

workers power

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Blunkett's new asylum law means
barbed wire Britain



Asylum panic fuels race hate

Fight racism Smash fascism

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REFUGEES
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**DEMONSTRATE: Saturday 22 June
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asylum
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The resistible rise of Europe's far right - centre pages

Britain is full...of racist politicians

David Blunkett calls himself plain speaking. We call him racist. He is the tormentor of innocent and desperate refugees. And now he is mouthing the sort of anti-Muslim filth that gave the far-right Dutch racist Pim Fortuyn short-lived fame before he was shot dead.

But with Blunkett, it's not just rhetoric. He is backing up his words with action. On 23 May the British government issued yet another declaration of war against asylum seekers.

The *Guardian* carried what Downing Street press officers refer to as "blue sky thinking". In reality this story was almost certainly a calculated leak, designed to show Tony Blair's determination to win a vicious "Dutch auction" when it comes to usurping the European far right's claim on racist populism.

An 11-page document talks of RAF transport planes deployed in operations to deport thousands of people and the Royal Navy patrolling the Mediterranean in search for vessels carrying would-be immigrants.

News of this paper emerged only days after Blair had pressed his right-wing Spanish counterpart, Jose Maria Aznar, to push for a further strengthening of "Fortress Europe" during Spain's presidency of the European Union.

Across Europe politicians of various stripes have been playing the race card, scapegoating refugees and immigrants for a range of social and economic ills. The success of the veteran fascist, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in the French presidential primary, followed by the showing of the murdered demagogue Pim Fortuyn's "list" in Holland's parliamentary election, has led mainstream

politicians to strike ever tougher poses against refugees and "illegal" immigrants.

In Britain, New Labour briefly tried to assert its anti-fascist credentials in the run-up to the 2 May local council elections, urging demoralised voters to turn out in droves simply to keep out the British National Party (BNP). But New Labour is playing with fire. Instead of undercutting the BNP's appeal, its asylum and immigration policies only lend legitimacy to the extreme right.

Home Secretary Blunkett, in promoting his latest asylum and immigration legislation, consciously echoed the rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher when he referred to refugee pupils "swamping" our schools. Norman Tebbit, the one-time Chingford skinhead, declares Blunkett should be in the Tory party and BNP leader, the unabashed Nazi Nick Griffin, praises much of the Home Secretary's approach to immigration.

In practice, the Government has already exposed asylum seekers to vicious attacks in prisons at Norwich and Forest Bank (Manchester) and fuelled a climate where racist attacks are once more on the rise. The victims have included people such as the Kurdish refugee, Firsat Dag, murdered on the edge of Glasgow's Sighthill estate, but also members of long-established black communities.

The masters of spin are obsessed with the impossible task of placating the real and perceived prejudices of the readerships of *The Daily Express*, published by New Labour's favourite porn merchant, and the hysterically reactionary, *Daily Mail*. No doubt the government hopes to deflect attention from its failed

policies with talk of "Secure Borders". After all, what better way of deflecting attention from the abject failure to redistribute wealth and improve the circumstances of marginalised sections of the working class than scapegoating those depicted by Home Office minister, Lord Rooker, as "single men who have deserted their families for economic gain"?

In the wake of the "leak" to *The Guardian*, it has already become clear that the government is going to introduce amendments to its own legislative proposals. These include measures for:

- The "certification of weak and non-compliant" asylum applications, which means that the Home Secretary will have powers to block the re-examination by an immigration adjudicator of cases, numbering thousands ruled out on "technical grounds"
- To prohibit judicial review of certified cases and cases decided by the immigration appeals tribunal
- A revised "white list" of safe countries, mainly in Eastern Europe: asylum applicants from these countries will be automatically deported after an initial rejection, with no right of appeal, and
- Mandatory dispersal of unaccompanied children from London and the south east of England.

The Home Office's latest bill had already intensified the government's drive to deter people fleeing civil wars and repressive regimes, often backed by Britain - the world's second biggest arms dealer - from seeking refuge in this country. David Blunkett had previously spelled out his intention to:

- Double from the current 1,800 to 4,000 those locked up in profit-making detention centres for the "crime" of seeking a safe haven. These prisoners already include men, woman and children as young as six months.

- Quadruple the numbers deported each year to 30,000 - many of those may face torture or death in their country of origin. In 2001 at least two deaths occurred in raids by immigration snatch squads.

- Continue the forced dispersal of asylum seekers to some of Britain's most deprived estates, with few qualified interpreters and immigration lawyers.

- "Warehouse" people in large-scale accommodation centres in isolated rural areas, cutting them off from support networks and making them targets for racist violence.

These are some of the features of a government package that marks the most serious assault on civil liberties in 50 years. New Labour's asylum policies can also literally kill - not least by driving detainees and rejected applicants to suicide. At the same time, a basic support package pegged at 70 per cent of the woefully inadequate level of Income Support drives many refugees into destitution and despair.

The ever tougher stance against asylum seekers comes at a time of acute labour shortages in public services. The NHS is begging for qualified staff and the British Medical Association has identified at least 500 surgeons and 1,500 other qualified medical personnel among refugee communities.

Studies suggest that 50 per cent of refugees hold higher academic or professional qualifications. Even the Home Office publicly recognises that: "Migration is a consistent feature of human history. It brings huge benefits, increased skills, enhanced levels of economic activity, cultural diversity and global links." The potential contribution is huge, yet the government's brutal message remains: "you are not welcome here".

At the same time, of course, the British state turns a wilfully blind eye to a degree of "illegal" immigration, allowing bosses in certain sectors of the economy to exploit a pliable source of cheap labour, lacking basic citizenship rights and living in constant fear of detection and deportation.

Rarely has the need been greater to



stand up for the rights of refugees and those of immigrant workers generally. Against this background a wide variety of organisations and individuals have come together to build a week of action in defence of asylum seekers to coincide with international refugee week between 15 and 22 June. It starts with a mass protest outside the Harmondsworth detention centre, near Heathrow airport, on Saturday 15 June and culminates in a demonstration through the streets of central London on 22 June - commemorating the second anniversary of the horrific deaths of 58 young Chinese men and women at Dover. A simultaneous march will take place in Glasgow.

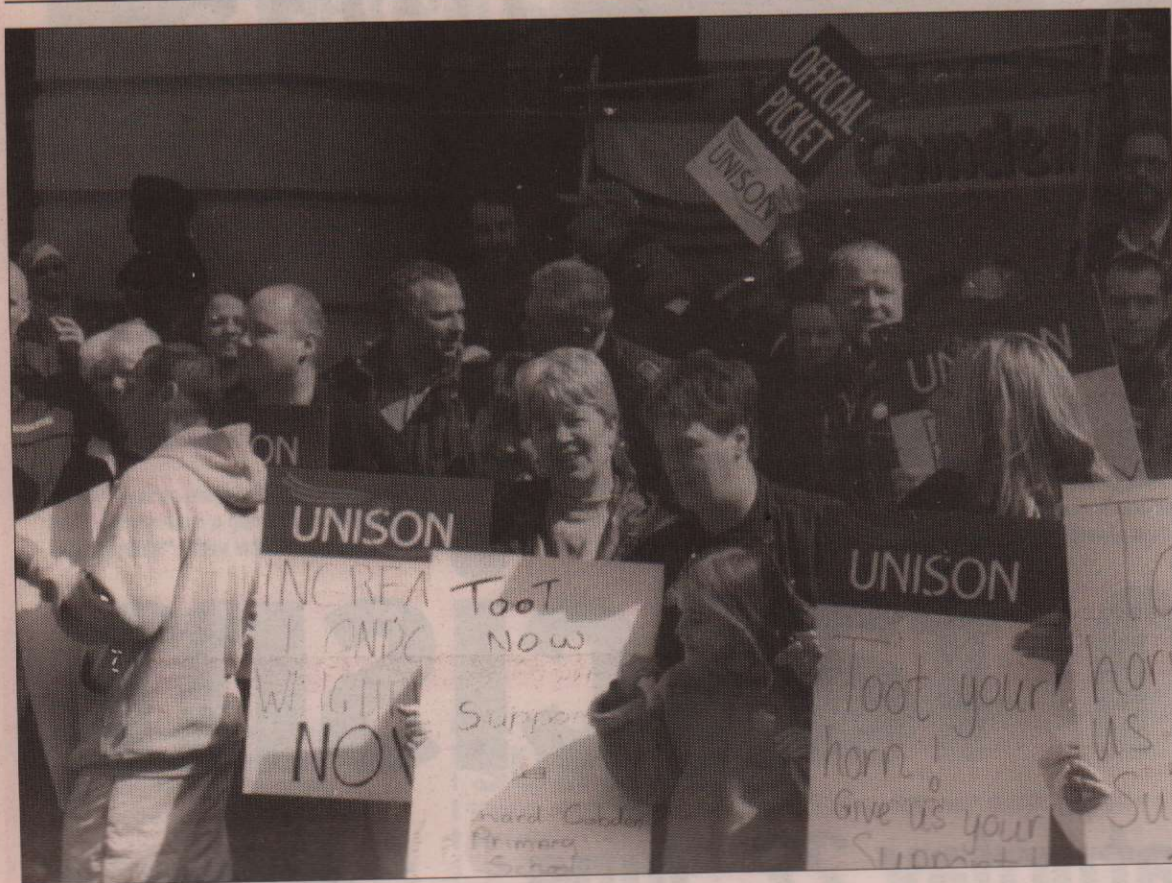
To date half a dozen Unison branches, several MSF branches and the London regional committees of both MSF and the RMT have backed the week of action, along with the Socialist Alliance nationally, the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and numerous refugee community organisations from across Britain.

Workers Power urges all its readers to take part in the week of action and 22 June demonstration, and to win the active support of union branches, local Socialist Alliances and community groups for the activities.

In the meantime, there will be a mounting need to show practical solidarity with asylum seekers through organising effective local campaigns against detention and to stop deportations from British ports.

There is also a crucial ideological battle to be fought and won in the labour movement itself for an end to the whole regime of immigration controls in Britain and throughout Europe. Such laws are inherently racist in their conception and implementation, and serve to compound the human misery inflicted by global capitalism while undermining the very working class unity that alone is capable of bringing such misery to an end.

● Contact Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers at www.defend-asylum.org



Strikers gathered on the steps of Camden Town Hall on 14 May as thousands of Unison members walked out across London. The one-day action was the biggest by local government workers in England and Wales since 1989, and centred on the joint union demand for an increase in London Weighting allowance to £4,000 across the capital. Unison's industrial action committee has given the green light to a further two-day strike on 12 and 13 June. The local authority bosses have finally offered talks with union negotiators - most probably on the second day of planned action, making it the ideal focus for a strikers' demonstration. A strike ballot on the national pay claim for local authorities gets under way from 10 June in the GMB and T&G, as well as Unison.

OUT NOW

Volume 8, no 2 of *Revolutionary History*

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Sweatshops and kickbacks haunt the beautiful game

The World Cup 2002 is here. People will be eating, drinking and breathing football for the next few weeks and the big sporting brands hope to clean up.

But if you're cadging an extra hour off work to watch the game, spare a thought for the people who have made the shirts. Behind the labels lies sweatshop misery.

Both Nike and Adidas have launched a marketing offensive on a grand scale. It is a multi-million pound media extravaganza. Adidas is spending over £24 million on the tournament, including sponsoring 10 out of the 32 teams.

Nike is going hell for leather. They have spent £50 million to get the rights to the Elvis song "A Little Less Conversation", re-mixing it for a global TV campaign worth over £90 million.

They have employed the hottest football stars - who won't scratch their arse for less than £10,000 - to push their goods. The Secret Tournament is spearheading the campaign, starring the likes of Arsenal striker, Henry, Brazilian wonderkind, Ronaldo and Eric Cantona.

And they are targeting youth more than ever. Nike is sponsoring a three-a-side football match in the Millennium Dome for young up-and-coming football stars between the ages 11-16. You, too, could become the next Michael Owen - if you wear Nike gear.

All over Britain, you can't make a move without seeing a poster, a billboard, a neon sign that is advertising the Nike scorpion, "a symbol for stinging play."

As Nike's PR machine also says, "Before the ad, there is always a product." Behind the glitz and the glamour, behind the slick advertising campaigns, there are millions of people all over the world that won't have the time or opportunity to even watch the World Cup despite being directly linked to Adidas and Nike.

These are the young workers who are employed in the sweatshop factories of sporting goods companies like Nike and Adidas across the globe. They don't have the opportunity to play sport; their life is ground down by slave labour. Behind the "stinging play" there is the stingy pay.

In April 2002, the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee published an independent investigation, which exposed the working conditions in two factories in the Guangdong province of mainland China that produced footballs for Adidas.

The findings revealed there is minimal labour protection for such workers. There were wage violations, working up to 14 hours a day, with bad living conditions and restrictions on their personal freedom. The conditions these workers are forced to work under are illegal, but normal in the region.

Unique to the production of quality footballs, a lot of the manufacturing process requires high labour intensity and hand sewing.

Chemicals and intensive heat are used in processing genuine leather and yet workers are not provided with appropriate health and safety equipment, resulting in them being exposed to industrial and health hazards. Mechanical injuries are commonly found in the cutting department. Medical care is often not available.

There is now a new term in the Chinese language - "guolasi", which has originated from the Guangdong Province and means "death from overwork". Young workers - some only 19 - are suddenly collapsing and dying after working exceedingly long hours, day after day.



Senegal players celebrate but it's still a game of two classes

Children as young as six years old are being used to make footballs for the World Cup 2002. Researchers for the Global March against Child Labour found more than 50 children working up to 14 hours a day producing FIFA-branded footballs in the Sialkot and Sangla Hill districts of Pakistan. The children told the researchers that they received 13 rupees (18p) per ball and stitched an average of four to five per day. Fifa sells officially branded balls on its website for £64.

"I have been stitching footballs for as long as I can remember," said Geeta, a young girl from Jalandhar, Punjab, who was about 12-years-old. "My hands are constantly in pain. It feels like they are burning. There is nothing I can do - I have to help my older sister complete the order."

According to the industry's own research, 20 per cent of the balls brought to the US are stitched by children under the age of 14. Most children are forced into labour to help their families earn enough money to survive. Football stitching becomes home-based family work where a middleman acts on behalf of the sporting goods manufacturer.

In 1996 Fifa and international unions agreed on a Code of Labour Practice for the production of footballs carrying the Fifa authorised trademarks. In the "spirit of fair play", Fifa recognised its own and its licensees' responsibility to ensure ethical production of footballs and other World Cup accessories. The Fifa code of conduct included:

- a living wage for all workers
- no forced overtime: a maximum 48

- hour week
- at least one day off in seven
- a safe and hygienic working environment
- the right to an independent trade union
- no child labour: pay for their schooling

After child labour became a big scandal for Fifa in 1998, it said it would ensure that it was not used in products bearing its logo. Yet in the past six years since the code of practice was agreed, Fifa has made no attempt to ensure that these codes are adhered to even though the code contained provisions for effective monitoring.

As a "proud" sponsor of the World Cup, Adidas has pledged that it will adhere to the code of conduct. Nike, itself, has had a code of conduct in place for years. Yet neither company has made any serious attempt to monitor these factories and enforce the code of conduct.

Activists from around the world have been putting pressure on Fifa and national football teams to make this championship the first international sporting event free of child labour and in compliance with fair labour standards.

In Britain, NO SWEAT! activists have been taking the protest onto the streets, and naming and shaming the multinational companies. We are fighting for the code of conduct to be enforced in factories worldwide and monitored by independent labour organisations. We are fighting for the code to become reality, not just a charade. All workers have a right to a decent life.

It's a shadowy, unaccountable transnational organisation, dispensing bribes to the Third World and riddled with corruption. No, not the IMF, but FIFA - the international football federation that is running the World Cup.

Just days before the World Cup, FIFA held its annual meeting and re-elected the man charged with corruption by his own subordinates. But that does not worry Sepp Blatter. He won on the back of votes from some of the poorest countries in world football. The fact that his main innovation has been a programme that dispenses millions of dollars to the football officials of these countries surely has nothing to do with it.

Once Blatter was reinstated, his critics resigned and dropped the corruption charges. With the world's attention now focused on the game not the dodgy deals surrounding it, will that be the end of the matter?

Don't count on it. Because FIFA is sitting on a pyramid of financial disaster that could bring the whole game trumpling down once the World Cup Finals have ended.

The corruption allegations raised by Blatter's right-hand man, Michel Zen-Ruffinen, go back years - but it was the collapse of FIFA's marketing partner, Swiss-based ISM, that triggered the crisis. FIFA's official losses are put in millions of dollars. Zen-Ruffinen says it could be billions. We will only know the truth if Blatter's ability to go on covering up the state of FIFA's finances fails.

But the sheer scale of the money being talked about tells us something about the way international capitalism is leeching off football.

There are two big sources of profit from football: advertising sponsorship and broadcasting rights. Since the advertising on players' shirts and boots would not mean much if they weren't on TV, it's no surprise that the lion's share is generated by TV rights.

Or, rather, was generated. As well as the collapse of ISM, which was in charge of marketing the World Cup, we've seen the bankruptcy of Kirch Media - the German firm that owns the TV rights to both this and the 2006 tournament.

The football's still being

televised, because Kirch is being allowed to run itself while bankrupt - a nifty capitalist trick. But after the event it is likely that the whole structure of international football, TV rights and sponsorship will come apart. Football Associations in the developed world - especially UEFA - are even talking about setting up an alternative to FIFA.

If all this capitalist chicanery were something you had to put up with in order for the sport to grow and improve, and had no impact on the game itself, you might decide you could live with it.

But what it all means for football was shown in the last World Cup Final, when Brazilian boy-wonder Ronaldo had a seizure before the big game. His name was left off the team sheet but he reportedly begged the manager to be allowed to play. Other reports say he was forced to play.

Nike had a \$200m sponsorship deal with Brazil and Ronaldo himself was getting \$1m a year.

A Brazilian Congressional Committee hearing two years ago failed to shed any light on the sequence of decisions that led Ronaldo to go on the pitch. His performance was dismal. Was it because Nike pressured the coach, pressured the player or because they pressured themselves? We may never know but the incident is widely seen as an example of how the commercialisation of sport can kill real competition.

Another example is what is happening to the English Football League in light of the ITV Digital collapse. Up to 30 out of 72 clubs could go bankrupt. The TV money made them as dependent as junkies on the commercial handouts. They've spent most of the money up front on players' wages. These in turn end up in the pockets of sports car dealers and lapdancing club owners. Because capitalism couldn't make a profit out of making us pay to watch football on TV, football itself has to pay the price.

The current World Cup will no doubt be full of drama and excitement. But with people like Blatter in charge, fans will be keeping fingers crossed that it's only sporting drama - not financial collapse or Ronaldo-style personal tragedy.

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Byers resignation exposes rail failure

Frank Kellerman looks at how the Third Way policy on rail led to a minister's fall

He lied, he spun, he stabbed his civil servants in the back. The press hated him. So did the City of London's bankers. But what finished him off was something different.

Transport secretary Stephen Byers resigned because Labour's transport policy was uncovered as an incoherent mess. Not by hostile papers or Tory gents – but by a Labour-dominated committee of MPs. The House of Commons select committee on transport gave a damning verdict on Labour's 10-year plan hours before Byers decided to go.

If he were still in office, Byers today would be having to defend a 10-year transport plan whose inconsistencies are obvious. He would be having to defend the part-privatisation of London Underground to a consortium including Jarvis – the firm still under investigation for the Potter's Bar rail disaster.

He would be having to watch the corporate manslaughter case against the rail companies in the Paddington crash reopened. And the slow meltdown of the UK's new air traffic control system, as its private owners get ready to pull the plug.

Byers' few defenders will point out that it was John Prescott who drew up the 10-year plan. But that misses the point. Both in planning and execution Labour's transport policy was a worked example of the Third Way – the political philosophy that is supposed to underpin Blairism. Byers' departure is a tacit admission that the Third Way is intellectual junk.

Political commentator Andrew Rawnsley, whose books rely on the uncanny skill of being able to report private conversations between Labour ministers, once wrote this about Stephen Byers: "Stephen Byers, so goes the theory among less successful rivals, is proof that New Labour has perfected the science of human cloning. He's a fortysomething; he represents a constituency in the north-east; he supports Newcastle United. He talks relentlessly about the Third Way. Uncanny, isn't it? He even has a partner who is a lawyer. The DNA of Tony Blair does seem to be perfectly reproduced in Stephen Byers."

That is why Byers' defeat by a mixture of finance capitalists, militant trade unions and spurned spin doctors is so significant. It is a worked example of the dead end that is New Labour politics.

We knew even before Labour was elected in 1997 that it would not renationalise the railways – despite promising to do just that. Those who assumed this was simply pragmatism are wrong.

The Third Way theory does not say socialism has to "live with" the market. It says the market is the best mechanism for achieving social justice. But not the market red in tooth and claw: the market as regulated by progressive governments, with the capitalists given incentives to deliver improvements in public services.

That philosophy underpinned what Labour tried to do with the railways in the first term.

First of all Labour determined that "transport is not a priority" – so there would be no massive new investment. But they did see that the patchwork of competing railway companies could not deliver real improvements for the travelling public. So instead of short

term concessions – designed by John Major's Tory government to make sure capitalist competition was working on the railways – Labour handed the train companies much longer leases.

Then it turned the franchise awarding body into a potentially more powerful regulator: the Strategic Rail Authority. It beefed up OffRail, the regulator in charge of getting value for money out of the generous handouts to privatised Railtrack. And that was that. There you had it. A model of regulated capitalism.

And what did it deliver? Hatfield. The Hatfield crash revealed what many track maintenance workers already knew: that privatisation and subcontracting had reduced safety and accountability on the railways to a fatal degree.

No one could trace the lines of accountability. Lawyers for the competing capitalist firms stepped in to hamper the investigation. Terrified, the masters of entrepreneurial risk who were running Railtrack simply shut the network down. Two years later it has still not fully recovered.

Meanwhile, Railtrack itself continued to demand more money from the government to shore up its finances. In Third Way theory, at this point, the regulators step in. But there was a problem. The man Labour had put in charge of the SRA – Sir Alistair Morton – believed the best way of regulating and guiding the market is ... market forces.

To be honest you could forgive New Labour for mistaking Morton for a signed-up Third Way socialist. Pinstriped City gent, prone to issuing Latin missives, totally opposed to state intervention in the economy in general. Whoever would have suspected he would sabotage Labour's rail plans from within?



Byers in happier days

Enter Byers. From the moment of re-election it is now clear Labour was contemplating some form of endgame for privatisation of the rail infrastructure. But Byers managed it according to Third Way principles.

The New Labour think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research, had been working on a plan for a "not for profit" replacement, with unions on the board and no capitalist shareholders. Byers even found a way of avoiding compensating shareholders: by withdrawing state funding from Railtrack it would go bankrupt, leaving the City investment funds empty handed. Unprivatised but not renationalised: a living achievement for the Third Way.

Unfortunately, Byers forgot one crucial set of people: the capitalists. Behind the scenes they were furious. They pointed out that, since Labour's whole public service strategy depended on private finance, the £1.5bn compensation to

Railtrack shareholders would be peanuts compared to the added cost of PFI schemes if the City ramped up borrowing costs.

The Private Finance Initiative – that other piece of Third Way financial wizardry – could not work if, with one tweak of a gold plated cufflink, institutions like Fidelity, M&G, NM Rothschild scrambled the Treasury's calculations.

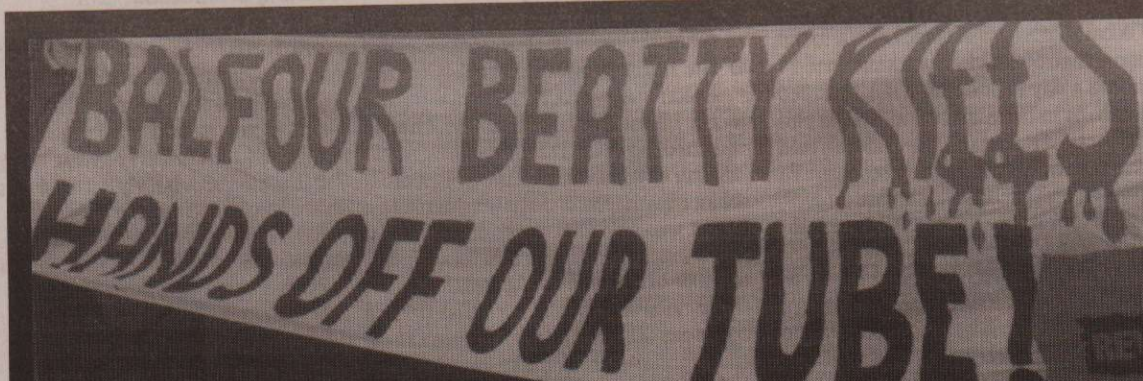
So in the end, for the greater good of saving this 30-year give-away scheme to the capitalists, Railtrack shareholders were compensated. Meanwhile, the non-profit company that will underpin public transport has been formed. It is headed by Ian McAllister – a man who has dedicated his life to running Ford Motor Company!

Back at the SRA, the 10-year rail plan, was published. It called for a renewed burst of Third Way energy. Sixty billion pounds is needed to upgrade the railways, according to the government's minimum estimate. But the government will only provide £25bn. The rest must come from the private sector.

However, commentators are sceptical about the City's willingness to stump up the money. It is not the profits – returns are set at a handsome 10 to 15 per cent. It is the risk. "What happens to our money if there is another Hatfield? That's what the City bankers were asking Byers.

Then Potter's Bar happened. If, as looks likely, the maintenance contractor Jarvis is to blame, that will smash confidence in the Third Way. The City bankers will see rail investment as a high risk business. Passengers will see private involvement as invariably lethal.

That was the conundrum on Stephen Byers' desk the day he decided to vacate it. And it is still there.



On 29 May the Public Private-Finance Awards ceremony was held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London. Hosted by Rory Bremner this gala dinner was held to hand out prizes to privatisers. That's why anti-privatisation campaigners from *The Agitator* – Workers Power's trade union and workplace activists' network – the socialist youth movement Revolution, and Globalise Resistance, turned up to upset the party. A successful and noisy protest wiped the smile off the faces of the fat cats, as they clambered over walls to avoid being confronted by demonstrators on their way in to the hotel!

Labour's transport policy is in a mess

Labour came to power on a wave of opposition to pointless new road building. The Tories had been ringroad crazy: creating new traffic, destroying the environment and lining the pockets of construction firms. All the transport experts agree that car usage cannot go on rising; that new road building actually encourages traffic growth; that cars are a thousand times more lethal than trains – and car-related pollution is damaging children's health. The experts said the only sensible policy was to:

- Improve public transport through massive new investment.
- Make public transport cheaper.
- Make car driving dearer – either through fuel and car tax or road tolls.

Labour's 10-year transport plan was built on these principles. And the "anti-car" element was seen by the Blairites as proof that the Third Way could be radical: that it could put the interests of children and passengers before those of roadbuilding companies. That it could – given time – persuade Mondeo Man to get on his pushbike or take the train.

The first U-turn came in 1999. Labour appointed Lord Gus McDonald to hang on John Prescott's right flank as Transport Minister. A former "Trotskyist hard-man", McDonald had never been a leftist of the tree-hugging variety. One of his first duties was to open the "Journey Zone" at the Millennium Dome – alongside Ford chairperson Ian McAllister, whose sponsorship of the zone had no doubt helped to ensure the predominance of the car in the Millennium Dome's vision of our transport future. McDonald even chipped in: "This puts paid to the idea that Labour is anti-car".

Then came the fuel protests. Britain seized up as a lower-middle class coalition of truck drivers and farmers stopped petrol distribution in protest at high fuel taxes. Fuel tax rises stopped – and with them any strategy of using taxation to curb car use.

That left only congestion charges and road tolls. But that was Ken Livingstone's idea: so Labour opposed congestion charges in London and road tolls remain in the realm of its "blue sky" thinking – meaning in the distant future if we think we can get away with it.

With public transport going backwards instead of forwards; with a £35bn hole in rail funding; with the traffic reduction strategy in reverse this all left the Integrated Transport Plan in tatters.

The Third Way said the market was the most efficient way of delivering this and all of Labour's other social objectives. That has been proved a lie. All the other lies and deceptions surrounding Byers essentially flow from that big contradiction.

Blairism has looked untouchable elsewhere. With health, the real damage of the PFI will be felt in 10 years' time. With education there's been meddling but not wholesale privatisation. With transport – probably the most crucial public service after schools and hospitals – that is where the Third Way has had its chance to work. And it's been a disaster.

The price of new cars is falling, fuel prices are expected to drop in real terms, while public transport fares are increasing – and have to increase to give the private rail companies their profits.

What has the Third Way delivered on transport? In a word, chaos. And that's why Byers' departure is more than just the long overdue resignation of a liar.

Fascism came to power in Italy following the "March on Rome" by Mussolini, which began on 28 October 1922. But there was no March on Rome. Mussolini arrived in Rome on the night train from Milan at the invitation of King Vittorio Emanuele III. *Paolo Silone* explains the truth behind the myth

How the bosses backed Mussolini's march on Rome

Fascism came to power in Italy at the point when the real revolutionary period in Italy between 1920 and 1922 (the "biennio rosso") had begun to wane. Under the centrist leadership of Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga, Italian workers had not forged an alliance with the peasants and land workers and were unable to take the post-war factory occupations and control of production beyond the point of dual power.

With strikes continuing to disrupt the economy and with the centrist leadership hesitating, mass sectors of the petit bourgeoisie became exasperated and swelled the ranks of fascism. Since the political representatives of the bourgeoisie were wracked by a crisis of authority and were effectively unable to restore order, it was left up to the fascists to offer their solution.

King Vittorio Emanuele III, stated that in October 1922 there were about 100,000 fascists ready to converge on Rome and unleash a civil war in the bid for power. His claimed that these circumstances forced him into calling on Mussolini to form a government. The fact is there were between 10,000 and 25,000 black shirts, most of whom were unarmed, positioned about 50 miles from the capital and with no connections to the fascist military command in Perugia. They could have easily been crushed by the army.

But the monarch decided to make use of the powers granted to him by the constitution, and didn't sign a decree from the then prime minister, Luigi Facta, calling for the suppression of the black shirts by the army. The latter, whose loyalty to the king was unquestioned, now had the "legal" green light to do what its generals were already disposed to do – stand aside and allow Mussolini to come to power.

In his first parliamentary speech as prime minister, Mussolini cajoled, ridiculed, insulted and threatened the liberal parliamentarians. For their part, they listened in silence, cowering and cringing and uttering not a word. Then, showing their true "democratic" colours, they voted overwhelmingly in favour of granting full powers to the fascist government for a whole year. All this was despite the fact that Mussolini had only 7 per cent of parliamentary seats.

Mussolini thanked them by immediately consigning them to the dustbin of history, depriving the liberal bourgeoisie of all political power and putting an end to the rule of prattling parliamentarians. But Mussolini's victory resulted from a coup d'état on the part of the king and the army, formally sanctioned by the bourgeois parliament.

It has been described by some Italian historians as a compromise between fascism and the liberal state. This helps explain the immediate demobilisation of the black shirts, and the nature of the first Mussolini government, which included only four fascists, all the others being liberals, Popular Party Catholics and even two social democrats.

But, after the murder of socialist Giacomo Matteotti by fascist black shirts in June 1924, and the announcement of



Italian fascists march in Rome (left), Mussolini in heroic pose (centre) and hung up dead with his mistress (right)



the dictatorship by Mussolini in his speech of January 1925, fascism began to consolidate and to construct the corporate state – that is, crush all independent working class organisations, its parties and unions.

Just what did Italian fascism represent and what were its roots? To justify the fact that it disarmed communist partisans and helped re-establish the democratic credentials of the very state that had terrorised workers for 20 years, Stalinism peddled the notion that fascism was the expression not of the productive industrial bourgeoisie, but of parasitic finance capital and agrarian interests.

While the fascists did defend the great landowners and Mussolini was terrified of the very notion of agrarian reform, his regime represented the interests of Italian imperialist capitalism. Fascism was the fulfilment of the imperialist ambitions of its ruling class from around the turn of the century and reached its full expression in the First World War.

For fascism, the First World War represented the "regeneration" of Italy through the spilling of blood, a sacrifice that should have guaranteed the acquisition of the soil on which that blood

had been spilt. The black shirts worn by the paramilitary squads symbolically recalled the military values of the special assault troops (Arditi) formed between 1917 and 1918.

These had been made up mainly of low-life criminals and of self-aggrandising anti-democratic petit bourgeois intellectuals who claimed that they had fought and won the war on their own and therefore had an automatic right to political power.

The fascists cultivated a mythology about Italy's role and ambitions in the war, stressing lofty ideals. In reality, Italy's war was fought and "won" by a mainly peasant army which was profoundly opposed to the conflict. The "ideals" for which they died were control of the Balkans, sectors of northern Africa and Asia Minor.

Although fascism could only come to power on the back of the defeat of the post-war revolutionary working class assault on crisis-ridden capitalism, recent research is beginning to show that fascism emerged ideologically, programmatically and, though to a much lesser extent, even organisa-

tionally during the war itself.

Under the leadership of Enrico Corradini, Luigi Federzoni and Alfredo Rocco, the Italian National Association (INA) diffused a nationalist imperialist ideology based on the "productive" bourgeoisie. The INA argued that only through expansion could Italy's production and emigration problems be solved. It emerged around 1900 following Italy's disastrous defeat in 1896 at the hands of the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik at Adua in the disputed territory of Eritrea. On that occasion, Italy's pretensions to imperialist grandeur met head on with a determined enemy, with Italian military-industrial weakness and with the lack of support from the Italian population that for the most part hated the army.

The nationalist imperialists proposed that since the nature of never-ending struggles abroad demanded increased unity at home, what was needed was a well-organised and disciplined hierarchical social system that did away with internal democracy and which crushed the "internal enemy".

Class struggle and socialist terminology were still demagogically employed, but this was projected onto the terrain of the struggles between imperialist powers: the "proletarian nation" of Italy was to go into battle against the "demoplutocratic" powers of Britain, France and America, all of whom had divided up the world without, including Italy.

The extent to which this reactionary programme found support from the industrial and commercial classes is seen when Corradini's newspaper, *Idea Nazionale*, went daily in 1914. The board of directors consisted of Corradini and four industrialists, the most important of whom was Dante Ferraris, vice-president of Fiat and president of the Lega Industriale.

In February 1923, just four months after the fascist rise to power, the Italian National Association dissolved into the National Fascist Party and Corradini and Rocco noted that the fusion was made possible because of a "unity of ideals". It was really a recognition of the fact that they represented the same reactionary interests.

Since October 1914, Mussolini had been financed by monopoly capital

and large landowner interests and had been conducting a ferocious campaign of lies, insinuation and threats against the Italian Socialist Party. He received financial support from arms manufacturers such as Ansaldo in Genoa. When the first fascist meeting was held in Milan in March 1919 it was in the headquarters of the Industrial and Commercial Alliance. It was claimed at that meeting that Italy had been robbed of the territorial fruits of its "victory" at the Paris peace conference.

It was the myth of the "mutilated victory", one which had been tried on following Eritrea and again, though to a lesser degree, during Italy's imperialist adventure in Libya (1911-12). This was an anti-socialist and pro-imperialist mobilising myth which coincided perfectly with the strategic interests of Italian capitalism in the long-term preparation for the renewal of inter-imperialist war.

It was therefore of profound significance that on taking office in 1922 Mussolini personally took over the foreign and internal ministries, giving himself powers of domestic repression and ambitions for imperial conquest; Mussolini personified the project of crushing internal resistance to increase industrial production in preparation for ongoing war.

As early as 1919 he had called on Germany to sign the Versailles treaty, "guilt clause" and all, so as to get the thing over with and prepare along with Italy to settle the scores left over from the recently concluded conflict.

In his writings on fascism, Leon Trotsky argued that fascism's historical mission in the epoch of imperialism was reducible to the political expropriation of the bourgeoisie in order to better re-organise capitalist society, by smashing the organisations of the working class, in preparation for imperialist war.

The coup d'état of October 1922 represented the beginning of the Italian bourgeoisie's long-term bid for imperialist predominance. Working class organisations had to be crushed in order to maximise industrial production, and whole generations of youth who would be the cannon fodder of the future war had to be prepared not just physically but ideologically.

Collaboration with the Fascists

Most of the liberal bourgeoisie in Italy welcomed Mussolini and collaborated with his destruction of democratic rights; many were rewarded rather than punished for this after Mussolini's death. One of the members of the Mussolini government, Giovanni Gronchi, would later be a Christian Democrat president of the Italian republic.

Alcide De Gaspari, who became Italian prime minister in the post-war period, and who is still today considered the founding father of Italian Christian Democracy, likewise supported Mussolini's premiership.

Key liberal figures such as Luigi Einaudi (a bourgeois economist) and Benedetto Croce (a conservative philosopher) not only supported Mussolini's government, but had been particularly enthusiastic when the fascist squads were on their rampages of gratuitous violence and murder in the early 1920s. Einaudi later became president of Italy.

All this attests to the criminal nature of the Stalinist strategy of subordinating the working class' struggle against fascism to the leadership of "anti-fascist" liberals and Christian democrats. Recent research has shown that Stalinist leader Palmiro Togliatti's controlled publication of Gramsci's writings after the war was designed precisely to ingratiate "communists" with the catholic church and the Crocean liberal intelligentsia.

While Gramsci's writings are certainly confused and confusing, Togliatti's was nevertheless a classic exercise in the Stalinist school of falsification with the sole aim of legitimising his treacherous strategy of forging the popular front with the very pro-capitalist forces who had ratified the coup d'état in October 1922.

Europe's march to the racist right

October 1999

Austria: The Freedom Party (FPO), led from 1986 to 2000 by Nazi sympathiser Jörg Haider, comes second in the 1999 general elections on an anti-immigration and anti-EU ticket, winning 27 per cent of the vote and 52 seats in parliament under the PR system. Coalition of conservative Austrian People's Party and extreme right Austrian Freedom party takes power in February 2000.

October 2000

Belgium: Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block - VB) Becomes the biggest political force in its Flemish stronghold city, Antwerp with 20 out of 50 seats on the city council. In the 1999 parliamentary elections it took 9.9 per cent of the vote, translating under the PR system to 15 seats in the lower house. VB is anti-immigrant and openly anti-semitic, advocating Flemish self-rule.

2001

Italy: The far right, anti-immigrant and separatist Liga Nord (Northern League) and Gianfranco Fini's fascist front party, Alleanza Nazionale, entered a right-wing coalition with Silvio Berlusconi's governing party. Defying international criticism, Berlusconi gave three cabinet posts to the Northern League, despite the fact that it only polled 4 per cent of the vote, and one key post to Fini.

October 2001

Norway: The Progress Party, which wants to cap immigration at 1,000 people a year, wins 62 out of 165 parliamentary seats after polling 14.7 per cent. The Labour Party that had dominated Norwegian politics for almost a century is ousted. New right-wing coalition government relies upon Progress Party to form a coalition government.

November 2001

Denmark: The Danish People's Party (DPP) sweeps into parliament as the country's third-largest party after taking 12 per cent of the vote and 22 seats under Denmark's partial PR system. Now underpinning a centre-right government coalition, it has drafted tough new asylum policies and cut aid to the developing world.

April 2002

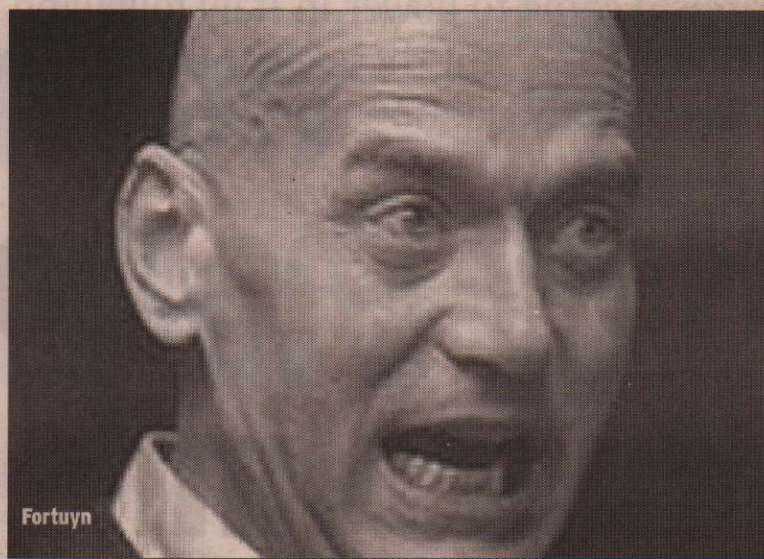
Portugal: Right-wing coalition that includes strongly anti-immigration People's Party won power

May 2002

Netherlands: In general elections on May 15, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim List Pim Fortuyn came second to the centre-right Christian Democrat Party (CDA), winning 26 parliamentary seats in its first ever election contest and relegating the social-democratic PvdA into third place. It is now preparing to enter a coalition government with the CDA.

France: Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the fascist Front National (FN) took 17% in the first ballot, beating the Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin, to second place as the Socialist vote collapsed. He took 18 per cent in the second round. The FN is tipped to win 3-6 seats in parliament in this month's general election.

Across Europe the far right is making electoral gains. And mainstream parties are jumping to their racist rhetoric. *Andy Yorke* assesses the threat and slams mainstream social democracy for its inability to formulate a progressive answer to right-wing bigotry



Fortuyn

Resistible rise

It started with Jorg Haider's far-right FPO beating the Social Democrats in Austria in the autumn 1999 elections, then claiming a place in the coalition government with the Conservatives.

There were successes in 2001 for the far right in elections in Italy, Norway and Denmark, followed by a string of similar results in March and April this year.

In Portugal in March, the anti-immigration Popular Party won 14 seats in parliament and entered the coalition government.

In France Le Pen, the presidential candidate of the long-established Front National, knocked out Lionel Jospin, the Socialist Party candidate, to get through to the second round, where he held his vote at 18 per cent in the face of a conservative right to far-left campaign for Chirac.

Most spectacularly of all, the List Pim Fortuyn in Holland – only formed three months before the elections on an anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-establishment ticket – became the second largest party in the Dutch parliament, relegating the ruling Social Democrats into third place and entering the government.

Now in Germany too, the historic post-war liberal party the FPD is making a turn to right-wing populism. Its deputy leader is indicating sympathy for the LPF in Holland and Haider.

This hysteria across Europe is the more remarkable when you consider the United Nations High Commission on Refugees recently published figures that over the past 10 years there has been no increase in the rate of immigration into the European Union. In certain years – the high point of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia or Kosova, the war in Afghanistan – it has risen but then fallen back again.

Similar figures for crime have been published to show that there has not been an increased "crime wave" either. Nor do immigrants make a net claim on "our health and education services". Again the reverse is true.

But these facts are not reported, no one argues back in the mass media against the hysteria. The official parties of the left, social democracy and labour, not only do not argue back but join in finding "solutions" – racist ones – for the non-existent problem.

The landslide victory of the Labour Party in Britain in 1997, followed by Jospin becoming PM in France and Schroeder in Germany, ushered in a

brief period where all but three of the European Union states were headed by Social Democratic governments and coalitions.

Now we are seeing this unravel in equally dramatic fashion, alongside the triumph of a deeply racist agenda in European politics.

In country after country the mass media have linked the issues of immigration, lack of integration, crime and the financial strains on the education, health and social services. The result is that the anti-immigrant hysteria has spread from fringe fascist parties to boost a series of new or made-over parties willing to play the race card for all its worth.

Something new is happening across Europe. The coalition governments are dependent upon these right-wing parties, and forced to incorporate much of their anti-immigration and law and order ideas into their own policy.

Repression and racism are certainly on the march and in this atmosphere the potential for fascist growth really does exist.

How fascism reinvented itself

So how do we characterise the new far right forces that are setting the agenda across Europe?

There are a handful of historic fascist groupings in Europe that have made a breakthrough into the mainstream – but they did not do so as open fascists nor by using classic fascist tactics.

They did so by espousing racism related to fears of immigration and above all by electoral politics, not street marches by paramilitary detachments. Their anti-Semitism was also kept well under control – usually left to coded references that only old fascists (and the far left) would recognise.

Le Pen's FN in France, Haider's FPO in Austria, Fini's Alleanza Nazionale – all these parties began as the coming together of former fascist cadres after World War II (in the case of the FN these regrouped in 1972). Most of the leaders remained fascists all right and could not see much if anything wrong with Hitler, Mussolini or Petain.

They could see that street fighting and sporting Nazi or Petainist regalia were not going to get them far – except perhaps broken heads and a jail sentence. Votes were what counted in the post-war European states.

In France and Italy fascists went fur-



Haider



Fini

ther than simply maintaining underground race-war sects, and founded front parties with non-fascist racists and populists. This enabled them to reach out to the masses, focusing on anti-immigration rhetoric, linking it to crime, unemployment, and more recently the cuts to services.

These front parties were anti-establishment, attacking the corrupt coalition politics of the ruling mainstream parties – in the most recent French elections, the conservative hopeful, Chirac, didn't dare debate Le Pen, knowing that he would lay out in vivid detail what a crook Chirac is. To make the transition, however, they were forced to jack in key parts of their programme, and the parties they founded were not fascist, but fronts for fascists and incorporating populist and even neo-liberal conservative forces.

From them they picked up neo-liberal and pro-free market policies – quite different to the strong state autarchic models of pre-war fascism. First they fused with rabid nationalists, and then with extreme right-wing neo-liberals who were attracted by their new free market policies allies and weren't picky about being in the same organisation with them either.

The anti-Semitism was dropped except for the odd one-liner or rant to a strictly internal audience. Their Nazi apologetics became defensive – though usually when challenged on the Holocaust, they relativise it by reference to British, American and Russian war crimes, or pronounce it greatly exaggerated.

Most importantly, they dropped the violence; the skinheads and gangs were

kept out of the limelight and told to keep quiet, with a few kept around as "bodyguards". Respectability was the key word. The aim is to win control of the state through elections, just like any other right-wing party.

This meant that the fascist front parties did not create a mass movement of street gangs to hammer the left and workers' movement. Such a movement had been decisive for pre-war fascism to appeal to a bourgeoisie terrified of the workers. Rather than parliamentary victories the pre-war fascists used their muscle to get the bourgeoisie to let them into power through a fake "revolution", like Mussolini's march on Rome (see p5), or as an emergency measure, like Hitler being ushered in by Hindenberg.

For the latter-day fascist front parties what was truly distinctive to fascism – its fundamental strategy for power – has been put on hold in favour of gathering ever more votes. Precisely because of the impact of the war and the Holocaust on the consciousness of the masses in Europe, such a dramatic change of tack by the likes of Le Pen is not at all surprising.

Parties like the FN ran campaigns, got their ribbons on and squeezed the flesh, got elected, took the perks of office, and learned how to look respectable. And they attracted more and more members and politicians on this basis – not on the basis of fascist politics.

This electoral strategy by the fascist front parties sounds a lot like the LPF, the Danish People's Party and Norway's Progress Party. However, there is a fundamental difference. Though they stress the same issues, none of these parties were founded or dominated by



se of the right

fascist cadres in the way the FN was.

They are thoroughly racist, anti-EU, and usually neo-liberal, but also untried, untested, and willing to compromise on immigration once in coalition. Amongst their leaders there is no sign of the Second World War nostalgia of Le Pen, Fini or, for that matter, Haider. They have no open connections to the fascist skinhead movement or underground terrorist cells such as those that exist in countries like Germany and Sweden. They are not a front - because the inner core of leaders and activists is not or was never fascist. They are racist, populist parties.

This understanding is important. These parties are hateful and must be fought tooth and nail by the workers' movement. But their rise does not equal the rise of fascism in Europe. The crucial task for socialists is to rally workers to a fight against racism, to combat and build real mass revolutionary alternatives to the flagging social democratic and labour parties and the rising far right populists and to combine this with determined struggle to smash the real fascists and fascist fronts on the streets.

Tensions in the fascist front parties

Haider's FPO falls somewhere between a fascist front, like the FN, and a far-right, racist populist party like the LPF.

The FPO is dominated by neo-liberals and business people, and the fascist hardcore is ageing and isolated - Haider himself was forced to resign as head of the party as the price of the FPO joining the coalition government in 2001. Haider, at a March 2001 rally, caused an uproar with his statement about illegal immigrants and drug dealers - that it was a priority "to eliminate them uncompromisingly". The skinheads in the street outside the rally shouted "What Haider can't do, we'll carry out on his behalf", and "Inside they're talking, outside we'll get down to business", and hospitalised two socialist students.

The leader of the Freedom Party, Susanne Riess-Passer said Haider's comments were misinterpreted: "He was not referring to the elimination of foreigners, but to the elimination of the problem. I forbid this insinuation that the Freedom Party is hounding foreigners."

This is more than just a one-two act: there are real tensions between the two wings of the FPO. Haider was nearly forced to leave the party by other lead-

ers when he visited Saddam Hussein in Iraq in February. Newspaper reports claim they discussed the "Zionist and US conspiracy".

His supporters in the FPO have created the Austria-Iraq friendship society, while Susanne Riess-Passer, the party's leader and vice-chancellor argued, "my party is not a sympathetic one to the Iraqi regime or to Saddam Hussein." A split, and a convergence of the Haiderite wing with the skinhead youth, is always a possibility under the right social conditions - economic crisis and an upsurge in the class struggle.

The Italian Alianza Nazionale (AN), which was set up by the fascist MSI, has evolved in a populist direction away from open fascism. After electoral successes in the early 1990s, when the old political system imploded in a series of corruption scandals and trials, the AN was invited into a coalition government with billionaire Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

Gianfranco Fini, the AN's leader, wants to create a mass right-wing parliamentary party. This obliged him to condemn skinhead violence and discourage supporters from giving the old fascist salute. In 1995 the MSI liquidated itself into the newly formed AN.

Now it is distancing itself from Le Pen since the furore in May - Fini reaffirmed the AN's condemnation of "all forms of intolerance, violence, xenophobia and anti-Semitism" and welcomed the leader of Italy's Jewish community who praised the AN for its good sense!

The AN politicians are in the ascendancy but the hard right neo-liberals face two problems: there is still a fascist wing, silenced, but restive inside the AN, and there are limits to the electoral strategy. A survey cited by La Repubblica showed that 40 per cent of right-wing voters plumped for Berlusconi's party because the "AN is very close to Forza Italia so one might as well vote Forza Italia".

The heightened class struggle in Italy, with the growth of the social forum movement and most recently 13 million workers on general strike, could blow the government off course and the AN back into opposition; a failure of the movement to hit the big time on the electoral road could open a recruiting ground among disaffected workers and youth for the fascist wing of the AN, tipping the balance in it away from the suits and soundbites, and back towards the boots and beatings.

Nearly half of 18-30 year olds polled in the Netherlands said they were in favour of zero immigration and would vote for List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). When its popular leader was assassinated two weeks before the election, a wave of shock reached Princess Di levels of popular grief.

Fortuyn was a gay racist who claimed that Islam was backward and intolerant, that it hadn't been put through the "laundromat" of enlightenment and humanist values as Judaism and Christianity had. Maybe he should have asked gays in the USA how tolerant the born again Christian right were.

He claimed that the Netherlands was "full up", and argued for zero immigration. In a TV interview he said: "Have you ever noticed that Moroccan boys never steal from Moroccans?"

Then he stated that he would remove anti-discrimination clauses from the constitution - one step away from the "National Preference" laws that parties such as Le Pen's FN want to impose. They want to make it illegal not to discriminate in favour of "native" citizens.

For these last remarks Fortuyn got the sack in February as leader of the Livable Netherlands, a not-so-far-right far-right party - and went on to set up his own LPF. It won 37 per cent in the March Rotterdam elections, challenging the Social Democrats' grip in this key stronghold. After becoming the second largest party in the May 15 general election, the LPF shattered Holland's traditional balance of power.

The LPF's 26 MPs entered parliament and the right-wing coalition government. The Social Democracy was pushed into a tie for third place with its liberal VVP coalition partner.

But Fortuyn did more than scapegoat immigrants and stoke racism.

He was openly gay and argued for softening the drug laws - he is a far cry from the stodgy "family values" right of Europe and North America. He was relatively young and media savvy. He mercilessly ridiculed the whole political system - already discredited - and this is the key to understanding his popularity.

Since World War II three mainstream parties, the conservative Christian Democracy (CDA), the liberals (VVP), and the social democratic PvdA, have ruled in various coalitions.

For the past 20 years the PvdA-affiliated trade unions and big business have struck an agreement to act as "social partners" and "make sacrifices" to pull Holland out of the early 1980s stagnation and 27 per cent unemployment.

It hasn't worked, and it was and is a one way street - the workers do all the sacrificing.

The anger at this allowed the PvdA to do well in the 1994 elections. It set up the "Purple Coalition" (red plus blue) with the Liberal free marketeers - a "historic first", since the CDA has been the lynchpin of every coalition since 1945. But the attacks on the working class only deepened.

The result is a record number of Dutch millionaires

and 20 years of falling real wages, a welfare state under radical "reform", and now rising unemployment. Behind the prosperous and tolerant image which Amsterdam presents to tourists there is a Holland of temp agencies and workfare schemes, where nearly one in six households live at or below the poverty line, and a higher percentage of people work on temporary flexible contracts than anywhere else in Europe.

Five per cent of the population is immigrant, brought in to do all the rotten jobs or fleeing the deepening poverty that is the third world under globalisation. But they are concentrated in certain areas - nearly half of Rotterdam's population is immigrant.

And the mainstream parties had adopted nasty anti-immigrant rhetoric before Fortuyn came on the scene. The Purple Coalition passed the harshest anti-immigration laws Holland had seen so far.

This deepening poverty, the bitter disappointment with the union and labour leaders, the political system where every election seemed to result in more of the same, all led to a welling up of popular anger with mainstream politics.

Parliament was like a smoothly running board room of old cronies, insulated from the burning concerns of ordinary workers as it downsized their lives. It was this political culture that Fortuyn looked like he would blow apart.

But a close inspection showed that workers could expect nothing from him. He stood for zero growth in health

and education spending and tax slashing incapacity benefit. His phobia for the EU, where he wanted to put up border controls again and demand that Holland's contribution was refunded, made him a potential Dutch Margaret Thatcher.

But was Fortuyn a fascist? No - not unless we let this word just become a term of abuse for any racist. His party wasn't built on skinhead boot boy gangs or even on the decrepit remnants of Dutch Nazis from WWII.

It is a grab-bag of media personalities, young hungry businessmen coming in from the outside, and independents with different views and little cohesion, united behind a charismatic leader, himself with little political experience.

Already its position on immigration is confused and it is backtracking, offering an asylum for illegal immigrants that the CDA has rejected as too soft! It's most likely route is to be absorbed into the Liberals or Conservatives.

The LPF's number two MP on the list was black, from Cape Verde, as were other public figures in the LPF, and Fortuyn himself vehemently rejected comparisons to Haider or Le Pen.

There is no hint of the anti-Semitism that fascist parties take up as a central (if concealed) theme, as they look back to their historic roots in Hitler and national socialism. The LPF is not a fascist party, but an unstable far-right populist party, with racism as its calling card to the people and radical neo-liberalism to attract a section of the business class.

Who was Pim Fortuyn?

Israel tightens its iron grip

After the massacre at Jenin, imperialist plans to impose a settlement on the Middle East are beginning to take shape, writes *Mark Robbins*

Yasser Arafat has been released from weeks of confinement in his own office in Ramallah, and is now "free" to wander the various enclaves still controlled by his weakened Palestinian Authority.

The stand-off in Bethlehem between Israeli forces and Palestinian police and militia has been ended through a controversial agreement for the exile of some of them to several European Union countries. The Palestinians accused of assassinating far-right Israeli tourism minister, Rehavam Zeevi, have been "convicted" by a makeshift PA court and handed over to British and American gaolers to serve their sentence. Marwan Barghouti and other prominent figures of the resistance – plus hundreds less prominent – remain in Israeli custody and can expect to stand trial in the next few months.

The much anticipated all-out Israeli attack on Gaza has been cancelled or indefinitely postponed – ostensibly because of the advance publicity given to it, but more likely because a deal was struck at the last moment between Israel's Prime Minister Sharon and President Bush.

The Israeli army, however, retains its right to make bloody incursions into Palestinian population centres, to make arrests, carry out assassinations, bulldoze homes, and carry out other acts of collective punishment. Naturally, the economic siege and "closure" of the Palestinian territories to the outside world continues unabated.

The armed Palestinian militants continue their attacks on Israeli civilian, military and settler targets, with no more (or less) tangible results for the struggle to end the Israeli occupation than previously.

Israel's security may not have improved as a result of Sharon's incursions, but the Palestinians' ability to effectively block a political settlement that would be to their disadvantage has been considerably weakened. Israel's control of the Occupied Territories is probably now stronger than at any time since the beginning of the uprising in September 2000.

It has not, however, all been good news for Sharon. It is not simply enough to hold the territories by force and settle them with Jewish colonists – Israel needs to impose a political settlement on the Palestinians if it is to guarantee the stability of its continued occupation. As yet, there are few signs that Arafat is willing or capable of making the broad-ranging concessions on Palestinian statehood and territory that Israel demands, and imposing them upon his own people.

Indeed, there is continued US pressure to resume talks for a "two-state settlement" – and Bush needs movement on this issue if he is to gain any Arab (or European) backing for his planned attack on Iraq.

It should not be forgotten that George Bush senior forced Yitzhak Shamir's government to attend the Madrid conference in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War by threatening to withhold loan guarantees. This later brought down Shamir's government and paved the way for the Oslo accords.

The origins of today's war lie in

the failure of the Oslo "peace process" to bring about an end to the occupation and the creation of a separate Palestinian state – the basis upon which Oslo was sold to the Palestinian masses by the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Arafat rejected Ehud Barak's "generous offer" – of apartheid in several discontinuous bantustans in less than half of the West Bank and surrounded by Israeli settlements – because such a solution would have been unacceptable to the Palestinian people who live in the Occupied Territories. They had already been asked to make the painful historic compromise of accepting Israeli control of 78 per cent of their historic homeland in expectation that they would be allowed independence in the remaining 22 per cent.

Israel has effectively fought this war to prevent the emergence of any meaningful Palestinian "state", which means that Sharon will be unlikely to concede what Barak did not concede given Israel's now tightened military grip.

However, to impose Barak's "generous offers" or Sharon's "less than generous" ones requires a Palestinian leadership willing to act as collaborators and as guarantors of Israel's security.

Arafat's Palestinian Authority, while not taking part in the resistance and indeed selling it out at critical moments, cannot agree to the current situation as anything other than a "temporary" measure pending renewed "final status" talks – at least not without losing any semblance of authority amongst the masses. Hence, the renewed bombast from Sharon's main rival, former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to the effect that Arafat is an "obstacle" to peace, or not a "peace partner", who needs to be removed from power before negotiations can take place. Hence also the vote by the ruling Likud party's central committee – against Sharon's advice – to oppose any form of Palestinian state.

This is also the motive behind Israel's calls on the Palestinian Authority to carry out "democratic" reforms – a bizarre demand, given Israel's general lack of respect for the democratic rights of Palestinians under its rule, and its own complicity in the Palestinian Authority's many documented human rights abuses. The competing Palestinian security services are to be "streamlined" with help from the CIA, the better to protect Israel's security and repress Palestinians.

Meanwhile "representative" institutions are to be established and elections held to foster a more "moderate" leadership to replace Arafat – or with which Israel can negotiate over Arafat's head. Having failed to displace Arafat by pushing him to fight a civil war against the Palestinian "rejectionists", Sharon now wishes to displace him by means of a rigged "democracy" under continued Israeli occupation.

The real danger for the Palestinians now lies not in the remote possibility of a stable settlement to create a powerless Palestinian "mini-state", but that the current situation may drag on indefinitely and create, de facto, such a reactionary settlement without any formal agreement. The only logical conclusion is that the resistance to the occupation must go on. The lesson of the uprising so far, however, is that the masses must be mobilised against both the occupation and its Palestinian Authority collaborators. They can't leave the struggle to a self-appointed band of armed fighters who cannot dislodge the occupation or defeat Israel.

No war over Kashmir!

Self-determination for the people of Jammu-Kashmir

The threat of a terrible war between India and Pakistan – one that could go nuclear – shows that George Bush and Tony Blair's post-September 11 attempt at ordering the world has achieved the exact opposite.

The threat of a catastrophic war between two of their most loyal and important allies is clearly not what they wanted but it is a direct consequence of the impact of imperialism, economic and military, on the region.

Atal Behari Vajpai, the Hindu chauvinist Indian premier and Pakistani military dictator Pervez Musharraf are threatening the desperately poor people of the subcontinent with enormous suffering and destruction.

In partitioned Jammu and Kashmir weeks of heavy exchanges of artillery fire have forced at least 25,000 villagers to flee the border areas and resulted in an unknown number of deaths among the civilian population. One million troops face one another along the so-called line of control.

Indian warships patrol the approaches to Pakistani waters. Warplanes, tanks and missile batteries are ready for action in what is already India's biggest-ever military mobilisation. Millions of landmines have been laid along the border.

The reasons for this enormous waste of resources and the bloody chaos which war will bring are integral to the whole drive to globalisation and the establishment of a unilateral US "empire" and its cover for this, the "war against terrorism".

Over the past three years Vajpai has been opening India up for US and EU multinational corporations and the full destructive effects of neo-liberalism. The working class and the urban and rural poor are hardest hit. Consequently Vajpai's party, the Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), suffered heavy defeats in recent state elections.

As opposition has mounted to its free market policies the BJP has had recourse to fomenting deadly communal hatreds. The BJP glories in its determination to strengthen Hindus' privileges and discriminate against the other religious minorities. BJP militants were directly responsible for the bloody rioting in the state of Gujarat where 900 people, mainly Muslims, were killed.

As a result Vajpai's shaky coalition faces disintegration and near annihilation at any ensuing national election. Add to this the enormously increased tension in India's one Muslim majority state, Kashmir – a state held against the will of its people within the Indian federation – and the full scale of the potential explosion in the present situation is clear.

Washington is desperately worried that an Indo-Pakistan war would

undermine its military operations in Afghanistan. This could lead to a revival of the Taliban and al Qa'ida resistance and destabilise the entire region, threatening US economic penetration of India and the long-term looting of central Asia's vast oil reserves over the coming decades.

On the Pakistani side an equally reactionary constellation of forces to the BJP coalition is hard at work. Pervez Musharraf has no democratic credentials. He is a wretched puppet of the USA's war to impose its will on Afghanistan. But at the same time within his military regime the Pakistan security forces, the ISI, continue to facilitate Islamist Jihadis (holy warriors) getting into Indian-held Kashmir.

Since 1989 armed Jihadi groups such as Lakshar-e-Taiba and Harkat-al-Mujahideen have attacked the Indian military in a war that has cost the lives of at least 30,000 people. In an attack in Jammu and Kashmir on 14 May, 34 people died at Kaluchak near Jammu. The attack by Pakistan-based Islamist Jihadis on the Indian parliament in Delhi last December was a massive provocation, aimed at pushing the present slide towards war.

Such actions open the Pakistani military regime to charges by India of fostering terrorism. Pakistan's promised crack downs on "cross-border terrorism" – while violating democratic rights in Pakistan – have never been applied to the part of Kashmir ruled by Islamabad. Thus, Vajpai can paint his war moves as part and parcel of the war against terrorism.

There is little doubt that much as the majority of Kashmiris resent Indian oppression they do not welcome annexation by Pakistan or a Taliban-style Islamist regime. The movement for independence launched in 1989 by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was for a secular state independent of both its giant neighbours.

Indeed, the Jihadis have repeatedly attacked militants and leaders of the Kashmiri independence movement. Indian army actions have also hit Kashmiris hard.

The demand for self-determination and, if freely and democratically expressed, independence, is a progressive demand, which all socialists should support, against Indian and Pakistani annexationists. Neither country's "religious" or "historic" claims should override the views of the people of Kashmir.

A war between Pakistan and India would be a totally reactionary one on both sides. It would be a war not for

the defence of the national rights of the Kashmir people, but for the retention or extension of territory by two states which have never allowed the Kashmiri people the right to any sort of uncoerced self-determination.

The workers and peasants in India

and Pakistan should mobilise now to stop their ruling classes from starting a criminal war which will serve only the interests of their exploiters. But if a war starts the workers' movement must use every means to

A war between Pakistan and India would be a totally reactionary war on both sides

make sure it ends in the overthrow of the ruling classes who have brought misery and destruction on their own people.

Revolutionaries on both sides – in the event of war – must raise the slogans:

- Down with Vajpai and Musharraf and their military and religious-chauvinist regimes.
- Freedom for Kashmir – all Indian and Pakistani troops out of Jammu and Kashmir.
- For all imperialist troops out of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Only workers' power in India and Pakistan can lay the basis for a socialist federation of all the states of the region

Unfortunately, the workers of India and Pakistan do not have a revolutionary leadership that could undertake such a policy. In the name of "fighting terrorism," the Congress Party, the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) have rallied behind the Hindu chauvinist BJP. The CPI spokesperson, Ajay Chakravorty, demanded that Pakistan should be punished and the CPI-M leader in parliament, Somnath Chatterjee, avowed that his party had always backed the government in the "fight against terrorism" and would continue to do so. This is treachery.

The right-centrist Labour Party of Pakistan on the other hand limits itself to pacifist appeals rather than saying clearly that social revolution is the only way the workers and peasants can disarm the warmongers or establish lasting peace.

The acute crisis of revolutionary leadership across the whole subcontinent shows the burning need for a new revolutionary international to rally forces to a programme of class independence and proletarian internationalism, as well as to mobilise struggle around the world against globalising capitalism – imperialism, the real initiator of war and misery.

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Florence forum will set anti-capitalist agenda

Dave Stockton outlines the issues facing the anti-globalisation movement before the next big gathering

The decision to hold a European Social Forum (ESF) was made at the second World Social Forum, which met in Porto Alegre in Brazil, earlier this year.

The ESF will run from 7-10 November in Florence and is supported by a wide range of trade unions, the Social Forums, and various parties and far left organisations.

At the first Brussels organising meeting it was agreed that: "The ESF, which is part of the World Social Forum process, has to be a common public space of dialogue, discussion and contamination (sic)" and most definitely, "not a conference, not a movement or congress."

The organisers, particularly *Le Monde Diplomatique* and Attac, opposed the participation of parties as such, seeking to restrict the status of "official delegates" to NGOs and trade unions, for the reason that these are "social organisations", part of "civil society" and that members of parties should be there as individuals.

This is a reactionary viewpoint, confirming Attac's role as the right-wing of the anti-capitalist movement. Parties and organisations of the left are - as they have long been - legitimate components of the workers' and progressive movements. They have as much right to participate in such events as the self-selected leaders of movements such as Attac.

The ESF's political "point of reference" is the "Call of the Social Movements" issued by Porto Alegre. Something of the pressure of the more radical socialists and populists among the 60,000 participants made its way into this Call. Despite Attac's expressed dislike for linking the resistance to corporate globalisation to the movement

against Bush's "war against terrorism" the Declaration stated: "There is the beginning of a permanent global war to cement the domination of the US government and its allies. This war reveals another face of neo-liberalism, a face which is brutal and unacceptable. The opposition to the war is at the heart of our movement."

Attac's vice president Susan George argues that the war against terrorism is not the military expression of globalisation and that it would be fatal for the movement to join together with the anti-war movement. Attac's reticence on the war is clearly related to the low level of anti-war mobilisations in France, its original homeland.

The Porto Alegre Call also reflects the pressure of the large and strongly critical delegation which came from Argentina. It declares its solidarity with "the force of 'cacerolazos' and 'piquetes,' popular mobilisations [which] have demanded their basic rights of food, jobs and housing".

It is also imbued with the experience of the Italian movements, such as the Social Forums, radicalised by events in Genoa. It denounces the G8 and the Berlusconi government which, "responded with violence and repression, denouncing as criminals those who dared to protest".

It stigmatises US involvement in the military operations of Plan Colombia, the economic blockades against Cuba and Iraq, the growing repression against trade unions, social movements, and activists. It demands "unconditional cancellation of debt and the reparation of historical, social, and ecological debts". These latter demands go beyond the timid positions of most of the NGOs.

As can be seen from the fact that the

Green Party in Britain opposed making the Call the basis for the British ESF mobilising committee this declaration has to be defended from attacks by the right. Some of its statements and most of its calls are defensible as gains by the more militant fighting organisations within the anti-capitalism movement (ACM).

What is wrong with the Call is what it does not contain.

It does not identify capitalism and imperialism as the enemy - merely neo-liberalism. It does not draw any lessons for mass action from the mass demonstrations like Prague, Genoa and Seattle. It does not say how all the demands it raises can be won. Can they be imposed on the existing institutions, the IMF the World Bank - subject to some reforms, as Attac thinks?

Or do they require a complete dismantling and a return to the self-sufficient national strategies of the 1960s as figures like Walden Bello call for? Is a return to small-scale local communities and the abandonment of most international exchange necessary, as the radical populists of the Americas, and the anarchists suggest? Or is the overthrow of global and local capitalism by mass action led by the working class, by international revolution, the only way to "another world"?

The Call of the Social Movements says nothing on all of this. It does not dare to mention anything like the class struggle and "workers" are included only in a list of "social subjects" or "actors" in the post-modernist/post-Marxist jargon so popular amongst intellectuals in France and Italy. In short this is a reformist document. It is one we are obliged to accept as a starting point for the discussions at the ESF but not as

limitation on them.

We need to be clear that the spirit of the anti-capitalist movement - as reflected in the militant struggle on the streets of Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg, Melbourne and Genoa - will not permit NGO officials, reformist politicians, or trade union bureaucrats to narrow the agenda down to what they regard as "possible".

Some positive developments have already taken place. The ESF will discuss the question of war as well as neo-liberalism. Also, it has been decided that the rigid distinction between "official delegates" and the "fringe" which existed in Porto Alegre will not be followed in Florence.

The "Italian" proposal presented to the organising meetings held in Brussels and Vienna suggests a triple theme: neo-liberalism and globalisation; war and disarmament; democracy and citizenship.

Each day will be structured around large general conferences (2,000-3,000 people) held in the morning. These will be followed in the afternoon by a large number of seminars, campaigns and self-organised workshops. Specific debates will take place in the late afternoon and then cultural events in the evenings.

The more radical forces (Ya Basta, IST) will advance more radical proposals. The SWP in Britain has already proposed discussion of the Argentine assemblies populares, the Italian social forums, the participatory budgets of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT). Indeed Brazil may be a major issue of debate between reformists and revolutionaries if Lula, the candidate of the PT, is elected president in October.

Also Italy itself provides a rich agenda for debate. The struggles of workers like

the young FIOM strikers, the anti-war and anti-racist mass mobilisations against Berlusconi, the experience of the social centres and Ya Basta! will all provide an impetus to radicalism.

However, despite their support for a more radical agenda, the SWP have shown no appetite for open or sharp criticism of the reformists and the NGOs. They are strongly opposed to any polarisation of the movement - fearing it will lead to a "premature" split.

This is a wrong approach, since the question will not be a "split" in any immediate organisational sense. And besides, polarisation already exists - and is manifest on every international demo that takes place when the reformists queue up to denounce the "violence" of the revolutionaries, the anarchists and the militants who are prepared to take on the riot cops rather than just lobby the big-wigs.

Florence will be a battle - a political battle - to win support from the militant workers and youth. They will be presented with all shades of reformism at the ESF. If revolutionaries do not openly and boldly present an alternative then reformism will gain ground.

The mobilisation for the ESF is an enormous opportunity to raise questions rarely discussed in the bureaucratised national labour movements, to meet and confront reformist ideas.

In addition it is an opportunity to make sure that the radicalised young people, who formed the overwhelming majority of the mobilisations from Seattle to Seville, do not get sidelined by the academics and the MPs. We urge all our readers to make plans to go.

■ To join the revolutionary anticapitalist delegation email: esf@workerspower.com

Discussions and collaboration are under way between the LRCI and PTS. An LRCI comrade has been in Argentina for more than month and we have elaborated a common declaration on the strategy and tactics of Marxists in the current worldwide class struggles. We have agreed to a reciprocal publication of articles in the papers of the PTS and Workers Power. Here is the first contribution from the PTS

Bringing the working class into struggle

According to the *Financial Times* the executive director of HSBC, Keith Whitson, said the bank has no plans to cease operations in Argentina. One of the ambitions of neo-liberalism during the time of the Menem government was to make us believe that handing over banks to foreign hands would make those banks "more secure", since they would be backed by the big home concerns.

This was part of the basis of the class alliance between big imperialist capital and sections of the petit-bourgeoisie, which underpinned the bourgeois democratic regime through more than a decade of anti-popular offensives. Yet these days, small savers attack the banks, setting fire to their doors, fighting the police and opposing the plan to devalue their savings.

This complete turnabout among sectors of the petit-bourgeoisie has led one investment banker from the USA to say: "The term 'capitalism' has become a bad word, as has 'profits'."

The right-winger López Murphy has put himself forward as one of the presidential candidates, representing sectors of finance capital. Recently a businessman asked him: "How can we brainwash those people who think that the IMF or the privatised enterprises are to blame for the crisis?" To which he replied: "I have been asked this question many times. Our ideas have been knocked down." The party of finance is in a very bad state in Argentina.

For their part Duhalde and the Peronist party (PJ) promised a "new model" where, they say, finance capital, will not be allowed to prevail. This dream collapsed very quickly when the government went on bended knee to the IMF and the banks. Worse, the "production alliance" that emerged from the big industrial enterprises has virtually fallen apart.

It had been supposed that the devaluation, which favours exports, would produce bigger revenues for the state. But the Economics Minister Lavagna, the second in four months, calculates that exporters did not turn more than \$4bn of profits in the period January-April this year into pesos, thus helping to further appreciate the dollar which remains worth more than 3.50 pesos today.

These sectors have already benefited from the "peso-fication" of their exorbitant debts in dollars by the state, which amounted to a great national robbery at the expense of the small savers and waged workers. But they demand more and have formed a new group (AEA-Association of Argentine Businessmen) in order to press for an "exchange insurance" that would allow them to get dollars at half their present value so they can cancel their foreign debts. They ask that this demand be included within the "overall agreement" with the IMF and the international banks.

Duhalde depends upon a parliamentary coalition with the rotting body



CTA contingent on 29 May general strike (left) and the Zanon factory, Neuquen, where workers have taken over the factory and produce for the local community (right)



of the UCR, deprived of power in December and, fundamentally, on the support of the PJ governors who despite the fact they keep him in power, treat him like a "squeezed lemon". They try to "take the juice" while leaving him the task of applying the demands of the IMF and, after an agreement with the IMF, and calling new elections some months before those scheduled for September 2003. But all of this "plan for an orderly transition" could find itself in tatters because the political and economic crisis is getting deeper due to new struggles of the exploited.

The PTS has insisted since the revolutionary days [of December], and as against those on the Argentine left such as the IU and PO, that we cannot rest content with that part of the struggle made up of the social bloc between the unemployed and the middle class, an alliance summed up in the phrase "pickets and pot-bangers".

The first plank of our policy is to fight to bring in the millions of waged workers, prevented from intervening into the struggle up until now because they are trapped between the fear of unemployment and the control of the main trade union federations.

This lack of a mass working class explosion, which would dislodge the hated political regime and start to pitch the Peronist party into crisis, is not without consequences. The survival of the old regime allows for all types of political manoeuvres to take place that politically expropriate the demands of last December.

The demand for "bread and work" by the poor masses and the unemployed which they emblazoned over the supermarkets and the blockaded roads, the government tries to meet with a "social plan" which involves handing out 150 pesos to each family, and by which means the PJ tries to recreate a social base for itself.

They are launching Consultative Councils in order to distribute this aid, organs of class collaboration in

which the reformist leaders of the bureaucracy of the CTA and the CCC together with government functionaries all participate. The most combative pickets' movements tend to reject this policy, but they are marking time.

For its part new divisions and realignments have opened up within the main trade union federations. The CGT led by Daer has all but entered the cabinet. The dissident CGT led by Moyano, has moved into opposition but has been weakened and only brought out 7,000 people onto the Plaza de Mayo on 22 May. The CTA-CCC held a national strike on 29 May which was only heeded by the organisations of the teachers and public sector workers, although it showed much more vitality than the CGT which brought together tens of thousands in different protests and road blockades around the country.

But the trade union bureaucracy as a whole is consciously preventing the entry of the workers' movement into the struggle and blocking united action. They have passed from a truce, or direct support for the government, to protest actions on the streets, but they are very far from measuring up to the full-scale of the catastrophe that is increasing unemployment, attacking the gains of the provincial states and lowering the wages of the masses.

Our demand on the trade unions and their federations to break off their collaboration with the government and call a united active strike, is accompanied with a call on the pickets' movement, popular and workers' assemblies which are in struggle to form a co-ordination or popular and workers' assembly to unify the vanguard and through this lead the millions, who march on intransigently rather than just accept the meagre subsidy, but who still attach themselves to the leaders of the trade unions or the unemployed.

This is the road we must take if we are to get an active general strike which

can win. The PTS is putting this policy into practice in Neuquen, where a Coordinadora del Alto Valle has been set up between the Ceramic workers' trade union and the MTD (unemployed movement) and various trade union sections and groups in opposition to the trade union bureaucracy.

They demand that the regional trade union federation – together with the coordinadora – set up a regional assembly of workers, made up of rank and file mandated delegates. Thus we combine the united front demand on the main trade union federations, especially the CTA-CCC bloc, with the main task of this stage of the struggle that opened in December: the building of organisations of workers' power. But this has not yet been achieved.

The old regime also pursues an electoral strategy that involves surveying how people "intend to vote" in the probable early elections. The MP Carrió of the ARI and Luis Zamora, the ex-MP of the MAS in the 1990s, find themselves heading the list contesting the top place with PJ candidates such as Reutemma.

They promote themselves as "honest politicians", against the hated caste of MPs, senators and functionaries of the old parties, popularly and generally felt to be corrupt and responsible for their sufferings.

The sympathy felt towards Zamora and his group, Self-determination and Freedom, is especially widespread among those who are part of the cacero-lazos and the local assemblies in Capital Federal. This appears as a political turn to the left by the middle class sectors. But the popularity of Carrió and Zamora goes up in the opinion polls to the degree that they appear in the street assemblies. While they present themselves as legitimate children of the "get rid of them all" movement, it is with the intention of turning the direct action of December to the passivity of the ballot box.

The delay in the appearance of the working class as an independent factor

gives life to the left-wing of the bourgeoisie such as Carrió and the petit-bourgeoisie such as Zamora. As a result of not having brought down the old regime (this was a limitation of the December days and points to a difference we have with the Morenoite organisation in Argentina – the MST – which dubs these days "a Russian February") we cannot exclude the possibility that the broad masses must pass through the experience of a "more popular", "more participatory" democracy, to overcome illusions in a petit bourgeois democracy.

This amounts to seeking a self-reform of the regime through the likes of Zamora and Carrió, who are respectively, the left and centre-left wings of this regime.

The revolutionary Marxists of the PTS know that there is no intermediate regime between decaying semi-colonial bourgeois democracy, put under threat in December, and a workers' republic, for which we fight, based on co-ordinations, popular and workers' assemblies – or whatever name Argentine soviets will come to be called.

But in order to open the road to them, which are the only means for installing a genuine democracy for the millions of exploited, we think it crucial to help accelerate the experience with the left-wing of the democratic bourgeoisie. For this reason, given the present rhythms of the revolutionary process in Argentina we think that the tactic of a revolutionary constituent assembly is very important.

That is to say, an assembly achieved by means of an active general strike, imposed on the ruins of the Pactos de Olivos regime and their repressive forces, and convened by a provisional popular and workers' government based on the organs of struggle and direct democracy of the masses, which has gained authority in the struggle to sweep away the dregs of the hated political caste and the machinery of the capitalist regime.

France: vote left and organise to fight the new government

Christina Duval says the left's electoral success should be used to build a movement against Chirac

French voters will be taking to the polls again on 9 June in the first round of the legislative elections, which will determine who will govern France for the next five years.

On 5 May, outgoing President, Jacques Chirac, won the second round of the presidential elections with 82 per cent of the vote thanks to a "Republican Front". This saw the left rallying around the corrupt leader of the right in order to keep out the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The first round of the presidential elections created a shock throughout France when Lionel Jospin, the socialist candidate and French Prime Minister, failed to get through to the second round. He came third behind Chirac, who won a mere 20 per cent of the vote, and Front National (FN) leader, Le Pen, who gained nearly 17 per cent.

The historically low scores for the reformist left – the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCF) – reflected the extent to which French workers are disillusioned with the politics of the government of the "Gauche Plurielle". It was a government more concerned with managing capitalism and balancing the books than representing the interests of the workers who put them into power.

This, combined with the corruption rife in the parties of the right, and the lack, as yet, of a mass alternative, rooted in working class communities, meant that Le Pen's score (not much higher than in 1995) took on a new significance.

Chirac's victory has allowed him to put together a government and a programme designed to win votes from potential FN voters and, more importantly, to put an end to the incoherence of a disparate set of feuding right-wing parties that have lacked unity and purpose since the mid-1990s. By forcing all Gaullist parties to line up behind him he gained the necessary mandate to reorganise the right and lay the basis for a future single right-wing political party.

The extent of the crisis brought about by the first round of the presidential elections has limited the weight of dissenting voices within the camp of the right – the vast majority of the right has rallied around the Union pour une Majorité Présidentielle (UMP), Chirac's new party.

The government appointed by Chirac is threatening war on the working class, immigrants and youth. The nomination of a stalwart of industry and member of the bosses' union (MEDEF) as Minister of the Economy is an indication of things to come. The MEDEF had been busy drawing up its own plans for restructuring France in favour of capital and now it appears to have a political formation determined enough to put this programme into action.

The plans to reduce taxes by 5 per cent immediately, at a cost of 2.7 billion euros, is a gift to the capitalist class – the richest 1 per cent will sweep up 30 per cent of this in tax cuts, while vicious cuts in public services will make up the shortfall. A right-wing majority in June will also mean increased repression against youth in the working-class suburbs.

The UMP's programme against crime is a repressive attempt to kill two birds with one stone – win votes from the FN by repeating their simplistic arguments about "insécurité" while increas-



Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin (left) with candidates of Chirac's Union pour une Majorité Présidentielle. Chirac was able to use his presidential victory and the movement against Le Pen to unite the French right around his policies



ing the powers of the state to harass working class communities and, ultimately, the labour movement. One of the first acts of the new Minister of the Interior was to tour a Parisian suburb and pledge to rid it of the mainly immigrant prostitutes who work there.

The PS is incapable of reversing the progress of the far right in France. Its proposals to raise the minimum wage and to increase low salaries means little when they refuse to talk hard figures. It also adds the all important caveat that the rate of economic growth will be a determining factor for any such measures. The PS claims to be opposed to the "total" privatisation of public services. Yet the PS government carried out a wave of privatisations under Jospin.

The PCF is hardly any better. The PCF's main battle cry centres on it being a "left" force with a future coalition capable of giving workers a voice by putting pressure on the PS majority. Yet in the last government it refused to break with the government and gave its policies a left gloss – one that many clearly saw through.

Even Jospin's most famous reform – the 35 hour week – had very little impact on unemployment (official unemployment stands at 2.4 million). Many workers now have the same workload to do in 35 hours instead of 39. Those jobs that have been created were for the most

took on a variety of forms, depending on the level of class consciousness of different sectors of the working class.

Some workers abstained, demonstrating their disillusionment with their traditional parties. Others voted for newcomers – another way of expressing the same sentiment. The most isolated and marginalised sectors of the class voted Le Pen, illustrating the danger of the spread of racist and reactionary ideas in the absence of a mass working class political alternative.

However, just under 3 million voted for a working class alternative. The big votes for Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) reflected a positive political movement away from the PS and PCF, one that reveals the existence of an opposition to capitalism and one that can form the basis of a working class political alternative to right-wing reformism. The tragedy is that the potential to turn this heightened class consciousness into a coherent and organised political force has up to now been hampered by the politics of LO and the LCR.

The big votes for Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) reflected a positive political movement

part low paid, temporary jobs.

Given that after five years of a left government, 4.5 million people still live under the poverty threshold (1,184 euros per month for a couple with two children), it is hardly surprising that workers rejected the reformist left in the presidential elections. This rejection

Back PS and PCF in the second round

If there is a real danger of the left not getting into the second round the local labour movement should campaign vigorously for a united workers' candidate around a programme decided by workers and youth in their constituencies. If the reformists refuse to take part in this workers' united front then they will be exposed as splitters before the working class and will pay the price in electoral terms.

It is highly unlikely that LO or the LCR will get through to the second round since only those candidates with at least 12.5 per cent qualify. Therefore workers and youth should vote for the PS or PCF against the right's openly reactionary programme in this round. Despite the obvious disillusionment of workers with these parties, they still remain workers' parties, open to the influence of the working class. Class conscious workers,

including those who vote LO or LCR in the first round, will vote PS or PCF in the second round in order to stop the right having full control of the reigns of power.

It would be an error to turn our back on those workers who understand that a government full of Chirac's henchmen will make Jospin's government look like a picnic. This is why revolutionaries have to argue in working-class communities that the stakes in this election are high, and to abstain or to spoil the ballots papers, as LO is arguing, is to give the MEDEF a free hand to attack the working class even more viciously.

But this call for a vote for the PS or PCF has to go hand in hand with mobilising workers in the unions and in their communities to hold their elected representatives to account and to put pressure on them to defend workers' interests. The PS and

PCF candidates have to understand that workers' votes do not represent a blank cheque to continue their attacks against the working class.

Workers should also call on the PS and PCF to break their alliance with bourgeois parties like the Greens. In some constituencies, the "Gauche Unie" (the rebranded name of the Gauche Plurielle – PS, PCF, Greens and the liberal PRG) has selected a single candidate in order to maximise their chance of getting through to the second round. In the second round, where the Gauche Unie's candidate is not a member of a bourgeois workers' party (such as a Green or PRG candidate), PO is calling for a spoilt ballot. Similarly, where the choice in the second round is between the FN and UMP, we say that workers should express no preference at the ballot box.

LO and the LCR are standing against each other in most of the constituencies. There has been no real attempt to have a joint campaign. The LCR merely suggested carving up the country, with an LO candidate in half the constituencies, the LCR candidate in the other half. A joint platform was not even considered, let alone any attempt to involve the millions of people who voted for their organisations in April in the election campaign – either in drawing up the platform or in choosing the candidates. LO turned down the LCR's offer in its renowned sectarian fashion, using the LCR's call for a vote for Chirac on 5 May as a pretext to cut off all discussions.

The programmes put forward by LO and the LCR, are not revolutionary programmes, they are left reformist programmes designed to tail the reformist consciousness of advanced workers. They address many of the burning issues that concern workers, such as unemployment, low salaries, lack of adequate housing, cuts in health and education and racist harassment from police brigades. But neither organisation attempts to use these issues to illustrate the need for workers to fight for their own solutions by imposing workers' control at different levels of society. They do not fight for a workers' government, based on the workers' own democratic organisations, to expropriate the bourgeoisie, smash its institutions of political rule and reorganise society in the interest of the majority. And of course the key question of the repressive and class nature of the state hardly gets a mention.

Nevertheless their programmes are clearly for the defence of the working class against the bosses' offensive and it is this that makes them attractive to workers disillusioned with the Gauche Plurielle. The experience of the Jospin government has created the conditions in which a significant and growing minority of workers are open to revolutionary politics – both LO and the LCR state clearly that they are revolutionary organisations.

This is a positive development that revolutionaries have to relate to. Which is why, Pouvoir Ouvrier (PO), the French section of the LRCI, is calling for a vote to LO or the LCR in the first round of the elections on 9 June.

At the same time we call for community meetings organised by the labour movement to discuss and democratically decide the kind of programme workers need to defend their interests and to choose a single far left candidate.

To those who are concerned about the dispersion of left votes (given the outcome of the presidential elections), we say that it is the Gauche Plurielle that created this situation and the best way to fight the right (both "moderate" and "far right") is to encourage the development of a left political alternative. In this context that means voting for LO or the LCR.

If current opinion polls are to be believed, the right looks set to win the election. Chirac has used his interim government to reorganise his troops and make the right appear as a credible alternative – just one example of why we were correct to go against the stream in May and call for a spoilt ballot paper. But whatever the outcome of the elections, one thing is sure: workers need to mobilise now against the future gov-

The general secretary elect of the civil service union, the PCS, has been prevented from taking up his position by the right wing bureaucracy. We say:

Defend Mark Serwotka

Stop the coup in the PCS

"This is the most outrageous affront to democracy in our union. It's an attempted coup by a tiny bunch who have no support in the union." This was Mark Serwotka's response to the palace coup launched by the right wing inside the PCS, the civil service union, in late May.

Mark was due to become general secretary on 1 June. He was elected by 41,000 members in a democratic ballot, beating his nearest rival by 7,000 votes, in November 2000.

The sitting general secretary, Barry Reamsbottom, tried to scupper that election through court action. He failed. He considered standing against Mark, but realised he couldn't get enough branch nominations. Inside the PCS he was an appointed general secretary and has never been subject to any election.

At the recent PCS conference delegates had voted overwhelmingly to confirm Mark as general secretary, as the union's representative on the TUC's general council and to oblige Reamsbottom to honour the legal agreement he made with the union to resign on 31 May 2002. The right tried – and failed – to stop



Mark from taking office.

Undaunted, the right, the so-called Moderate Faction, who have a slim majority on the national executive, convened an unconstitutional meeting on 23 May and voted to overturn the election result and the conference decision, and to sack both Mark Serwotka and left-

wing president Janice Godrich.

Democracy? Playing by the rule book? Respecting the wishes of the members? The right-wing clique couldn't care less. They just want to smash the left even if it means smashing the union to do it. After all, Reamsbottom and his friends have long been involved

with the CIA-backed Committee for Transatlantic Understanding. They know all about coups against democratically elected regimes!

A campaign against the coup – with Mark able to control part of the head office thanks to sympathetic staff – has been launched by Left Unity, the largest left grouping inside the PCS. Resolutions of support have flooded in. Workplace meetings have been called, leaflets and petitions circulated, and lobbies and rallies planned.

It is vital that every militant – inside and outside the PCS – supports this campaign. Not only is elementary trade union democracy at stake – so too is what Mark stands for: trade unionism that fights back against privatisation and low pay, trade unionism that stands for the workers against the bosses.

At the moment, a court has ruled in favour of the pre-executive meeting status quo, namely that Mark is the general secretary elect and has the right to perform his duties of office. A date for a full trial has been set for 15 July. The left are confident they can win in court.

But stranger things have happened. There is a real chance that unelected,

pro-capitalist judges will show the same contempt for democracy as Reamsbottom and find some obscure rule that debars Mark from office. It is therefore vital that we do not rely on the courts but continue the campaign amongst the membership.

We need to isolate completely the Reamsbottom gang so that whatever the court rules, we have enough people ready to march in and take over the union's head office and every regional office, and turf the right out altogether – sack every Reamsbottom appointee and hold new elections for every Reamsbottom supporter who was voted into office.

The opposition to the right-wing clique goes well beyond the traditional left. Thousands of new members recruited as a result of the strikes led by Mark over the last year oppose Reamsbottom. Many Labour Party supporters are outraged at his action. Each and every one of these members can be mobilised to support a campaign to ensure that democracy triumphs against cold-war style skulduggery. Building that campaign is the urgent task for every PCS militant and amongst militants in other unions.

BUILD THE OPPOSITION TO THIS ATTACK ON TRADE UNION DEMOCRACY

The TUC has said nothing about Reamsbottom's coup. While John Monks was quick to give his best wishes to the slippery Stephen Byers, he has stayed remarkably silent about Mark Serwotka. Tony Blair, on the other hand, was reported to be delighted by this news, according to the Sun.

A half-decent trade union federation would have immediately intervened on the side of a democratically elected general secretary. But the TUC is lacking in elementary decency. After all, one of its officials, Mike Power, is on record as trying to undermine the election campaign of the left-winger Bob Crow in the rail union, the RMT. This could only have happened with the blessing of the TUC's top leaders.

The leading players in the trade union bureaucracy have a game plan, based on the idea of "partnership". They want to operate the unions as

(junior) partners of the bosses. To do this they have to rein in action by the members. At the same time they are in cahoots with Blair – who also espouses "partnership" – in order to ensure that any union revolt against New Labour's privatising, pro-big business agenda is derailed.

These top guns have been deeply alarmed by the elections of left-wingers like Serwotka, Crow and Billy Hayes in the postal union. They have been shaken by the growing hostility expressed in various unions towards using union political funds to bankroll the Labour government's attacks on the working class.

Above all their anxiety is growing as more and more workers – college lecturers, local government workers, journalists, teachers, firefighters, railworkers – decide that strikes are a quicker and more effective way of winning pay increases and

combating privatisation than any amount of "partnership" twaddle.

This explains why the New Labour bureaucrats are silent about the coup in the PCS. They will be glad to be rid of Mark Serwotka. It explains why they are organising a counter-offensive, aimed particularly at the Socialist Alliance, to prevent unions deciding to democratise their political funds. It explains why they are working overtime to draw lefts who they think can be brought "on message" – like Mick Rix of Aslef, Andy Gilchrist of the FBU and Billy Hayes – into the charmless bureaucratic circle, though Rix and Hayes are at least on record as opposing Reamsbottom's coup.

In defending Mark Serwotka we need to organise rank and file workers against this right wing offensive. We need to forge unity between militants across the unions in favour of democratic

unions, controlled by the rank and file and committed to class struggle against each and every aspect of the bosses offensive. In short, we need to build a militant rank and file movement that can take on and defeat the bureaucrats, the better to take on and defeat the bosses.

● The Socialist Alliance is calling an urgent trade union activists' conference to discuss the right-wing offensive and how to fight it. We urge all our readers to attend:

Saturday 29 June, 11.00am, South Camden Community school.

Contact the Socialist Alliance for credentials and further details:

Wickham House, 10 Cleveland Way, London E1 4TR, Tel: 020 7791 3138, e mail office@socialistalliance.net

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