

workers power

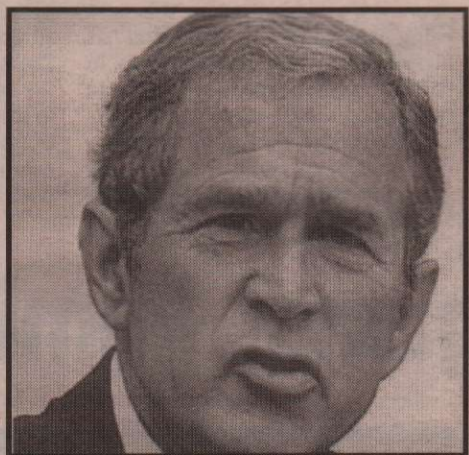
revolution
against
global
capitalism

October 2001 Issue 257 ★ Price 50p

- Defend our civil liberties p2
- The agony of Afghanistan p4-5
- One year of the Intifada p8



DEFEND AFGHANISTAN



DEFEAT IMPERIALISM

STOP US/UK'S WAR

See page 3, 5 and 6 for more on the war

Beware Blunkett's clampdown

New Labour has inherited and further developed a formidable array of repressive legislation. But, as *Jon Bevan* warns, more measures are in the pipeline under the guise of the anti-terrorist 'crusade'

A drive to war inevitably brings overblown rhetoric about national unity, patriotism and the need to stifle dissent, even as our governments supposedly act in the name of freedom and democracy. But Tony Blair and co will be relying on a good deal more than media self-censorship to marginalise opposition to the war drive.

Home Secretary David Blunkett has pursued his own reactionary agenda since the World Trade Centre attacks – not only a crackdown on refugees, but the threat of identity cards for the rest of us in order to access the most basic of services. Under the proposal floated prior to Labour Party conference, any seriously ill person could have turned up at hospital without an ID and been refused admission.

Even without sections of the media instilling paranoia and whipping up an anti-Muslim backlash, it does not require much imagination to see how an ID card scheme would license the police to revive the discredited "Sus" law and target people from ethnic minority communities.

Blunkett has backed down from this pet idea – for now. But Labour's record on civil liberties suggests it could well come back as part of the long-term "war against terrorism".

Blair's beloved "free world" has become a whole lot less free since he took office in 1997.

The danger signs were already there when Labour were in opposition. Labour shadow ministers helped draft the notorious Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJA), which vastly increased the police's powers of stop and search. Once elected Labour were happy to leave this appalling legislation on the books, unamended.

The beauty of the CJA, to our rulers, was that it enabled police to stop, search, and detain merely on suspicion that persons might be about to create a public disorder. In effect, it severely curbed the right to demonstrate. The police used it on Mayday (though many of their actions were actually illegal) and around the recent Labour conference demo, where Wombles (anti-capitalist militants) were summarily arrested prior to the event.

Under two authoritarian home secretaries, Blair's government has rein-



Blunkett is using the "anti-terrorist" drive to attack our civil liberties

forced the CJA with even more draconian legislation. The legal arsenal now includes the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 1999, and last year's Terrorism Act.

The Criminal Justice Act 1998 set another frightening precedent: it enabled courts to convict a person for belonging to a proscribed (banned) organisation merely on the evidence of a senior police officer. Repeat: you are a terrorist because a copper says you are. In addition, the act instructs juries to treat a suspect's refusal to answer "relevant" questions as corroboration of the police officers' evidence.

Ever since the Pentagon developed the internet more than 30 years ago, governments have worried about the potential use by "subversives" of electronic communication. In proposing censorship, politicians have raised the bogeyman of fascist websites – but it is the left they're really after. Seattle con-

firmed their worst fears – a mass protest organised largely over the net.

Labour's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 1999 gave MI5 huge new snooping powers over the net – direct access to ISP data, for example, and the right to demand encryption (coding) keys. Under this legislation,

which made a mockery of the freedoms supposedly conferred by the Human Rights Acts, a person can be charged for receiving an illegal message even if they don't know who sent it – and if anyone reveals, even to a partner, that they have been asked for an

encryption key, they can be jailed for up to five years!

Of course, there's still the good old phone – if you can find one that isn't being listened to. Phone tapping has increased markedly in recent years. In part this has been due to MI5's need to find work for itself after the end of the Cold War. Under new anti-terrorism legislation, Labour are likely to give the police the right not only to tap calls but

to use the transcripts as evidence in court.

The Terrorism Act 2000 proscribed a long list of organisations and included a significant redefinition of what constitutes a "terrorist." Anyone merely proposing the overthrow of the state by force, or even any form of attack on an individual, property, or communications system, is now a terrorist for the purposes of British law. Hackers can be terrorists; likewise, destroyers of GM crops; people who smash up McDonalds; members of revolutionary socialist groups. If national security dictates, then all such individuals and organisations can be declared illegal overnight. Premises can be invaded by police without a warrant.

Blunkett's new proposals go even further. Anyone thought to have knowledge about "terrorists" will be liable to arrest and prolonged questioning without charge. Banks will be forced to reveal details of suspected "terrorist" accounts.

There can be no doubt that the developing anti-war movement will face attacks under already existing legislation and from the state's covert spooks, all in the name of defending freedom. Snooping on CND activists and attempts to undermine militant trade unionism were well-known long before Stella Rimington published her memoirs about being Britain's spy chief.

As the experience of the war in Northern Ireland illustrates, once "anti-terrorist" measures have become familiar and acceptable, they can become a part of routine policing. Not so long ago, the image of military police defending the Labour Party's conference from peaceful demonstrators would have been dismissed as paranoid fantasy. Now it is reality. The state has drawn an equal sign between "fundamentalist terrorists" and anti-capitalist activists.

The imperialist powers have grown ever keener to harmonise immigration and anti-terrorist laws – drawing in those lesser nations which have not attracted a significant "terrorist" threat. The WTC attack will be seized on to justify new repressive measures not only in the US and UK, but throughout the EU. But every attack on civil liberties confirms just how insecure the "New World Order" really is.

There can be no doubt that the developing anti-war movement will face attacks under already existing legislation and from the state's covert spooks, all in the name of defending freedom.

Politicians whip up hatred against immigrants

Asylum seekers have numbered among the first victims of Britain's drive to war.

Even though there has not been a shred of evidence to suggest that any of those responsible for the terrorist attacks in the USA had ever sought asylum in the West, the mainstream media have been fuelling paranoia and chauvinist hatred.

Two days before the 11 September attacks, *The Sunday Express* retailed a front-page lead story that

claimed that dozens of Iraqi agents had gathered at the miserable Sangatte camp, near Calais, with the ultimate aim of launching attacks in Britain. The *Daily Mail* followed suit with a similar story, 10 September and a vicious cartoon depicting pro-Bin Laden "Muslims" marching past a mosque.

During the 14 September emergency session of parliament, the Tory backbencher John Butterfill claimed that some of the 5,000 Afghans who had sought asylum in Britain in the past 18 months should be terrorist suspects: a new twist on blaming the victim.

After Australia's barbaric treatment of mainly Afghan asylum seekers on board the Norwegian ship Tampa, Aussie defence minister Peter Reith sought to justify the refusal to allow the ship to land by reference to the probability that Bin Laden supporters were on the vessel.

Politicians across Europe have seized on the 11 September attacks as a pretext for pursuing more draconian legislation

what we think

- Defend asylum seekers and their communities from racist attack
- End the government's racist voucher scheme and forced dispersal

against would-be refugees or for whipping up populist racism on the streets:

■ Home Secretary David Blunkett unveiled a package of measures at the recent Labour Party conference that would further restrict the right to claim asylum. In effect, immigration officials would be empowered to automatically refuse entry to individuals suspected of having links to a terrorist organisation. In short, Kurds, Palestinians, Colombians and Sri Lankan Tamils would be among those

people directly affected by such a measure.

■ A special meeting of European Union ministers in Brussels on 15/16 October is likely to tear up what remains of the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees.

■ A senior French government minister – in complete contradiction to local investigators – is now suggesting that the blast at a Toulouse fertiliser factory that claimed 29 lives was the result of terrorism simply because a French national with Islamic fundamentalist sympathies was among the dead.

■ In Italy, the extreme-right Northern League, part of the Berlusconi coalition government, has mounted demonstrations featuring placards with the slogan "Illegal immigrants=Islamic terrorists".

Against this background the anti-war movement must align itself firmly against the surge in racist violence and in defence of asylum seekers. Concretely, this means supporting communities under attack, demanding an end to the detention of asylum seekers and foreign nationals, charged with no crime, and fighting for an end to the government's voucher scheme and forced dispersal policies.

Stop the rise of the racist tide

Violence against Asian and Muslim immigrants has not yet reached the levels seen in the USA, where at least three murders have occurred in so-called "revenge" attacks. Even so, there has been a dramatic rise in vandalism, including arson attempts, against mosques and in street-level physical assaults across Britain.

The most serious reported incident occurred in west London where Haniddullah Gharwal, a 28-year-old Afghan refugee, driving a mini-cab, was set upon by a gang of three white men. They shouted racist abuse, including references to the World Trade Centre attack. They left the victim paralysed from the neck down. Another cab driver of South Asian origin was at the sharp end of a similar assault in Brentford, West London, in the early hours of 24 September. In Swindon, a 19-year-old Asian woman was set upon with a baseball bat by a gang screaming "Here's a Muslim", while a white male shouting racist abuse struck an Asian woman with a hammer on a crowded tram in Greater Manchester.

The fascists, in particular the British National Party (BNP), have seen their opportunity and stepped up production and distribution of its leaflet targeting asylum seekers, as well as producing an explicitly anti-Muslim leaflet. Several of the most serious attacks on mosques have taken place in Greater Manchester, where the BNP has been most active in recent months. In Oldham, where BNP leader Nick Griffin gained 16 per cent of the vote at the general election, thugs smashed the windows of the New Jamia mosque and daubed its walls with racist graffiti.

■ National day of protest action called by the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS), Saturday 3 November. For further information contact CDAS, BCM Box 4289, London WC1X 3XX, Telephone: 07941 555183 or E-mail: info@defend-asylum.org

What we think...

Stop the US/UK's war

The US-led attack on Afghanistan is an atrocity. The war that Bush and Blair have unleashed from the comfort of Washington and Westminster will kill and maim thousands more innocent victims.

We have to be clear that in this war we want to see the imperialist coalition defeated, and that means supporting all Afghan military resistance against imperialism, including Taliban resistance. Why?

Blair and Bush's war aim is not simply to "end terror" - it is to reassert global capitalism's domination of the world and control the central Asian region.

That's why tens of thousands of people across the globe have come together to oppose the war.

The American press has asked the question: "why do they hate us"? But few in the establishment can stomach the answer.

The system of global exploitation that is run from Wall Street is one, long organised atrocity.

Hunger and preventable disease kill thousands of children every day in the poorest countries of the world. Heavily indebted countries spend more on debt repayment than on education and health. And the USA's puppets - the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organisation - are on a mission to rip away every obstacle to cheap labour and privatisation.

But global capitalism does not just kill by starvation and disease. The USA backs torture regimes and terror groups across the globe.

It backs the death squads in Colombia. It backs the Israeli murder machine against the Palestinians. It even backed bin Laden when his terror groups were useful in the fight against the Soviet Union.

To point to all these facts is not to justify the September 11 attacks - but it does justify the mass movement against the imperialist war - a movement that must unite workers, refugees and peace campaigners in the developed countries with the mass struggles against imperialism that are raging from Palestine to the Philippines.

The attack on the World Trade Centre has given Bush and Blair every excuse they need to step up repression against liberation movements in the Middle East and around the world.

It has set the stage for a crackdown on civil rights, on refugee rights, on media freedom.

And it has allowed the West's rulers a free hand in the class struggle. As George W Bush gave a billion dollar handout to the airlines, the airline bosses were preparing to sack 90,000 - many without redundancy pay or benefits.

In Britain, those who called for the TUC to keep up the fight against privatisation were denounced as "traitors" - and the GMB union has already called off its million pound publicity campaign against privatisation. Gordon Brown has warned there will be spending cuts to pay for all the bombs and bullets.

But the class struggle will go on.

And it is no longer just a struggle against privatisation and poverty. Bush has drawn the line - you're either for us or against us. And Blair has rushed preening to his side.

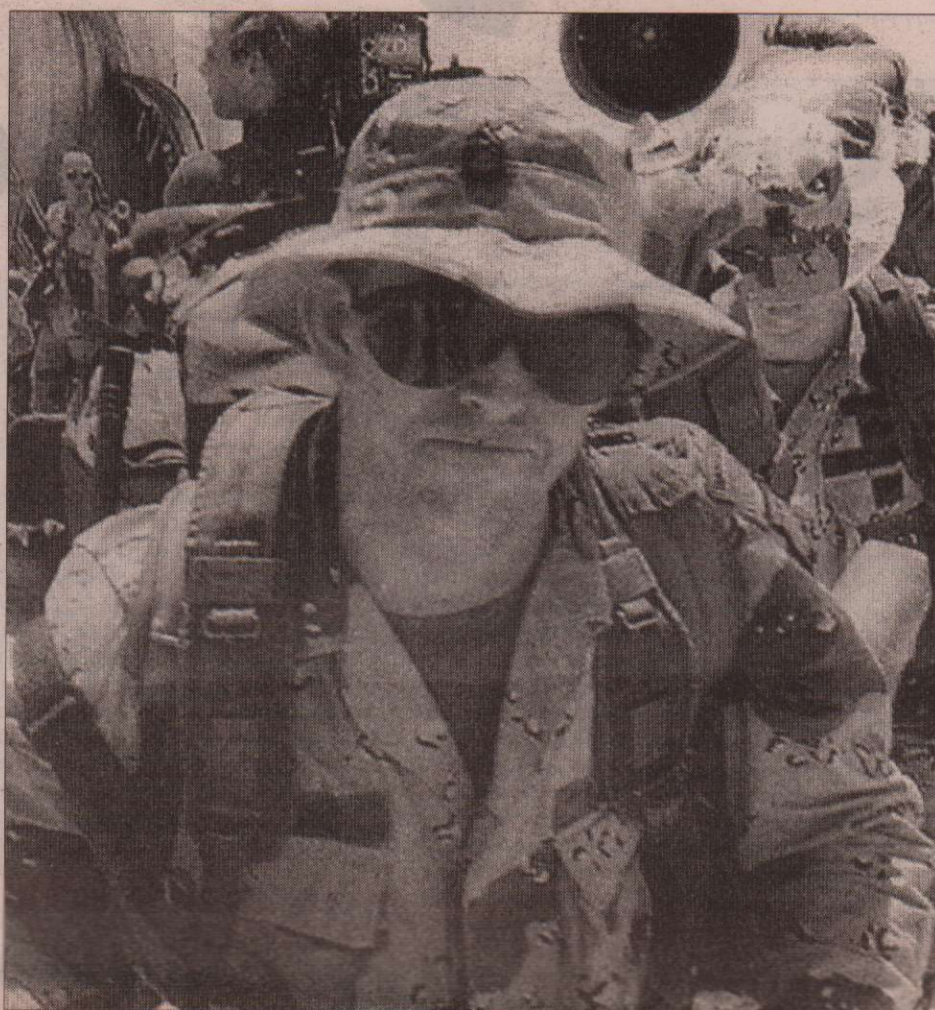
Well sorry, Tony Blair: the millions of workers who voted Labour did not vote for a US-led military rampage across Asia and the Middle East.

We need mass action, uniting trade unionists, peace campaigners, refugee groups and the anti-capitalist movement to stop the US/UK's war. If we fail there will be a decade of carnage.

In the immediate aftermath of the World Trade Centre attack there was talk, in Washington, of carpet bombing and even nuclear strikes. Now it seems the USA is taking a step-by-step approach. But it's just as dangerous.

The hawks in the Bush regime - and many on the US right - wanted to unleash Armageddon, not just on Afghanistan but on all the rogue states who will not play ball with US domination: Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya and North Korea. They even threatened strikes against Pakistan until it agreed to co-operate with the USA.

But a different strategy has now emerged: the "ten year war on terror". Far from representing



restraint or moderation, this strategy is designed to deliver an even more complete US triumph over the peoples of the Third World.

The USA is busy constructing a coalition with some of the worst dictatorships in the world.

Jack Straw was sent on an errand to kiss the backside of the Iranian dictatorship that has killed tens of thousands of workers, students and peasants.

US diplomats are showering favours on the military dictatorship in Pakistan. Musharraf's right wing junta can have debt relief and even its own nuclear weaponry in return for siding with the US.

Russia has been given the nod to carry on massacring and raping Muslims in Chechnya in return for its support.

The imperialists are operating the old maxim of US policy: "They may be sons of bitches but they're our sons of bitches". As a result, those struggling for democracy and human rights across the globe will now be on the receiving end of unbridled repression.

As well as bombing, we are likely to see incursions by ground troops, commando raids and a prolonged dirty war against Islamic movements.

It is because of the scale of opposition and resentment to imperialist rule, because they fear the transformation of resentment and opposition into mass resistance, they know Cruise missiles are not enough.

Imperialism's other repressive techniques against its opponents are well known and all too effective. They include police repression, deportation, torture, censorship and death squads. They include puppet leaders of mass movements and client states - people like Arafat and the Jordanian monarchy who would rather do deals with the US than lead resistance. They include tame Labour and trade union leaders who will agree to suspend the class struggle for the duration of war.

That is why we must be clear: imperialism's target is not just a few Islamic "terrorists". It is the whole global resistance to capitalism that is in the gunights of the Washington offensive.

And whether liberals and pacifists in the west like it or not - the masses of the Third World will fight back.

If the workers' movement does not head up the resistance it will be led by radical right-wing Islamic movements, from Egypt to Pakistan to the Philippines.

Because of this - and because of the terrible price the imperialists will extract from a global victory - the working class and socialist movements must put themselves at the head of anti-imperialist resistance.

The workers' movement in Britain must com-

The anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s must be our model. It acted, along with the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people, as a major deterrent to US military aggression for years.

memorate not just the US workers who died on 11 September but also the innocent victims of US foreign policy in Latin America, the Balkans, the Middle East and across the globe.

The best way to fight for the interests of ordinary people in the USA, Britain and the other imperialist countries is to launch a mass movement against the imperialist war, protect ethnic minorities and defend civil rights.

That includes giving active support to the Palestinian struggle against Israeli reoccupation of cities and towns in the West Bank.

The anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s must be our model. It acted, along with the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people, as a major deterrent to US military aggression for years.

There already exists a vibrant mass movement against global capitalism. It has "summit-hopped" its way into history, paralysing the imperialist economic diplomacy and shaking the confidence of the system's apologists.

Now that movement - which had begun to unite with organised workers sporadically and

tentatively - must do two things:

■ sink deeper roots into working class communities;

■ come out openly against the war and organise direct action to hinder the war machine.

The task of the moment is to prevent the imperialist attack. Blair's ministers have been quietly shocked by the size and immediacy of the anti-war response. And we've only just started.

The LRCI and its British Section - Workers Power - stand clearly for the military victory of all Afghan forces that resist the US/UK offensive. This includes Taliban forces that resist the imperialist offensive.

The war against Afghanistan must be the signal for a generalised protest across the region: strikes, the occupation of roads and the blockade of US military installations can paralyse the Pentagon warmongers.

Workers across the globe must stand with the ordinary people of Afghanistan against the military onslaught.

The events of 11 September show that globalisation, and the USA's domination of the world, are not heralding a new era of peace and plenty.

We are entering a period of dramatic instability, in which the hatred and revulsion engendered by imperialist policy, global inequality and national oppression, rouse individuals to acts of desperate violence as well as to mass resistance.

The USA is sowing the seeds of further conflicts to come, ensuring that the 21st Century will be at least as violent and bloody as the last.

The World Trade Centre attack sent shockwaves through the world economy - but it did not cause the recession that is about to be unleashed. Capitalism itself is the root cause of economic misery.

Added to the miseries of repression and war we may be about to see those of a prolonged and co-ordinated global recession.

But another world is possible.

A world without racism, war and unpredictable terror can only come about if we attack the root causes.

And the root cause is capitalism.

Capitalism sucks wealth from ordinary people to feed a privileged layer of rich businessmen. Capitalism dooms humanity to crisis and war.

Socialism means taking away their wealth and power and putting society under the control of the working class. It means allocating resources according to need, not the profit motive.

To get socialism we need a workers revolution.

And revolution - not terror - is the biggest fear that stalks the White House and Downing Street. Our rulers know that every world war has resulted in huge revolutionary upheavals.

They told themselves that, with the collapse of the corrupt, decrepit Soviet bureaucracy they had seen the end of history. But history has returned, big time.

Of course, as in all wars, there will be a wave of patriotism as "our boys" go in. Just as surely there will be a wave of revulsion when some of these young people come back in body bags while Blair, Brown and Straw sit smugly thousands of miles from the action.

Revulsion will turn to anger as workers realise it is they who are having to pay the price: through spending cuts, job losses and curtailed civil liberties.

Millions will realise that the war Blair and Bush have unleashed against "terror" is in fact a war against democracy and social justice.

Globalisation, indebtedness, poverty and the rule of military tyrants are the real payload on the warheads of the cruise missiles they will aim at Kabul, Baghdad or Khartoum.

That's why socialists are determined to turn the struggle against the war into a struggle against the system that has spawned it.

Shoulder to shoulder, workers and young people across the globe, we can stop Bush and Blair's war, defend Afghanistan and defeat imperialism.

For more on the war, see:

<http://www.workerspower.com>

or <http://www.worldrevolution.org.uk>

The agony of

A land of suffering

Afghanistan is not simply a poor country. It is one of the most economically and socially backward, war ravaged, famine stricken and desperate places on earth. Yet the USA, the world's biggest imperialist power, has launched a prolonged military onslaught on it. This can only add to the devastation which Soviet intervention, CIA sponsored civil war and the reactionary medievalists of the Taliban have so far achieved.

Afghanistan proper came into being in 1747, following a nine day council meeting - a Loya Jirga - of the warlords and tribal leaders (khans) of the dominant ethnic group, the Pashtuns. They elected an Emir, Ahmed Shah Durrani, and his dynasty ruled Afghanistan until 1973. Yet this unbroken royal lineage did not mean that national unity and a modern nation state had emerged. Far from it. The king mainly served as an arbiter between the clans, tribes and disparate nationalities who inhabited the region.

The factors militating against modernisation were numerous. Afghanistan's geography was a major factor. A vast and inhospitable desert in the west, highlands in the centre, and enormous mountains in the east and north (the Hindu Kush), meant that the country was carved into distinct chunks by nature itself. Herat, an oasis town in the west, was a world apart from Kabul in the foothills of the Hindu Kush. Different influences and different cultures grew and became entrenched in this fragmented landscape.

Only a small portion of the land (around 20 per cent) was fertile. Large sections of the population were nomads. Others relied on an ancient tribal system, dominated by large landowners, in order to survive. Loyalty to the clan meant being able to work a small plot of land. Being able to eat - and enjoying the protection of the clan from rivals out to steal your produce - reproduced and reinforced an essentially feudal system.

As late as 1979 the cities and major towns of Afghanistan - Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar - E - Sharif and the capital, Kabul - were inhabited by only around five per cent of the population. Years of war have slightly swelled the urban population with refugees. But the modern urban classes of Afghanistan remained too weak in numbers and too divided in politics to lead the transformation of the country. In particular the core of the working class (industrial and service waged worker) to this day numbers hundreds of thousands, rather than millions. The majority of the 20 million population live in tiny rural villages, the mountains and the deserts.

The establishment of a monarchy was only possible with the consent of the khans. The interference of that monarchy in the affairs of the tribes that the khans ruled was excluded from the outset. Any attempt at interference was met with violent resistance. When King Ammanullah attempted systematic modernisation in the 1920s (with help from Soviet Russia) he was driven from the throne and replaced by the more pliable and traditional Pashtun monarch King Zahir, who ruled from 1934 to 1973 and is now being talked of as the new ruler of Afghanistan.

In such circumstances the emergence of a genuinely Afghan national consciousness was thwarted. The population remained divided between several distinct nationalities, deeply hostile to each other. The main group, the Pashtuns, have dominated and oppressed the others - Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras plus many smaller groups - for centuries. Unity has only ever come about episodically, usually during conflicts with the big powers (Britain in the 19th and early 20th century; Russia in the 1980s).

Ethnic conflict has been compounded by religious antagonism. The Hazaras account for around 20 per cent of the country and are Shi'ite Muslims. The majority of people in Afghanistan are Sunni Muslims. Such was the persecution of the Shi'ites by the Taliban in the late 1990s that Shi'ite Iran was on the verge of invading to defend its religious thinkers.

Despite all of these disadvantages Afghanistan has always been an important country for the imperial powers, the regional powers and, of course, for the former Soviet Union. It is, by virtue of its location, a vital crossroads in the trade routes between the Indian sub-continent, the far east, the Middle East and Europe. Its cities grew as great trading centres during the heyday of the spice trade. The quickest land route to India lay through the valleys and across the mountain passes of Afghanistan. The Khyber pass, to this day is a major trading thoroughfare. Even if you know next to nothing about Afghanistan you will probably have heard of this famous pass.

In addition Afghanistan has always acted as a kind of natural buffer zone between the great powers. In the nineteenth century it was the setting for the "Great Game" between Britain and Tzarist Russia. It quite literally stood between a Russia that was expanding into Central Asia and a Britain determined to rule eternally over the lucrative sub-continent.

Three times British expeditionary forces crossed into Afghanistan - 1838, 1878 and 1919 - in a bid to place it under direct colonial rule. Three times they were beaten back. In 1878 Britain did secure control of the country's foreign policy, a major prize given the conflict with Russia. But the attempt to maintain this in 1919 saw the mighty British empire humbled by the ill equipped but utterly determined Afghan tribesmen.

In the later twentieth century it was a vital barrier between the USSR and Iran (a threat when the pro-US Shah ruled and when the Islamic fundamentalist Khomeini replaced him) and pro-imperialist Pakistan. It was in order to maintain its ability to play that role that the USSR launched its fateful invasion of the country in Christmas 1979.

But by 1988, after killing over one million people and blasting mountains and cities alike, Russia began to withdraw its troops and by 1989 had conceded defeat.

Today Afghanistan's geopolitical importance is supplemented by the need for a safe pipeline across the country to carry the plentiful natural gas and oil of Central Asia to an energy-crazing west.

The USA was still busy trying to secure the contract for this pipeline for Unocal, a US oil multinational, when the current crisis broke. Selecting Afghanistan as a target for attack in the aftermath of September 11 is therefore not just to do with "terrorism". It is also prompted by the prospect of getting that pipeline after all, and with it access to the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia.

As a result of all of these factors - internal and external - Afghanistan has never made the leap into modernity that each of its neighbours undertook.

It has been preserved not simply as a semi-colony, but as a profoundly backward, feudal dominated and nationally divided semi-colony. Its remarkable and successful repulsion of invaders - British and Russian - has not given rise to a modern nation state. Rather, the victories have strengthened the feudal warlords and landowners and their antiquated system of tribal rule. This society was perfect for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Backward, divided, war weary but still at war with itself - enter the Taliban, "god's invincible soldiers." But their mission was not to create a modern

King Zahir who ruled from 1934 to 1973



The origins and

The Taliban - which literally means "students" or "seekers" of Islamic knowledge - grew from nothing in 1994 to become rulers of 90 per cent of Afghanistan by 1996.

It is an extremely young movement. The average age of its partisans is 14 to 24, and its leader Mullah Omar is 40 years old. It is an exclusively male Muslim brotherhood.

Most of its members grew up as orphans of the three wars in Afghanistan: against Russia from 1979 to 1989, against the regime Russia left behind from 1989 to 1992 and the intra-Islamic civil war which began in 1992 and continues to this day. A handful of leaders, like Omar, fought the Russians. But most of the Taliban's fighters were raised in the refugee camps in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. There, they were taught by fundamentalist mullahs in the Madrassas, the Islamic schools.

Their ideology stems from an Islamic sect in the eighteenth century, the Deobandi. Their beliefs are close to those

of the Wahhabi sect which dominates Saudi Arabia. But they are interwoven with Pashtun tribal customs as well, and can be summed up as a desire to restore a pure Islamic society in Afghanistan and beyond. The norms of the seventh century AD form their working model.

They have no constitution or policies as such, claiming their rule is based on the Koran and Sharia, Islamic law. They have no government separate from the religious leaders. The word of their leader, Mullah Omar, is absolute. Based in Kandahar this cleric assured his power by covering himself in the cloak of Mohammed during one of his very rare public appearances.

Omar rules through his students, a militia numbering at least 20,000, and his loyal clerics. The regime is based on terror. The young militia were, as one Taliban put it, organised gangs of "what Karl Marx would have termed the lumpenproletariat". Their situation in the refugee camps in Pakistan was desperate. Outside interference in Afghanistan by Russia and America alike

The Taliban's shock troops were the dispossessed youth of the refugee camps in Pakistan. But how did such a makeshift force win so many stunning victories in such a short time? Who backed the Taliban?

In the light of the west's fulminations against the Taliban after 11 September the answer to this question will catch the unwary by surprise. The Taliban could not have won without the backing of the USA. Imperialism helped them to power and then kept them in power.

US involvement in Afghanistan began when the modernising but crisis-racked regime of General Daud was overthrown in 1978 by the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The PDPA was based amongst primarily on the army and air force, but also on the small working class and intelligentsia. It was a Stalinist organisation and its seizure of power was via a coup, not a revolution.

The PDPA was, however, desperate to modernise and unite the nation, turn it into a pro-Soviet state and smash the feudal rule of the khans. The problem was, it chose to do this purely from above. It issued decrees abolishing peasant debt and reforming the land. It carried through a literacy programme and it tried to eradicate the worst aspects of women's oppression.

But it did all of this in a highly bureaucratic fashion, using repression rather than trying to mobilise the masses. Moreover, it was itself deeply divided. The Parcham wing of the PDPA under Taraki favoured concessions to the landlords and clerics and draped itself in the Green Flag of Islam. The Khalq wing, under Amin, was a kind of extreme third period Stalinist sect - waging brutal war against its opponents, including within the regime.

In the autumn of 1979 the Khalq leader, Amin, overthrew Taraki and

killed him. Amin then threw himself into the war against the Mujahedin (based on the tribal warlords) that had already organised a Jihad (holy war) against what it saw as the communist infidels in Kabul.

The USSR, which had poured billions into Afghanistan to keep it friendly, saw the danger of Amin blowing up its entire project. In 1979 it invaded the country, killed Amin and installed Babrak Karmal, whose first television appearance included an appeal to his fellow Muslims. The Soviet plan was to score quick victories against the Mujahedin and then effect a reconciliation with the Islamic opposition. It backfired badly and the USSR was to pay a heavy price, retreating in 1988-9 defeated, demoralised and wracked by internal crises that culminated in its collapse.

Washington saw its chance to engage the USSR in a proxy war.

Even before the Soviet invasion, the CIA had commenced a secret operation to support the Mujahedin. After the invasion, that support continued and intensified. Officially, more than \$6 billion was given to the Islamic fighters. Unofficially it amounted to a lot more. The victories of the Islamic fundamentalist came courtesy of Washington.

The National Security Adviser to the Carter regime at the time, Zbigniew Brzezinski, commented in 1998: "We didn't push the Russians to intervene but we consciously increased the probability that they would do so. This secret operation was an excellent idea. It drew the Russians into the Afghan trap."

Carter's successors, Reagan and Bush senior then prosecuted the proxy war with a vengeance and on the day Kabul fell to the Islamic reactionaries there were raucous celebrations at CIA headquarters. All the money, the training of Afghan guerrillas at US rifle clubs and CIA camps, the political support and the provision of the Stingers had paid off. The USSR

Afghanistan

doctrine of the Taliban...

seemed to have brought nothing but misery. Hence their hatred of "modernity" and their idealisation of a distant golden age.

A flavour of Taliban rule is revealed by the edicts of their leaders. On capturing Kabul the Taliban immediately issued decrees such as:

"After one and a half months if anyone observed who has shaved and/or cut his beard, they should be arrested and imprisoned until their beard gets bushy... To prevent music and dances in wedding parties. In case of violation the head of the family will be arrested and punished."

This sort of interpretation of Islam is fundamentalist rubbish. The Taliban claim that their decrees are merely the strict application of Sharia, Islamic law. Yet there is little justification in the teachings of the Koran for many of these policies and actions and little support for them among the majority of the world's Muslims.

Women are the Taliban's number one enemy. With each conquest in the 1994-

96 offensive, their first act was to close down all schools for girls. Women were forbidden from leaving their homes unless they were in clothes that completely hid every single feature. And then they were only allowed out in the company of male relatives.

The Taliban also banned women from working, except in the medical sector.

The basis of this gender hatred is the belief that women are a source of temptation leading men away from the true path of Islam. Therefore women must be completely segregated from men. The only way to impose this is to deny them any civil rights whatsoever. This is where the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice – the Taliban's secret police – comes in. They patrol, whips and guns in hand, to ensure that no woman transgresses any of the edicts laid down by the Taliban's leaders.

The scale of the tragedy for women at the hands of the Taliban needs to be understood in the context of a society in which they were already treated as

second class citizens and subject to being traded by their fathers for the requisite bride price.

- Prior to the Taliban's victories there was 90 per cent illiteracy amongst women. When they took Kabul the Taliban promptly closed 63 schools affecting 103,000 girls and sacked 7,800 women teachers.

- Out of every 100,000 pregnant women in Afghanistan 1,700 would die during childbirth. The Taliban issued 11 rules governing the behaviour of women in hospitals (doctors, nurses and patients) every one of which hampers healthcare and has led to thousands more needless deaths.

But while women were a primary target the Taliban's edicts aimed at everything classified as "un-Islamic". Televisions, cassette recorders, even kites and homing pigeons, were decreed illegal, the kites smashed and the pigeons killed. Petty theft was punished by dismemberment. More serious crimes resulted in execution (often in public). Radio Kabul, renamed Radio Sharia by

the Taliban, announced on 28 September 1996:

"Thieves will have their hands and feet amputated, adulterers will be stoned to death and those taking liquor will be lashed."

Political, religious and national oppression was also brutally imposed by this all-Pashtun movement. To wipe out the last traces of the old pro-Soviet regime the pre-1992 president Najibullah, under the protection of the UN, was captured by a Taliban, castrated, had his genitals stuffed in his mouth and was then dragged around Kabul by a jeep before finally being shot. Every suspected sympathiser of the old regime suffered a similar fate.

Similar treatment was meted out to Islamic opponents of the regime, to Shi'ites, to national minorities and to those city dwellers suspected of being under western influence. All of this resulted in the creation of one of the most vicious dictatorships on the planet.

But it begs the question: how did the

Who is Bin Laden?



Al-Qaeda is an individual terrorist organisation. While it is fighting the USA today there is nothing progressive about bin Laden's ideology or tactics. Even after he had declared war on the US troops in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden still found time to dispatch arms and supporters to Yemen to combat a "communist takeover".

Bin Laden's pawns are semi-literate youths drawn from the shanty towns of the Middle East, and even from migrant communities in the West. But the core of the movement is rich businessmen from the Gulf monarchies. In addition bin Laden makes use of a network within other Islamic groups – in Egypt and Algeria for example. The sole criterion is that they are right wing, anti-secular and anti-communist.

Washington and Whitehall, gave support to bin Laden when it suited their own political ends.

Six months before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 the US commenced covert aid to Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas in Afghanistan who were fighting the Kabul government.

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the CIA, according to official figures, gave \$6 billion of military aid to the Mojahedeen. The CIA and Britain supplied engineers and advisers to help bin Laden build his bases. His fighters were trained at the High Rock rifle club in Connecticut and a CIA training camp called "The Farm" in Williamsburg.

Bin Laden's former organisation, the MAK, received support from the CIA, as did seven different factions of the Afghan Mojahedeen. Crucially the US supplied the rebels with US Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, a factor that many observers point to as the turning point in the Afghan/Soviet war.

Senator Orrin Hatch, a senior Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee, commented on all of this: "It was worth it. Those were very important pivotal matters that played an important role in the downfall of the Soviet Union."

...and their backers

had suffered a catastrophic defeat.

Initially, the USA was disinterested in what happened next. But when Clinton came to power, Afghanistan was still engulfed in civil war. The conflict was between the PDPA and the Islamic forces and then, from 1992 onwards, between rival Islamic warlords. In these conditions, the US decided to back the emerging Taliban movement as a force for stability. It did this by directly involving its regional agent, Pakistan. The Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, with CIA backing, armed and equipped the growing Taliban movement and began to transport large numbers of its supporters from the refugee camps into Afghanistan.

The Taliban launched its offensive in 1994 to bring to an end the civil war that was raging inside Afghanistan. Its successes were spectacular as warlord after warlord fell. When it captured Kabul in 1996 the west heaved a sigh of relief. Not only would the Taliban bring order but, eventually, they would become an ally in the US war on drugs (Afghanistan supplies most of the world's opium).

Indeed George W Bush last May – that's a mere six months ago – indicated his support for the Taliban by granting it a \$43 million dollar aid package. That made the US the single largest sponsor of the Taliban regime in the world.

It hoped to woo the regime into handing over its guest, Osama bin Laden, and secure recognition for it beyond its only open supporters, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover the multinational oil company Unocal was now pushing for a settlement with the Taliban so that it could outflank its rivals in its bid to gain control of the planned oil and gas pipelines across the country and into Central Asia. The stakes had become high and Bush was willing to pay the Taliban to seal the deal.



US/UK backed Afghan guerrillas fighting the Soviets

Unocal received State Department backing and was given regular CIA briefings. The remaining opposition to the Taliban – the reactionary Northern Alliance – openly complained that the Taliban was being backed by the US because of Unocal's interests in the area.

So the USA bears direct responsibility for securing the victory of the Taliban, ably assisted by Pakistan.

Despite being sponsored by the US, however, the Taliban is not a creation of the US. Its emergence does owe something to the failure of the post PDPA regime to secure peace in Afghanistan.

Between 1992 and 1994 Afghanistan was in a state of perpetual chaos. For the traders – the trucking companies who constitute a mafia in Afghanistan – the

ending of the chaos was essential. Only with a new order could their trade begin to pay real dividends. Moreover this Mafia had powerful friends in Pakistan who promised to build and repair roads if only order could be established and tolls minimised.

This section of Afghan society poured money into the Taliban once it was convinced that they were determined to pacify the country. In this sense the Taliban did have the backing of an important wing of the small Afghan bourgeoisie within the country. This wing was happy to use the militia so that it could resume its lucrative trading operations (of contraband like drugs, as well as official commodities like fuel).

Imperialist backing, support from

the trucking bosses and an army of enraged lumpen youth – these were the potent factors that contributed to the Taliban's success. This did not, however, mean that the Taliban was a US agent.

The mullahs had their own agenda, their own reactionary goals and, to use CIA parlance, were always capable of delivering a "blowback" – turning on their paymasters.

On September 11 this appears to be what happened. The Taliban placed Pashtun hospitality (and probably support) for Osama bin Laden, above everything and now find themselves about to face the wrath of the "crusaders".

What next for Afghanistan?

Out of this conflict imperialism will try to piece together some new alliance – based around the aged king (in exile since 1973), the reactionary Islamic Northern Alliance or possibly even dissident elements within the Taliban. But for the people of Afghanistan the outcome will mean more misery. Refugees, already numbering millions, will freeze and die in the camps. Peasants will starve as drought and war exact their deadly toll on the land. The tiny working class and urban intelligentsia will once again see their historic cities reduced to rubble.

Afghanistan's agony can only be ended when a force is built, not only in that country but in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, which can rally the people around a project of modernisation that directly benefits them and involves them directly and democratically. Until a socialist federation of the near east is created, however, the agony will continue.

Revolutionaries

The USA and Britain are raining down bombs and cruise missiles on Afghanistan. Power stations in Kabul and Kandahar have been hit, plunging these cities into darkness and terror. The first civilians have been killed. Now the question is posed which side are you on. Here the League for a Revolutionary Communist International spells out what we will argue now the bombs have begun to fall.

What does Workers Power say about the war?

Our position on the imperialist attack on Afghanistan is that we are for the defeat of Britain/USA and its allies and for the victory of all the Afghan forces that resist them.

So our policy is for revolutionary defeatism with regard to the imperialist states, and revolutionary defensism with regard to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a semi-colony – a country that despite formal state independence is fully dependent on the world market dominated by the imperialist powers and their monopolies.

Does this mean supporting the Taliban?

In the event of imperialist attack, the LRCI stands clearly for the military victory of all Afghan forces that resist the US/UK offensive. That includes Taliban forces if they resist the imperialist offensive.

This in no way implies political support for the deeply reactionary Taliban regime or for the terrorist policies pursued by Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda organisation.

The LRCI condemned the indiscriminate mass terrorism of the attack on the World Trade Centre and the killing of the passengers of civilian airliners. This is not the way to struggle against imperialism. But we stress that imperialism is the biggest terrorist, having killed many, many times more innocent civilians during the past 10 years than bin Laden or the Taliban.

But aren't the Taliban just as bad as imperialism?

Afghanistan is a poor, devastated country – held in backwardness by decades of imperialist-sponsored civil war and economic dependency. US imperialism and its allies are the great powers responsible for poverty, wars and ecological disaster all over the globe.

Certainly the Taliban are a deeply reactionary force, which has banned all opposition, suppresses other religions and minorities, and has driven women from work and education.

But this war is not a war between democracy and reactionary Islamism. It is a war for US and imperialist control of a semi-colony. It is from this fundamental point of view that we defend semi-colonial countries – the regime in power at the time of the war is a secondary question.

We have to analyse this war not from just a short-term snapshot of the current situation but from the socio-economic fundamentals. The key starting point for Marxists is the relationship of the contending states to the world capitalist order and the interests of the class struggle against global capitalism.

So what is this war about?

The war is not about terrorism or Islamism. It is about imperialism's determination to crush any opposition around the globe. Imperialism wants to have the right to dictate to any country in the world what type of government it should have. The USA wants the right to intervene within other states at any time on the pretext of a "war on terrorism". The USA also wants control of the central Asian region and to secure territory for its oil supplies. From the Afghan side this war is about the defence of the country's sovereignty against the imperialists' grip.

Revolutionary communists are not champions of nation states – we want



Taliban camp. Revolutionaries should support the struggle of Afghanistan against imperialism

to see a world free from borders and nationalism. But national independence must not be abolished by the dictat of powerful nations over weak ones. It can only be overcome through the free and voluntary association of nations in an international socialist society, in which inequality and exploitation have been abolished.

But how can you side with a force in a war without supporting its politics? Surely this is a complete contradiction?

No it isn't. In the class struggle it is often the case that revolutionaries have to take sides in a conflict with forces to whose leadership and policies we are completely politically opposed. This does not and must not mean that we endorse or prettify their politics in any way.

The war is not fundamentally a choice between US democracy and Taliban theocratic despotism. It is between the right of the USA and Britain to dominate and plunder the natural resources of central Asia and the right of semi-colonial countries to resist imperialist aggression

The reason we are obliged to take sides is because of the real, practical, objective situation and what it means in terms of the worldwide conflict of forces. The war is not fundamentally a choice between US democracy and Taliban theocratic despotism. It is between the right of the USA and Britain to dominate and plunder the natural resources of central Asia and the right of semi-colonial countries to resist imperialist aggression.

There are countless situations in the class struggle in which revolutionaries have been obliged to support military forces which are at war with imperialism despite their counter-revolutionary politics. This was the case in the Falklands or Malvinas War in 1982 and the Gulf War in 1991. In the former case Workers Power (Britain) and the Irish Workers Group called for victory to Argentina. In the latter case the LRCI

called for victory to Iraq. We did this without for a single moment supporting the dictatorship of General Galtieri whose Junta had murdered thousands of workers and leftists when it came to power. Likewise we did not express any political support for a Saddam Hussein the butcher of the Kurds and the Shiite population of southern Iraq.

"It is in the direct interests of the Iraqi and Kurdish people to defend Iraq against imperialism without for a minute abandoning their just struggles for national freedom, democracy and class emancipation. In the war they should propose a military united front against the attacking imperialist forces. In practice this would require that the regime cease all repression against the progressive forces.

But whatever the regime's actions

had massacred 250,000 Chinese communists in the late 1920s. Trotsky explained this position very clearly with regard to Brazil in 1938 and, as with a great deal of the revolutionary ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, this method is directly relevant, and can be applied, to the situation today.

Trotsky wrote: "In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally – in this case I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the other hand should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners, and robbers!" ("Anti-imperialist struggle is key to liberation", September 1938, in *Writings, 1938-39*, p.34).

How does this apply today?

There is a fundamental difference between the USA and Afghanistan – a far deeper one than the contrast between their internal democratic and dictatorial regimes.

The USA is the greatest danger to the working class and poor peasantry of the world. It is the new imperialist monopoly – the sole superpower. Its military might is driving globalisation and seeking to establish a new world order based on the unrestricted advance of capital across the globe. Afghanistan

Does this approach have any history in the revolutionary movement?

Yes – Trotsky supported Chinese government forces against Japanese imperialist invasion in the 1930s, at the head of which stood Chiang Kai-shek, who

s and the war



US soldiers. A defeat for the US/UK attack would be a blow against imperialism worldwide

on the other hand is an extremely weak semi-colonial country which has been racked with imperialist sponsored war for decades. Even the triumph and reactionary policies of the Taliban are in large measure the result of US policy since 1979. The Taliban were created out of the efforts of imperialism to defeat the Soviet-backed PDPA government in the Afghan civil war and to resist the USSR's invasion. Afghanistan's development is blocked primarily by imperialism. The greatest enemy of the workers and peasants of the region is imperialism.

Can't we say we are for the defeat of the imperialists without being for the victory of Taliban forces?

This would be a complete evasion. If we are for the defeat of the imperialists, it means we want the forces that are fighting them to win. Anything else would reduce our anti-imperialism to a mere phrase.

Does this mean that workers and progressive forces in Afghanistan should be in a united front with the Taliban?

The Taliban won't allow this. They are still imposing a brutal dictatorship over all other forces in the country. This would make a united front practically impossible because of their absolute intolerance of any opposition and their refusal to collaborate with non-Islamic forces (which is a very broad category according to their world view!) They would seek to prevent any independent organisation or arming of the peasants or workers. This, together with their venomous hostility to women's rights and the rights of the non-Pashtun nationalities, are massive obstacles to a large-scale mobilisation of the masses to defeat imperialism. If they persist in these policies this will enormously contribute to imperialism's triumph or the imposition by Pakistan and others of a compliant pro-imperialist regime in Kabul.

What is more, it would be unprincipled to enter a formal "united front" or alliance in which the revolutionary communists were obliged to drop or hide their politics.

The LRCI's programme *The Trot-*

skyist Manifesto explains that the anti-imperialist united front involves: "Striking tactical agreements with non-proletarian forces at both leadership and rank and file level. Such agreements might involve striking formal alliances or committees. Where this is the case the fundamental pre-conditions for entering such blocs are: that the bourgeois or petit-bourgeois forces are actually waging a struggle against imperialism, or its agents, that no limitations are placed on the political independence of the revolutionary organisation within this bloc and that there are no bureaucratic exclusions of significant forces struggling against imperialism."

But revolutionaries and working class forces should fight for an anti-imperialist united front.

Without giving an iota of support to the arch-reactionary Taliban government in Afghanistan or the movement of Osama bin Laden, we call for and support the united action of all Afghan forces – including Islamist forces – to repel the imperialist assault.

How could an anti-imperialist united front ever be possible if the Taliban refused it and allowed no space for independent forces to organise?

Inside Afghanistan, the slogan of the anti-imperialist united front would be both:

- a rallying call on the people to fight the imperialist invasion; and
- an attempt to mobilise those who are fighting under the leadership of the Taliban to force the Taliban leaders to abandon their dictatorship and broaden the basis of resistance to imperialism.

In this way we fight to arm the people and break the Taliban's dictatorship over them. It is a political fight for a mass independent resistance to imperialism. At the same time as focusing the armed struggle on the imperialist invasion as the main enemy, it involves an ongoing political struggle to mobilise the forces which can overthrow the Taliban and destroy their dictatorship. It poses the need for democratic rights, class independence, rights for secular forces, the arming of the masses, an end to persecution of women

and national minorities, but it does so unambiguously from the perspective of fighting imperialism as long as the latter is attacking. It is not a suspension of struggle against the Taliban but the best form of it in the circumstances of imperialist attack

This distinguishes us from the bourgeois and pro-imperialist opposition by stressing that our criticism is not that the Taliban are fighting imperialism, but that because of their oppression of women, their reactionary Islamist agenda, dictatorial hatred of the democratic rights of the people etc, they are not capable of a consistent or effective fight against imperialism.

Does this mean we should suspend the struggle to overthrow tyrannies like the Taliban or Saddam during the course of the war against imperialism?

No, it means that the struggle to overthrow them proceeds along a new path – the path of mobilising forces from within the struggle against imperialism. When preparing and planning the insurrection, we would take into account the imperialist onslaught. Otherwise, we would be saying we were indifferent to the outcome of the war.

The Spanish Civil War gave an example of how revolutionaries could even support an insurrection against a regime that it was fighting alongside against fascism, if that regime tried to weaken or disarm the workers organisations. In this case the workers in

Barcelona in May 1937 rose up in arms against the capitalist popular front regime without stopping fighting at the front against the fascists and without stopping producing arms for the war. This is far from being excluded in countries like Afghanistan.

But if we said in the process that we didn't care about the war with the imperialists, and if our tactics didn't ensure that the anti-imperialist struggle were not set back, then we would be cutting our own throats – or rather, ensuring that the imperialists cut our throats if they won the war.

gressives fail to oppose it, the Taliban would be in an even stronger position still. If they won the war they could claim sole credit and there would be no opposition with any anti-imperialist authority. And if they were beaten after mounting the only resistance, their brand of Islamism would gain enormous prestige in the Middle East and central Asia. Anyone who stood back or colluded with the imperialists would be utterly compromised in the eyes of the masses as the full consequences of an imperialist victory became clear.

The way to defeat imperialism and

We fight to arm the people and break the Taliban's dictatorship over them. It is a political fight for a mass independent resistance to imperialism. At the same time as focusing the armed struggle on the imperialist invasion as the main enemy, it involves an ongoing political struggle to mobilise the forces which can overthrow the Taliban and destroy their dictatorship

But the Taliban are not actually fighting against imperialism – they are not progressive enemies of USA but reactionary ones. So how can an anti-imperialist united front be right?

There is only one sense in which Taliban or bin Laden actions are anti-imperialist – and it is only in that sense that we support them action.

Is it terrorist actions against US workers? No – we condemn them.

Is it rejecting modern society and banning TV and modern dress? No – we fight it.

Is it the barbaric oppression of women? No – we expose it and arouse the struggle of the people against it.

Is it resistance to the US/UK military attack on Afghanistan? Yes. This and only this is progressive. And it is this and only this that we support.

So does this mean that we raise the slogan 'Victory to the Taliban'?

Definitely not. That would be a gross accommodation to the arch-reactionary politics of the Taliban. We never said victory to Saddam Hussein, victory to Galtieri and the Argentine Junta, victory to Stalin or victory to any reactionary governments. We are for the victory of the Afghan forces against imperialism – not for confirming their political leaderships in power.

But would a victory for the Taliban not lead to greater reaction in Afghanistan?

Temporarily, perhaps. Certainly, if they were the only force that stood up to imperialism. If all the anti-Taliban forces back the US invasion, or if pro-

minimise the reactionary advantage that the Taliban would seek to seize is to fight for the independent mobilisation of the masses against the US/ British attack. This requires the bold use of the revolutionary tactic of the anti-imperialist united front.

How can we explain this to workers who rightly hate the Taliban?

Directly, and without equivocation. Many workers in imperialist countries will object to our position on chauvinist lines – others will take a pacifist line that opposes the war without supporting resistance to imperialism. But we are revolutionaries and we must state what is the truth, not adapt our position to the present consciousness of the majority. We need to use clear, patient language but not give in to the wave of chauvinism or imitate the pacifism that almost inevitably accompanies the onset of war in an imperialist country.

Anyway – we don't draw our line from the existing consciousness of the workers in this or that country but from the interests of the international working class.

As Trotsky explained: "The mentality of the class of the proletariat is backward but the mentality is not such a substance as the factories, the mines, the railroads, but is more mobile and under the blows of the objective crisis, the millions of unemployed, it can change rapidly."

("Discussions with Trotsky", in *The Transitional Programme*, Pathfinder edition, p127)

It will change rapidly if there is a prolonged war – and we must have clear revolutionary arguments to win new forces and build a powerful anti-imperialist movement.

We have the utmost confidence that the national sections of the LRCI and the REVOLUTION youth groups will do this imaginatively and clearly, taking account the psychology and mood of the working class and anti-capitalist youth.

We appeal to all organisations that support our view to work with us to defeat the US/Allied imperialist war drive and build a new revolutionary international to unite revolutionary communist forces around the world.

Correction

The September 30th special issue of *Workers Power* contained the formulation, "Does this mean we side with the Taliban? No." We recognise that this is, at best, ambiguous and, at worst, it appears in contradiction to the LRCI's established position of unconditional defence of any semi-colony under attack from imperialism, as codified in the *Trotskyist Manifesto*. While it is true that we will neither give any political support to the Taliban regime nor cease the struggle against it, we will subordinate that struggle to the higher priority of defence of Afghanistan against imperialist attack. Consequently, we would call for the Taliban to cease its repression of other political forces committed to defence, would undertake common defence actions and, where the Taliban is in direct conflict with imperialist forces or their local agents we would, indeed, be "on the side of the Taliban".

Statement put out by New York City Labor Against War, September 27, 2001

September 11 has brought indescribable suffering to New York City's working people. We have lost friends, family members and co-workers of all colors, nationalities and religions - a thousand of them union members. An estimated one hundred thousand New Yorkers will lose their jobs. We condemn this crime against humanity and mourn those who perished.

We are proud of the rescuers and the outpouring of labor support for victims' families. We want justice for the dead and safety for the living.

And we believe that George Bush's war is not the answer.

No one should suffer what we experienced on September 11. Yet war will inevitably harm countless innocent civilians, strengthen American alliances with brutal dictatorships and deepen global poverty - just as the United States and its allies have already inflicted widespread suffering on

innocent people in such places as Iraq, Sudan, Israel and the Occupied Territories, the former Yugoslavia and Latin America.

War will also take a heavy toll on us. For Americans in uniform - the overwhelming number of whom are workers and people of color - it will be another Vietnam. It will generate further terror in this country against Arabs, Muslims, South Asians, people of color and immigrants and erode our civil liberties.

It will redirect billions to the military and corporate executives, while draining such essential domestic programs as education, health care and the social security trust. In New York City and elsewhere, will be a pretext for imposing "austerity" on labor and poor people under the guise of "national unity".

War will play into the hands of religious fanatics - from Osama bin Laden to Jerry Falwell - and provoke further terrorism in major urban centers like New York.

Therefore, the undersigned New York City

metro-area trade believe a just and effective response to September 11 demands:

■ No war. It is wrong to punish any nation or people for the crimes of individuals - peace requires global social and economic justice.

■ Justice not vengeance. An independent international tribunal to impartially investigate, apprehend and try those responsible for the September 11 attack.

■ Opposition to all racism - defence of civil liberties. Stop terror, racial profiling and legal restrictions against people of color and immigrants, and defend democratic rights.

■ Aid for the needy not the greedy. Government aid for the victims' families and displaced workers - not the wealthy. Rebuild New York City with union labor, union pay, and with special concern for new threats to worker health and safety.

■ No Labour austerity. The cost of September 11 must not be borne working and poor New Yorkers. No surrender of workers living standards, programs or other rights.

Signed by the following Union branch presidents plus hundreds of union members across New York City
 Larry Adams, President, National Postal Mail Handlers Union Local 300
 Barbara Bowen, President, Professional Staff Congress-CUNY/AFT Local 2334
 Arthur Cheliotis, President, CWA Local 1180
 Michael Letwin, President, Association of Legal Aid Attorneys/UAW Local 2325
 Jill Levy, President, Council of Supervisors and Administrators, NYS Federation of School Administrators, American Federation of School Administrators Local 1
 Maida Rosenstein, President, UAW Local 2110
 Brenda Stokely, President, AFSCME Local 215, DC 1707
 Jonathan Tasini, President, National Writers Union/UAW Local 1981
 See www.labournet.org

One year of the Intifada

LRCI supporters in Occupied Palestine examine the prospects for the struggle of the Palestinian people

The Palestinian intifada is one-year old. Nearly 800 people have died since 28 September last year when the then opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the site of the Al Aqsa mosque on Temple Mount in East Jerusalem, a shrine sacred to Muslims.

He was inciting the Palestinians to rebel so as to create a pretext for a massive shift to the right in Israeli policy and so hope to reverse the wretched concessions made to the Palestinians under the terms of the Oslo Accords of 1993.

For their part the masses launched a new intifada not to defend the Oslo settlement but because its promises of national freedom had proven so illusory. The intifada is a heroic demonstration that after seven years, the implementation of the various stages of those accords has not brought Palestinian national self-determination nearer but has made their national oppression worse.

The peace settlement, brokered in Norway and signed in Washington on 13 September 1993, was the biggest blow yet delivered against the Palestinians since they were first driven from their land 45 years ago.

The first element of the betrayal lay in the PLO's official diplomatic recognition of "the right of Israel to live within secure borders", which legitimised the pogroms and forced population transfers carried out by Zionism in 1947-48 against the Palestinian people. It sanctioned the results of a war by which Israel was founded on 73 per cent of the territory of the Palestine mandate by 33 per cent of its (Jewish) population. The new autonomous areas agreed in Oslo were to contain less than 30 per cent of all Palestinian people. The four million Palestinian refugees - now the largest and longest existing such population anywhere - were told that they could forget about any idea of return or compensation.

Second, this agreement forever confined the 18 per cent Arab minority within the Zionist state of Israel to permanent second class status with no hope of unification with their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Subject to virulent anti-Arab racism, ghettoised and super-exploited in a few sectors of the economy, they are forced into competition for jobs with their Arab brethren across the Green Line.

Third, the PLO betrayed the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. By renouncing real sovereignty over the territory they have been granted by Israel, the PLO abandoned the legitimate



PLO's Arafat and Israeli minister Peres

national aspirations of the Palestinians for their own state in return for a supervised series of mini-bantustans with limited devolved powers.

The agreement stated that Israeli troops should be withdrawn from Gaza and Jericho in the West Bank. A PLO police replaced them and Israeli military administration of these areas gave way to PLO administration in tourism, education, welfare, health, taxation. None of these go to the heart of state power - that is, sovereign political institutions, with control over all areas of civil society, the ability to conclude diplomatic treaties or build an army to defend its borders.

The Oslo accords were designed to segregate the Palestinians into enclaves surrounded by Israeli-controlled borders, with settlements and settlement roads punctuating and essentially violating the territories' integrity. Theft of land and house demolitions proceeded apace after Oslo.

The settlements - armed to the teeth - expanded: 200,000 Israeli Jews have been added to Jerusalem, 200,000 more in Gaza and the West Bank. The Israelis insisted upon the right to maintain an armed presence outside of Arab population centres but capable of immediate deployment against the Palestinians.

On 28 September last year they said: enough! They rebelled and 90 per cent of those killed in this rebellion have been Palestinians, mostly unarmed and many of them children, who have died trying to expel an occupying power from their homeland.

It has been a year of murderous assaults by tanks and Israeli troops on Palestinian controlled land in the West Bank and Gaza, bulldozing homes, a year of heroic resistance by Palestinian youth.

It has been a year of economic catastrophe for tens of thousands of Palestinians who have been subject to Israeli curfew or not allowed to go to work as normal inside Israel.

It has been 12 months of helicopter gunships and F16 planes dropping bombs on Palestinian towns and widespread assassination of Palestinian political activists by the Israeli security services.

It has also been a year of massive political polarisation. Ariel Sharon, the terrorist butcher of the Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps in 1982 was elected Prime Minister on the back of a shift to the right of the Israeli Jewish population.

His policy is to tear up all previous agreements brokered by the US between Israel and the PLO and annex 50 per cent of the West Bank, allowing Israeli super-

vised "autonomy" to the Palestinians in the rest.

But this reactionary repression and ambition has only served to radicalise the Palestinian masses. Arafat is so weak he dare not arrest Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants who are responsible for suicide bombs in Israel for fear of provoking a mass uprising against his Palestinian National Authority.

In an unprecedented move the 20 per cent of Israeli citizens who are Palestinian have taken to the streets as never before in solidarity with their oppressed brothers and sisters in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The DFLP, opposed to the Oslo process, and marginalised and repressed in the 1990s as a result, has suddenly found new life and prominence.

The radicalisation of the intifada and the Palestinians within the Occupied Territories is not in doubt. But they cannot defeat Israel on their own. They neither possess the military force or the social weight to score a lasting success, in expelling Zionism from their lands.

The key to the next stage of the intifada is to build on the undoubted sympathy of the working class and poor peasants in the surrounding Arab states for their plight and to turn this support into

action.

For the last 12 months the repressive regimes in the Gulf monarchies and Egypt have controlled and severely curtailed the expression of support for the intifada. Yet the USA and Israel fear a major destabilisation in the region because of the threat of mass protest and more in these countries which also targets the complicity of their own governments in refusing to help the Palestinians alarms the USA.

After the 11 September attack on New York and Washington, the USA has been forced to make concessions to these very regimes in order to draw them into their war coalition against Afghanistan. Bush has even been forced to announce his (rhetorical) support for a Palestinian state and to urge Sharon to avoid provocations against the Palestinians.

Now is the time to generalise and deepen the intifada; to ignite the hostility many Arabic and Islamic people feel to imperialism - its war plans, its record of oppression, of its greed for the region's resources - into one mass movement. We need a movement that can rock the region and force Zionism and imperialism to concede to the just claims of the Palestinians for national self-determination.

■ Victory to the intifada
 ■ For an unconditional and immediate end to the military occupation in all of the Occupied Territories! Drive the Zionist settlers - front line troops of Zionist expansionism - back to Israel; there can be no self-determination for the Palestinians while they are there against the will of the Palestinian people.

■ Open the borders between the West Bank and Israel, remove all restrictions on movement. Immediate release of all political prisoners and an end to all repressive and discriminatory legislation.

■ Immediate building of popular camp, village and workplace committees of resistance to the occupation. Build mass defence militia. Put the Tenzim under the control of the camp and town committees not the PNA and Fatah. For a revolutionary Constituent Assembly to debate what kind of state and government the Palestinian masses need.

■ For mass demonstrations in Cairo, Beirut, Jordan, Damascus against Israel and the passivity of the Arab rulers.

The only solution to decades of oppression and war is the permanent revolution, the overthrow of all the bourgeois governments of the region and the creation of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

'They want to turn Argentina into another star on the American flag'

We reprint here edited an interview with José Montes, Christian Castillo and Susana Sacchi, candidates for the PTS (Workers Party for Socialism) slates for the parliamentary elections in Argentina on 14 October

LVO: How will the new US policies affect Argentina?

Jose Montes: The most concentrated sector of the establishment, which is represented by De la Rúa, will try to deepen our close relationship with the US. As we from the PTS say, 'they want to turn Argentina into another Star on the American flag'. The president of the Rural Society, Enrique Crotto, who recently demanded, along with banker Escasany, that the Pickets (unemployed workers, workers and peasants who have been mounting pickets in opposition to government attacks) be repressed, has expressed it very clearly: "There is no third position, you are with civilisation or you are with barbarism and barbarism is any kind of terrorism, of whatever ideology, and in whatever country." These oligarchic hypocrites are the same people who supported Videla's State terrorism. We workers must not only reject the sending of Argentinean troops against a brutally oppressed people like Afghanistan, but also any political support from Argentina for the US's "anti-terrorist crusade" that will be used to protect imperialist interests in the whole world. This is a decisive issue for all Argentinean workers.

Susana Sacchi: They are also taking advantage of this situation to strengthen the country's repressive mechanisms. Minister Jaunarena is trying to achieve a reform of the Defence Law that would allow the military to play a more active role in domestic repression and the intelligence services. In making the "fight against terrorism" a question of state, they are preparing to use those repressive mechanisms against workers. There are already 240 US soldiers in Salta as part of Operation Cabañas 2001. And now the gendarmerie, which has been there since the last Pickets' upsurge in Mosconi, has just set up an "Operation Crisis Committee" along with the Army, the police and other security and intelligence organisations. The teachers' Union of Tierra del Fuego has recently accused the provincial government of giving up land, by means of a decree, to set up a US military base, which adds to the one they want to set up in Chubut. Like the teachers of Tierra del Fuego, we must reject all these repressive preparations in the whole country and other attacks against national sovereignty, as a part of our protests against imperialist aggression towards Afghanistan or any other oppressed country.

LVO: It looks like there are bleak prospects for the workers and people.

Christian Castillo: Yes, but the 1990s can't be brought back. Today the US holds Argentina like the rope around a hanged man. Weeks before the attacks, US imperialism became aware of the consequences that Argentina's downfall would have and came out supporting it. While they presented the prospect of Argentina's default as a threat against the people, because of the poverty it would bring, they themselves feared the consequences of the instability that it could provoke in Latin America. And even on an international level: the economic crisis is "global". We are heading towards a global recession. But while in the 1990s, in exchange for our close relationship with the US, Menem took advantage of the capital that flowed into the country through privatisations, now this capital



Argentinian anti-globalisation protests

ist country's prospects are pretty bleak, even if the ruling class subjects itself even more to imperialism, it would be similar to the "lost decade" to the 1980s during Alfonsín's government. This was the situation even before the attacks and now this tendency becomes deeper.

LVO: A return to the 1980s?

Christian Castillo: No, because in the 1980s, after the imperialist victory in the Malvinas people started to believe that imperialism was unassailable. Now, there is an awakening of anti-imperialist feelings in Argentina, in Latin America and, in general, in the whole semi-colonial world. This is important because without stopping foreign debt payments and without renationalising privatised companies under workers' control and getting the economy's main sectors to work under a plan to benefit the majority of the population, that is without breaking the country's relationship with imperialism, there is no way we can achieve any serious plan to solve the problems of unemployment and the increasing poverty. The international crisis clearly shows the falseness of what they have been telling us for the past ten years. We were told that since 1989 the US was an invulnerable superpower that strengthened its rule throughout the world, without restrictions. We always considered the opposite to be true: that the fall of the US's world partner which was the governing bureaucracy of the ex-USSR, which at one time was used to contain regional conflicts, would be strategically harmful for imperialist rule, although at first it would make the US the strongest world power. But in order to defeat the world's biggest terrorist, who slaughtered the peoples of Iraq and Yugoslavia, the oppressed peoples of the world must unite with the workers of imperialist countries. This is what happened during the Vietnam war in the 1970s, when the US experienced their first military defeat, caused by the resistance of the Vietnamese people combined with the massive protests on the streets of the USA and the main capitals of the world which paralysed their military plans. And that is the unity against the US's

war plans that we must seek today, between the workers of Argentina, the peasants and workers of Bolivia, Brazil and Mexico, with the workers in the US and the anti-capitalist movement that protested in Seattle, Prague, Genoa and against the IMF summits in the capitals of the imperialist countries.

LVO: There are many readers who wonder why the left wing doesn't come together.

Susana Sacchi: The crucial problem is how to achieve the unity of the working class. The emergence of the pickets and the unemployed workers' movement, and more incipiently, the emergence of new workers' leaders who are opposed to bureaucratic union leaderships is the start of a new workers' militancy. Creating a coalition with these tendencies is a true challenge for a left that wants to be revolutionary, because the great task before us is to strengthen the working class which will produce the great changes needed in Argentina. This is why PTS promotes the co-ordination of workers with the unemployed workers' movement, and the participation of combative unions, like the Ceramists of Neuquén in the Pickets' Assembly. It's from this point of view that we see our differences with the rest of the left-wing. But we promote unity for different actions, for example in protests against imperialism's war plans in Afghanistan, which is needed urgently. The unity of the left can only make sense if it has revolutionary goals. Because if it doesn't, what would we achieve with the unity of leftist political parties if it is only used to for the elections?

LVO: What is the meaning of your campaign slogan "No More Capitalist Argentina"?

Christian Castillo: Against the utopian proposals of reforming capitalism, we say that the establishment will not give up anything they have achieved through their counter-revolution of the 1990s. Who can actually believe that the privatised companies, the banks or multinationals like FIAT who financed fascism in Italy, will permit a peaceful

redistribution of their profits in Argentina? On the contrary, the deeper the capitalist crisis becomes, the more aggressive monopolies become against workers and the oppressed peoples. We must put the main sectors of economy into the hands of workers, the only hands that are clean and honest. The only productive and creative class of our society must be saved. If this regime based on the exploitation of salaried labour, with an extremely high level of structural unemployment, denies even the right to its slaves to being exploited, then this regime must disappear.

The unity of the left can only make sense if it has revolutionary goals. Because if it doesn't, what would we achieve with the unity of leftist political parties if it is only used to for the elections?

José Montes: In the back-rooms of power, the ruling class makes up and breaks conspiracies that are typical of a regime that is dying out, because all predictions announce that Cavallo and De la Rúa will not make it to 2003. But even though they are dangerous and used against workers, these conspiracies are doomed to failure. For example, De la Sota presents himself as "a change from the Establishment", but winning the presidential elections for him would only be possible if the 2003 elections were carried out in advance, that is with De la Rúa's downfall. And this can't be imagined without a more profound crisis than that of 1989, when Alfonsín gave up his presidency to Menem, who, at that moment was supported by a strengthened Peronist party. On the other hand, the bourgeois sectors that imagine a "government of national unity" while maintaining De la Rúa's presidency, like Alfonsín, Duhalde and the CGTs, with a Peronist "prime minister" or minister of economy, would

have to apply the same "Zero Deficit" plan applied by Cavallo or otherwise seek for a solution causing a devaluation. And lastly, if Cavallo-De la Rúa, who will be defeated in these elections, want to stay in government until 2003 with the illusion of gaining strength from their relationship with the US, they are going to provoke greater protests from the workers and peoples, who are unwilling to live like this.

Christian Castillo: The tendencies towards the emergence of combative sectors of the student movement which are shown in La Plata in the campus occupations, and that are expressed in a high level of political awareness in all the universities of the country, are reflecting the increasing tension between classes, showing that we are heading towards greater class confrontations after October. The poverty of mass movement is hiking up to unbearable levels. None of the new centre-left variations, even if they get a lot of votes in October, are prepared to contain the consequences of this crisis. Elisa Carrió might get great support today among the middle classes that are fed up of "corruption", but that will not be enough in the future to stop a left oriented tendency when their savings are confiscated. Priest Farinello, who receives support from popular sectors, in opposing, as he has already declared, "the pickets methods", will not have the authority to stop them, especially if factory occupations become popular as a response to factory shut-downs, which might happen as a result of the increasing recession.

José Montes: The current struggle being carried out by the state workers of Entre Ríos, Jujuy and Formosa is a sign of what lies ahead in the different provinces. The zero deficit law and the cutbacks on federal co-participation programmed for the government's budget for 2002 which they are getting ready to vote after the elections, are going to cause resistance. And not only because of state workers' wages and pension cuts, their payment in tickets and even cutbacks in the unemployed workers' job plans. The crisis is also affecting the "conservatism" of those who are trying to keep their jobs, because in private companies, only in the past month there were more than 5,000 workers sacked, around 12,000 workers were suspended and salary cuts affected approximately 6,000 workers, without counting the monthly wage arrears.

The Pickets' National Assembly is called for October, and according to what was decided at the last Assembly on 4 September in La Matanza, it will be "open to all workers' organisations (...)" with one representative every 20 organised employed or unemployed workers, to decide how to continue our struggle plan and to promote a solution to this crisis". We think that the third Pickets' assembly should express a perspective of class independence, in favour of breaking with the country's imperialist domination. Because of the perspective of increasing class conflicts in Argentina, we will use these weeks of electoral campaigning to present candidates that are workers against the politicians of the capitalist regime. ■ The interview has been edited down for reasons of space. Full text can be found in the PTS paper, La Verdad Obrera (LVO) or at www.pts.org.ara

Shock to an ailing system: does it mean global recession?

The world economy is facing a downturn in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks. A US recession is certain, but will it trigger a global slump? These questions now haunt the bosses *Ronald Hahn reports*

The attack on the World Trade Centre shut down US aviation for three days and Wall Street for a week. As a result, some businesses will close forever. The head of Boeing said in early October that up to half of America's airlines could go bankrupt, given their already precarious finances. He made this claim in justifying 30,000 job cuts at Boeing itself.

The US economy was already edging towards recession before the planes hit the building. But the short-term economic impact of the attack, combined with the long-term instability it has injected into the capitalist system, will prolong and deepen the US recession.

Already the policymakers are hard at work trying to turn the situation around. Suddenly, hardline monetarists plead for increased spending. Buccaneering US airline bosses now call for the nationalisation of airport security. But the addition of big tax cuts and government spending to the already frantic interest rate cuts simply raises the stakes. If it doesn't work, then the USA is doomed not just to recession, but possibly deflation.

How this will impact on the wider global economy is a more complex question because it depends how much the individual governments of the main industrial countries are prepared to deviate from the US line. It also depends on the length and disruptive impact of military action, and on the working class response.

To understand the complex layers of cause and effect between a US recession and a global depression – and the world's rulers really do fear the latter now – we need a snapshot of the US and world economies as they were at 0845 eastern time, 11 September 2001.

Why was America already in trouble?

Unlike Britain, the USA still has a large manufacturing base, both low and hi-tech, and the productivity miracle enabled by information and communications technology (ICT) was considered crucial to prolonging the economic recovery after its "natural" endpoint.

The years 1997 and 1998 had seen extreme turbulence on the financial markets, with a stock market crash, the near collapse of a major investment fund and a massive bailout by the US Federal Reserve. The fear was that inflation would follow – but it didn't, and that was put down to the productivity miracle.

The second extraordinary phenomenon was the stock market. A combination of easy money from the Fed, the flight of capital from Asia to the USA and a new round of investment in ICT pumped up the greatest stock market bubble in history – and a half-baked theory that stock market values would no longer be governed at all by profitability.

During the past two years these illusions have crumbled. First the stock market bubble burst, in March 2000, as the whopping lies told by dotcom companies about growth prospects unravelled. But it was not until late 2000 that the share slide exacerbated a downturn in the real economy, especially in the ICT and advertising-driven media sectors. On 9 January 2001 the Federal Reserve boss, Alan Greenspan, made

his fateful pronouncement that the main battle was with recession, not inflation. He cut interest rates at an emergency session and announce further cuts nine times in as many months so that US rates had tumbled from 6 per cent to 3.5 per cent.

Over the course of those nine months nearly one million people were laid off. But the most telling figure was for profits: after nearly a decade of "double digit" operating profits, suddenly there were none. The technology, media and telecoms industries led the way – but significant "old-economy" industries were suffering by early 2001 – especially the auto industry.

As a stream profit warnings spilled forth, the US stock market continued sliding. It lost 18 per cent of its value between 1 January and 11 September. That destroyed wealth across the board, because nearly two-thirds of US citizens had been lured into share ownership by the seeming miracle of easy gains post-1993.

Everyone was waiting to see how all this would impact on consumer spending in the USA – the main driver of economic growth. Just before the attack, it became clear US consumer spending too was falling on top of a falling stock market, falling profits and falling growth. It now looks like overall growth between April-June 2001 was just 0.3 per cent – and that the third and fourth quarters will see the US economy shrink: the technical definition of recession.

With some recessions, politicians come forward who basically say: "let it rip". Thatcher and the first-term Ronald Reagan did this – refusing to counteract "market forces" for essentially political reasons, thus creating the best conditions to take on and beat the organised working class.

Now, despite the fact that most capitalist economists subscribe to some form of neo-liberalism, there are few takers for a let it rip approach. Instead, both sides of the American ruling class are united in the view that government action must halt and turn round the trend to recession. The right-wing want massive tax cuts, the Democrats and some Republicans want a government spending spree and a return to big budget deficits. Both are now firmly focused on the task of "management of aggregate demand" – the key concept of Keynesian economics, supposedly outmoded by the triumph of neo-liberalism.

Is controlling interest rates enough?

Conservative parties across the globe are wedded to using interest rates – so-called monetary policy – to manage the economy. But they are now finding that interest rate cuts alone are not enough to stimulate demand. So they look to tax cuts: but tax cuts when war beckons simply means a bigger budget deficit. In the end the refusal of the US ruling class' ideological opposition to a straightforward state-interventionist role will hamper their counter-crisis programme and deepen the crisis.

But will government efforts to stimulate demand work? The masters of the world already have an answer when they look at Japan. Japan has entered its fourth recession in 10 years. Interest rates there are effectively nil, having



Gordon Brown: believes he has conquered boom and bust

Tower of bourgeois babble

"Things that up to now seemed not possible are all of a sudden not only possible, but quick action is possible with lots of countries," says US Treasury secretary Paul O'Neill.

"A concerted economic stimulus package is out of the question," says his German counterpart Hans Eichel. "The attacks affected the U.S. in a different way to the rest of the world."

"If there is a shift in the international economic situation, then we may have to consider fresh measures," says Masajuro Shiokawa, the Japanese finance minister. "But we can't decide what to do so soon."

been cut by successive governments determined to use monetary policy to overcome prolonged stagnation. But it hasn't worked.

So successive Japanese governments have resorted to pure demand management techniques: government spending programmes and infrastructure investment combined with the central bank simply printing money. Huge modern bridges with no traffic on them stand in mute testimony to the limits of capitalist demand management.

The European Union is global capitalism's third major powerhouse. While Japan struggled to halt deflation, and the USA pursued a panicky response to the threat of recession, the Eurocrats did not seem to notice anything was wrong. The whole basis of economic and monetary union, and so the Euro, was founded on the neo-liberal policy of keeping inflation and public spending low in all Eurozone countries. European Central Bank president Wim Duisenberg behaves like a number-crunching

sloth, refusing to countenance anti-crisis measures, because his pension depends on hitting inflation and public spending targets. In short: the EU under its current political leadership is making a point of refusing to be bounced into urgent measures to stimulate demand – and this too will weaken the USA's anti-crisis efforts.

In short, Europe – despite having the best position from which to resist recession and even assume the USA's mantle as leader of world growth – lacks political will: a pro-growth strategy would probably undermine the shaky Euro and dislocate the different economic cycles within the EU profoundly.

The USA is pledged to use the crisis to restart the World Trade Organisation negotiations that were effectively stymied by the Seattle demo. Indeed, from Gordon Brown to George W Bush all the leaders were quick to say: the best way to fight back is to restart trade talks. The Australian newspaper even carried an exhortation "Fight back with free trade". But the ruling classes of the Third World may see this as a moment to extract a high price in terms of social concessions.

All of this sets the scene for future conflicts within and between the imperialist blocks – despite their current shows of unanimity at G7 meetings.

On top of all this, the capitalists are starting to fret about a renewed third world debt crisis. "We worry that global conditions have deteriorated to the point that a third world debt crisis like the one in the 1980s could result," said investment bank Bear Stearns in early October. It fears that Argentina will finally default on its debts under the pressure of the working class resistance to austerity – precipitating a wave of defaults.

Behind the scenes there is another worry: which financial institutions will be over-exposed to failing companies as they topple? The insurance industry is already apprehensive about the eventual cost of paying for the September attacks. It will pass on the costs to cash-strapped industries. And if an airline goes bust who are its bankers? The Swiss banks UBS and Credit Suisse stepped in to save Swiss Air not least because a complete collapse would have left them in trouble. But what if half of America's airlines go bust. What if a hidden iceberg of bad debts suddenly looms ahead?

Can the bosses stave off a recession?

All these fears explain why capitalist policymakers are frantically hustling to stave off global recession. With Japan on the edge of a deflationary spiral and the USA certain to go into recession, their backs are against the wall. Beyond the efforts of the individual imperialist leaders there is a naive belief that the "international financial institutions" can save the day.

Gordon Brown seems to believe that the calculating powers of Microsoft Excel, combined with neatly timed policy tweaks, can conquer boom and bust. Recent history suggests otherwise. It was the IMF which probably amplified the Asian crisis of 1997-98: its crass and corrupt actions set the stage for the mini-revolt of the third world ruling classes at Seattle in November 1999. The WTO process is moribund. The World Bank is only good at drawing up and imposing austerity budgets – not what you want in a recession.

This recession was shaping up to be bad even before the 11 September attacks. The attacks will merely concentrate the effects.

Unlike the last recession, this one marks more than the end of a cyclical recovery. Previous recessions have been triggered by events in the financial markets and by monetary policy decisions. Growth peaks and turns down, cyclically; inflation rises because productivity drops; governments slam on the brakes with higher interest rates; a credit crunch occurs that deflates the stock market and the housing market and a short recession follows.

This one is different. It did not start in the financial markets: it started with a real downturn in profits, reflecting overcapacity across the board from automobiles to credit-card companies. Profits will not come back until a very big shake-out occurs: the large-scale destruction of capital that the system demands. While some "bubble" companies have lost 95 per cent of their value in 18 months, the worst is yet to come.

Many factors apart from imperialist economic policy will influence the outcome of the crisis. Indeed, the real crisis begins with the admission that no theory or policy – either monetarist or Keynesian – can stop the runaway train to ruin. Then it becomes a pure question of whether one country will foist the costs onto another; or one class against another. The outcome of that is not decided in economics books or finance ministries, or even in the Afghan mountains – but on the battlefields of class struggle itself: the workplaces of the world.

AIRLINE JOB CUTS SINCE 11 SEPTEMBER

Boeing	30,000
American Airlines	20,000
United Airlines	20,000
Delta Airlines	13,000
Continental Airlines	12,000
US Airways	11,000
British Airways	7,000
Swissair	3,760
Alitalia	2,500
Midway Airlines	1,700
Virgin Atlantic	1,200
British Midland	600

.....and rising still

As Britain goes to war against Afghanistan, most union leaders seem determined to postpone the class struggle for the duration. But Britain's bosses aren't about to announce a truce, writes *GR McColl*

No let up in the class struggle

Tuesday 11 September was supposed to be the day that Tony Blair threw down the gauntlet to the TUC over the privatisation programme that seemed to be the hallmark of his second term. Instead, a sombre Blair made a brief announcement from the podium of the Brighton conference centre about the breaking news of the terrorist attacks in the USA and then left for London to resume his posturing as "global statesman". The next day outgoing TUC president Bill Morris, general secretary of the TGWU, declared the Congress closed as a symbol of respect to the thousands killed in New York City. UNISON national executive member and TUC delegate, Roger Bannister, was all but denounced for suggesting that the Congress agree a date for reconvening to debate a series of key motions.

Since the TUC's premature shutdown unions that had been threatening the government with a major showdown over mounting private sector takeovers in the NHS, education and the provision of local services have been headlong retreat. First the GMB and then UNISON suspended million-pound advertising campaigns, with their leaders referring to the "special circumstances" that have arisen since the tragic events in New York

and Washington.

Britain's top bosses have had no such qualms about carrying on with business as usual, whether at the Docklands Arms Fair or in issuing redundancy notices. BA has cited the sharp downturn in transatlantic air travel since 11 September as a convenient pretext for accelerating a programme of large-scale job cuts. The Post Office announced the axing of some 11,000 jobs on 4 October, while General Motors has indicated that it will slash European production by 15 per cent this quarter. Meanwhile, mass sackings in the computer and electronic industries have continued from Berkshire to the silicon glens. A recent survey for the MSF union depicted a grim picture across manufacturing as a whole, with up to 100,000 jobs at risk between now and Christmas.

The performance of the trade union tops at the abbreviated Labour Party conference suggested that the slightest hint of a concession was enough to mute their criticism. Though the GMB's John Edmonds fumed at the conference's composite resolution on public services, UNISON's Dave Prentis reverted to type and withdrew from a confrontation with the government. The justification for this about face consisted of two ambigu-

Excerpt from 27 September statement unanimously agreed by the RMT Council of Executives: "We remain . . . actively opposed to all racism and violence. We also oppose any Government crackdown on civil liberties including the imposition of compulsory identity cards, any fast track extradition procedures or watering down of the Human Rights Act.

Further, we as a Trade Union totally reject any suggestion that we should moderate or give up our primary responsibility to protect our members' interests in all sections of the Union.

We reiterate our Socialist beliefs and pledge our Union to . . . support the CND demonstration on 13th October in Trafalgar Square and invite Branches and members to attend with Union banners."

ously worded pledges to eliminate "the two-tier workforce" (in privatised services) and to review the Best Value regime in local government.

While few union leaders have publicly given Tony Blair a blank cheque, virtually all of them have remained silent about a war that has effectively looked inevitable since 11 September. Most have confined themselves to expressions of sympathy to the families and friends of the workers killed and maimed in New York. There have been three notable exceptions nationally: the RMT (see excerpt from statement), the rail drivers' union ASLEF, which attempted to submit an emergency motion opposing the war drive to Labour Party conference, and the FBU.

Jane Calvert-Lee, the London director of the main bosses' organisation, the CBI, cynically implied that members of the RMT and ASLEF on London Underground would be abetting "terrorism" by taking strike action in pursuit of a decent pay rise. She told the *London Evening Standard* that "People are feeling now is the time to show the terrorists that it is business as normal, and anything that makes it difficult to get across London isn't going to make that happen."

So far the two unions have not backed off from their commitment to two days of strikes on 12 and 18 October: an example for workers elsewhere to follow.

It would be naïve to assume that the majority of British trade unionists cur-

rently support an anti-war movement, but there is substantial evidence at a local level that the mood among activists in unions such as UNISON and the NUT is broadly opposed to war and especially to the suspension of resistance to the Blairite agenda. In London Camden UNISON's branch committee and borough-wide NUT association meetings in Camden and Tower Hamlets, while Birmingham Trades Council co-sponsored a 400-strong anti-war meeting on 3 October.

For socialists in the unions it will be vital over the next few weeks to carry both an anti-war and an anti-capitalist message into the workplace. The conflict waged against Afghanistan by Blair and George Bush is not our war and we must not pullback from the defence of our jobs, pay, terms and conditions in the name of a spurious "national unity". But more than this the argument needs to be had that the organised working class has an absolutely vital role in stopping that war. The case must be put for industrial action in opposition to the war itself since the main enemy for workers in Britain, the US and indeed across the world remains rooted in the citadels of economic, political and military power in the imperialist countries.

From anti-capitalism to anti-war

Jeremy Dewar argues that the anti capitalist movement should be central to the anti war movement

Despite the horrific events of 11 September and the frenzied hatred whipped up by US politicians and the media, the US anti-capitalist movement has responded extremely well to the war threat.

Across the United States, in 150 different cities and campus towns, street marches and protests have denounced George Bush's war drive. 20,000 or so anti-capitalist campaigners decided not to call off their planned demonstrations simply because the World Bank cancelled its Washington DC summit. Instead they turned the 29 September action into an anti-war protest.

Indeed, around the world anti-globalisation groups and individuals have wasted no time in turning their sights on the war-mongers. Not surprisingly after Genoa, Italy's social forums have been to the fore, organising mass demos of tens of thousands across major cities. But even in Britain, several thousand braved heavy rain and joined the protest outside New Labour's conference to raise the slogans: "People not profit! Peace not war!"

The anti-capitalists are right to see this war as part of the system that they oppose. Bush and Blair are continuing their capitalist globalisation policies through military means.

What is globalisation?

It is the deliberate policy of subordinating and distorting the economies of the poorest countries on the planet with a huge debt of over £2 trillion, which must be paid to the world's richest people. Through its financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, the USA and its allies use this debt to force impoverished countries to hand over their industries, services and raw materials for knock-down prices. The World Trade Organisation then tears down any health and safety, environ-



Anti capitalist protesters take to the streets against the war, Washington 30 September

mental or labour legislation that gets in the way of the multinational corporations dumping their products on the local population, and forcing local businesses to the wall.

This latest phase of US-dominated imperialist rule has contributed to an absolute fall in living standards in some 60 countries since the early 1980s. Infant and childhood mortality rates have risen in many part of the world, with some 19,000 children dying each week from malnutrition or dehydration.

Anyone who gets in the way of all this will face globalisation's ultimate enforcer: NATO.

As a right-wing New York Times columnist put it in 1999: "You can't have McDonald's without McDonald-Douglas". In short, the armed might of this imperialist alliance is there to protect and promote the interests of global corporations.

Of course, Tony Blair used his address

to Labour's conference to promise to "provide more aid, untied to trade, write off debt, help with good governance and infrastructure, training to the soldiers, with UN blessing, in conflict resolution, encouraging investment, and access to our markets so that we practise the free trade we are so fond of preaching. But it's a deal: on the African side, true democracy, no more excuses for dictatorship, abuses of human rights".

The fact that Blair made this statement shows that he feels pressure to answer the anti-globalisation movement's criticisms. But his statement is full of lies, empty promises and coded threats.

The third world debt stands at £2,200,000bn. Not a single country has had its debt cancelled. Meanwhile, the USA has found \$150bn to winkle Bin Laden out from his bunker – many times more than it has ever subtracted

from third world debt.

The WTO meeting in Qatar next month will not deliver fair trade; it will attempt to prise open even more of the third world's markets to the multinationals, while protecting the imperialists' home markets, as with the EU's agricultural tariffs.

Democracy? That's ok, but not in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan because these cruel dictatorships are key allies in the war against Afghanistan. And still no democracy for the people of Kuwait, the supposed beneficiary of the last war the west fought for democracy. Training for soldiers? Like Britain and the US trained the forces that make up the Taliban and the Israeli armies, perhaps, Tony? Or the kind of UN intervention that saw Dutch soldiers roasting a Somali boy "for fun", or that withdrew from Srebrenica for 24 hours while the Serbian chauvinists stepped in to massacre 20,000 Bosnian Muslims?

No wonder the war leaders' words about this not being a war on Islam, about it being a humanitarian mission, about it restoring democratic rights and an economic future to the poor ring hollow in so many people's ears.

This war is being fought for global capital.

Securing the oil in the Caspian Sea is one economic target for the US and its allies. But more than that, they are using this war to give a warning to all opponents of globalisation: "mess with us and this is what you'll get".

The Terrorism Act from last year already made everyone who supported people fighting back against state terrorism a terrorist – now Bush and Blair have declared a 10 year war on terrorism. This will mean a stepping up of the criminalisation of the anti-capitalist movement. It will mean more protesters will be faced with gun-totin' cops who have been briefed that they will be untouchable no matter what level of violence they use against us. It will mean more shot dead like Carlo Giuliani.

For all these reasons – because the war against Afghanistan will create still more innocent victims, because a US and NATO victory will provide a fillip for globalisation and set back all those resisting its deadly grip, because behind the scenes the politicians are using the hysteria to strip away our civil rights and pad up the police – the anti-capitalist movement must also become an anti-imperialist movement.

NATO is the armed wing of the IMF, WTO and World Bank. The anti-capitalist movement must intensify its opposition to the war drive – and once the fighting starts do everything in its imaginative, creative and daring power to make sure that the globalisers lose.

**workers
power**

- No compensation to the fat cats
- For a publicly-owned rail network

As Railtrack hits the buffers, we say...

RENATIONALISE THE RAILWAYS

It's official: privatisation has been a disaster for the railways. A disaster for passengers and rail workers alike. Railtrack, the privatised firm that operates the track and the stations, has collapsed as a business. It was ushered into "administration" – controlled bankruptcy – after it told the government it couldn't balance its books.

Just days before Railtrack's collapse, transport minister Stephen Byers told a Labour Party conference fringe meeting that renationalisation was impossible – because it will cost £7bn to reimburse shareholders. So as we go to press Byers is trying to spin a typically New Labour solution: Railtrack will become a "public trust" that can still borrow money from capitalist banks but does not make profits for its shareholders.

The solution saves face for Blair – but it cannot hide the fact that his whole privatisation strategy is coming unstuck.

Labour in opposition promised to stop rail privatisation: they could have done it simply by pledging to renationalise – that would have killed the process stone dead. Instead they did a u-turn and said they would honour the privatisation contracts. Then came

Paddington and Hatfield – disasters that dented public confidence, revealed the private managers as a Dad's Army of incompetents, and blew a huge hole in Railtrack's finances.

Railways are nationalised in most countries for one good reason: it costs a lot to maintain a safe railway with high volumes of passengers – too much compared to the rate of return on investment for a capitalist company.

Labour is shying away from complete renationalisation – but it may yet have to bite the bullet. For two reasons: first, the banks simply may not want to plug the £3bn debt gap, or stump up the £5bn to rebuild the West Coast Main Line that links London, Manchester and Glasgow. Second because working class people who travel and work on the railways have the power, now, to force renationalisation.

But two questions hang over any renationalisation:

■ How do we ensure the railways are run better than before – after all, today's Railtrack incompetents were largely the same people who've run Britain's rail network for decades?

■ What to do about the shareholders who are likely to see their investments



Stephen Byers: days before collapse said renationalisation was impossible

ruined?

The first answer is: don't put it back under the old management control, bring in the experts – not the flash capitalist consultants but the railway workers themselves. They should demand

workers' control of the publicly-owned Railtrack – committees of rail workers and passengers should identify the problems and the solutions.

The second answer is simple: don't compensate the large shareholders.

Those who choose to put their money into the stocks and shares that promise profit from the labour of others have already reaped the rewards, now they must bear the risks.

The big business investors will bleat that "it's the money from ordinary people's pension funds" – if so, and they get into trouble, let the government nationalise them as well. That is not so unthinkable because it is more or less what several thousand well-heeled pension-fund holders in Equitable Life have been calling for in the last few months.

In the end it is not only Railtrack that has to be renationalised. The train operating companies can only run their operations at a profit because Railtrack makes a loss. Carrying on with that means taxpayers subsidising these anti-union fat cats who run GNER and South West Trains.

That's why the whole system should be renationalised as a single integrated rail network – including the rail maintenance operations that were parcelled out to firms like Balfour Beatty. The relaunched network should operate with heavily subsidised fares and a massive programme of public investment to rebuild the railways.

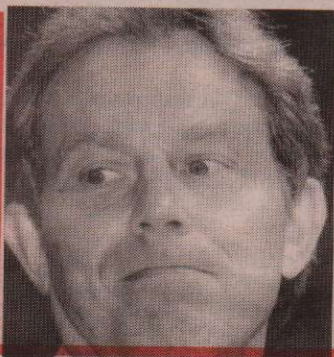
GET ACTIVE!

**workers
power**

Join the campaign to stop the war!

Workers Power and Revolution will be campaigning all over the country to defeat the US/UK's war and to defend Afghanistan. Get organised with us. Sell this paper – order extra copies today. To find out more phone: 07730 220962 email: network@workerspower.com

Stop Bush and Blair's war



Support the global unions' day of action against the WTO 9 November 2001



Trade union leaders from around the world took the decision to mark the launch of the next Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Doha, Qatar by staging a Global Unions' Day of Action by the Work-places of the World. For information contact Revolution 07951 493 232 or Workers Power on 07730 220962 or email: network@workerspower.com