

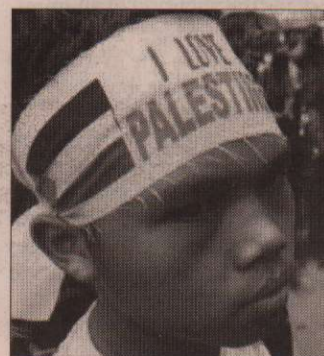
workers power

Inside

- Yarl's Wood to Woomera: racist asylum policies exposed
- Organising the rank and file in the unions
- German workers set to strike

As Palestinians resist Israeli onslaught, join the...

GLOBAL INTIFADA!



THE TELEVISED pictures of Israeli tanks rolling into town after town of the West Bank brought millions from Iraq to Indonesia onto the streets.

They were joined by tens of thousands of socialists and democrats across the rest of the world.

On 26 March, hundreds of thousands of Yemenis took to the streets of the capital Sanaa. The official news agency estimated that 1.5 million people took part in the march.

On 31 March more than 100,000 people demonstrated in Tripoli.

Over 50,000 Egyptians protested on March 31 and April 1, in Cairo and the cities in the Delta. The slogans of the protest challenged Mubarak's collaboration with Israel and the United States and called on Egypt to break off relations with the Zionist state.

Some 100,000 Iraqis marched in Baghdad on March 30.

In Jordan 20,000 people marched in Amman and a general strike was held on April 1 in solidarity with the Palestinian people and to back up calls for a boycott of U.S. goods and war against Israel.

Tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees demonstrated on March 29 in refugee camps in Lebanon to denounce the assault on Ramallah.

8,000 were on the streets of London on 30 March for a demonstration called by CND.

And the worldwide solidarity

movement has been taking its message of solidarity to Palestine itself. Jose Bové led a march of European anti-capitalists in Ramallah. As they neared Arafat's compound they were attacked by the Zionist occupation forces and turned back. One Australian activist was shot in the stomach.

In Europe and the United States the official media is resolutely suppressing news of this mass movement. But the truth is that these are the biggest solidarity actions since 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon. The fact that a major part of the huge global anti-capitalist movement is embracing the Palestinian cause is a great leap forward.

Now the trade unions and rank and file of the socialist and communist parties of Europe and the USA must match the courage and determination of the people of the Arab world and the anti-capitalist activists. They must break the support of their leaders for Israel's murderous occupation and build a movement that can isolate Israel politically and economically, while giving real practical assistance to the Palestinians.



★ **Victory to the intifada! Send arms and money to Palestine's heroic fighters!**

★ **Israel out of the occupied territories. Dismantle the settlements!**

★ **Boycott all Israeli goods. Picket every Israeli embassy!**

The fight for Palestinian self-determination - centre pages

Step up the asylum fight

More than 300 people gathered in Manchester last month for a major conference in defence of asylum rights. Participants ranged from current asylum seekers through to civil rights solicitors and trade union activists.

The 23 March event, organised by the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS) in conjunction with a number of other organisations campaigning around refugee issues, attracted activists from as far afield as Bristol and Glasgow.

One of the workshop leaders was author Teresa Hayter, who forcefully put the case for the abolition of all immigration controls saying, "A more just world order would be one in which no one is forced to migrate, but everyone is free to do so if they wish."

The conference marked a significant step towards a far greater degree of co-ordination between the many disparate campaigns that have sprung up in opposition to particular detention centres and the mounting number of threats to deport individuals.

In addition to CDAS, it included national groups such as Barbed Wire Britain, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and the National Civil Rights Movement (NCRM).

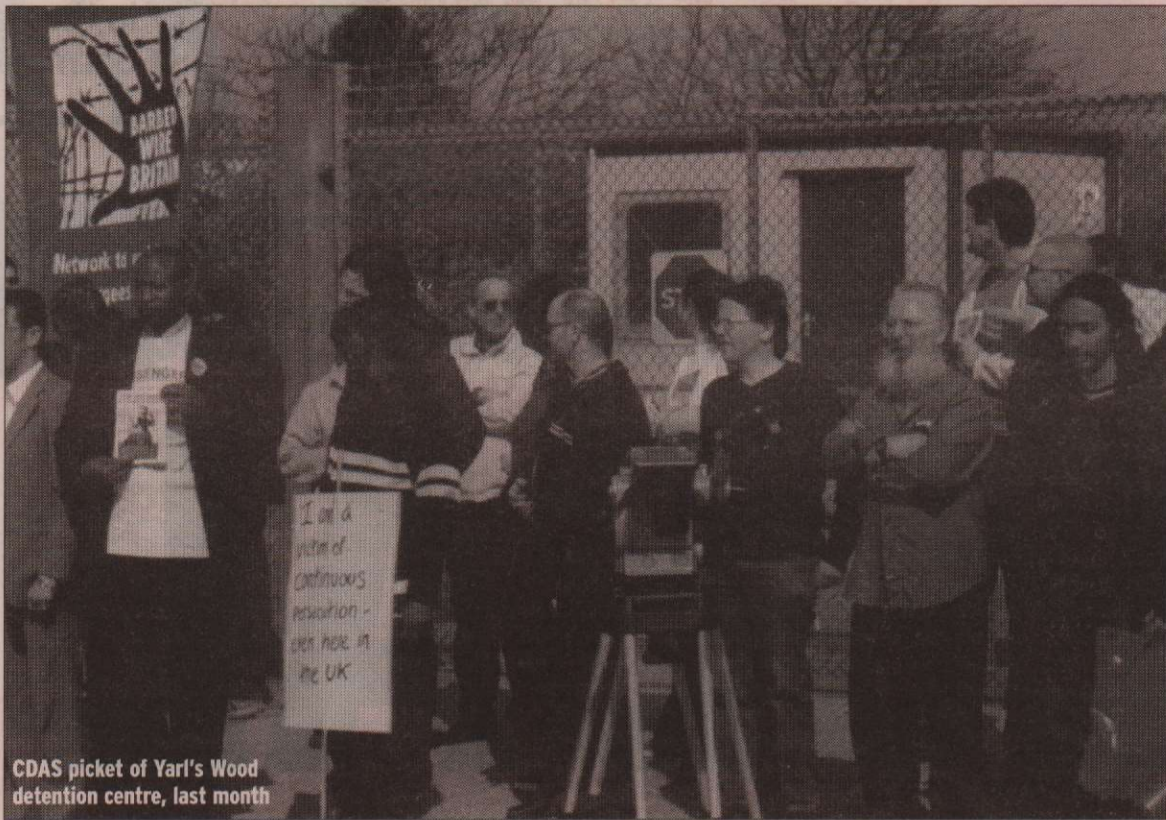
The National Assembly Against Racism, however, pointedly ignored invitations to sponsor and attend the conference. Instead, it appears content to confine its opposition to the forthcoming legislative attack by Home Secretary David Blunkett to a set-piece Trafalgar Square rally in May.

The conference came at a crucial time as the Home Office continues to resist calls from local campaigners, backbench MPs and the Fire Brigades' Union to hold a public inquiry into the mid-February fire at the Yar's Wood detention centre. In addition, David Blunkett has already revealed the essential features of his latest efforts to construct an ever more draconian asylum and immigration regime.

In a plenary speech to the conference NCRM chairperson, Suresh Grover said, "This government has seen the most racist legislation and practice yet when it comes to asylum seekers. These attacks are something we didn't witness even under the Tories."

As outlined in the 7 February White Paper these include:

- A doubling in the number of asy-



CDAS picket of Yar's Wood detention centre, last month

The Yar's Wood detention centre, with the capacity to hold over 900 immigration detainees in "luxury" prison conditions, is currently closed. The complex stands as a monument to the inhumanity of New Labour's asylum policies and to the folly of privatisation.

Yar's Wood had originally been built at a cost of nearly £100 million (but with no sprinkler system) and was operated by the international security corporation Group 4, the principal player in a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) consortium.

On the night of 14 February a fire swept through the complex, destroying two accommodation blocks and causing an estimated £38 million worth of damage. The insurers for Group 4, with links to the Lloyd's syndicate, DJ Pye, are now suing the Bedfordshire police under the Riot Damages Act of 1886 for nearly £97 million - or some 250 per cent more than the damage estimate.

In a development very reminiscent of the aftermath of the August 1997 "uprising" at the Campsfield detention centre, Group 4 was busily peddling the line that detainees had rioted and that the fire was most probably part of a

sophisticated plot to escape from the facility. A junior Home Office minister, Angela Eagle, has since had to concede, however, that earlier Group 4 and government claims that detainees had obstructed firefighters were untrue, and that the primary concern was securing control of the alleged uprising rather than ensuring the safety of any detainees who may have been caught in the blaze.

In the meantime, more than 70 Yar's Wood detainees who were in the facility on the night of the fire have been transferred to actual prisons since then. At least one and possibly two Yar's Wood inmates have since been deported. The obvious question that arises: did these men and women see too much?

The government refuses so much as a public inquiry into this mess and recent events smack of a cover-up. While campaigners should press ahead with the demand for a public inquiry, the basic objectives remain simple:

- Yar's Wood stays shut.
- All other immigration detention centres are closed and detainees released.
- No compensation for Group 4 and its insurers.

lum applicants forcibly detained to 4,000 in any given week

- An increase of 400-500 per cent in the number of deportations
- Maintaining a forced dispersal pro-

gramme away from London and the South East, twinned with the introduction of accommodation centres for warehousing hundreds of refugees in isolated rural areas

- Further restrictions on appeal rights for rejected applicants
- Cash support - replacing the notorious voucher system - but still equivalent to only 70 per cent of the meagre

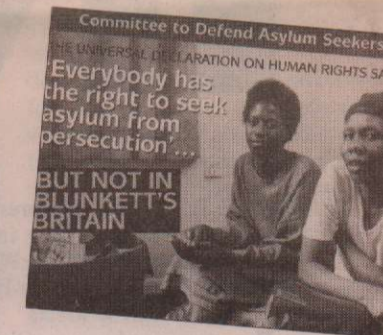
level of Income Support.

A number of these measures, since they mark a continuation of existing policies, may not even be the subject of parliamentary debate after the publication of the Blunkett bill later this month. Only militant action, however, is going to stay the hand of Blunkett on issues around asylum and immigration.

The meeting gave an opportunity for some practical advances. For instance, efforts are under way to establish local and regional telephone and e-mail "trees" to facilitate rapid responses to information about attempts to deport immigrants and refugees from British airports. There have been a few notable successes in recent months in attempts to physically prevent the implementation of removal orders. But much still needs to be done in terms of winning the active support of trade unionists working for the airlines and at airports currently used by the Home Office.

Crucially, the Manchester conference agreed to a co-ordinated programme of activity that features a week of action from 15-22 June to coincide with the semi-official "Refugee Week". This celebrates the "contribution of refugees to British society", but will steer clear of confrontation with the government. The asylum rights week of action is likely to begin with protests outside detention centres.

The week's culmination will be a London demonstration on 22 June, which will mark the second anniversary of the horrific deaths of 58 Chinese immigrants in the back of a lorry at Dover.



■ CDAS has produced an updated fact sheet. Send cheques made payable to the "Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers" to: CDAS, BCM Box 4289, London WC1X 3XX.
 ■ www.defend-asylum.org

Aussies show direct action works

Palm Sunday - March 24 - saw some of the biggest marches for years against the Australian Federal Government's vile racist asylum and refugee policies. Ten thousand people rallied in Sydney, 3,000 in Adelaide and over 30,000 marched in Melbourne. The protests were directed against the coalition government's cruel treatment of people fleeing war and starvation.

Any refugee actually arriving on the Australian mainland without identity papers or a passport is subject to mandatory detention. Thousands of asylum seekers are currently incarcerated in detention camps surrounded with razor wire.

The most notorious of the camps is Woomera, in the middle of the South Australian desert, where inmates suffer searing heat in the day and freezing temperatures at night. They remain locked up for months and even years while their claims are processed. The camp inmates

have responded to this degrading treatment with hunger strikes and even protest suicides.

But the government is doing all it can to stop refugees getting to mainland Australia. In the infamous Tampa incident a boat crammed with refugees was kept for days off the coast as the navy and government refused them permission to land.

The refugees were taken to Nauru and Manus islands. There are now plans to set up a refugee camp on Christmas Island. This is the infamous "Pacific Solution", which bribes or strong-arms tiny Pacific island nations to take the burden for the Australian government.

A parliamentary investigation is under way over reports in the media that refugees on the boat had threatened to throw children overboard. The government, it appears, doctored navy reports, which actually showed the boat

sinking and refugees trying to get the children to rescuers in the water. This vile manipulation of the truth was designed to whip up racist hysteria against immigrants supposedly willing to sacrifice their own children.

This racist filth helped Howard to an election victory over the Labor Party, despite the fact that his basic immigration policies were backed to the hilt by Labor. Since the election there has been a rethink of hardline anti-immigration policies in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) itself.

At grassroots level the Refugee Action Collective (RAC) and other groups have been campaigning and developing links with the detainees inside the camps. The week after the Palm Sunday demonstrations a major mobilisation took place around the Woomera detention centre. Over 1,000 protesters travelled long distances to set up camp in the desert just outside the detention centre.

Young protesters attacked the perimeter fences, pulling these down while refugees inside made a sustained attempt to break out. This meant climbing over razor wire and squeezing through a high fence made of spiked metal stakes.

Fifty detainees broke through the fence and 14 were smuggled away by the protesters. Though many have since been arrested, rumours suggest a few people may still be free. What is clear is that detainees themselves were prepared to risk everything to escape. This included women and several children.

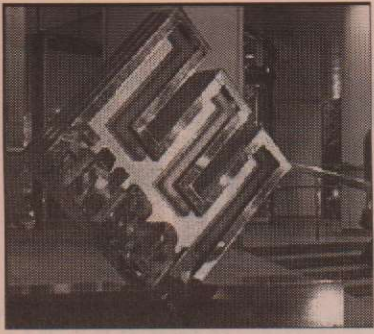
The Federal Minister for Immigration, Phillip Ruddock, announced that if there was evidence of collusion between the demonstrators and the detainees people would be charged with conspiracy to defeat Commonwealth law where the penalty on conviction is up to 10 years imprisonment. It is little wonder that the most popular slogan on

the Melbourne demo was the chant, "Lock up Ruddock. Free the refugees. Lock up Ruddock. Throw away the key."

Despite several Woomera protesters being arrested for aiding and abetting escapees there appears to be no stopping the protest movement. Plans are already well under way to use the mobilisations for May 1 to focus around refugees with plans to blockade the Immigration Department's offices. RAC Victoria has also called a national day of action for refugee rights for Sunday 2 June.

The big issue now is if, after Woomera, the refugee rights movement can simply go back to a strategy of marches, vigils and appealing to forces like the Churches and ex-Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser.

It is clear that those locked up in detention centres are willing to take militant action, and so are some in the refugee rights movement. Now is the time to apply the lessons of Woomera.



Sunk by the scramble for superprofits

AT ENRON'S British headquarters, just next to Buckingham Palace, the removal men are still hard at the task of dismantling the gym, the sauna and £21m worth of luxury office equipment. It was all sold in an auction after the US parent company went bust last December, the biggest bankruptcy in corporate history.

Meanwhile at Arthur Andersen's UK base, on London's prestigious Strand, it's clear the removal men will also soon be paying a visit. It won't go bust. But the firm that signed off Enron's cooked books is set to break up, losing its trademark name forever. Its orange logo is reflected in modernist orange sofa-sculptures in its slick reception area. They will surely go the same way as the Enron exercise bikes.

Enron, Andersen: these were not household names – they were far more important than that. Enron and Andersen were bywords for success in the yacht clubs of the rich; in the loft apartments of the City traders; and in the country cottages of the investing classes. Now they are like dirty words in the corridors of power.

What does their collapse tell us about modern capitalism. Not just that it's corrupt, but that the relationship between business and governments is one of organised corruption.

On top of that the demise of Enron – which seemed to have discovered a modern version of alchemy – and of Andersen, which was busy writing the textbook for it, gives a fascinating glimpse of late capitalism's contortions. As it struggles to squeeze profit out of declining industries, it has to invent new ways of conjuring money out of nothing. Enron was where the conjuring trick went wrong.

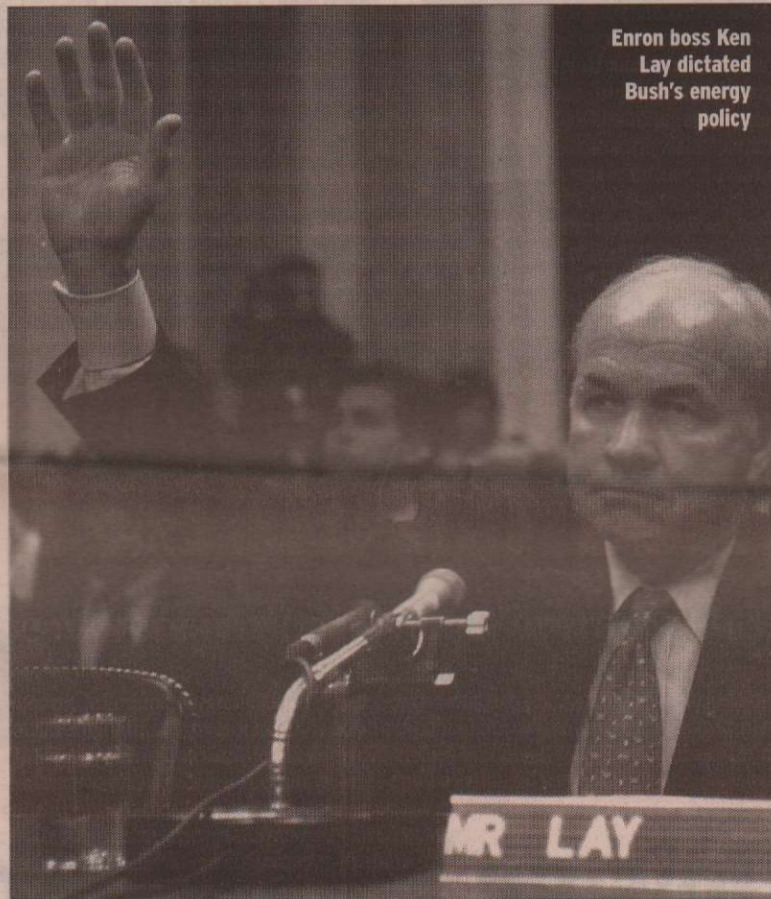
Enron started out as a gas pipeline company. Somewhere along the line it became a gas trading company. Then it came under the scrutiny of another emblematic modern corporation – the strategy consultants McKinsey. McKinsey specialises in "corporate transformation" and the consultant delegated to Enron, Jeff Skilling, realised Enron's trading activities could be expanded from the world of real commodities to that of "derivatives".

Instead of trading volumes of gas, they could trade rights to the future use of gas. With the internet growing, they could buy or lay thousands of miles of fibreoptic cable and trade – again, not just the right to use it now, but rights to use it in future. Within a few short years Enron grew to be the seventh biggest company by sales in the USA. Skilling left McKinsey to become Enron's chief executive. And McKinsey's famous Quarterly magazine, read in boardrooms everywhere, trumpeted this triumph of business alchemy in every issue.

Why did derivative trading hold the secret of success? Consider the problems facing a "normal" capitalist corporation. Most are companies over 100 years old, operating in markets that economists call "mature". That is: the rate of profit is well known, the acceptable sales mark-up standardised, the room for new entrants minimal. In a mature industry there are only two ways to gain an extra dollop of profit on top of what the rules of capitalism say you should get: monopolise the market or come up with a stunning technical innovation.

If capitalism were a system simply run for the benefit of generating an operating profit, the rarity of "super-profits"

Enron crashed and brought down accountancy giant Andersen. But behind the scams is a deeper meaning: capitalism's search for superprofits is getting desperate, writes **Frank Ciro**



Enron boss Ken Lay dictated Bush's energy policy

would probably not trouble many boardroom minds. But since the late 19th century, operating profits from individual businesses have been subordinated to the task of generating a return to the finance capitalists who collectively own most businesses. Either through bonds or loans or shares, banks and big financial institutions dictate the priorities of big business.

And the priorities have been not simply to generate profit but super-profit; not simply to return dividends to shareholders but to boost the share price. Some US companies in the 1990s even did away with dividends altogether, reducing the value of holding a share to the ability to sell it at a higher price. Instead of a claim on operating profits, a share certificate became like a betting slip.

As the share price bubble of the late 1990s grew, the companies that could show a theoretical chance of generating super-profits were the ones whose share price doubled, trebled, or shot up tenfold. But not all companies can command the monopoly position of a Microsoft, nor the technical prowess drug giant GlaxoSmithKline.

There remains one area where, for those with a combination of guile and bottle, superprofits can still be made

without either a monopoly or a patent technology: trading – the subtle art of buying cheap and selling dear.

But you have to be trading something where the true price is not clear to the consumer. Hence derivatives.

The true price of, say, gas, telecoms access or even bad weather insurance, is obvious to its consumer today. But

not in five years' time. If your guess is better than theirs, you can mint money, effectively by selling the option today for a price dearer than you know you will have to pay.

That is what Enron did. It evolved a complex derivatives trading operation out of a bricks and mortar business. And for a time it really looked like it had discovered how to make gold from base metal. The internet boom collapsed but Enron didn't.

And while it had been breaking the mould at the level of its business model, it was engaging in some very traditional business activities. As a new corporate giant it had to buy influence fast. Its business model depended on the deregulation of the US energy industry.

But some states were not deregulating fast enough. And states like California, where privatisation had caused a short supply of electricity, were screaming blue murder over high prices and market manipulation. So it needed friends in high places. These it bought with lavish donations to politicians: \$1.2 billion in all. When the Congressional investigations began, one politician after another had to rule themselves out on the grounds that they had taken donations from Enron.

Enron's chairman, Kenneth Lay, meanwhile nosed himself so far into the new Bush regime that, it is believed, he actually wrote the government's proposed new energy policy. To this day, Bush will not reveal who was involved in drafting it.

The problem with Enron was this. Its derivatives based operations could always leave it open to high risks. To boost its share price – the constant over-

riding objective – it had to hide any losses or liabilities incurred.

For five years, it is now clear, its finance director, Andrew Fastow, presided over a regime of moving debts into arms' length companies – a practice allowed under US accounting rules under certain very lax conditions. This effectively concealed the price Enron was paying for its risks – making it look like every bet paid off. As the massively over-rated share price became the wonder of the world, Enron's top bosses started selling their shares secretly, netting tens of millions of dollars each. They even forced Enron workers to buy and keep the shares while they sold them.

When a young New York journalist dared to ask, in a magazine article, whether all this was right, no fewer than seven Enron executives turned up in her boss's office to demand an apology. Instead, all the professionals – the debt analysts, accountants, stockbrokers and the giants of business journalism – belatedly and reluctantly started to ask the same questions.

The company collapsed. The value of Enron's shares fell from \$84 each to peanuts in a few weeks. Then came the bombshell. Accountants Arthur Andersen – one of the most respected, names in corporate capitalism – had been shredding millions of documents alleged to prove their involvement in setting up the whole scam.

Accountants are supposed to be the gatekeepers of capitalism. They ensure that cooking the books is kept to acceptable limits and that share prices bear some resemblance to reality. But Andersen had a proudly aggressive interpretation of this role.

They combined auditing services with consultancy services: advising clients how to avoid tax, move debt to arms-length companies, fix accounting schedules to – as the US regulator put it – "meet financial reporting rather than economic goals". And then at the end of the year they had the job of checking that all this work had been done according to the rules.

Not only had they failed to spot Enron's hidden debts. Not only had they signed off the accounts of a company whose practices they described, in a leaked memo, as "intelligent gambling". Andersen's consultancy operation must have been involved in designing the whole system.

Last month Andersen's struggle to survive that scandal ended. Outside the USA it will be broken up and merged with one or more of its rivals; its US company will very likely go bankrupt.

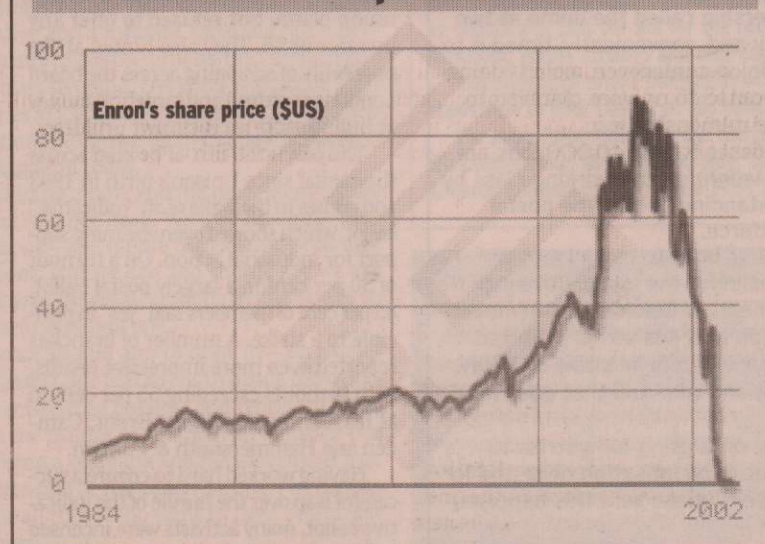
Apologists for capitalism would like to claim that Enron is the exception. And in a way it is. Not because it cooked the books: that's universal. It was exceptional because it looked like a new model of dynamic capitalism. It was the pioneering, hard-drinking, high-rolling company that crashed and burned.

Other, more staid, capitalist giants will – as they say in business circles – "stick to their knitting". They will not crash and burn. But then again they will never innovate, nor take risks. And they will never generate the superprofits or the fantasy league share price that Enron enjoyed.

Super-profit firms will still exist as long as they can command a monopoly position and a technology advantage. But Enron was the promise of a different kind of capitalism – endlessly expanding beyond the bounds of monopoly, finance and even real commodities, making money out of pure inside knowledge about the future.

The Enron crisis has crunched many of the big names of modern capitalism like so many plaster statuettes: Enron, Andersen, McKinsey – and more will follow. But it has really ground to dust the illusion born in the late 20th century that a new kind of capitalism could spring from beneath the tottering traditional monopolies – and make a profit from thin air.

Rise and fall of a capitalist illusion



MAYDAY...MAYDAY

International Workers Day, May 1, is a day that was taken by the workers from the bosses in the struggle for the 8 hour day. It is a day of celebration and solidarity for workers around the world, as workers from Turkey to Sri Lanka, from South Africa to Poland, take to the streets.

In London, this year's Mayday is shaping up to be a real focus of the growing opposition to privatisation and the attacks on workers' rights by the Labour government.

Why is this Mayday so special? For the first time since 1829, the state has allowed a march on Trafalgar Square while parliament is sitting. This is a legal march, granted by the Mayor of London to the "United for May Day" coalition, which is comprised of GLATUC (Greater London Association of Trades Council), SERTUC, Globalise Resistance and the Socialist Alliance.

Another important development is that this march has the backing of many major trade unions, for example the Transport and General Workers Union, Communication Workers Union (postal workers that are facing job losses of 40,000), NUT, Unison and MSF.

The organisers are expecting over 10,000 on the demo. Many unions are talking about taking strike action on the day. The CWU is backing the march and may call on its members, who knock off at 1pm anyway, to strike for 15 minutes (legal under the anti-union laws) to get there on time. East London firefighters have also backed the demo. This is on top of an expected 3-5,000 marchers from Turkish and Kurdish organisations.

Globalise Resistance wants to create a carnival atmosphere at Clerkenwell Green and Trafalgar Square. There will be speakers at the rally in Trafalgar Square - Tony Benn, Diane Abbot (MP), Mark Serwotka (general secretary elect PCS), and Ruth Winters (vice president Fire Brigade Union).

But the state has not given Trafalgar Square to the Mayday coalition without conditions. The Metropolitan police have agreed to the march on the understanding that this does not set a prece-



Mayday 2000. Make this year bigger and better

Revo

Revolution, the revolutionary socialist youth group, is building for a London-wide school/college/university walkout. To get involved contact 07951 493 232 or info@worldrevolution.org.uk.

Sexual Freedom

At 5pm in the evening will be a Sexual Freedom Coalition Carnival in Soho, with the Rhythms of Resistance samba band and supported by the GMB trade union, which has recently created a new sex workers branch of the union

dent and that the march will be "disciplined and orderly". GLATUC insist on a peaceful demo "tightly stewarded" with 200-strong stewarding group.

We are in favour of a mass peaceful march that can attract thousands of workers and their families onto the streets. And we need strong stewarding to ensure this. But at the same time, we recognise that the given the state's record of attacking protests - espe-

cially during the last two Mayday events in London (and Birmingham last year) a key job of the stewards will be to defend the march from any police provocations.

The type of "stewarding" which happened on Mayday 2000, when the Glatuc stewards did the cops job for them and tried to hold back the march from linking up with other demonstrators in Trafalgar Square, is not what we want.

MAYDAYS WORTH REMEMBERING

May 1, 1974, 6 days after the beginning of the Portuguese revolution

Day of Liberation: the Portuguese Festival of Brotherhood
Diário de Lisboa, 2 May 1974

The people united will never be defeated

The explosion of joy that the whole country experienced yesterday can only be compared with those celebrations that broke out amongst those peoples liberated from Nazi domination at the end of the war.

Portugal was also a country occupied, until last Thursday, by fascism, and it has now experienced its very own liberation celebrations with a euphoria, a sensibility, and a profoundly significant determination.

Suddenly emerging into the light that had been denied them for half a century, the Portuguese people have emerged from the shadows with a vehemence, an overwhelming eagerness that only the blind could ignore.

So, in the streets of Lisbon and Oporto (for example) there were spectacular displays of the birth of the people's voice. From today hope is (re)born in our people. To help you understand, yesterday there was a public festival (finally) without fear or suspicion. It was a genuine festival. One could proclaim that which had been pent up in the soul, and hail the victory of those who have put fire in our hearts.

The placards on display, the songs, the repeated slogans, the embraces, the smiles, the flowers, the hands raised in the "V" of victory, this is the alphabet of the new language of brotherhood - here and now.

In Lisbon, around one million people lived through this event that is already one of the most fascinating moments of our entire history.

The civic mindedness, the respect, the unity, the maturity that the people demonstrated represent the greatest response to those who, for decades, vilified us as being uncivilised, who prevented us from exercising our rights to our opinions and to our freedom. Because of this, yesterday's response becomes one of the most certain ways to effect the alterations that will be capable of leading to the formation of the new Portuguese and of the new Portugal.

We have already taken the first step.

Stewards should be elected and held accountable to the demonstration.

The main job of all socialists now is to mobilise workers and anti-capitalist youth to join the march in their thousands. In workplaces, schools and colleges we should be publicising the demo, getting people committed to coming and organising transport.

Wherever it is possible we should get strikes - including school strikes - to

maximise numbers attending. Where this is not possible we should get delegations, with banners.

The message should be - anti-capitalist demonstrations and strikes all over the world, from Argentina to Italy, at Brussels and at Barcelona, have pitted the power of the millions against the power of the millionaires and their governments. Let's do the same on Mayday here.

Stop Post sell-off

The Post Office is a prime target for privatisation. The bosses want it. New Labour wants it. At some point they will combine to go for it.

The post workers' union, the CWU, is dead against privatisation. Its leader, Billy Hayes, has more than once vowed to fight it. Yet Hayes, and the rest of the CWU leadership, have a funny way of proving they are up to a fight. Faced with an insulting pay offer the leadership called a strike ballot. They got an overwhelming vote for action but used it to go back to the negotiating table. No strike over pay.

Billy Hayes then called a demonstration against privatisation. This should have been a real focus for building the fightback. Militants could have used a demo to win support throughout the union as well as from other workers. Instead the leadership called the demo at two weeks notice, issued hardly any publicity and, conveniently, timed it to clash with the Socialist Alliance Trade Union conference, which a large number of CWU militants had been delegated to or were planning to attend. The result was a poorly attended demonstration.

The latest announcement from the bosses is that 40,000 jobs are to go. This will be the biggest single onslaught on the working class by the Labour Government - for it is Blair standing behind the postal bosses egging them to take on the workforce.

The response from the CWU leaders has been to call a lobby of parliament. Of course militants should build for the lobby. But much more is needed. Blair is out to take on the CWU because its members have shown a militancy and determination that has so far thwarted every major attack on it, notably during the unofficial strike last May. The members have shown they can fight and win. And that goes for a battle over job cuts and privatisation.

The leadership should build on this by organising for a strike to defend every job and to defeat the threat of privatisation once and for all. And the rank and file need to organise to make sure this happens, with or without Billy Hayes' backing.

Unison: vote yes for action

More than 70,000 members of Britain's biggest union, Unison, look set for a showdown with local authority bosses across Greater London's 32 borough councils.

An official strike ballot will run between 19 April and 2 May in support of a unified, London-wide weighting (cost of living) allowance of £4,000 after employers not only rejected the joint union claim, but refused to offer any increase at all. They also hinted at the possibility of scrapping across the board London weighting and targeting money at high-profile recruitment problems.

The poll is the first of its kind across the capital since Unison's birth in 1993 and comes in the wake of an "indicative" ballot, which showed overwhelming support for industrial action. On a turnout of 30 per cent in a largely postal ballot, 85 per cent of members said "yes" in principle to a strike. A number of branches reported even more impressive results, with turnouts exceeding 55 per cent in at least three boroughs: Brent, Camden and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Having worked hard to ensure a successful leap over the hurdle of the indicative ballot, many activists were incensed to learn that Unison's national industri-

al action committee voted 5-4 on 27 March to delay the staging of an official ballot. The union's London regional executive had agreed to push for a swift poll to enable a legal walkout to take place on May Day.

This year, of course, 1 May falls the day before the London-wide council elections, and is also due to see the first serious attempt at unity between London's trade union and anti-capitalist movements in a protest march. While arguments at the industrial action committee centred on the logistics of a ballot that would be all but immune from a court challenge by the bosses, there can be little doubt that some members of the union's national executive are none too keen on publicly identifying the union with the anti-capitalist movement in any way, shape or form.

George Binette, a departmental convenor and vice-chairperson of Camden Unison, commented: "A number of stewards and even people who had not been especially active before did a fine job encouraging people to vote and putting the argument for a massive 'yes' vote. Recruitment, especially among workers in schools, has shot up. More than 100 people joined the branch in March. Need-

less to say, though, there is disappointment and frustration at the industrial action committee's decision to delay, but we now need to ensure that the postponement of the ballot does not cost us momentum."

There are, however, a number of hopeful signs. Stewards are being encouraged to tell members that a one-day strike in mid-May is just the beginning and is unlikely on its own to win the full claim. At the same time, branch committees are talking about establishing separate strike committees as a means of involving new activists, making decision-making transparent and ensuring that things get done. Everyone seems to recognise that picket lines are essential.

In the meantime, Unison United Left activists must fight to make sure of:

- A huge "yes" vote in the official ballot.
- First action no later than mid-May.
- Support for indefinite strike action.
- Elected and accountable strike committees.
- Effective picketing.
- Improved co-ordination between the branches
- Leaflets to communities arguing why other workers and service users should support the strikes.

Organising in the unions

The Socialist Alliance Trade Union conference, held in London on March 16, was a sure sign that things are starting to get better in the unions, writes *Mark Hoskisson*

When the Socialist Alliance national council, last October, decided to hold an open conference aimed at trade unionists, expectations were modest. We thought a few hundred might turn up to discuss the related themes of democratising the political fund and fighting privatisation.

On the day of the conference – having switched the venue from a 500 seater to the larger Camden Centre – 1,038 people from 33 different trade unions had registered. Figures for the number of those who were delegated are incomplete at the moment. But it is looking as though at least one third of those present were officially delegated by their unions to attend.

Delegating bodies – branches and regions – included a significant number from the RMT, ASLEF, FBU, CWU, Unison, Amicus and the NUT.

With over 300 members of Unison present this was probably one of the largest gatherings of Unison left activists ever. Other unions with large numbers in attendance included the education unions, the rail unions, the CWU, GMB, TGWU, FBU, Amicus and the

media unions.

This was certainly the biggest unofficial trade union conference since the 1970s.

There were two main discussions – on the political fund and on the fight against privatisation and the current strikes. In between the conference broke into union based workshops to discuss developing networks and taking campaigns forward in individual unions.

In the discussion on the political fund Matt Wrack, of the FBU and author of a Socialist Alliance pamphlet on the Political Fund – *Whose Money is it Anyway?* – argued that the key was to place control of the fund in the hands of the members.

This did not mean calling for disaffiliation from Labour now, but it did mean opening the fund up to other political forces that sections of the union membership expressed clear support for – like the Socialist Alliance or the Scottish Socialist Party. If Labour chose to expel unions for practising such democracy, he argued, then that was their problem not ours.

Workers Power agrees with this view.

The fund should be allocated proportionally, according to support in the union, to different political organisations. Not only does this democratise the fund – and force Labour to campaign for support that it has hitherto taken for granted – it raises the entire issue, as Alison Higgins of Unison argued of “democratising all the other structures of the union and taking them out of the control of the bureaucracy”.

Yunus Baksh, a Unison NEC member, was also right to emphasise that this fight meant opening up the fund to working class and socialist organisations not rival parties of big business like the Lib-Dems. Charlie Balch of the CWU and Greg Tucker from the RMT completed the platform and reported on their unions’ campaigns against privatisation and the effects of privatisation respectively.

The debate itself – limited because of time – did demonstrate a wide degree of unity on the need to democratise the fund and, at the same time, demand that the unions affiliated to Labour use that affiliation to fight against Blair inside the Labour Party. In a later platform speech Richie Venton, of the Scot-

tish Socialist Party, did argue for a campaign now to break the link with Labour.

Most comrades, rightly in our view, feel that this would be premature and would cut us off from Labour Party supporters who favour democracy but want to keep the link. It would also risk – at this stage – opening the door to the sort of “non-political” unionism that the bureaucracies of the non-affiliated unions like the NUT and PCS and that the hard right in some affiliated unions wish to see become the norm.

The conference also agreed, by acclaim, to send its greetings to the ceramic workers of Neuquen in Argentina who have occupied their factory.

The session on privatisation – which opened with CWU members marching in from the anti-privatisation demo and continued with a speech by young striking medical secretaries from Sunderland – demonstrated the extent to which the conference chimed in with the growing resistance to Blair inside the working class.

Speakers included a delegate from the Italian Rifondazione Comunista who reported on the growing struggles against Berlusconi and the need to forge an internationalist anti-capitalist working class alliance to defeat the Blair/Berlusconi alliance. And Mark Serwotka, general secretary elect of the civil servants union, the PCS, clearly aligned himself with the rank and file against the bureaucracy and issued a call for a united demonstration and strike against privatisation.

What became clear in this session was the need to link the fight around the political fund to the organisation of a fightback against Blair’s anti-working class policies. George Binette, of Camden Unison, argued that what was really needed to take things forward was “a rank and file movement that begins as an anti-capitalist movement as well as an anti-bureaucratic movement.”



Mark Serwotka

Mark New, a leader of the Dudley health strikers, argued from the platform for a rank and file movement to take its place in the ranks of the anti-capitalist struggles.

The workshops certainly suffered from the lack of meeting space in the venue, with Unison and education having to share the main hall. These were designed to establish networks and discuss future activities. While some progress was made in several of these groups, the overall results of the workshops were patchy and in future more attention needs to be given to making them work more effectively.

The conference did not take any decisions on future policy or direction. This was inevitable given its open character and the fact that it was very much a first, and tentative, outing. However, its very success – and the undoubted sense of purpose and confidence that it gave to those attending it – now poses the Socialist Alliance with the need to work out how to take the momentum forward.



Striking Sunderland medical secretaries addressed the conference

Where next?

Whatever else it proved, the Socialist Alliance trade union conference demonstrated that any strategy of confining the Alliance to being primarily an electoral united front is wrong.

This was probably the most successful Alliance event held to date – and while it was rightly used to mobilise support for the forthcoming local elections it quite clearly attracted people because it intersected with the growing mood among militants who are aiming to organise in the unions.

The Socialist Alliance has a clear responsibility to build on this mood. The question is how?

There is general agreement that we should re-convene the trade union conference for later in the year. In the meantime we should seek to develop the Alliance profile in the unions through fringe meetings at this year’s conferences and around a campaign to push the Political Fund pamphlet in the unions.

But what we really need inside the unions today is to organise as wide a layer of rank and file militants into a coherent force capable of taking on the bosses, the government and their own bureaucratic leaderships.

Despite some leaders – like Edmonds in the GMB and Hayes in the CWU – cutting funds to Labour under pressure of their members, the bureaucracy as a whole remains in awe of Blair. It is unwilling to organise a militant campaign against privatisation, let alone sustain a serious strike against it. Where it is driven to action by the members over pay – as with the London teachers – it is able to turn strikes on and off regardless of the outcome and regardless of the wishes of the membership.

Above all, the bureaucracy’s agreed strategy of forging “partnership” with the bosses, its mind-numbing routinism and its lack of determination all prevent it from reaching out

to the new layers of the working class, millions of young and unorganised workers, who could breathe new life into the labour movement.

We are facing a growing contradiction between the tasks facing the working class and the bureaucratic limitations that hem its organisations into a world of bureaucratism, inactivity, strict observance of anti-union laws and partnership with anti-working class bosses and a government committed to the needs of big business.

To resolve this contradiction, socialists need to build two things: a revolutionary party capable of offering a coherent political alternative and a militant rank and file movement capable of transforming the unions into democratic bastions of militant class struggle. The latter will not be built without revolutionaries at its core. And the party cannot come about unless revolutionaries prove up to the task of taking a bold lead in the struggles of today.

A step towards building a rank and file movement can be taken by the Socialist Alliance itself. We cannot simply proclaim one into existence – and ignore the existing organisations inside the unions. But we can and should say we are in favour of one and give the recall conference the power to decide on steps towards building one.

The next conference should aim to draw in – on a delegate basis so we can assess our real strength inside the working class – as many activists as possible and representatives of left formations in the unions so that we can hammer out a strategy for organising a real rank and file movement that can, as George Binette said at the conference, act as a focus inside the unions for all those who want to fight both capitalism and bureaucracy.

Vote Socialist Alliance on 2 May

In the local elections scheduled for 2 May we urge all our supporters to vote for and campaign for Socialist Alliance candidates.

Labour councils are the front line battle troops in General Blair’s operation to privatise everything. From council housing to care homes, Labour is putting up for sale signs outside its town halls. It is cutting services to the bone at the same time as earmarking millions for the next stage of George W Bush’s “war against terror”.

The Socialist Alliance is campaigning against privatisation and war. It is for cancelling the debt to the Third World countries and for taxing the rich to pay for the extension of vital services that workers need. It wants those services to be under workers’ and users control so that we can decide how they should be run.

The Socialist Alliance also wants local budgets to be decided upon by local working class communities and supports strikes, demonstrations, town hall lobbies and occupations to impose those budgets. It believes money for services can be released by local councils introducing local business and wealth taxes and by refusing to foot the bill for the racist police forces who stalk our streets harassing youth, strikers and anti-capitalists.

The campaign offers thousands of workers an opportunity to register their opposition to New Labour at the polls. Take the chance. Vote Socialist Alliance.

For more information on the campaign write to the Socialist Alliance, Wickham House, 10 Cleveland Way, London W1 4TR or contact the Socialist Alliance national office on 020 7791 3138 or email: office@socialistalliance.net

Copies of Matt Wrack’s Socialist Alliance pamphlet on democratising trade union funds – *Whose Money is it Anyway?* – can be obtained from the SA office at £5.00 for 10 or £1.00 each.

Contact the SA office to order copies: Socialist Alliance, Wickham House, 10 Cleveland Way, London W1 4TR or tel: 020 7791 3138 email: office@socialistalliance.net





Palestine

Last month was the bloodiest in Palestine since the new intifada erupted in September 2000. *Keith Harvey* explains what Israel hopes to get from its latest murderous onslaught on the Occupied Territories

On 28 February, Israeli tanks invaded Balata refugee camp in Nablus. This was swiftly followed by similar attacks on Tulkarem Nur al Shams, Jenin, Azaa, Aida and Deheisha, Arrob, Khan Younis, Rafah and Jabalya refugee camps.

In the first two weeks of last month 163 Palestinians were killed after Prime Minister Sharon proclaimed a "new" stated policy of "hitting Palestinians hard [until it is] very painful. We must cause them losses, victims, so that they feel the heavy price".

These victims were on top of the more than 1,000 Palestinians killed and more than 18,000 injured since the intifada began.

In the final week of March the Palestinians responded with further suicide bombs, killing forty-one people in seven incidents. Israel then launched "Operation Defensive Shield" on 29 March – in fact a full-scale invasion of areas controlled by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Its aim has been to crush the Palestinian militias and terrorise the civilian population. Israeli forces took over six major West Bank towns and cities – Ramallah, Qalqiliya, Jenin, Tulkarem, Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron – and have arrested more than 1,100 Palestinians. Jericho remained the last island of Palestinian control in the West Bank. Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah was the first to be hit and he remained isolated there surrounded by Israeli troops.

Sharon's policy shift in late February transcended the assassination of "suspected" activists and bombing of targeted PNA or PLO/Hamas buildings that had characterised Israel's bloody oppression of the Palestinians legitimate resistance. It has been broadened to a full frontal attack upon Palestinian civilians in the refugees camps, which form the organising centre and mass base of support for the intifada.

But the first half of March also witnessed a flurry of diplomatic activity: the return of Anthony Zinni as Bush's envoy to the Middle East, a Saudi "peace plan" which proposes to swap "normalisation" of relations with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Territories; Sharon even conceded the possibility of negotiations without a ceasefire. A UN Security Council resolution – with US backing – for the first time backed the idea of a Palestinian state.

The murderous repression and the diplomatic initiatives are related and form a unified whole. It is very reminiscent of the first months of 1993. From February through May that year Israel embarked on the bloodiest repression of the first intifada in the wake of successful Hamas operations; more were killed than at any time since 1967.

Thousands of Palestinians were detained, hundreds expelled to Lebanon, the Gaza sealed off. Yet at exactly the same time secret negotiations started in Norway between Israel and Palestinians that led to the Oslo accords in

September 1993.

In short, the brutal repression by the Zionist state is an attempt to strengthen its negotiating position ahead of any resumed talks on a political settlement by destroying the infrastructure of resistance and the use of mass detentions as a bargaining chip.

CEASEFIRE

On September 11 last year the intifada was nearly one year old and was locked into a war of attrition. After 11 September George Bush gave Sharon the green light for a more brutal repression of the intifada in the name of the war against terrorism. US intervention was thereafter confined to securing a unilateral ceasefire by the PLO/PNA and to exert pressure on Arafat to arrest and crush the non-Fatah resistance fighters (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, PFLP). The resistance movement responded by greater use of suicide bombs inside Israel, more daring raids on Jewish settlements and finally more effective attacks on the occupying Israeli army.

The intifada thus proved stronger than Sharon's reputation and determination; his one attraction to Israel's Jews – that he could bring them security through use of force – has proved utterly illusory. His poll ratings plummeted from 80 per cent last summer to 45 per cent in March.

He has lost support on all sides. In the last two weeks we have seen the Jewish population inside Israel polarised like never before. The anti-occupation

movement of reservists has mushroomed in the last month. Since September 2000 almost a thousand soldiers and potential draftees have now told the army officials that they will not take part in the occupation.

An unprecedented 15,000 strong peace demonstration took place in Tel Aviv on 2 March, followed by a small – but again the largest to date – demonstration (3,000) in Jerusalem on 8 March calling for an end to the current wave of Israeli invasions. On the other side 50,000 demonstrated calling for the overthrow of the PNA and the "removal" of Yasser Arafat from Palestine.

The logic of Operation Defensive Shield suggests the next move is for the destruction of the PNA and the resumption of full control of the West Bank and Gaza. This would involve the defeat and disarming of 30,000 PNA fighters and the permanent garrisoning of the West Bank and Gaza again. Many on the far right in Sharon's government press for this and even for the expulsion of Palestinians out of the West Bank.

But such a move is opposed by a majority of the Israeli army high command and intelligence service. The army is already wracked by a growing movement of reservists who refuse to be deployed to the killing fields of the West Bank to carry out orders to murder children and unarmed demonstrators. The army knows it would face a civil war in the ranks if it tried to force reservists to permanently re-occupy the whole of the West Bank and take responsibility

for administration of the territories.

Having sanctioned the Israeli invasion in March and having seen most of its war aims achieved within a week, Bush stepped in on 4 April to announce that Secretary of State Colin Powell was to return to the region. His mission is to rescue a much weakened Arafat from the rubble of Ramallah and force him to sign up to a new "peace deal" that gives Israel what it wants and breaks the objections of the PLO to the deal that was on offer before the intifada began.

The Bush administration knows that destroying the PNA and Arafat would spell the end for any attempt to get the Middle East Arab ruling class to sign up to his impending attack upon Iraq. In turn the Arab ruling governments know that an all-out war to crush the PNA would ignite their own peoples.

Just as the Madrid conference in 1991 (the precursor to the Oslo accords) was a "reward" to the local Arab states for their support for the USA in the Gulf war against Iraq, so the support for the Saudi plan and the UN resolution is a bribe aimed at compliance with the coming attack on Iraq.

But what kind of "peace" can be imposed on a defeated PLO and PNA? Under his leadership Yasser Arafat has brought the Palestinian people to the brink of catastrophe. The mix of guerrilla struggle, bourgeois diplomacy, corrupt patronage and brutal repression of opponents has ensured that Arafat's "leadership" over the Palestinian people has resulted in his complete failure

After a year of hostility to the intifada Israel's Zionist left has started to mobilise against the actions of the Israeli army. *Mark Robbins* outlines the origins of the Israeli peace movement, its development and stance towards the intifada

The recent re-awakening of the Israeli peace movement, with large demonstrations in Tel-Aviv called under the slogan "The Occupation Is Killing Us All", and the emergence of a "refusenik" movement of Israeli reservists refusing military service in the Occupied Territories, has put the Israeli left back in the spotlight. This has happened after a year of complete silence in the wake of the Palestinian uprising and the election of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

There are growing calls in diplomatic circles for a negotiated settlement, and the Arab summit in Beirut recently discussed Saudi proposals for normalising Israel's relationship with all the Arab states in return for full withdrawal from the 1967 territories and a Palestinian state.

PEACE NOW

The largest and most well-known of the Israeli "peace" organisations is "Peace Now". It was founded in March 1978 by 348 reserve commanders, officers, and combat soldiers of the Israel Defence Forces. Their objective was to pressure the Likud government to bring about a politically negotiated settlement with Egypt, Syria and Jordan, the frontline Arab states whose territory had been lost in the 1967 war. Their argument was that security required a political settlement as well as military superiority – and they wrote to prime minister Menachem Begin that: "Real security can be achieved only when we achieve peace." This obsession with Israeli security, rather than with the roots of the national conflict, has been a hallmark of this group and the Israeli peace movement as a whole.

During Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the movement mushroomed, mobilising 400,000 people (one-third of the country's population) to demonstrate

for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and a commission of inquiry into the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, in which Israel was implicated – with Sharon himself identified as the architect of the butchery.

When the Intifada broke out in 1987, Peace Now argued for negotiations with the PLO and claims the credit for paving the way for the Oslo accords.

While claiming to be a non-party organisation, it has long been associated with the "doveish" wing of the Labour party establishment, and has supported former Labour-led governments such as those of Ehud Barak, Shimon Peres and Yitzak Rabin.

Today, their own stated objectives include, "Israeli withdrawal to safe borders from the West Bank and Gaza; creation of a Palestinian state subject to strict military limitations; negotiation of security and peace accords between Israel and Syria leading to a safe Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights; and a resolution on the status of an undivided Jerusalem that accommodates the national aspirations and religious needs of both Israeli and Palestinian residents."

In practice, this means that they oppose full withdrawal to the 1967 cease-fire lines, expect the Palestinians to accept a capital city outside of Jerusalem's historic boundaries, and insist that a Palestinian state should be prevented from having arms and military formations that might pose a threat to Israel's security. They also seek to exclude foreign (that is, Arab) military forces from Palestinian territory.

Equally, they insist that the Palestinian Authority "has the responsibility to make a maximum effort to thwart terror ... resume effective security co-operation with Israel; arrest and prosecute within the full extent of the law those Palestinians who engage in terrorism..."

Peace Now rejects the right of return of the refugees,

arguing that this demand is "an unacceptable threat to Israel's integrity, demographics and sovereignty". Instead, it argues for the return of Palestinian refugees, not to their homes in pre-1967 Israel, but within the boundaries of a future Palestinian state, "as Jews are allowed the right of return within the borders of the State of Israel", and limit themselves to the repatriation of limited numbers of refugees into Israel as part of a programme of family reunification.

They argue that "settlement building must be frozen during the peace process until such time as the future of the territories, including the status of the settlements, has been negotiated", and that settlers who want to return to Israel should be financially assisted to do so. But they do not call for the full removal of the settlements – rather that settlers who remain in place "should understand that they will be subject to Palestinian law and sovereignty", and that Israel and the Palestinians may negotiate border adjustments that would annex a portion of settlements to Israel while leaving others under Palestinian control.

Taken as a whole, this places their programme extremely close to the mythically "generous offers" that Ehud Barak presented to the Palestinians at Camp David in July 2000, whose rejection preceded the outbreak of the current uprising.

It is therefore not surprising that their reaction to the Palestinian uprising in September 2000 was a sense of betrayal by their "partners in peace". They remained largely silent as the government of their favoured candidate for prime minister, Ehud Barak, used brutal and indiscriminate force against civilians to crush the uprising. Author Amos Oz, one of Peace Now's leading lights, went so far as to argue in February 2001 that the "doves" should "re-examine their perch", that it was no longer the case that "the sole obstacle to peace is

Under siege



Demonstration in refugee camp (above); Al Fatah militia (below)



to secure self-determination for them.

The roots of the second intifada lay in his disastrous decision to co-sign the Oslo declaration of principles in 1993 with Israel and the subsequent detailed agreements (such as Cairo 1994) which set out the range of the PNA's powers and security commitments made to Israel.

At Oslo Arafat agreed to legitimise Israel's redeployment of its occupying troops to those parts of the West Bank and Gaza that allowed it to defend Jewish settlements and secure the natural resources and roads that enabled them to function.

Around 59 per cent of the West Bank is officially under Israeli civil and security control. Another 23 per cent was placed under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control. Barely 18 per cent was ceded to the territory governed by the Palestinian National Authority.

In return for this and recognition of the PLO Arafat recognised the state of Israel. The fate of settlements and East Jerusalem were left for further negotiations during the "interim period". The negotiations on the "final settlement" were meant to be concluded in 1996 but were repeatedly delayed as one crisis after another erupted. In July 2000 attempts at a final settlement between PLO and Prime Minister Barak under Clinton's pressure failed because of Israel's intransigence on settlements and the status of Jerusalem.

In September 2000 all the contradictions of the post-Oslo peace process exploded. The manifest determination of all wings of Zionism to deny the Palestinians a meaningful independent state and substitute for this a series of disconnected, encircled bantustans finally led to a second intifada. At the centre of this explosion lay the settlements, an ongoing and growing negation of the

Palestinian's right to self-determination, a fact recognised even by US Senator George Mitchell's report in May 2001 when he recommended the Israeli government freeze all settlement activity because of their provocative character and oppressive results.

Settlements are integral to Zionism because Jewish immigration is at the heart of the Zionist state. Israel has only been able to sustain its colonial project by drawing in a constant supply of Jews from around the world.

Any "peace deal" that does not remove settlements from the Gaza strip and large parts of the West Bank will simply guarantee further explosions. Any attempt by Arafat to legitimise their existence and growth in any "final settlement" which recognises a Palestinian "state" would probably cause civil war among Palestinians.

ISOLATION

The Saudi peace plan has the implicit backing of Bush and the Gulf states. Its attraction to Israel lies in ending its economic and diplomatic isolation from the region and holds out the prospect of rich contracts to rescue its flailing economy in the medium to long term.

The PLO have welcomed the UN and Saudi proposals. But they are as much of a trap as Oslo was. If the Saudi plan is committed to full withdrawal of Israel to pre-1967 borders, including the dismantling of settlements (or placing them under Palestinian jurisdiction) then it is doomed since Israel will not countenance it.

If this is "negotiable" in return for the present (or slightly enlarged) set of PNA bantustans being labelled "a state" by the international community and Israel, and this state cannot allow refugees to return home, then it is a recipe for future intifadas and civil war.

Two states living in harmony and justice is a chimera. What we have now is, de facto, the two states solution that is compatible with the existence of the state of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state. The only just solution must encompass equal citizenship rights for Jews and Arabs and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their land of origin. This means a state in which Jews and Arabs are equal, not a state that defines itself specifically as "Jewish" or "Arab".

Otherwise the continued existence of an Israeli-Jewish state, even alongside a Palestinian state, would depend on the maintenance of racist citizenship laws and the exclusion of millions of Palestinians from the territory. Far from providing the basis for a lasting peace, this could only condemn the region to further cycles of repression and war.

The destruction of the Zionist character of the present state of Israel is the only basis upon which a future just settlement to the present conflict can be built. Without it there can be no right of Palestinian's to return, without it there can be no end to the cancer of settlements within the body of Palestine. The opposite is also true: relinquishing the demand for the removal of settlements, (and hence the withdrawal of Israeli troops) and for the right of Palestinians to return can only confirm the exclusionist, anti-democratic character of Israel.

Only a socialist secular republic of the whole of Palestine – which has rights for all and privileges for none, based on the unity of the Jewish and Arab working class and small farmers, the nationalisation of land and the expropriation of big business and finance – can bring peace and justice to Palestine. Without justice there can be no peace.

Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories", that Israel had presented the most far-reaching offer that it could make, and that the Palestinian nation had "rejected peace".

MERETZ

Another important group is Meretz, which describes itself as "The Israeli Social Democratic and Peace-seeking Party". Its programme commits it to "human rights, equality, social justice, Israel's security, and to the values of humane Zionism". Like Peace Now, it opposes any division of Jerusalem or a full withdrawal to the cease-fire lines of 1949, arguing that they "have never been internationally recognised borders", and argues that negotiations over future borders must be related to security and demographic considerations, so that Israel's security will be enhanced. Similarly, it argues that the evacuated territories "will be demilitarised, and any violation will entitle Israel to act in accordance with the fundamental right of self-defence".

While calling for a settlement freeze, Meretz says that "Israel will do everything in its power to protect its citizens" in the territories prior to a negotiated settlement, and Meretz fights to ensure that the Israel Defence Force receives "the full budgetary resources needed to preserve its might and its superiority in qualitative, technological and human terms over all the armies of the region".

Equally, it calls for the return of the Palestinian refugees to the territory of a future Palestinian state, but not to their lands in pre-1967 Israel. As a political party, it has repeatedly taken part in coalition governments led by the Labour establishment, including Ehud Barak's.

The defining feature of this wing of the peace movement has been its dependence on the Labour establishment, its argument for "peace" as an extension of Israeli security policy, its commitment to a negotiated settlement and a two-state solution, and therefore also to the defence of the Jewish state.

The Oslo accords were a godsend to this movement, appearing as they did to vindicate their historic policy. This has made them into uncritical admirers of Labour-led governments when they were engaged in the "peace process". It has also pitted them against the Palestinians when their resistance has erupted into confrontation with the Israeli state.

Just as significantly, it has placed it on the defensive against the Israeli right when Israeli security is threatened by Palestinian resistance, and when repression is seen to produce better results than negotiation in creating "security".

GUSH SHALOM

The most militant of the Israeli peace organisations is Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc). Its most prominent figure, radical Israeli journalist Uri Avnery, established secret contacts with senior PLO figures in 1974 and famously visited Yasser Arafat during the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982. His organisation calls for full Israeli withdrawal to the cease-fire lines of 4 June 1967, unilaterally if necessary, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

It also calls for a recognition in principle of the right of return for the Palestinian refugees, although insists that the return of Palestinians to Israel should be subjected to strict quotas over a 10-year period following a political settlement. Nevertheless, this is

still much further than any other group has gone in recognising the historic injustice committed against the Palestinian people by the creation of Israel. Avnery and Gush Shalom are still committed to a Jewish state and a two-state solution – however, they embody the most extensive version of it.

Like other sections of the peace movement, Gush Shalom called for a vote to Rabin in 1992, Peres in 1996 and Barak in 1999. Unlike other figures on the Israeli left, Avnery defended the Palestinians' to resist following their uprising in September 2000, denounced Barak's "generous offers" to the Palestinians for being the humiliating demand for surrender that they were, and refused to support Barak during the elections that led to his downfall and the creation of a government led by Ariel Sharon.

Nevertheless, he anticipates that the creation of a Palestinian state in a two-state solution will enable Arafat to isolate and demobilise the Intifada – that is, to strip it of its revolutionary potential for transforming the whole region. Just as the Peace Now and Meretz wing of the peace movement argue for a negotiated settlement and partial withdrawal as the best guarantee of Israeli security, Avnery and Gush Shalom argue for a two-state solution and full withdrawal as the price of bourgeois democratic stability. Instead of being a fellow-traveller with Labour Zionism, this makes him a fellow-traveller of Fatah's bourgeois Palestinian nationalism.

Ultimately, the real obstacle to the Israeli left's goal of a two-state solution is Israel's own domestic political, social and economic division. Israel has maintained the internal unity of its Jewish population through its policy of occupation and settlement-building, thus buying off disaffected (Jewish) minorities by granting them privileges at the expense

of the Palestinians.

Any withdrawal from the territories or abandonment of the settlements would result in the loss of the social position held by those sections of Israeli Jewish society whose livelihood depends upon the spoils of occupation, and would result in an internal Israeli conflict. This is why Israeli governments of both right and left have clung so tenaciously to the settlements, and with them have prevented an accommodation with the forces of "moderate" bourgeois Palestinian nationalism.

It is also why a two-state solution will not bring about peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples – as a militarily stronger Israel will always have recourse to renewed expansionist aspirations in order to guarantee the internal stability of the Jewish state, in whatever boundaries the Jewish state might exist. A genuine peace between the peoples, and not merely their ruling classes, will only come about with the abolition of all national privileges, including the privilege of having a Jewish state built upon the ruins of a Palestinian Arab nation.

Nevertheless, co-operation with the Israeli peace movement is possible. Their various activities – of monitoring human rights abuses, civil rights violations and settlement-building, their acts of protest against the occupation, and their calls for withdrawal from the Occupied Territories – are all supportable, and can form a basis for common action with anyone committed to defence of the national rights of the oppressed Palestinian Arab people. However, revolutionary socialists believe that only a complete break with any defence of their own national privileges, and therefore also with Zionism and the defence of the Jewish state, will allow a just and lasting peace to become a reality.

On 21 April French people will have the chance to vote for a record 16 candidates in the first round of the Presidential elections. The top two will go forward to a run-off on 5 May. These are likely to be the current right-wing president, Jacques Chirac, and the present Socialist Party prime minister, Lionel Jospin. Neither of them will get more than 20 per cent in the first round.

Chirac's seven-year term went badly wrong from the outset. Millions took to the streets in a three-week wave of protest against an anti-working class plan of privatisation and cuts in November-December 1995 and defeated it.

Fifteen months later Chirac plucked up courage again and dissolved parliament with its right-wing majority, arguing that he needed a still larger majority to drive through the austerity drive that the Euro would require.

This turned out to be another blunder. Not only did the left win the elections but the threatened austerity drive was postponed, as the continuing boom in the world economy finally dragged France along with it in the late 1990s. This filled the state coffers to overflowing and provided the socialist-led left coalition government with enough money both to bring in the Euro and to finance a number of minor reforms.

Over the last five years Chirac has been reduced to an impotent figurehead in a system of "cohabitation" that was generally popular with the electorate. Apart from this, he can point to no positive aspect of his Presidency.

Chirac has proved to be not only an incompetent politician, but also a corrupt one. Protected by his office, he has repeatedly avoided investigation by the law, but not by journalists who have clearly shown the network of corruption that financed his party, his allies and his high-rolling personal life.

On the other hand, Lionel Jospin's five years in office have done much to erode the main basis of his support – the working class. For much of Jospin's period in office, unemployment declined substantially – over 1,800,000 jobs created – due to both state-backed employment programmes, especially for young people, and to the growth of the world economy.

But over the last eight months, all that has begun to come unstuck. A number of high-profile closures have made workers once again uneasy about the possibility of becoming unemployed. The government is taking the rap.

One of the key reforms which the government is so proud of – the 35 hour week – has proved a double-edged sword. Although it has reduced annual work time, it has done so at a high price: bosses can now impose brutal changes in the working week, getting the flexibility that previous right-wing governments were unable to deliver.

Workers in many sectors, and particularly in the Post Office, have fought long and often fruitless battles against the consequences of this law and are angry with the government that introduced it.

Yet Jospin has resolutely turned his face to the centre, claiming that his policies are not socialist (he's right about that), and that he wants to win over the centre ground. It will only confirm the convictions of those workers who think that there is no difference between Jospin and Chirac, and will probably weaken the willingness of other workers to go out and vote for Jospin in the second round.

Unless he makes a radical change to his policies – and this is unlikely – it seems that Jospin's main hope lies in the threat of a right-wing victory eventually frightening working class voters out their beds on 5 May. If he loses, it will be the consequence of the demoralising impact of his pro-capitalist policies on important sectors of the French workers.

The main challenge from the left is likely to come from Robert Hue of the Communist Party and Arlette Laguiller, who is standing for the fifth time for

French Socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin wants to become president. But he's attacked workers' rights and there's a left wing challenger, so how will workers vote, asks Mathieu Roux

Lutte Ouvriere (LO). Polls suggest that this time Arlette may storm past Hue getting 11 per cent of the vote against the latter's 6 per cent. For the PCF this is yet another step towards oblivion whereas for Arlette it will be a triumph.

Twenty years ago, the French Communist Party (PCF) was the biggest party in France, with hundreds of thousands of members and polling over 20 per cent of the vote. As well as controlling a large number of municipal councils and the main trade union, the CGT, the PCF also had a massive influence over cultural life, and intellectuals in particular.

Today, Hue, is trailing behind Laguiller and his party is increasingly seen as an irrelevance by most workers. In the 1980s, the PCF succumbed to the siren call of parliamentary power and entered the government.

As a result, when the government

underlining the co-responsibility of the PCF for these policies, LO's campaign is clearly focused on France, scorning both the questions of Europe and – with particular vehemence – the anti-globalisation movement. LO's campaign is high on denunciation and chronically low on programmatic substance.

Following their adoption of an "emergency plan" for the 1995 campaign, they now put forward a series of immediate demands, against unemployment or reductions in pensions and raising the age of retirement, etc. However they avoid saying how workers should fight for them. Despite LO's red flags, and Arlette's avowal of "communism" its concrete programme is reformist in its parameters and its methods.

Arlette does not use her national prominence to summon workers to direct action against unemployment, let

calling on them to fight for the creation of a new workers' party in the weeks and months following the election.

What will happen in the second round? The Socialist Party cannot simply assume that those who voted for the Trotskyists will all turn out to vote for Jospin in the decisive second round. An important layer of working class militants, often with a (mistaken) differential hostility to the Socialist Party as against the Communist Party, have made it clear that they will not vote Jospin in the decisive second round of the election.

This position is now widespread amongst the vanguard, in a way that it was not in previous elections. Some people (up to 30 per cent of LO's electors in 1995) actually voted Arlette in the first round and Chirac in the second! More decisively, neither LO nor the LCR will call for a vote for Jospin.

It is possible that a lack of support from these layers in the second round may cost Jospin the election. However, the perception of a fundamental political identity between the policies advocated by Chirac and Jospin extends far beyond the vanguard: opinion polls suggest that up to three quarters of the electorate as a whole consider them to be identical. This is hardly surprising – on all essential points, they do agree.

This is not a piece of ultra-left exaggeration: the key decisions about the future form of French society will not be taken in Paris, but in Brussels. Despite their rhetoric about the need to protect public services and pensions, both Chirac and Jospin will apply the majority European line.

For example, at the recent Barcelona summit, they both agreed to increase the retirement age by five years. In return, Europe gave them a two year breathing space before implementing it. This decision could create a volatile situation – it was precisely the threat to pensions that was the most explosive part of Juppé's policies in 1995.

In these circumstances, it is important that French workers do not go along with the passive abstentionism of Lutte Ouvrière and the LCR and refuse to vote in the second round.

If the right wins the presidency and then goes on to win the parliamentary elections due in the Autumn, the wheel of reformism, renewing its credentials in opposition, will be given another spin. The Socialist Party appeared out for the count when Chirac won but the experience of a right-wing government was enough to send millions flocking back to Jospin by the next elections.

The vast majority of workers consider, however wrongly, that there is a difference between the policies of Jospin and Chirac, or at the very least there is a difference in the severity of the attacks they can expect from a victorious right. For this reason they will vote Jospin.

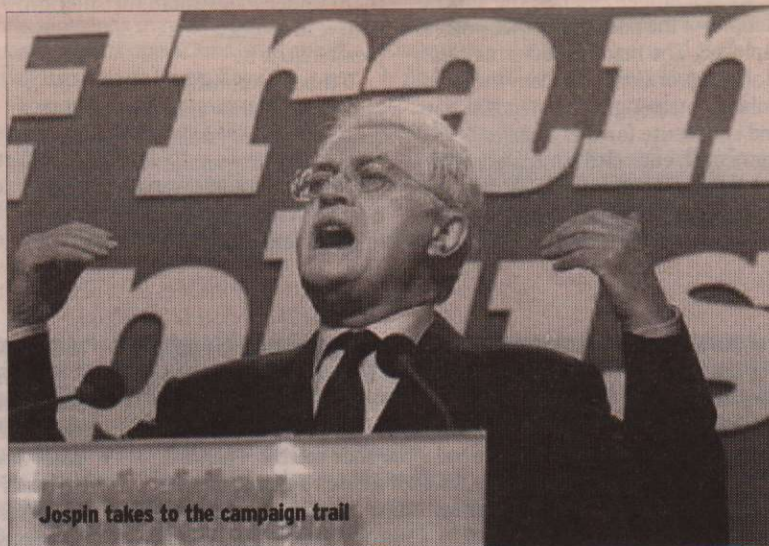
Revolutionary socialists need to be able to show those workers, in struggle, how wrong they are, and the importance of a revolutionary alternative to the Gauche Plurielle. The best way of doing that is to put Jospin and the PS-PCF coalition back in power to prevent them posing as the only alternative to right wing austerity.

The value of putting the reformists to the test has been shown by the last five years: the attacks carried out by Jospin have done much to undermine his support amongst vanguard workers. That process has yet to be completed, however, as shown by the absence of any alternative leadership.

By putting Jospin back into power, by organising the fightback against the neo-liberal policies that will inevitably follow, even if they are dressed up in a reformist guise, workers will be best able to both resist the bosses' offensive and create the basis for a new workers' party armed with a revolutionary programme.

■ For more on the French election and French politics, go to www.pouvoir-ouvrier.org French section of the LRCI

Jospin vs Chirac... but what about the workers?



Jospin takes to the campaign trail



Chirac

alone against racism and the threat of war. Despite her profile as a "Trotskyist" the votes she wins – even if she tops 10 per cent – will certainly not be votes for a revolutionary course of action for French workers.

The press treatment of Laguiller has changed since 1995, presumably because her campaign is becoming a more serious electoral factor. A series of investigations into the Union Communiste – the once-secret organisation behind LO – have described its structures and even shown that Robert Barcia (aka Hardy), the cult leader of the extremely "workerist" LO, is in fact the boss of a pharmaceutical training company.

On a number of occasions, Laguiller has been reduced to tears as she has been harassed over LO's internal regime, while journalists have feigned surprise as they "discover" that she thinks the Russian Revolution was a good thing! There is little sign that this anti-communist campaign is having any effect on Laguiller's support, however: she is widely admired for her commitment and her patent personal honesty.

It is clear that important sectors of the working class have turned their back on the PCF and the PS and are looking to Laguiller, who they see as an honest candidate. A much smaller number will vote for Olivier Besancenot, the candidate of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), leading section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

Given the extreme crisis of leadership within the French working class, and the various calls for the creation of a new workers' party, a vote for Laguiller or Besancenot in the first round could help build the momentum for such a party. Revolutionaries should give critical support to this pole of opposition to the pro-capitalist policies of the Gauche Plurielle government, whilst

made its turn to austerity in 1982, the PCF's muscular reformist rhetoric was revealed as the empty bluff and bluster it truly was. Its continued claim to be "the revolutionary party" sat ill with its pro-capitalist practice. As a result, much of the PCF's traditional base began to turn away from it, either abstaining, voting PS or even, in some areas, voting for the racist Front National.

In the second half of the 1990s, the electoral and political collapse has continued unabated, reinforced since the PCF joined the PS and the Greens in another coalition government in 1997. The traditionally pro-PCF CGT, sensing which way the wind was blowing, broke all official links with the PCF.

The membership continues to increase in age and decline in number. The PCF's daily paper, "L'Humanité" is little read and is only kept afloat by massive state subsidies.

As in the past, LO's campaign is aimed at what was the traditional electorate of the PCF. Emphasising the betrayals of the Socialist Party, while

GERMANY

Unions blow time on 'partnership'

Frederik Haber, an activist in IG Metall, reports on the German union's upcoming pay battle

Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schröder had hoped to keep wage rises low in 2000 and 2001 so as to boost profits for German bosses. This would make an increase possible in 2002 and, with workers and capitalists all happy, Schröder and the ruling social democrats (SPD) would win the election in September. But Schröder's plan has backfired.

Of course, the bosses were keen to accept the government's help in drawing the trade union leaders into an unofficial agreement concerning wages two years ago, especially when pay increases did not keep pace with inflation last year. But today company chiefs don't want to take away any money destined for the pockets of their shareholders and give it to the their workforce.

But the workers are in no mood to make the same mistake again. The metalworkers' union IG Metall is demanding a rise of 6.5 per cent and many other trade unions are following this example. But, say the employers, "that is as high as the wage claim submitted during the boom year of 1999, even though the economy now faces a recession. Are workers crazy?"

Not crazy, just determined. On the one hand, the metalworkers felt cheated by the way the agreement in 2000 was pushed through. Warning strikes were just about to start, the power of the unions had yet to be brought to bear, when, in the North Rhineland-Westphalia region, the trade union bureaucracy signed a two year deal.

In this region the links between the union heads and the SPD are still very strong and the region's top union bureaucrat shortly afterwards became the regional minister for labour affairs. With their hands tied, the metalworkers had to watch the bosses boast about the profits being made in Daimler-Chrysler, Bosch, Siemens and Porsche. Real wages have stagnated since 1991. And those responsible were the workers' own leaders, even if the trade union bureaucracy in other regions tried to heap all the blame on this one treacherous official.

Traditionally, preparation for the wages dispute starts after the summer holidays with a discussion over the claim between the different companies and the trade union representatives. But last year's process was disrupted by the events of September 11 and, additionally, a recession was looming.

The cowardly leadership of the IG Metall thought that all mention of class struggle should be suspended. The hierarchy of IG Metall was split over who was to succeed Zwickel as president of the union. So the leadership ordered the debate on the wage claim be postponed.

This gave left wing shop stewards and works council members a chance to intervene and tap into the rank and file's discontent. Until now the left in the unions was loosely organised in the Network for a Trade Union Left. This broad left was initiated four years ago



German metalworkers begin warning strikes for 6.5 pay rise

and brought together a wide range of people, including left bureaucrats, syndicalists, and members of left radical organisations, mainly from the IG Metall, media workers, and from retail and banking.

The Network had annual conferences to debate the crisis of the unions and denounced the policies of the union leaderships. But the left had not build any solid links between the various rank-and-file members, even if some local networks or forums could boast of having a good base in some factories or offices.

But inside the Network some were already planning an intervention into the wages round. We saw a chance to get links with those shop stewards in the plants who still have a tradition of militancy – "IG Metall as a counterpower" – and thereby to the rank and file.

We circulated an appeal, proposing

to put in claims of around 10 per cent and rejecting all plans for a two-part demand, the second bit of which would vary according to company profitability, as some union leaders suggested. We supported a fixed sum pay rise for all – a long standing demand of the left to help close the widening gap between workers' wages in different industries.

But we did not make this a precondition, mainly for the practical reason that wages are so different nowadays across Germany and across all sectors; unity was better expressed with a demand for 10 per cent across the board. Additionally it was clear that the government would again attempt to get the employers and the trade union leaders together in the "Alliance for Work" and impose a new limit for wage increases. Defeating this attempt was the main challenge, not the distribution of income within the working class.

The shop stewards' committee in

Porsche was the first to submit a claim – 9.5 per cent. The movement soon spread and was not confined to plants where there are leftists in the shop steward committee. Due to the delaying tactics of the bureaucracy, the militant committees and those suspicious of the leadership's motives, put in similar claims – from 8 per cent up to 13 per cent. And they all rejected a split claim and defended area bargaining, in which a claim is submitted to the whole of the metal industry in a certain region, not factory by factory negotiations.

The leadership had to give in. By the time they submitted their first claim, they had to agree to one in the 5-7 per cent range, and finally agreed to a 6.5 per cent claim, something they had never intended at the outset.

This was the first victory for the left in the unions and proof that it was possible to have an impact on a national claim. Of course, the leadership tried hard to regain the initiative. Those who are hoping to be elected as IG Metall's next president are now especially eager to show they can keep control of the dispute.

The situation differs throughout the country. In some regions the first actions have taken place, despite the obligation on the union leaders to delay action. Plans are in hand for warning strikes across the whole country throughout April and if there is no agreement by the end of the month, there will be a ballot on strike action in one region, to be chosen by the IG-Metall leadership. Any strike would start in May. Naturally, the leadership assures everyone that no one wants a strike and we should not be even talking about it publicly.

Also IG Metall is "planning" this strike in such a way as to avoid breaching anti-union laws that the previous Kohl government introduced and which Schröder has not abolished. In Germany, workers on strike and victims of direct employer lockouts receive strike pay from the union, which they, of course, have paid over time with quite high membership fees.

But workers in factories that are made idle because the suppliers cannot deliver any more, do not receive anything. They used to get the equivalent of unemployment pay from public funds. This is designed to set the victims of the so-called "cold lockouts" against the strikers. So now there is a plan to have rolling strikes of just one or two days.

This plan may crumble if the employers react with an aggressive lockout, closing down some factories. That could have a great impact due to the very interdependence of production and could stop many factories being able to produce.

Or the rolling strikes may prove insufficient and workers will press for an all-out strike which would soon affect other industries and the whole country. The question is whether the bosses are looking for the chance to defeat the working class in an open battle, some-

thing they have not achieved yet. And if they are, can they succeed and what role will the government and the trade union bureaucracy play?

Even if the whole strike movement can be kept under control, the future of IG Metall is at stake. Can it, after some years of slow but persistent decline, get back on the path of organised militant struggle? Seeing this as a last chance to reverse this decline is what adds a touch of steel to the determination of the militant shop stewards for a fight.

Schröder fears this strike, even though a fight by the working class could actually secure his electoral victory by mobilising the class. But this is only one possible outcome.

Nothing is really decided yet. Very much will depend on the question whether the whole union, the whole class, can be mobilised – and that is where the left wing militants can play their part. We have to take a bold step forward, transforming the more active parts of the trade union left into the core of a rank and file movement and rooting it in the metal industry plants.

There has to be an independent strikers' bulletin and a campaign to fight for the full 6.5 per cent claim, strike actions that can force it on the bosses, and control over the running of the dispute by the workers. This campaign can build on the fact that in recent elections to works councils the left wing and militant candidates did well.

Supporters of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International are working together with comrades of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, comrades linked to the Turkish Workers Party and other left militants to build this rank-and-file movement.

But we also fight for real strike committees elected by the striking workers and local action committees to combine forces with the workers of other branches. When the strike tactics of the leadership prove insufficient, we will call for local and regional strike committees to take over the running of the strike. We will show that this wage round can be a turning point for the whole of the working class and encourage a fight back against cuts in social welfare (e.g. pensions, health care, unemployment pay).

To help in this process we call on all activists in the anti-capitalist movement to support the strike, fight together with the workers against the bosses who are responsible for war, poverty, pollution and exploitation here and in the third world.

This is the best way to establish a new militant layer in the working class and the trade unions whose militancy and political horizons do not simply end with a fight over wages.

■ For more visit...
www.arbeitermacht.de
www.workerspower.com
www.igmetall.de

China: oil workers spearhead fight

Peter Main reports on a growing revolt against capitalist restoration which threatens market reforms

Strikes and protests involving tens of thousands of workers have shaken major industrial cities in China's north eastern provinces of Heilongjiang and Liaoning. They represent a major advance in workers' resistance to the effects of privatisation and plant closures.

In Daqing on 1 March, 3,000 workers laid off from the oil industry demonstrated, demanding payment of their allowances. On 4 March, 50,000 workers picketed the company headquarters and disrupted the rail network and were met by paramilitary police and a tank regiment. Two days later, 40,000 returned to the city amid reported confrontations with paramilitary forces.

Workers throughout China will recognise the significance of these protests. In 1964, when the workers completed construction of the Daqing oilfield despite the withdrawal of Soviet aid, China's then leader, Mao Zedong, hailed them as heroes and called on all workers to "Learn from Daqing!"

But now workers have different lessons to learn from Daqing. According to reports monitored by *China Labour Bulletin* in Hong Kong, the redundant workers belong to a new union which is also growing in other oil industry centres as far away as Xinjiang in Western China and Sichuan in the South West.

The spread of workers' resistance reflects the scale of lay-offs being forced through by the new bosses in the industry. Sinopec, for example, the biggest corporation in the oil industry has already laid off 250,000 and is plan-

ning a further 100,000 redundancies over the next five years.

The background to the Daqing closures reveals all too clearly what capitalist restoration has meant in the industry. PetroChina was formed in 1998 out of the assets of the state oil industry in Northern China. Its new management, still dominated by the representatives of the Communist Party, prepared it for listing on the New York and Hong Kong stock exchanges by a "restructuring". This left them with all the recently developed plants and divested the older ones, including Daqing. Workers' resistance was dissipated by agreements to pay both welfare and heating allowances. It is the non-payment of these that has sparked the protests.

Massive cuts have also been seen in the other core industries of the north east, steel and textiles. In Liaoyang City these led to the holding of joint demonstrations by seven thousand workers from six factories in early March. This was followed by demonstrations of some 30,000 from 20 factories from 12 March to 14 March. Here too, workers have elected their own delegates to represent them but their leader Yao Fuxin, a worker laid off from the Ferroalloy plant, was arrested.

Despite reports of confrontations with police and paramilitary units, there appears to have been no widespread military repression of the most recent strikes. This may reflect more than just local commanders' hesitation. Beijing itself is clearly worried by the scale of unrest in a year that will see the beginning of the transfer of

power from the current leadership centred on Jiang Zemin.

The most recent official figures from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, for the year 2000, show a total of 327,152 disputes in industry and 8,247 strikes, up from 6,767 in 1998. Increasing references to strikes in the official media suggest that militancy has continued to grow.

The Financial Times believes fear of unrest also lies behind a deceleration on the implementation of many of the reforms China introduced in order to qualify for membership of the World Trade Organisation at the beginning of this year. With as many as 150 million people unemployed, at least seasonally in the countryside, and reports of 25 per cent unemployment in the old industrial cities, the prospect of mounting foreign competition is an obvious cause of concern.

In January alone, Foreign Direct Investment into China amounted to US\$ 2.966bn, one third above the previous year, and contracted investment reached US\$7.187bn, very nearly double last year's figures. The reason for this massive increase is that China has now begun to open up areas of the economy previously closed to foreign investment. Inevitably, that investment will lead to restructuring and dislocation as it has done in other sectors.

Fear of social unrest, however, is not the only factor influencing the slowdown in WTO inspired reforms. Beijing may want foreign investment but it also aspires to become an economic superpower itself. It does not

want to lose control over the key sectors of industry or finance.

In banking, for example, although foreign banks will be allowed to deal in both commercial and personal banking by 2007, regulations have been introduced restricting their growth to one new branch per year.

A similar picture is developing in the telecoms industry. Until now, foreign firms were simply not allowed to operate in the sector at all. With mobile phone use increasing at the rate of five million new users per month, they saw the WTO accession as a signal to move in fast but have found themselves blocked by new regulations.

All the same, WTO rules are framed to the advantage of the big multinational corporations and there can be no doubt that they will, in the end, get their way. Already, they are turning away from the system of "joint ventures" with Chinese firms, which was the main way in which they could enter Chinese markets or establish production facilities within the country. Increasingly, they will set up their own wholly owned subsidiaries within which they will have complete control over all aspects of the operation.

The scene is set for a period of rivalry and jockeying for position between multinationals, the Chinese state and the fast growing private Chinese companies. This could provide an opportunity for China's workers to assert themselves. As the reports from Daqing and Liaoyang show, the destabilisation caused by capitalist restoration and development has not only restructured industry but

has also encouraged workers to begin to renew their own organisations.

If confirmed, the founding of a new union to represent redundant state industrial workers would mark a very important development. The official All China Federation of Trade Unions has always been primarily a tool of management rather than a representative of workers' rights and a genuinely independent organisation is a high priority for the whole labour movement.

Nonetheless, millions of workers remain within the official unions and, as state owned firms are privatised, it may be necessary to demand that these unions fight for their members' interests and turn themselves into real workers' organisations.

Whatever organisations emerge in the coming months, a high priority for them will be the unionisation of the new working class that is forming in the cities as millions of mainly young workers arrive, often illegally, from the countryside. Just as in the 1920s, when trade unions were first formed in China, the new unions will send a shock wave through the country. Successful action to raise wages, limit hours and improve working conditions will immediately raise questions about the future of the country that trade unionism alone will not be able to answer.

That is why, alongside the fundamental task of organising workers in all industries and regions, it will be vital to create a political party of the working class, committed to the overthrow of the remnants of the Maoist dictatorship and the rule of the new class of capitalists.

Mugabe's terror campaign continues

Following the elections, Zimbabweans can expect more repression and poverty, writes Keith Spencer

President Robert Mugabe has begun his new term in office as he finished his last – by crushing all opposition to his rule.

The police have banned a national weekend of demonstrations against Mugabe and detained more than three hundred activists.

Arrests and attacks on MDC activists, trade unionists and socialists have continued since the election in March. Polling agents for the MDC have been burnt out of their homes and their presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai was arrested for treason after the election for being secretly filmed allegedly calling for the "elimination" of Mugabe.

Five members of the International Socialist Organisation of Zimbabwe were arrested on 20 March at the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo. They were held for five days under the Public Order and Security Act, charged with supporting last month's three-day strike against electoral fraud. Food and water had to be brought in to them by their supporters. The ISO's offices in Bulawayo were also burnt down.

The March strike was organised by the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) but fizzled out following the government banning it – and MDC leaders undermining it. A national demonstration in Harare to publicise and build for the three-day strike was attacked and smashed up by the police using tear gas. ZCTU's leader was arrested on March 19 for organising the strike.

While Mugabe has clamped down even harder on the opposition, inter-

national delegates from South Africa and Nigeria have arrived in the country to broker a deal between the president and the opposition to satisfy Mugabe's international critics.

Both Nigeria and South Africa gave the election a clean bill of health in its immediate aftermath, which for a short while split the Commonwealth between the white countries such as the UK and Australia and the black African countries. However, it seems enough pressure was applied. Both African countries have their own problems and within a week both Thabo Mbeki, South African president, and Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigerian president, issued a statement along with John Howard, the Australian prime minister, expelling Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth for a year and applying sanctions.

It now appears that the deal being offered is for the government to bring on board the MDC as a junior partner and for the presidential and parliamentary elections to be held together in 2005.

However, Mugabe has so far not agreed to any of this and his recent pronouncements about the opposition have dismayed the envoys.

In the election, Mugabe received 1,685,212 votes (54 per cent) against 1,258,401 votes (40 per cent) for the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai. Official turnout was just under 60 per cent. The MDC estimates that there were 226,445 extra votes for Mugabe and that another 185,961 ballot papers in favour of Tsvangirai went missing.

In the year prior to the elections,

approximately 30 people were killed in politically motivated violence – mainly opposition supporters. During the voting period nearly 1,500 hundred people were arrested – again mainly opposition activists or polling agents and some prominent leaders of the MDC. NGOs claim that between 40 to 50 per cent of rural constituencies were closed to opposition polling agents with Tsvangirai activists waylaid, arrested or beaten as they tried to enter these areas.

Urban areas had insufficient polling stations or people were obstructed from voting in strong MDC areas by the police or army. Gangs of youths were hired by ZANU-PF to intimidate voters. Both the army and the youths were promised rewards: the army had their pay doubled for the two months prior to the elections and the youth gangs were offered three to four times the average wage to work for ZANU-PF.

War veterans have remained a solid bloc of support for Mugabe since he agreed to pay them monthly pensions in 1998. He has also gained support in the countryside for his land reforms.

Yet even this does not fully explain why the MDC candidate lost. Even in towns such as Bulawayo, where polling finished on time, the MDC lost support. In rural areas Mugabe gained increased support, even in areas where he was previously unpopular such as Matabeleland or in Manicaland, which in the last parliamentary elections was split evenly between the two parties. Compared with the elections of 2001 the MDC support has fallen.

This drop in support can be attrib-

uted in the main to the rightward lurch of the MDC to accommodate the white commercial farmers, the IMF and countries such as the UK and USA.

The economic programme of the MDC, known as Bridge, is both a continuation and deepening of the IMF-inspired economic structural adjustment programme implemented by Mugabe. Bridge calls for the liberalisation of all food and fuel prices, the deregulation of the finance markets, the sell-off of the last of the state enterprises and even of basic welfare services such as education and health.

The impact of such a programme would be a disaster for the masses of Zimbabwe. The MDC even admitted that there would be great pain in the short-term but held out the promise of international aid to soften the blow. But the IMF and the multinationals have no intention of offering such sops because they need their programmes to attack the working class and poor and make them pay for the crisis.

In addition to offering the workers and unemployed in the cities nothing, the MDC also did its best to distance itself from the rural poor. Where Mugabe has used the land question to both intimidate the opposition and mobilise support, the MDC has defended the white farmers and offered only a commission to investigate the land question at some later date.

Furthermore, the support that the NGOs, Commonwealth and multinationals gave to the MDC compromised it in the eyes of many in Zimbabwe, even if the propaganda of the government

controlled media is ignored. Black Zimbabweans, and Africans generally, are rightly proud of their independence and do not want to see it compromised by former white colonial powers.

Even though the video of Tsvangirai supposedly plotting Mugabe's death was dismissed by what is left of the independent media in Zimbabwe, they did raise questions about why the would-be president was having a series of meetings with white businessmen.

Voters were intimidated and threatened by the government yet left confused and disappointed by the opposition. And since the elections, the MDC has done very little to offer a lead apart from appealing to its international friends. Tsvangirai, who had been a leading member of the Zimbabwean trade union movement, opposed the three-day strike. Other MDC leaders told people to stay calm and not demonstrate.

Some sort of agreement will be made between the Commonwealth and Zimbabwe, which may include some concessions to the more right-wing elements of the opposition. In the end, international capital needs a stable strong government to carry out its cuts and attacks on workers and peasants' living standards and Mugabe and the ZANU-PF government are their – as they have been for the past decade.

The working class and its peasant allies needs an alternative to both Mugabe and the MDC. It needs its own leaders and its own party to fight for socialism and revolution as the only alternative to repression, austerity and the destruction of the country.

Lenin's book *What is to be Done?* – published 100 years ago this month – is one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented books in the history of political literature. Here *Dave Stockton* and *Richard Bremner* argue the pamphlet is essential to training a new generation of revolutionary activists.

The book our enemies fear

Defenders of capitalism, reformists and anarchists all agree that *What Is To Be Done?* (WITBD?) is nothing less than a blueprint for a one-party dictatorship led by an unaccountable elite of intellectuals. Even avowed Leninists argue that the book is one-sided and dangerous.

Why does the book attract such hatred and fear? Because it says it is the task of socialists not just to express ideas that arise spontaneously in the course of the working class struggle, but to organise the revolutionary part of the working class (its vanguard) so as to win millions to revolutionary action.

It says the revolutionary socialists must take up not only "pure class" questions such as low wages, job insecurity, the threat of unemployment but also the defence of democratic rights – and put an end to all forms of oppression (racial, national, gender).

To pro-capitalists this is intolerable. What is at first sight more surprising is that self-designated Leninists also affix a danger notice to it.

Alan Woods, leader of Socialist Appeal (what is left of the old Militant Tendency in the Labour Party), says in his book *Bolshevism: the Road to Revolution* that WITBD? contains a "one sided and erroneous presentation of the relationship of the working class and socialist consciousness".

So what does Lenin actually say? "The history of all countries shows that the working class exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of Socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. According to their social status, the founders of modern scientific Socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia."

Woods asserts that since workers engaged in general strikes, created Chartism, launched insurrections, and even installed the Paris Commune – the first example of the rule of the proletariat in a major city – all without being Marxists, this disproves Lenin's assertion that socialist consciousness and socialist ideas are not a spontaneous "internal" product of the working class itself.

But he is wrong. Yes, most of the Communards were not Marxists. That meant that many of them did not see the Commune as the rule of the working class, necessitating a France-wide seizure of power. Nor did they see the Commune as the beginning of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

So they did not march on Versailles or seize the Bank of France. Their actions, which flowed from their failure to fully realise what was at stake, contributed to the Commune's downfall. The Commune received its historic significance not just from the deeds of the heroic Paris workers but from Marx and Engels' analysis of them. Their critique of the Commune's limitations "came from outside" but they became an inseparable part of what the Commune meant for generations to come.

Tony Cliff (founder and leader of the British SWP until his death recently) says that Lenin's claim in WITBD? that socialist consciousness comes from outside of the economic, trade union struggle is in flat contradiction to Karl Marx's famous statement that "the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself", and that Lenin's book has therefore "bedevilled" the movement.

What Lenin is saying is simply that the working class, on the basis of its own experience in the struggle for higher wages, will develop an awareness of the need to combine with others to wage this struggle. This is trade unionism.

But left to its own devices this struggle does not "spontaneously" pose the need to abolish the wages system, that is capitalism. Throughout working class history in most countries most trade unionists have stopped at this point. If they had not then the world revolution would be behind us not in front of us.

The idea that there could be a total alternative to capitalism was a product of intellectuals, of theoreticians, not of waged workers. Why?

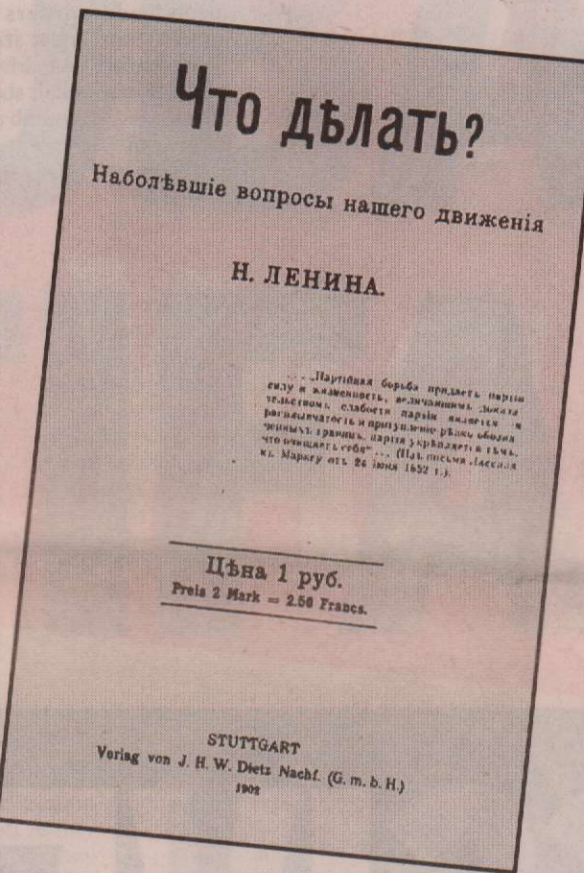
Because such an idea could only arise from a criticism of capitalism as an economic system, from the starting point of a critique of bourgeois economics, from seeing history and politics as a series of class struggles. It also required an analysis of the contemporary class struggle, of the concrete actions of workers, such as strikes and uprisings, and of the forms of organisation they give rise to.

Socialist and communist ideas arose and were worked out in debate from the 1830s to the 1870s by a whole series of thinkers and activists such as Owen, the Chartists, Fourier, Proudhon and last but not least by Marx and Engels themselves.

A second reason that Lenin pointed to the role of intellectuals was that they initially played a dominant role in Russia in both the Populist and the Social Democratic movements. These intellectuals came overwhelmingly from the privileged classes, the gentry, the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie.

This pattern is descriptive of the origins of such movements. Lenin did not suggest it was prescriptive for their entire existence. Quite the opposite, WITBD? brims with confidence that as a result of the spontaneous struggles of the workers more and more of them will come forward to become professional revolutionaries and they will do this job better than most of the middle class revolutionaries.

For Marxists the task is not at all to reserve a privileged position for the intelligentsia but to erase all distinctions in the revolutionary organisation between intellectuals and workers and between different types of worker. Lenin was advocating not an organisation of intellectuals to lead the workers but an



Front cover of the first edition of *What is to be Done?*

organisation of revolutionary socialists, drawn from the most dedicated workers and intellectuals, which could stimulate and offer leadership to the spontaneous struggles of the working class and help organise a broad, mass labour movement.

The relationship of the revolutionary organisation to the workers' movement is central to Lenin's thought. This is most concisely expressed when he says: "I assert: (1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders maintaining continuity; (2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organisation, and the more solid this organisation must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side-track the more backward sections of the masses); (3) that such an organisation must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; (4) that in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organisation to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation; and (5) the greater will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to

join the movement and perform active work in it."

Lenin insists that the dichotomy "organisation of revolutionaries" and "broad movement" is crucial. Generally the already conscious socialists – those who have understood and accepted a revolutionary strategy – must be organised in order to exert maximum influence on the mass of workers who are indeed spontaneously driven into struggle by the harshness of their conditions, by the repression of the state, by recognising that they can resist only if they unite their forces.

In Russia, and in any country living under a dictatorship, the organisation of revolutionaries must be a secret, conspiratorial one. Not only to ensure its very existence but to perform countless organisational, preparatory, information services to the broader mass struggles which will erupt even under a dictatorship.

It is in the context of such underground organisation that Lenin asserts that democracy will be "only a toy" and a harmful one at that. With unbreakable logic he argues not against democracy as essential in workers' organisations but that certain conditions are necessary for it to function. These are publicity, accountability, freedom of speech and organisation.

Where these exist it is possible for the membership to make informed decisions about who should represent them based on their deeds (their political record) as well as their words. All of this is impossible under a dictatorship. There "democratism", that is playing at democracy, is indeed a "harmful toy" because it opens up the organisation to police penetration.

WITBD? is centred on a polemic with a socialist paper *Rabocheye Dyelo* (RD) which centred on how a revolutionary organisation should operate towards the spontaneous struggles of the working class. Lenin argues the standpoint adopted by *Iskra* (The Spark), the paper of the Russian Marxists launched in 1901.

RD emphasised the spontaneous character of socialist consciousness. This led RD to restrict itself to the role of cheerleader of existing struggles rather than formulating a strategy for overthrowing Tsarism and moving on to the socialist revolution. It stressed instead the objective process, spontaneity.

RD objected strongly to *Iskra's* insistence that revolutionary tactics needed to be planned such as be embodied

in a programme and fought for in the class struggle. Against this RD argued instead that revolutionary tactics were a process that unfolded in response to the ongoing struggle. They did not need to be planned in advance, mastered and fought for by a vanguard.

Lenin's paper *Iskra*, according to RD, was always seeking to "belittle the significance of the objective or the spontaneous element of development" and was guilty of "setting up their programme against the movement, like a spirit hovering over the formless chaos."

Lenin replied to this: "But what else is the function of Social-Democracy if not to be a 'spirit', not only hovering over the spontaneous movement, but also raising this movement to the level of 'its programme'? Surely, it is not its function to drag at the tail of the movement; at best, this would be of no service to the movement; at the worst, it would be very, very harmful."

One particular example of this tailism and spontaneism is economism: the belief that the economic or trade union struggle leads automatically to socialist consciousness. Martynov, the chief ideologist of RD, argued that the task for revolutionaries can be summed up as "lending the economic struggle itself a political character". This means stressing those political questions which relate directly to the struggle over wages and conditions of work.

Lenin says that this means "fighting for the right to strike, for the removal of all legal hindrances to the co-operative and trade union movements, for laws protecting women and children, for the improvement of labour conditions by means of health and factory legislation, etc."

Essential as all these things are they do not, by themselves, express a socialist consciousness. They are "trade union politics" or as we could describe them "labour politics". Indeed on their own they are reformist politics because they do not require the seizure of power by the working class to achieve them. To be even clearer they are bourgeois politics, albeit for workers.

It is clear that Lenin did not at all mean that workers did not spontaneously struggle against capitalism, but that to be a conscious struggle against the whole system – to be a conscious force to abolish it and replace it with a new world system – the workers required a conscious strategy, a socialist programme and an organisation to fight for it.

WITBD? then provides the foundation for a scientific view of revolutionary organisation, underpinned by a dialectical understanding of consciousness and how it develops. It is a "must read" for all activists today.

**workers
power**

Jobcutting, unionbashing, City-loving, Bush-asslickin' Labour. Had enough of it? Then get marching. Anti-globalisers and union delegations take to the streets on 1 May. Be there...

MAKE

GROWING NUMBERS of working class voters are sick of Tony Blair and his New Labour government. And the message is getting through to the national press, trade union leaders – even to Labour MPs and officials.

Last month Stephen Byers agreed to shell out £300 million to compensate Railtrack shareholders after ruling out any such move last year. He caved in to threats from City bankers that they would boycott all future PFI deals with Labour.

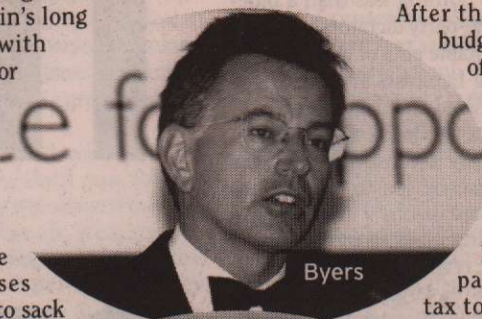
At the same time Labour greeted the decision to cut 40,000 post office jobs with silence: no Treasury bail out to save workers jobs – only to save shareholders profits!

In Barcelona earlier in the month Blair was glad-handing the most right-wing European leaders: Aznar from Spain and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi

He has formed a bloc with them against his brother "socialists", Lionel Jospin and Gerhardt Schröder, to push the European Union into adopting more "labour flexibility" and pro-market reforms.

In plain language this means combining Britain's long working hours with Spain's disregard for millions of its workers who have no labour rights and Berlusconi's plans to remove all obstacles in the way of the bosses when they want to sack workers.

No sooner had Blair finished in Barcelona than he was off to George W Bush's Texas ranch to get his orders for the next stage of the war drive against Iraq. Blair stands out like a sore thumb among European leaders for



Byers



Last May Day

his unconditional backing for the White House's plans to bomb Iraq and oust Saddam Hussein.

All this comes on top of growing anger among public sector trade unionists against Labour's relentless drive to privatise public services and reassure private contractors that they will not be

"burdened" with having to give

new recruits decent pay, pensions or proper holidays.

No wonder the *Sunday Times* found in a poll that 40 per cent of those who voted Labour last year think that Blair should stand down before the next elections!

After this month's budget millions of higher paid workers and middle class people who voted Labour in 1997 will be paying more tax to repair the NHS, the transport and education systems and wondering why Blair and Brown won't tax the rich and big corporations to get the money instead.

Even previously loyal trade union leaders and Labour MPs are now grumbling about New Labour's attacks. Nigel de Gruchy of the teachers' union NASUWT, denounced Blair as a "dictator". More than 130 Labour MPs have signed a motion opposing any attack upon Iraq.

Getting rid of Blair would be a result. But it will not happen if left to backbenchers plots in the parliamentary tea room or union officials' conference rhetoric. It needs a mass movement on the streets that unites the anti-war, the anti-capitalist, the anti-privatisation struggles and mounts a socialist challenge at the polls as well.

Unison is balloting for strike action in London over pay. Many of the London teachers' who struck last month for a higher London living allowance want to step up the action and link it to the national campaign for a shorter working week. Postal workers have voted once to strike over pay and will back action called to fend off the privatisation of the mail.

This year May Day provides a better focus than usual for bringing the various strands of the anti-New Labour movement together. The traditional organiser of the London demo, GLATUC have called on Globalise Resistance to organise a common march and rally this year. And for once it will be allowed to end in Trafalgar Square.

At the Socialist Alliance Trade Union conference last month Mark Serwotka, president-elect of the civil service union, the PCS, called on all trade unionists to strike on May Day. Unison local leaders are calling for their members to attend the march and rally that day in London. Branch officials in the CWU, the post office workers union, have called on members to attend the march after clocking off from their shifts. The firefighters union, the FBU, has supported the call for a massive Mayday march.

Globalise Resistance and Stop the War are urging their supporters to use the day to protest against Labour's plans for the war against Iraq and in solidarity with the Palestinian intifada.

On 2 May Socialist Alliance candidates are standing against Labour in many wards in the local elections to give workers the chance to protest against Blair's policies.

This May Day let's unify the anti-New Labour movement like never before!

- Stop Blair's war drive!
- Stop the privatisation of public services!
- Tax the rich!
- Cancel third world debt.
- Vote Socialist Alliance on 2 May!

MAY DAY

**1st
May
2002**

**United for
Mayday
DEMONSTRATE!
Assemble 12 noon
Clerkenwell Green
(nearest tube Farringdon)
Move off at 1pm
Rally at Trafalgar Square from 3pm**

MASSIVE!

www.workerspower.com

**2nd
May
2002**

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International
Mail to: Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX
Tel: 020 7820 1363
Email: paper@workerspower.com
Print: Newsfax International
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)
ISSN 0263-1121

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month. I enclose:

£9.00 UK
 £20 Europe
 £18.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____
Address: _____
Postcode: _____

JOIN US!

I would like to join the Workers Power group
 Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____
Address: _____
Postcode: _____

**Vote
Socialist
Alliance
in your
local council election**