the "real" economy?

The authors must be very pleased with their apparently timely conclusions; that the UK economy is teetering on the edge of a precipice, stability is a New Labour myth, and a financial crisis is waiting to happen.

The authors describe three sources of debt – corporate, government and household. They quite rightly identify the private

# The debt timebomb beneath the UK economy

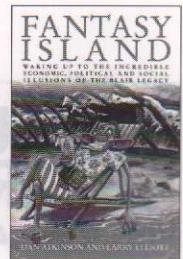
### FANTASY ISLAND

Dan Atkinson and Larry Elliott  
Constable / 2007 / £7.99

LARRY ELLIOTT and Dan Atkinson's *Fantasy Island*, attempts to debunk a number of economic "fantasies" about the British economy during

the Blair and Brown years. The authors are, broadly speaking, Keynesian economics journalists, who should be familiar to anyone who has followed Elliott's articles in *The Guardian*.

Tracing Blair's career from an apolitical university student





## Backspace / Feedback

sector as the one place where debt is not a problem, although they fail to draw the obvious conclusion – that corporate debt has been declining for several years as high rates of profit have enabled companies to fund investment without excessive borrowing.

Profitability is briefly referred to in a few other places; for example, UK companies earn more on their assets abroad than foreign investors do here, and returns on investment are higher in the relatively labour-

Elliott and Atkinson's "ticking time-bomb"; loans, credit cards and, most importantly, mortgages form the gravest threat facing the UK economy:

"Astronomical levels of personal indebtedness will, we believe, prove a millstone around the economy's neck in the decade to come, a blinding hangover that will hobble economic activity and consumer spending for years."

With rising house prices, the growth in mortgage debt has been

and the "real" economy. After all, the money circulating in the financial system, including loans, originates in the surplus value extracted from workers in the productive sectors of the world economy. Finally, and this forms the conclusion to the book, they view the UK as "living well beyond its means" and in need of a dose of traditional "restraint":

"At an individual, national and global level the message is the same: we have to start cutting our coat according to our cloth and end the delusion, cultivated by the government, that we can 'have it all'."

This is not a particularly inviting prospect for the workers and its not a particularly realistic one for the capitalists, when a record \$14 billion in bonuses has just been lavished on city financiers, but it is nonetheless deemed necessary for long term economic stability.

But it is not mainly government which tells us (the workers) that we can "have it all", but the financiers – who have already "got it all." Workers borrow because of the financiers' incessant propaganda encouraging them to live beyond their means, while wages are squeezed in the interest of global competitiveness, preventing them from doing so.

This focus on household's cutting their cloth doesn't fit in well, as elsewhere the authors do highlight the massive inequalities that neo-liberalism has engendered.

This blurring, or more accurately air-brushing of class, also colours their analysis of environmental crisis because of the historic link between growth in global GDP per capita and the rise in greenhouse gas emissions. The limitations of the "Stern Review" are examined, but little is said on what could be done if alternative technology was properly funded.

For Elliott and Atkinson, "Fantasy Island is on the point of disappearing beneath the waves"; financial and economic crisis appears imminent. So while they grudgingly acknowledge some of the features of the current upswing in capitalism – the unusually

### The focus on household's cutting their cloth doesn't sit well, as the authors highlight the massive inequalities that neo-liberalism has engendered

intensive service sector than in manufacturing. But this is in passing; the rate of profit, the key indicator for any thorough analysis of a capitalist economy, is largely missing from the book.

But if corporate debt is no problem, then government debt is a minor one. While the authors enjoy demolishing Chancellor Brown's "golden rule", showing how he has squeezed and then stretched the economic cycle to make the "current" expenditure budget balance, they show how the government's ability to borrow money more cheaply than private capital makes PFI an absurdly expensive way to build new schools and hospitals.

So it is household debt which is

enormous, up 94% from 2001 to 2005, whilst average earnings only grew by 22%. Mortgage repayments for first-time buyers are at their highest proportion of take-home pay since the early 1990s.

There are two main reasons for this rise in personal debt; the deregulation of financial services in the 1980s and low interest rates after the bursting of the dotcom bubble in 2000. As you would expect, the authors are in favour of much tighter controls on the city, such as capital controls and a tax on speculation. No fantasy island there then.

Their position on interest rates is less clear and it would have been useful to examine further the relationship between interest rates

## REVOLUTIONARY OUT NOW! HISTORY Pierre Broué Commemorative Issue Vol. 9 No.4

Trotskyist historian, editor of Cahiers Léon Trotsky and author of a major biography of Leon Trotsky, Pierre Broué, died in 2005. This new issue offers a critical, biographical article and a series of articles and extracts of Broué's work not previously published in English

Orders to: Socialist Platform Ltd, BCM 7646, London WC1N 3XX  
Web: [www.revolutionary-history.co.uk](http://www.revolutionary-history.co.uk) Email: [barry.buitekant@tesco.net](mailto:barry.buitekant@tesco.net)

strong global growth and the dynamism of the emerging economies over the last five years – they tend to view them as short-lived and dwarfed by the problem of debt.

Thus, they draw parallels between the world economy today and in 1929, but ignore the dramatic fall in production that occurred in the US and other developed economies several months before the Wall Street Crash in October.

They view the restructuring of the economy over the last quarter of a century – the decline of manufacturing and rise in financial services – as making the UK particularly vulnerable to a recession. They also recognise the trend towards services in all developed economies, but Germany and Japan are considered successes – with healthy current account surpluses – because of their larger

manufacturing sectors.

The book's metaphor of "fantasy islands" also has limits as a pedagogical device, and the reader does sometimes wish they would state their case more explicitly – the most glaring example being the discussion on military spending. The UK is apparently masquerading as a military superpower but doing so on a shoestring budget, such that the "fantasy" is unsustainable. But is militarism or under-funding the problem? Similarly, they can't quite decide if there genuinely has been low inflation over the last decade.

Despite these criticisms, it is refreshing to find a non-academic book that attempts to grapple with the "big" economic issues of the day from a left of centre perspective. Their analysis of capitalism and crisis is certainly thought provoking if never, of course, fantastical.

**Graham Balmer**

truly "the poor man's air force".

The book takes on an extra dimension in its discussion of the 1980s co-operation between the CIA, the Pakistani intelligence organisation, ISI, and Osama bin Laden, in the struggle against the USSR in Afghanistan. Their collaboration meant that car bombing went from being the specialisation of small and relatively elite groups of terrorists, to being developed on a mass scale, which has laid the basis for the almost daily use of car bombs by the Iraqi insurgency today.

And so there is far from a happy ending to Davis' book. In the concluding chapter he quotes a senior officer from the Royal Ulster Constabulary reflecting on the end of the troubles: "This is not a military issue, it is a political issue. The major portion of the damage and death . . . was caused by the fertiliser bomb . . . two men with shovels can make up a thousand pound bomb in a Fermanagh cowshed . . . you can't decommission shovels. It's minds which have to be decommissioned."

And as long as they are not, as the Iraq war proves, then the car bomb will remain an ever present feature of the news channels.

**Bill Jefferies**

## A history of the poor man's airforce

**BUDA'S WAGON: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CAR BOMB**

Mike Davis

Verso / 2007 / £12.99

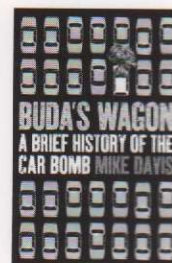
MIKE DAVIS is the author of some of the most stimulating and original investigations by any left wing author currently working. From his brilliant study of Los Angeles, *City of Quartz*, to his excoriating exposé of Britain's blood soaked empire building, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, Davis has consistently produced works which illuminate forgotten or ignored subjects from a radically different perspective to the normal apologetics of academic research.

*Buda's Wagon* is no exception. It does exactly what it says on the cover and traces how the car bomb originated in the frustration of an Italian American Anarchist exile, Mario Buda, who exploded a

cartload of dynamite outside Wall Street in 1920. He was protesting against the arrest of two of his comrades, Sacco and Vanzetti, framed by the state and later executed.

It follows the history through to the bloody onslaughts of al-Zarqawi in Iraq, attempting to systematically foment civil war by slaughtering defenceless Shi'ite Muslims. What becomes clear in this history is that the car bomb has always been the weapon of choice of the dispossessed and powerless.

Each technical development in the car bomb has meant its power has developed exponentially, while its ubiquity and ease of construction has meant it has placed in the hands of the determined, if not the popular, a weapon of terrible destructive power. As Davis describes it, it is





## Backspace / Back issues



## Back issues of Permanent Revolution still available

A list of articles (excluding briefings  
and book reviews)

Back issues £3.50 inc p & p

### Issue 1 July 2006

The split in the League for a Fifth International  
Morales and the Bolivian Revolution  
Spain 1936 Lessons of the Popular Front

### Issue 2 Autumn 2006

Five years on from 9/11  
Lebanon a welcome defeat for Zionism  
Globalisation: capitalism's long upturn  
Scottish Socialist Party split: politics or personality  
World economy: China's powering economy  
Britain: The NHS and the market  
Chile: the penguins' march to victory

### Issue 3 Winter 2007

Bush's year of living dangerously  
Venezuela: a revolution for our time?  
Climate change: tipping point for capitalism  
Prostitution: Marxism versus moralism  
Political Islam: behind the global jihad  
Marxism versus anarchism: to take power or not

### Issue 4 Spring 2007

Strong profits drive capitalism surging business cycle  
Widening Iraq crisis: Bush's Middle East gamble  
The state of the British working class  
Bolivia dossier: a country in ferment  
France after Chirac: the left and the election  
Women small changed: microcredit  
Ireland: the end of republicanism  
Spain 1937: Barcelona in revolt

### Issue 5 Summer 2007

Palestine: Hamas pre-empts US-inspired coup  
G8: more broken promises  
Sarkozy's anti-worker offensive begins  
End of the Blair era?  
SWP's economics: a distorted picture of global  
capitalism  
Opening a debate: the revolutionary youth movement

Payable by PayPal on our  
website, or please make  
cheques payable to  
PR Publications

Send to  
PR Publications  
BM Box 9180  
London WC1N 3XX

# permanent revolution

Issue 6 / Autumn 2007 / £2.50 €4.00



The Road to Red October

The ABC of Marxism

Read on line, download in PDF format or buy in hard copy for only £2.50 (inc P&P)

PR Publications,  
BM Box 9180,  
London WC1N 3XX

Cheques payable to  
PR Publications



"IF THE movement is serious about it, we can find common timetables for action. Immediately after Congress we should convene a meeting, to draw up concrete plans for joint action with those who are ready, but involve all of those who may want to take action further down the line."

This was PCS leader Mark Serwotka speaking to September's TUC congress when the motion for co-ordinated strike against Gordon Brown's pay cutting 2% wage ceiling for the public sector was announced.

The possibility for such action is real. The PCS is balloting for action and likely to win a yes vote for strikes. The postal strikes have been set in motion again. Other workers are due to ballot in other parts of the public sector. Even TUC general secretary, Brendan Barber, has promised to convene a special meeting to plan action that could lead to some of the biggest strikes in Britain for many years.

But the transition from ballots and resolutions to action to bust the pay freeze will not be an automatic one. The very leaders who talked left at the TUC congress will be convening their very own action committees behind closed doors – planning action to stop the strikes from taking place. The last thing the union leaders want in a run up to a possible election – that Brown may or may not call – is a "winter of discontent". They put the electoral fortunes of a neoliberal Labour prime minister well above the needs of their low paid members.

## Smash Brown's 2% freeze

After all this is the same Brendan Barber who helped stitch up the firefighters when they struck for higher pay during the Blair government.

This is the same CWU leadership who called off the postal strikes earlier in the summer at the very point when they looked like they could win. Billy Hayes and Dave Ward of the CWU gave the bosses time to regroup and pick off militants in key areas, clear the backlog of post and get ready for the second round of a fight that they always intended to have.

And, sadly, it is the same Mark Serwotka who went along with the calling off of joint action over pensions, resulting in the introduction of a two-tier pension system across the public sector that sold off the pensions of a whole generation of new workers.

What this means is that militants need to take the TUC's call for co-ordinated strikes as a cue to

build rank and file organisations capable of launching, sustaining and winning a public sector strike against the pay freeze. In every locality there should be union-based public sector alliances formed. They should begin preparing for action now – raising money, planning pickets, meetings and demos, contacting other unions to enlist support for the fight.

They should elect strike committees now and get ready to impose control over any action and any negotiations, carried out by the union leaders.

And they should begin the work of drawing in the whole working class community in every area, pointing out the threat to services that is lodged in the attack on pay, exposing the extent of privatisation and the plans to privatise yet more of our services.

Building such cross-union and community support for action now means we can turn the TUC resolution from words to deeds and smash Brown's pay freeze.

Back issues / Permanent Revolution 2 to 5

Back issues still available on request in hard copy or on our website. See inside front cover for details

[www.permanentrevolution.net](http://www.permanentrevolution.net)

