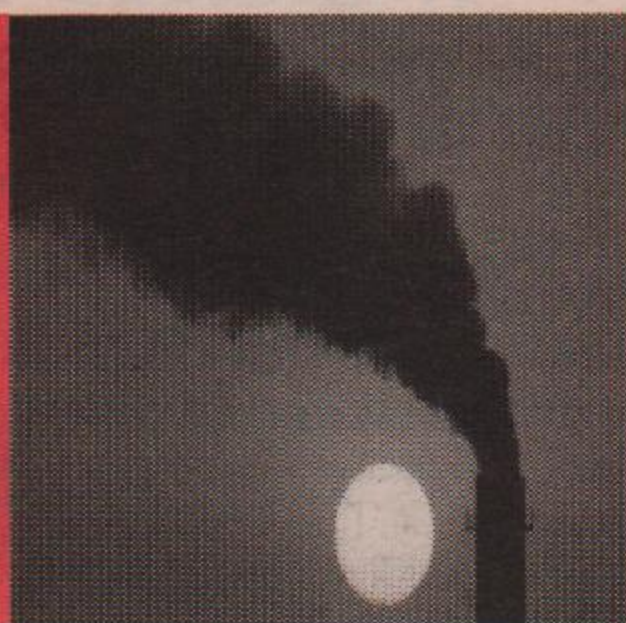
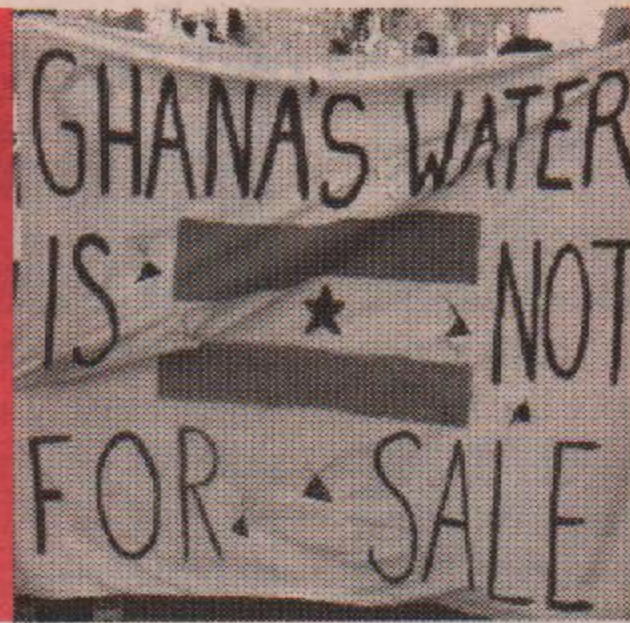


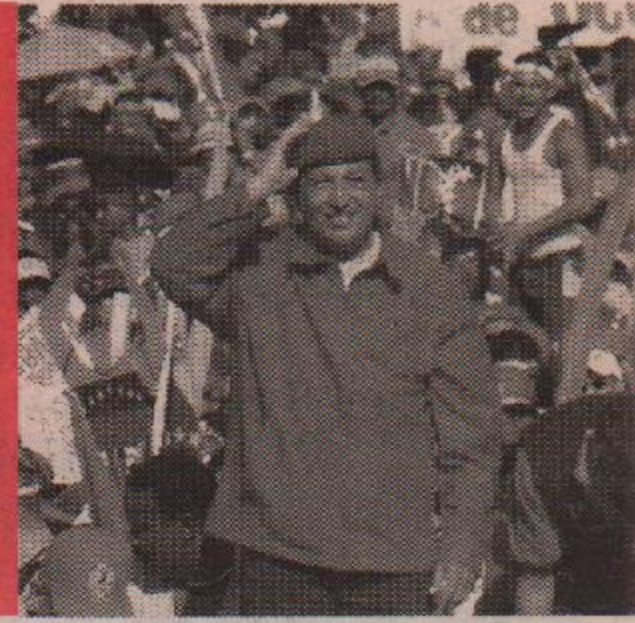
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Real education for all - not training clubs for the bosses!



Labour's plans for education would see a return to the days of selection and privilege

“Where local employers feel local schools aren't meeting local skills needs, they can get involved.”

This was Tony Blair's offer to Britain's bosses. He wants them to take charge of state schools.

Instead of schools having a curriculum to meet children's educational needs, they would service the needs of the local factories and businesses. Teachers would be recruited and trained according to commercial requirements,

and the bosses would draw up their own admissions policies.

Labour's new education White Paper - their 11th major schools initiative in eight years - could, the prime minister boasted, put countless schools out of local authority control in the next two years. The architects of this new policy, the education minister Ruth Kelly and the unelected Lord Adonis, aim to abolish the last traces of democratic accountability.

Every one of New Labour's previous initiatives have undermined the principle of comprehensive education for all.

City academies and specialist schools were the most brazen steps in this direction. Millions of parents, teachers and pupils know the result: a majority of nearly two-to-one in a recent opinion poll agreed that middle class parents get their children into better state schools.

Now Blair promises to take his reforms “further, faster”. Every school will be urged to form trusts with private sponsors from wealthy individuals, businesses, charities and faith groups. The full-blown private ownership of schools and control of what is taught there is set to be the norm, not the exception of

17 academies. This will mean class privilege rules in state education.

The only difference between trust schools and privatisation as we know it is that working class taxes will continue to subsidise the capitalist owners.

Choice for whom?

The government is selling trust schools as an expansion of choice, previously the preserve of the rich but now to be available to all. There will be parents' councils to “influence” decisions over school meals and uniforms. There will be an admissions code of practice that schools have to “take note of” and subsidised buses so that a few poor kids can sample schools on the other side of the tracks.

As *The Economist* noted wryly, these measures are only to cover that “something is being done to stop popular schools being colonised by the middle classes. But they will be unlikely to make much difference.”

The real choices are all on the side of the capitalists.

The new school owners are encouraged to take over all the schools in a locality. Each school will have its own speciality - or ethos - depending on the needs of local businesses. Each will have its own admissions policy too. To help parents decide which is most suitable for their child, there will be written tests to divide the year's intake into nine ability bands, with “choice advisers” on hand to point parents towards the right school.

This is a return to the method of the hated 11-plus exams that separated

grammar and secondary school pupils a quarter of a century ago. It threatens to groom children for their pre-ordained role in society - manual worker, office worker or university graduate - at an age when social background and standard of living will have had most impact on academic achievement.

The government knows that teachers will rebel against this attempt to turn them from educators into trainers. So private sponsors will be allowed to determine pay and conditions - breaking the strength of national unions and dividing teachers. They will be allowed to train up their new teachers and retrain inherited staff to wean them off such outdated notions as actually caring about the education of the children under their charge.

Steve Sinnott, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, hit the nail on the head when he said setting up schools to solve skills shortages “contradicts the purpose of education and creates a service which is about fitting each child to meet the needs of that employer”.

For socialists, the purpose of education is to properly explain to children and young adults the whole of society, and give them the tools to understand how each part relates to others and to the whole. It is about developing an understanding of the world of work, but not by limiting them to being trained as an isolated cog in the machine.

Only such a comprehensive education can lead to real choices and the attainment of full potential for all.

Stop the White Paper

Steve Sinnott is wrong when he says, “Parents do not want to control schools. They want to know that their child is happy, safe and learning.” Maybe some parents (and teachers) are content with that, but many others, including many working class parents, do want to play a role in shaping their children's education and future.

That is one reason why a successful fight against this capitalist takeover of state education has to involve an alliance of staff, especially the unions, parents, school students, and the local organised working class. These are precisely the people who should be running state schools. And their united action can stop the White Paper and the academies.

We should set up action committees based on these forces to explain what's really behind Labour's proposals, to organise leafleting, demonstrations and lobbying MPs. We should follow the recent examples set by Italian and Austrian school students and teachers in the face of similar attacks: strikes, walkouts and occupations.

Of course, we are not against input from the capitalists. The millionaires and their corporations can play a very useful role in education. They can give us their money, in wealth taxes, to pay for refurbished schools, decent wages, modern equipment and a fully comprehensive state education system, worthy of the name, for every child!

DEFEND OUR SCHOOLS!

Big step forward for new workers party campaign

The Rail Maritime and Transport union has called a conference on the crisis of working class representation. It will take place on Saturday 21 January 2006 at Friends House, Euston Road, London. *Jeremy Dewar reports*

This is a great step forward - indeed, historic, in terms of a British trade union starting a public debate on the need for working class politics. Workers Power urges all our readers to pass the motion opposite in their unions, their rank and file caucuses, their antiwar, antiracist and social campaign groups.

All those who have fought against Labour over the past eight years - and that is thousands, indeed millions - should be represented. The youth, in particular, who have been in the fore of many of these struggles and among the most internationalist in their outlook, should demand their rightful place in the debate over the future of working class politics. No new party can grow without the youth.

Workers Power supporters have played a prominent role getting this initiative off the ground. One of our comrades first raised the need for such a conference, in the Bristol RMT branch last year. Despite the RMT AGM's approval, the national leadership sat on the resolution for a year. When the branch re-submitted it to this AGM, the whole debate centred on whether we needed for a new party to fight against Labour and for the political goal enshrined in the union's rule book: socialism.

Unfortunately, RMT general secretary Bob Crow does not agree with this. "I would emphasise that the conference will not be used to promote the establishment of a new political party," he wrote to union reps, adding, "I would also stress that this will be a non-resolution based conference."

How can Crow curtail, in advance, what people will say at the conference? Especially when he knows members of his own union will precisely want to promote the founding of such a party!

Similarly, what does "non-resolution based" mean, that motions will be ruled out of order? Surely the norm in the workers' movement is for conference to determine whether it wants to take decisions, and which ones. To say otherwise in advance condemns the whole exercise to a powerless talking shop. And after eight years of New Labour and a further four in the offing, that's the last thing we can afford.

WHAT POLITICS?

The truth is, Bob Crow is playing political hide and seek. On RMT platforms during the general election, and again in Socialist Worker over this year's TUC Congress, he said that Labour was irreformable and that the working class needed a new party. But he has just signed a joint statement with Labour, hoping that the RMT will

one day re-affiliate to the party. And he told the *Camden New Journal* that last June he voted Lib Dem because it most closely represented the union's policies - even though it is an out and out bosses' party that wants the right to ban strikes in public services!

We don't want to exclude any of these positions from the debate. They all have currency inside the movement. Members of Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party and others should also get involved. Indeed, we should invite their leaders to the conference.

But we will politically argue against what we believe are false solutions to the crisis of working class leadership. We have always held the opinion that the Labour Party cannot be turned into a real anticapitalist party. We have also criticised Respect and the SSP for watering down the socialist programme (in a populist and reformist manner respectively) in order to opportunistically gain votes.

Crow's position puts his particular union before the working class as a whole, with disastrous results. Political parties do not represent trade unions against individual employers, but classes in a society-wide struggle for power. If we simply ignore the historic needs of our class - socialism - in return for minimal concessions on the running of the railways, then we will return to the

days of workers supporting the bosses' parties and renouncing their own independence. This is where Crow's Stalinism and its strategic reliance of a popular front with "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie leads. It is a dead end.

Workers Power will not hide its politics. We will be fighting for the conference to adopt resolutions to set up a campaign for a new, mass working class party, based on the trade unions and social movements. We believe that it should be a revolutionary socialist party committed to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a new society based on the democratic rule of workers' councils.

But we will not walk out if the January conference does not agree to this all at once. What we will fight for is that the conference does take concrete steps in the direction of establishing an independent working class - i.e. socialist - party.

BUILDING THE CONFERENCE

The task over the next few months is to build the conference. Already two encouraging initiatives have emerged.

First, Bristol Rail RMT has called a South West regional conference to rally support for the campaign and begin the debate. This is an excellent idea, which should be imitated across the coun-

try. It is the best way to ensure that the RMT council of executives does not stifle the national conference, and that the campaign sinks roots in the wider working class.

Secondly, the Socialist Party has launched its own campaign for a new workers party. In the past we have criticised the SP for its purely propagandistic approach to fighting for this outcome, and we continue to disagree strongly with its conception that any new party has to be reformist until events themselves push it in a revolutionary direction. No. The whole history of the Labour and European social democratic parties shows that events will push such parties in a capitalist direction, unless revolutionaries fight openly for an alternative.

Nevertheless, we will propose joint work with the SP nationally and locally on this campaign, and have already set up a public meeting for December in Leicester.

Indeed, we urge all working class fighters to join the campaign, whether they be in Respect, the Labour left, or no party at all. Visit www.workerspower.com to download a model motion, or contact us to see what is happening in your area or union.

We've had enough of Labour's wars, privatisation and racism. Let's put them on the skids!

Pensions: bureaucrats let the government divide and rule

By GR McColl

A surprise announcement from the TUC press office on 18 October was the first indication of a deal on public sector pensions.

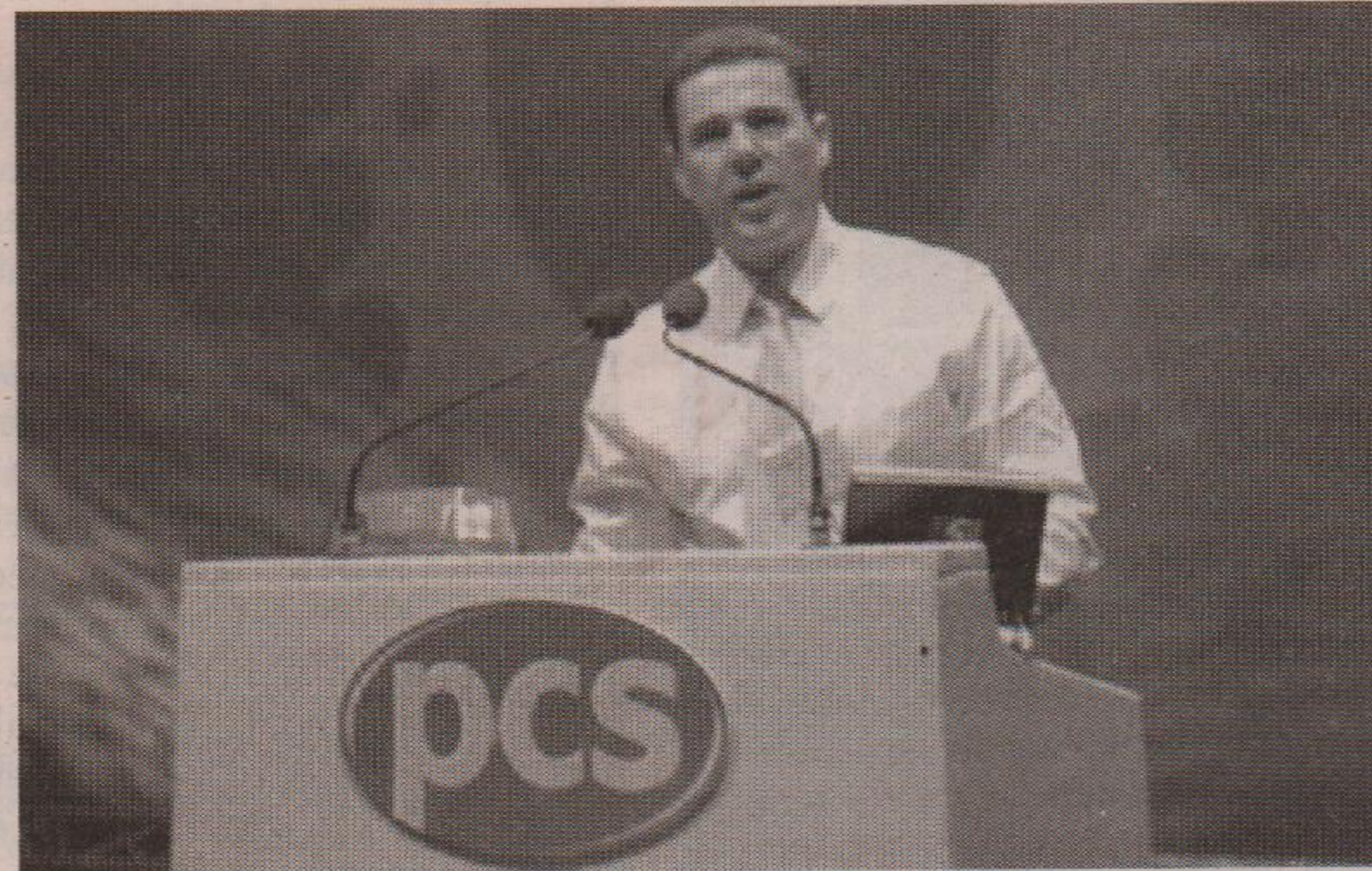
Alan Johnson, the former general secretary of the Communication Workers Union who is now atop the Department of Trade and Industry, must have called in some favours from his old bureaucratic buddies. A "framework agreement" emerged - apparently safeguarding the position of civil servants, healthworkers and teachers already in the schemes.

The following day most of the press lamented the government's failure to increase the basic retirement age to 65, while Digby Jones, head of the Confederation of British Industry, fumed about the Government's supposed "capitulation".

According to Jones, public sector workers enjoy indefensible privileges that make them the envy of private sector colleagues. Strangely, he doesn't think that workers might envy their bosses' pension schemes. The average executive in Britain's 100 biggest companies will retire on £167,000 a year. The average local government worker's pension is below £4,000. Do the maths!

Still, with the *Morning Star* describing the agreement as some sort of triumph and the "left" leader of the PCS, Mark Serwotka, declaring it a "significant achievement" many public sector workers were understandably convinced that their union leaders had won without a single day of strike action.

The *Economist* was closer to the mark. It noted that the union leaders have agreed to the Government's agenda for cutting pension costs by £13 bil-



Two-tier pension system a "significant achievement" according to Mark Serwotka

lion over the next 50 years. By conceding the principle of a two-tier pension scheme, with a much worse deal for new workers, the general secretaries signed away the pension rights of future generations. They did this without even consulting the existing union membership.

The union bureaucracy's approach is wrong, because it is not only unjust to younger workers, but also threatens the longer term future of the schemes. New recruits may object to the notion of "paying more for less" and choose to opt out altogether.

This not an acceptable compromise and there is an alternative. The threat of industrial action by the RMT in 2003 stopped Network Rail from closing its existing scheme to new members.

COUNCIL WORKERS LEFT OUT

Crucially the government has yet to offer the same framework agreement to those in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). And there is

no guarantee that the Local Government Association will do so.

Council workers and others covered by the LGPS face a sharper attack than the one the Government revoked in July in return for the suspension of strike action on 23 March. There is a risk that these workers will be isolated in resisting their bosses' demands for an immediate increase in the retirement age and higher employee contributions.

The United Left in Unison has pointed out that the Prentis "breached the spirit and, arguably, the letter of resolutions overwhelmingly adopted earlier this year" at the union's local government conference, which rejected "any suggestion of 'compromise agreements' on this matter" and agreed to oppose "increasing to 65 the age of entitlement to an unreduced pension". This position was "non-negotiable". There was no remit to bargain away the rights of future workers not yet in the scheme.

Unfortunately, the heat is off Prentis not least because the supposedly left-

wing national executive of the PCS voted on 21 October to rubber stamp the deal, with only one vote against (see box). The NUT national executive will discuss the deal in early November, with the Socialist Teachers Alliance e-list revealing divisions in the ranks of its executive members.

RANKS AND FILE

There are important lessons to be learned and issues to be debated over coming weeks, not least about the transparency of the negotiations, the exclusion of lay officers, never mind shop stewards, from the whole process, and effective control over our full-time officials.

Clearly the stand-alone strategy of electing left wing general secretaries and leaders has failed. We need for a rank and file movement within and between the unions, capable of transforming them from top to bottom. Such a movement will be crucial in developing the capacity to mount unofficial action in defiance of the anti-union laws and against the will of union leaders who consistently sell us short or sell us out.

Activists must launch a fight for:

- A campaign to inform members in all the unions of the dangers of a two-tier scheme.
- A ballot on the "framework agreement" with equal rights for members to put the case against.
- An immediate ballot for strike action, should the agreement be rejected.
- A clear call from Unison's Local Government Service Group Executive for an immediate ballot for strike action if the employers don't back down in early November.

The "framework agreement" threatens the unprecedented unity among

The SWP and the deal

Socialist Worker appeared after the announcement of the "framework agreement". An article by the paper's editor, Chris Bambery, was unambiguous, calling on public sector workers to "throw out this shabby pensions deal".

The SWP has a leading role in the United Left in Unison, where its comrades have taken a principled line in opposition to the deal and are pushing for strike action in local government if the employers do not back off.

This, however, is in stark contrast to the actions of two SWP members on the national executive of the PCS, Martin John and Sue Bond, who backed the deal last Friday. Other leading SWP trade unionists have branded their vote "wrong" but this begs two questions:

- What are they and their organisation intending to do in response?
- To what extent is the vote on the PCS executive the by-product of the party tailing the left of the union bureaucracy?

public sector unions that had brought the government to the negotiating table last spring. So it is all the more vital to maintain and build on the links established in some regions and cities between public sector trade unions - including the FBU, whose own scheme is also unprotected by the "framework agreement" - and pensioners' action groups in defence of decent pension at 60 for all.

workers power 5

Schools for socialism

Labour's education ideologues, Opus Dei adherent Ruth Kelly and Lord Adonis, have unveiled their programme for our schools. It aims to completely roll back the postwar gain of universal state run school education for all. It threatens to crush the idea that society - not churches, charities or millionaires - should educate the young. It wants to throw the burden of teaching the next generation how the world works away from the state and onto the family.

Any education system will reflect real social divisions. What Labour has proposed is a system that will serve the needs of capital through disciplining children and young adults, and making sure they know their future role and strive for nothing else. Of course churches and charities, not the bourgeoisie itself, will run these schools; but these have always been the bosses' tools for social grooming and control.

We need to turn the schools into a battleground, enlisting working class youth into the fight for their own interests. In the fight against segregation, dumbing down and social dumping, they will learn real politics and how class society works. This won't be a neutral campaign, nor will it unite all those who are against Labour's plans. But the school students and their working class allies need to direct their fire at the system that is dictating this policy: capitalism.

Sabre rattling in the Middle East

No sooner was the indelible ink dry on Iraqi fingers than Condoleezza Rice declared the referendum a victory for the constitution. The fact that Sunni Arabs had participated was reported as acceptance of the democratic process - despite the fact that they overwhelmingly rejected the deal. The spreading of the insurgency to the Shia south, and the poll showing two thirds of the population wanting US and British forces withdrawn also belied official optimism.

The imperialists are losing the war in Iraq - that is why the antiwar movement must take their threats to expand the war seriously. Rice and her underling Jack Straw wasted no time calling for UN sanctions against Syria, following the report into Rafiq Hariri's murder. Tony Blair pounced on Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's anti-Zionist outburst to denounce him as "a real threat to world security".

We do not need to prettify these two reactionary regimes to see through the fake repulsion of the US and Britain. Nor should we be complacent that, having got their fingers burnt in Iraq, Bush and Blair will not embark on another military adventure. Now that they have got involved in changing the balance of forces in the Middle East, the imperialists will inevitably be drawn into conflict with Iran, Syria and even Saudi Arabia. But we can stop them succeeding through mass demonstrations, walkouts and solidarity with the resistance.

Break the logjam, break with Labour

The Gate Gourmet sell out, the national failure to combat Agenda for Change in the NHS, and the retreat and disunity over pensions all have the same root: the union leaders are not controlled by the rank and file.

A YouGov poll for Unison showed 89 per cent against private companies running public services. Teachers and health workers have launched local campaigns against academies, foundation hospitals and the internal market. Youth flocked to Gleneagles to protest for trade justice. But unless we can break the logjam at the top, victory is not secured.

The problem is a political one. The union barons refuse to lead a fight that might damage Labour. Their whole strategy is to keep Labour in power and hope a left wing revival will one day grant their wishes. It won't happen. Under globalisation multinationals like British Petroleum and Deutsche Post have outgrown whole nation states, and they demand free trade. As ever, capital determines Labour policy, not labour.

To stop Labour in its third term tracks, we need to break the unions free from Labour and form a fighting working class party. Then we can have a real fight.

No borders? How would that work?

By Simon Hardy

Revolutionaries have argued historically for the free movement of workers and the abolition of all immigration controls. Many anti-racist campaigners would have supported this call, but in the face of rising hostility to refugees much of the far left has backed away from a demand now regarded as 'utopian' or 'too advanced' for potential working class voters. The Socialist Party, while in the Socialist Alliance, openly opposed including a call for scrapping all immigration controls and more recently the SWP has opposed proposals for Respect to adopt this position. So why are they wrong to concede ground on this crucial question?

First, some history: border controls are a relatively recent invention. The first long-term legal restriction on migration to the UK was the 1905 Aliens Act and was the by-product of agitation against Jews fleeing Tsarist Russia. The politicians who most energetically argued for immigration controls were also all members of far-right organisations. The first head of the UK immigration service was associated with the leadership of the anti-semitic and racist British Brothers' League.

In recent years a consensus has developed among the three main political parties around the ideas that "there are too many immigrants and the asylum system is out of control. Right-wing think-tanks like Migration Watch and some racist "whistle blowers" in the civil service have painted a picture keenly promoted by much of the media that we are being swamped by foreigners. The *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* would have us believe that millions of people are flooding here from abroad, taking our jobs, making Britain overcrowded and, worst of all, attacking "our way of life."

Outside this right-wing consensus that dominates New Labour and the Tories, some champions of neo-liberalism have argued for open borders - the free movement of all peoples and good across the world. From their point of view "little England" nationalism is actually a barrier to a more globalised economy and the flow of cheaper labour to the UK. Needless to say, few of those commentators would support citizenship rights for such workers, including access to welfare provision and the minimal protection afforded by British labour laws.

As socialists the starting point of our analysis must be that globalisation and imperialism causes population movements. Is it any wonder that the single largest group of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK today comes from Iraq? If the global bosses' international economic policies cause unemployment, misery, super-exploitation and war in large parts of the world then those workers have a fundamental right to leave where they are and seek safety elsewhere. Today, of course, British workers do not huddle in squalid refugee camps, fleeing famine and war, but for generations migration out of Britain has outstripped immigration as the nation exported its surplus labour around the globe to build an empire.

Bob Sutcliffe in *Index on Censorship* captures the hypocrisy of the west: "On your bike, as Margaret Thatcher's minister Norman Tebbit said, and you are a saint shining with neo-liberal virtues. On your ferry, and you are a demon against whom great European



Working conference against Section 9 and deportations

The Sukula family campaign has launched a call for a national conference for trade unionists, anti-deportation and anti-racist campaigners to kick-start a campaign against Section 9 of the 2004 Asylum and Immigration Act and against the mounting wave of deportations by the Home Office. It has already attracted the backing of organisations such as Liberty and the British Association of Social Workers, along with union branches in the North West and the region's Unison United Left.

Working conference against Section 9 and deportations: Methodist Central Hall, Manchester, Saturday 28 January 2006, 11.00 am - 5.00 pm. For further information please contact Jason Travis, Sukula Family Campaign, 0797 6476181, or George Binette, CDAS, 07905 826304.

democracies change their constitution in panic".

But even if you accept that it is a basic right to move freely around the world, then what about the practical realities? Would these have to include overcrowding of our cities and transport systems, rising homelessness and unemployment? There is certainly no proven link between rising immigration and unemployment. The depression of the 1930s saw mass unemployment across most of Europe and North America, but very little migration. In contrast, the post-war period of the late 1940s and early 1950s saw government ministers seeking to persuade workers from the Caribbean to come to Britain to fill the demand for labour in the NHS and public transport. More recently, we can dismiss the grossly exaggerated estimates for immigration in the event of open borders given the recent experience of the free movement of workers from the 10 European Union accession states such as Poland and Hungary. Instead of the millions forecast by the tabloids some 300,000 have arrived in Britain since May 2004. Few have claimed any benefits after their necessary period of residency, far more have faced terrible exploitation and life on the streets, but most have simply worked and paid taxes.

At the same time, however, socialists recognise that concerns about poor housing, stretched services and unemployment have a very real basis and that there is a competition for scarce resources, which makes racist and xenophobic arguments attractive.

In response, we fight for an integrated programme to tackle the social ills that inevitably arise from capitalism itself.

So in addition to opposing the continued sell-off of council housing we fight for massive investment without strings to restore existing stock and build new homes as part of an overall package of public works that would tackle inner city unemployment and

renew crumbling infrastructure. The remedy for overcrowded and inefficient public transport lies in renationalising the railways and bus services, placing them under workers' control without a penny in compensation to the privateers of Stagecoach, Virgin and the like.

To fund the programme would mean taxing the rich and big business, or seizing their and shareholdings' bank accounts if they should choose to become migrants themselves by fleeing the country. Such a socialist programme could begin the process of radically transforming our society. To pursue such a programme will mean a fight that would demand the overthrow the state itself, but migrant workers are our allies in that fight, not our enemy.

Immigrant workers have often been crucial to the development of labour and communist movements, ranging from trade unionism and anti-fascism in the East End of London through to the early days of the Communist Party in the United States and the recent "Justice for Janitors" campaigns by Latino workers in many US cities.

Workers Power rejects the left's retreat on the question of immigration controls. Our own sustained support for the Sukula family campaign in Greater Manchester and work for refugee rights in several communities have shown that an audience exists for a mass movement not just against this or that part of the Labour Government's legislation, but against the whole system of immigration controls. This demand will often not be immediately popular with white and, indeed, black working class communities in Britain, but it is an argument of fundamental importance if we are to move beyond isolated family campaigns and effectively counter the racist lies that act as a brake on united working class resistance and the struggle for a socialist future.

• For more information on this issue read Teresa Hayters' book, *Open Borders: the Case against Immigration Controls*.

Labour plays the ID card

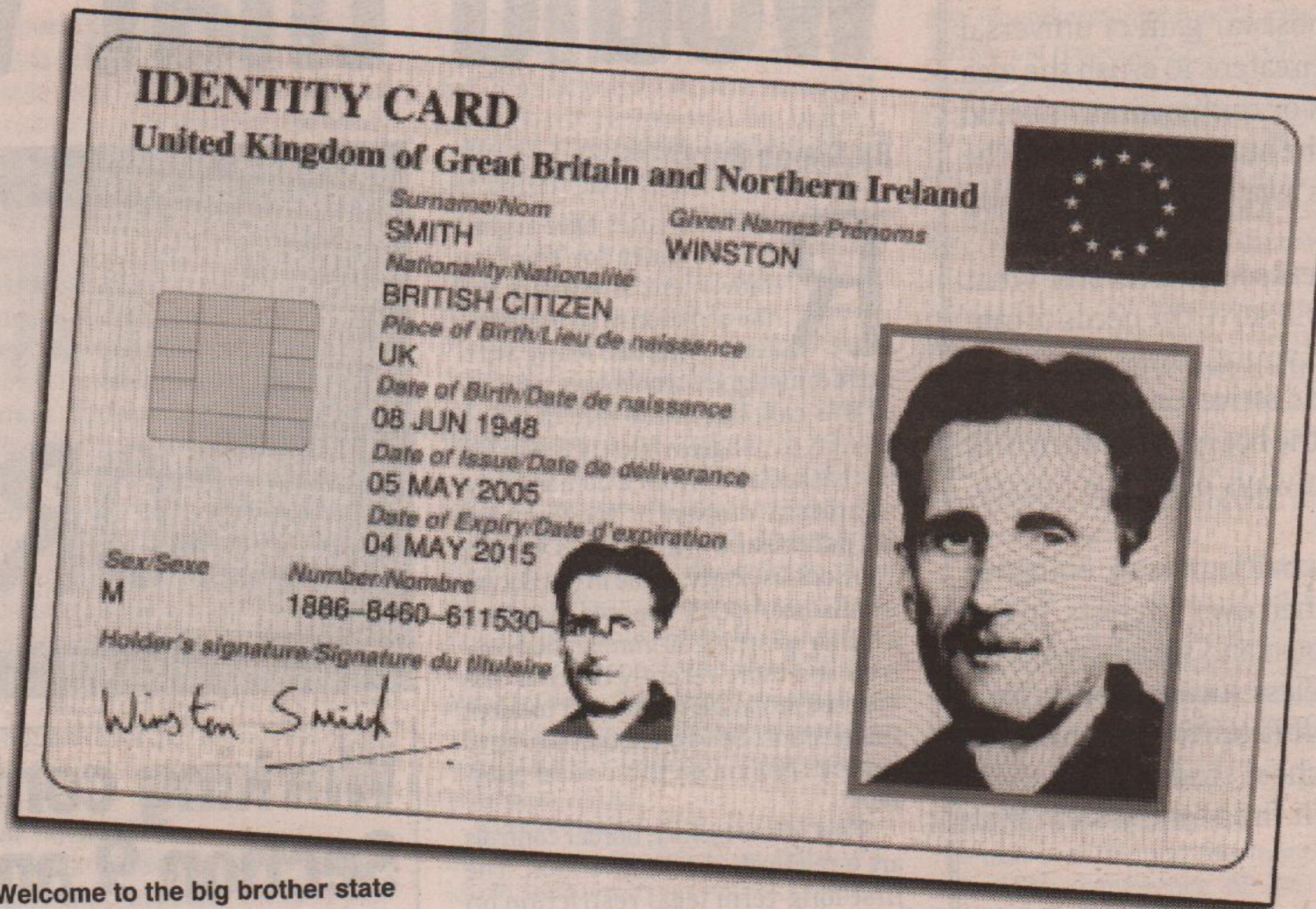
By James Roberts

In the wake of the 7 July bombings, the British state proposed numerous laws to strengthen its punitive powers. Whether that is the policy of shoot-to-kill handed to the police, the right to intern prisoners for up to three months given to the judiciary, or the ever more stringent immigration powers given to the Home Office. One power - first proposed by David Blunkett two years ago - has been resurrected in the last few months: the ID Bill.

Last week, the House of Commons voted on the bill's third reading, passing it on to the House of Lords with a very narrow majority of thirty-two. This reading also saw an unsuccessful attempt by Labour rebels and opposition MPs to separate the passport and ID card databases, so that people would be able to register for a passport without submitting details to the ID database. The Labour government has blatantly gone back on its promise that registration on an ID database would be voluntary.

If the bill is implemented in its current form, all those renewing passports from 2008 would be issued with a combined biometric ID card and passport from which all information would be stored on a national database. This would contain nationality and immigration information; date of birth and national insurance number; and fingerprint, iris and photographic records of all those holding the combined card.

Any government agency, from the Immigration Department through to the police and intelligence services, would have full access to this information. On top of this "government approved authorities" would have access to certain sections of the database. Enshrined in the bill is the ability to cross-reference ID database information with records already held by the



Welcome to the big brother state

police and other state departments.

What will an ID card scheme achieve?

Following 7/7, Charles Clarke himself admitted that ID cards would have done little to stop the attacks, given that the London bombers were British citizens. Labour is having problems lumping ID cards in with the political panacea of the "war on terror".

The government's determination to push on with this project, like many other "anti-terrorist" measures, is far more convincingly linked with Labour's racist anti-immigration stance. A brief glance at the bill shows that, whether or not it is compulsory for British citizens to hold the card, all foreign nationals will have to register on the ID database before 2008 or face a heavy

fine, possibly imprisonment. The scheme represents yet another barrier to prevent immigrants and asylum seekers from attaining the same rights as British nationals.

On top of this racist agenda, ID cards would further bureaucratise the benefits system, creating yet another set of hoops that claimants would have to jump through before being given council tax exemption, jobseekers allowance or housing benefit. By creating a biometric database that can be cross referenced with information already held by the state, people trying to claim state benefit will be subject to a whole new barrage of questions.

Essentially, what the ID card bill represents is another assault on the most underprivileged and downtrodden sec-

tions of society, forcing them to live as second class citizens.

Opposition to ID Cards

While ID cards are most likely to be used against activists, the working class and the oppressed, the fight against the scheme isn't by any means dominated by left wing forces.

Parliamentary opposition to the scheme lies mainly in the Tory and Lib Dem parties, with the Labour rebellion only consisting of twenty-one MPs. The main extra-parliamentary opposition to ID cards is the NO2ID campaign. While this includes progressive forces such as Respect, Globalise Resistance and the Scottish Socialist Party, NO2ID has its fair share of right wing affiliations, stretching from UKIP and the

English Democrat Party, through to the far-right Libertarian Alliance and the Freedom Association. The latter even has its origins in the unofficial blacklist used to throw militants out of industry in the 1970s!

The likes of UKIP and the Tory party say that ID cards will not be hard enough on these sections of society. In fact, these elements are only involved in the campaign to play a simple game of oppositional party politics with the Labour government.

Any of the right wing subscribers to the anti-ID card campaign would have been up there pushing for a compulsory, all-reaching identity scheme if it helped them crush the rights of non-British nationals and working class people. Is UKIP really going to stick up in defence of asylum seekers and migrants, the very people targeted by the scheme and who this racist outfit want to kick out?

With NO2ID including groups from right across the political spectrum comes the assurance that it will achieve next to nothing in either preventing the bill being passed, or preventing the scheme from being put into practice if it is passed. The only way of stopping the scheme lies in a mass campaign of non-cooperation, from both citizens compelled to hold cards and workers operating the database and producing the cards themselves, backed up by mass demonstrations and strike action.

This means, for the anti-ID card campaign to become more than a pressure group, it must gain mass trade union support. So far the only union affiliated to the campaign is Unison. If we really want to begin the fightback against this scheme, then we must call on the socialist and progressive elements of the NO2ID campaign to boot out the reactionaries and bring in the workers - those with an interest in defending all those targeted by this scheme and the Labour government.

Blunkett targets disabled claimants

By Keith Spencer

"The benefit system is crackers," said David Blunkett last month. It certainly is. It punishes poor people, it's a bureaucratic jungle and it is designed to browbeat the unemployed and the ill into low-paid jobs.

But David Blunkett doesn't mean this. He wants to drive even more people off incapacity benefit and into low-paid work.

Blunkett's latest insult came when he said that people on incapacity benefit shouldn't be sitting at home watching daytime TV but should be working. This is reminiscent of the hated Tory employment minister in the 1980s, Norman Tebbit, who told the unemployed get on the bikes and look for work.

Tony Blair made David Blunkett Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to do two things: cut pensions and cut incapacity benefit.

The current bill for incapacity benefit is £6.8 billion, which includes severe disablement allowance and income support because of disability. About 2.6 million people of working age receive these benefits.

Under the current system you can claim incapacity benefit if you are sick and disabled and not covered by statutory sick pay. The benefit starts at £57 a



week and rises after 12 months to the princely sum of £76 a week. The disability charity Leonard Cheshire told a Labour conference fringe meeting that 61 per cent of claimants were living in poverty thanks to these miserable pay-outs.

But it is still too much for Blunkett. In his forthcoming Welfare Bill, Blunkett will propose replacing the existing system with two new benefits by 2008 for all new claimants. The bill has only been delayed because Blair has demanded time limits for receiving new benefits and lower payments.

At first a sick or disabled person will receive something similar to jobseekers allowance and then go on to either rehabilitation support allowance or disability sickness allowance after a medical assessment.

The assessment will determine

whether a person's condition is severe and they are unable to work or "manageable". The benefit is linked to turning up for job interviews and searching for work - deductions will be made if a claimant does not attend a work-focused interview.

Blunkett believes 80 per cent of claimants should be preparing to go back to work!

It is already the case that people on incapacity benefits undergo regular medical examination by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP). Government ministers attacked GPs for being too soft on claimants. However under the existing system, which itself can treat a claimant badly, the doctor assesses a person's illness. Under the new system, the assessment will be linked to their ability to do a job and whether they are searching for work.

The Disability Alliance says the new system puts too much power into the hands of Jobcentre staff. They will rule on whether someone is doing all they can to look for work and whether excuses are plausible. Lorna Reith, the alliance's chair, said:

"Is the DWP seriously suggesting that junior Jobcentre Plus staff are to decide whether or not someone who's had a mental breakdown is ready to start looking for work? Or someone still undergoing chemotherapy should be ringing up employers? We are appalled

at the idea that people in this position would be penalised by having their benefit pegged at the poverty level of £55 per week."

Mental health charity Mind has also been campaigning against the deductions, which have already been occurring in areas piloting the proposals. In pilot areas the amount deducted is up to 15 per cent of the benefit, forcing even more people into poverty.

Most disabled people or people with mental health problems would like to work if they were not penalised if they had to stop working and if the job was well paid and provided other social benefits. Work can help people re-engage with society and feel socially useful.

But if a person has a recurring mental health problem, for example, it can be difficult to hold down regular work so that person would be penalised under the new rules for going in and out of work. Work can also subject people to stress, bullying, poor health and safety conditions and make people miserable - especially those who are vulnerable.

One indication of what type of work the government believes sick and ill people should do was given by the recent national Audit Office report into Remploy. Remploy is one of the government's favoured employers of disabled people and operates the New Deal for Disabled People.

The average wage for someone work-

ing for Remploy is £11,000 while it costs £18,000 to find a person work. A third of companies operating the new deal have not found anyone a job in the past three years. The government is providing public money to private sector firms to exploit disabled people.

The attacks on incapacity benefits are targeted at some of the weakest and most vulnerable people in society. Blunkett and Blair are kicking the legs out from under the welfare state like playground bullies.

The trade unions should start organising the unemployed and those on benefits. Links should be made between the wider labour movement and unemployment centres, disability actions groups and campaigns, claimants unions and other such bodies to launch a campaign against the proposals. Civil servants should refuse to comply with the legislation and doctors should refuse to carry out assessments.

The campaign should also fight for decent benefits linked to the average wage and for real support to help people into jobs linked to a higher minimum wage of £8 an hour. It should link up with other unemployed people and those in low paid work.

Disabled people have organised some inspiring protests and campaigns over the past decade and should be at the forefront of a militant campaign to stop this new attack.

Climate change: leaders fiddle while the planet burns

By John McKee

Waving his stick at some unfortunate porker that was probably going to end up on the royal dinner table, Prince Charles drawled "I don't want my grandchildren saying 'Why did you not do something about global warming?'"

Good question - well he could start by getting out of his gas guzzling Range Rover and getting rid of a few energy consuming palaces, not to mention the Royal Flight of planes. He could then pursue a life growing organic carrots - nothing like a royal parasite setting a good example!

The fact that climate change is even on the mind of the royal dunderhead is not surprising. The last few months have produced nothing but bad news reports from scientists monitoring the state of the planet.

Before the G8 Summit all the national science academies of the G8 countries plus China, India and Brazil called for urgent action to be taken by governments. Projecting that global temperatures were going to rise by between 1.4°C and 5.8°C over the next century, they called for effective measures to reduce greenhouse gases. Their pleas were ignored with Bush and the Republican administration denying that modern industrial activity has effected climate change.

Between 1990 and 2002 US carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, the most common greenhouse gas, increased by more than 13 per cent. A quantity that equates to more than all the cuts in emissions planned under the Kyoto treaty. The Bush administration withdrew from the treaty in 2001.

In September scientists monitoring the Arctic ice reported dramatic falls in the extent of sea ice - 2005 saw the ice at 18.2 per cent below the long term average. They fear the Arctic ice has gone over the "tipping point" where it is melting so rapidly that it never recovers in winter. The region will begin to absorb more heat, thereby entering a vicious



cycle of melting and heating. This will impact onto the ice covering Greenland, which, if it were to melt, would raise the world sea levels by six metres!

Similar reports are being made about the permafrost in Siberia. Here masses of methane gas, an even more lethal greenhouse gas with 20 times the impact of CO₂, will be released in vast quantities into the environment. And in Britain scientists from Cranfield University have discovered that warming of the soil since 1978 has had the opposite effect of what they originally thought. Instead of more vegetation growth reducing CO₂ emissions, the soil has been releasing CO₂ - an estimated 13 million tonnes a year for the whole of the UK, more than the cuts in CO₂ emissions made in Britain since 1990.

These events are known as positive feedback, as the world warms, global warming becomes self-reinforcing and more rapid. As one of the scientists from Cranfield said the likely outcome is that "all the consequences of global warming will occur more rapidly. That's the scary thing: the amount of time we have got to do something about it is smaller than we thought."

The deaths and destruction inflicted on New Orleans and the southern states of the USA by the worst hurri-

cane season on record, one linked directly to global warming and rising sea temperatures, give just a taste of things to come.

Beyond G8

Blair was going to make climate change a "big issue" at the G8 summit in Edinburgh last summer. George Bush told him to get stuffed. Soon after Bush signed an agreement with Australia, Japan, China, India and South Korea which aimed at promoting new "green technologies" and transferring the technologies to industrialising countries. This agreement was seen as a direct counter to the Kyoto agreement (and any similar future agreement) because it excludes any fixing or cutting of emission targets.

This is now the Washington mantra - global warming can be tackled by investing in new technologies. Restrictions on green house emissions by contrast damages the economy. Yet all the scientists and governments know that unless emissions are cut and targets set, with financial penalties on businesses that exceed them, the market will ensure that the old polluting technologies will continue.

Blair, who used to go round trum-

peting that Britain was a "world leader" on cutting emissions, has now thrown in his lot with Bush. Barely a month after Bush's new agreement Blair was in New York saying he had "changed his thinking" on post-Kyoto agreements. Sure enough he was now focussing on "technology led solutions" and saying that no countries were going to accept restrictions on their growth or consumption.

In fact under Blair's government Britain has gone backwards on emission targets. In 1997 so confident was the government of exceeding the Kyoto targets (a 12.5 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emission by 2010 compared to the year 1990) that it set its target at a 20 per cent cut. He was able to do so largely because Thatcher and Major had shut so many coalmines and coal fired power stations in the 1990s that the target looked easy. Instead under Labour CO₂ emissions have risen 5.5 per cent since 1997 - they should have been falling by 1 per cent a year to meet Kyoto limits. The 20 per cent cut has now been all but abandoned and the struggle is on to meet the minimal Kyoto targets. In the first six months of this year Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) figures show CO₂ emissions running at a 2.5 per cent increase.

Why is the government failing? The simple reason is that it will take no serious measures to force business to clean up its act. George Monbiot reported recently (Guardian, September 20th) on a Building Research Establishment conference where the environmental managers of big firms like BT and John Lewis made clear they could not adopt environmentally practices and products if it put them at a market disadvantage with other firms that did not. They favoured regulations that everyone had to conform to. The reply from the DTI was that such measures would be "an unwarranted intervention in the market".

Monbiot's conclusion, that maybe he was wrong about big business and that the obstacle to change is "not the market but the government", is wide

of the mark. The obstacle is both, because business and the government is wedded to a neo liberal market with minimal regulation. A recent survey from Carbon Neutral of 500 Directors of leading companies found that 75 per cent of them would only take measures to reduce carbon emissions if taxes or regulations forced them to. Most of them said they did not expect any cut in their firms' emissions.

While the earth is hurtling towards a potential climate catastrophe, governments and business are inventing reasons why very little can be done. Socialists and anti capitalists know that, left to their own devices, it is in the nature of capitalist economies and individual companies to maximise profits and drive down costs in order to compete in the market - even if the cost is to destroy the environment. Governments like Blair's and Bush's are so wedded to the neo liberal dogma that they are not even willing to regulate business to avoid a looming disaster - one that potentially will not only cost millions of lives but trillions of pounds.

If we want to save the planet we must not only throw out these pro capitalist politicians but abolish the system that puts profits and the market above people and climate.

Climate March London 3rd December

Protest the lack of action on global warming. March from Lincoln's Inn Fields 12.00pm (Holborn Tube) to US Embassy via the Exxon Mobil offices.

Speakers at US Embassy (2.30pm) include: George Monbiot, Michael Meacher MP, Caroline Lucas MEP
Info: www.campaigncc.org

Is nuclear power the answer to global warming?

By Keith Harvey

Tony Blair has been floating the idea of building more nuclear power stations to combat global warming. The spin is that he is losing sleep over the fact that Britain may not be able to meet its targets for cutting CO₂ emissions by 2010. Added to this, North Sea gas and oil supplies are falling away, giving the UK an energy supply headache in the medium term.

The government's chief scientific adviser Sir David King said last month "At the moment 24 per cent of energy on the grid comes from nuclear power; by 2020 that will be down to 4 per cent. That gap of 20 per cent is going to be very difficult to cover over the period 2010 to 2020 without new nuclear stations."

But are more nuclear power stations an answer to global warming and forestalling power shortages?

In the 1990s nuclear power fell

out of favour right across the political spectrum. The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 underscored just how unsafe an industry it can be; Ukrainian health authorities estimate that, in the long term, the final death toll could be as high 125,000 deaths from cancers.

Earlier this year enough radioactive material to make 20 nuclear weapons went missing at Thorp reprocessing plant in Sellafield, released through a leaky pipe, forcing the plant to suspend operations indefinitely.

But others insist that despite these examples, taken over decades the safety record of nuclear power compares well with other power industries and certainly good enough for the CO₂ emissions argument to tip the balance in favour of building more stations. Keith Parker, the chief executive of the Nuclear Industries Association, described nuclear energy as "non-carbon emitting". But while most nuclear reactors do not emit CO₂ the whole nuclear fuel cycle does

emits large amounts of CO₂. These arise from uranium mining, ore milling, and fuel enrichment among other things. If we add the energy hungry nuclear waste management on top, then one recent US study suggests that nuclear energy cycle produces about one-third the CO₂ per kWh as conventional mid-sized gas-fired electricity generation.

The nuclear industry also likes to claim that theirs is the most cost efficient means of producing electricity. But this ignores the huge subsidies that the industry demands to roll out a new programme on the scale they demand (25 per cent of the energy market). At the height of the programme, the level of subsidy required is calculated (using Cabinet Office figures) to be between £900mn and £1.8bn per year for at least 20 to 30 years. This is in addition to an expected cost of £1bn a year for the next 60 years to decommission and clean up the existing nuclear sites.

If these costs are added in

then the cost of a unit of electricity from nuclear generation is more expensive than oil, coal or gas-fired stations as well as renewables. In response David King argues that a carbon tax of £15.50p per tonne on carbon dioxide emissions "would switch the economic argument in favour of nuclear." Yet if these huge sums in subsidy were spent on fuel efficiency measures, like improving house insulation, they would have a much greater effect on reducing emissions. Some studies show ten times as much for each pound invested.

The fact is that a rational energy programme under capitalism is not possible while the main sources of fossil fuel production, electricity generation and distribution, and nuclear reprocessing remains in the hands of big business which puts profit before conservation, efficiency and safety. Nor can the nuclear power industry managers be trusted to expand the industry

given the lies and cover-ups they have been responsible for.

We are not against nuclear power in principle. But unless the industry is run under the control of the workers and the local communities in which the plants operate, then safety will always be compromised at their expense. It is they who must decide on what constitutes an adequate level of safety and when a plant should be shut down or is safe to reopen. Unless a proven safe and long-term method of storing nuclear waste is developed expansion of the industry is a non starter.

The whole power industry (oil, gas, nuclear and renewables) must be re-nationalised and placed under public ownership so that an integrated plan of research and development can be undertaken under the control of the labour movement without the pressure of making a profit. A safe, energy efficient and planet friendly power industry will not be possible without these steps.

Canadian teachers on all out strike

By Joy MacReady

On 7 October 42,000 teachers across the Canadian province of British Columbia walked out of the classrooms and onto the picket line after 90.5 per cent had voted to strike against Bill 12, the legislation pushed through by the provincial Liberal government to impose a new two-year contract that included a pay freeze and a ban on industrial action by teachers. Jinny Sims, president of the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF), said: "We will not be bullied into accepting another legislated contract that doesn't meet the needs of our students and doesn't respect our rights as workers."

The teachers were fighting for three main demands: free collective bargaining for teachers, improved working and learning conditions, and a substantial salary increase. Teachers were seeking a 15% pay increase over three years and the ability to limit class sizes. They had not received a real (above inflation) pay increase since 2000.

During the Liberals' regime, Premier Gordon Campbell removed the teachers' right to negotiate class sizes; implemented their inclusion under essential services labour legislation which means it is illegal for them to take strike action; and then imposed two successive government contracts. The last imposed contract in January 2002 eliminated existing provisions that restricted class sizes and ensured many support services would be there for students. The contract also decreed a 2.5 per cent a year salary increase over three years. But even that paltry increase was unfunded, so local school boards cut the number of teachers by 2,600.

Strike Action

The BCTF picket lines were lively and militant. Many wore placards saying "Anti-teacher legislation fails to solve a single problem for our students" and "If you can read this, thank a teacher." Students were vocal in supporting their teachers, joining the picket lines, painting banners and



Teachers' supporters at rally at University of BC, Vancouver; strike poster (inset)

touring around to speak at different rallies. The BCTF organised flying pickets across the province to build the strike. Support groups were set up that included parents fighting for their children's education.

Over the course of the strike, the BC Liberal government used every bullying tactic they could to crush the teachers. The government passed Bill 12 after three days of limited job action and then fuelled media attacks on the "illegal" teachers' strike. "We do not get to obey the laws that we like and disobey the laws that we don't like," said Premier Gordon Campbell. But they seem to be able to contravene international labour rights without blinking an eye.

The government took the BCTF to court and obtained an injunction to freeze the strike fund. It threatened

to arrest Sims and even the 42,000 teachers taking action. Finally, the courts also fined the union \$50,000 on the last day of the strike.

But despite the government's attempts to demonise the teachers, support from other trade unionists and the general public was overwhelming. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) was the most supportive, organising rolling walkouts in each region during the strikes.

The BC teachers' strike received such strong support as workers across the province are increasingly fed up with the Liberals' offensive against workers' rights and public services. The BC government had ripped up legal contracts stripped university workers of the right to strike (Bill 21), disregarded BC Supreme Court and Labour Board

rulings and stuck up two fingers at the International Labour Organisation.

On 17 October, some 15,000 demonstrated at the Parliament Buildings in Victoria. With CUPE members on strike there was no bus service, some government offices were closed along with BC liquor stores and many construction sites. There were rolling labour protests throughout the week in support of the teachers' strike in cities and towns across the province, culminating on 21 October in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland where 40,000 walked off the job. A general strike was on the cards for 24 October.

In a desperate measure, the Liberal government called in a negotiator, Vince Ready, and finally went to the bargaining table. The real threat of the general strike had shaken their confidence.

The government had attacked so many layers of workers across the province and big private sector disputes were still unresolved, such as the lock-out by Telus, the BC and Alberta telecommunications company.

As the pressure started to mount, the top layer of the union bureaucracy rode to the rescue. The leaders of several unions and Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Federation of Labour, started to weaken even though public support was growing. Sinclair was heavily criticised as he pulled BCFL's support of the regional walkouts after the demonstration in Victoria was so successful and butted in to announce that the teachers would vote on facilitator Vince Ready's recommendations before he or anyone else had actually seen them.

On 23 October the teachers voted to end the strike. The main disappointment was the absence of a binding government commitment to guarantee limits on class sizes. The additional \$20 million for class size and special education is not enough to have any serious impact on the system. The Ready report does not at all address guarantees on class composition and workload limits for non-enrolling teachers such as librarians, counsellors, ESL teachers, which have a big effect on the overall learning and working conditions of a school.

Although not a complete victory for the teachers, it was an impressive strike that yielded tangible results. After seven legislated agreements in the public sector by the Campbell government, the BCTF's courage in taking illegal strike action forced the government to appoint a mediator and to come to the negotiation table, breaking the pattern of passive acceptance of unilateral imposed contracts.

Of course, the war for workers' rights has not ended. Most of the public sector contracts expire in March 2006. George Heyman, head of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union, says that the teachers have inspired other public sector unions and they will ensure no more imposed contracts.

New Labour and faith schools

By John Grimshaw

New Labour is determined to increase the number of faith schools in Britain. Its policies have begun to seriously undermine the opportunity for children to be educated in comprehensive schools free from religious sectarianism and indoctrination.

Some Christians have certainly been aware of the opportunities available to them for some time. In 2000 John Burn OBE made a keynote speech, entitled "The Education Debate: Discerning the Times", to evangelical Christians. John Burn is the retired principal of Emmanuel College, the chairman (sic) of the Christian Institute and himself a committed evangelist.

In the speech he described the failure of the Church of England to involve itself in secondary education after 1945. He also lamented existing religious schools' associations with local education authorities and looked forwards to their demise. His most significant theme was that "in huge numbers of schools there is a spiritual and moral vacuum, and recognisable Christianity finds no place."

Burn said that all was not yet lost, however, and indicated the support of

many politicians for Christian schools, such as William Hague and Tony Blair. David Blunkett, then the education minister, was quoted as highlighting the opportunities for faith schools brought about by the Academy programme.

John Burn is no 'average' Christian; he is a fundamentalist who believes in rescuing children from graven images and teaching creationism as fact. He is not the only one in such a powerful position to promote an irrational rejection of scientific thought: Reg Vardy, the used car sales boss, now controls several schools in the north-east; and multi-millionaire Bob Edmiston, owner of the £330 million IM Group, is pushing for three academies in Coventry. The Academy programme has been tailored to allow anyone with £2 million (or less!), to get access to vast sums of public money to build a school in his or her image. Of the intended 200 or so academies planned, up to 40 per cent will be run by Christian organisations.

Academies are not the only line of attack. There are currently about 6,750 state-funded Anglican and Catholic schools in Britain with a few Jewish institutions. In 2002, despite a significant backbench rebellion, New Labour and the Tories pushed through plans

to create more faith schools. Former Education Secretary Estelle Morris argued that faith schools should be supported because they had a "sense of purpose and a sense of mission." She added that they had nothing to do with riots that had taken place across Northern towns in 2001 or sectarian violence outside Belfast primary schools.

Supporters of faith schools explain that they get better results for children or have a better ethos. Some claim that they enhance parental choice. All these claims are spurious. Currently most state-funded faith schools report better examination results, but this is because they are selective and take a smaller proportion of children from deprived households.

Although academies are to be set up in inner city areas, there is already evidence that they are using the tricks of covert selection. For example, Bristol City Academy leafleted parents in affluent residential areas. Initial studies have already shown that better off parents are beginning to move to the catchment areas of these well-financed schools.

Contrary to the lie that most people support faith schools, the Guardian published an ICM poll (August 2005), which showed that the public was massively against the state funding of

religious schools. Despite the 7 July bombings only 8 per cent were solely against Muslim schools. The majority, though, were against faith schools of all religious denominations. This is because ordinary people recognise that there is no room for religious schools within the state system. Why should people fund educational apartheid? Education should be open to all children and schools should be able to teach without any sort of religious interference.

So why is New Labour encouraging division in our schools? They are using religion as a cover for the privatisation of the education system. Blair has made no secret of the fact that he thinks schools are better run by business moguls, despite the fact that many of these people have no background in education.

New Labour has also made no secret of the fact that it despises workplace organisation and effective trade unions. The man who famously said that he bore the scars on his back of public sector workers is engaged in seeking his revenge. Academies can impose their own pay and conditions on teachers and education staff separate from any national rules. Faith schools are often some of the most poorly unionised. The recently announced White Paper is set

to continue this process. All secondary schools will become trusts free to seek out sponsorship. This, of course, will give business control of the school in the academy model. Local education authorities and democratic accountability will be a thing of the past. The intention is clear: individualised contracts, individualised schools, a docile workforce and indoctrinated students.

Now is the time to fight back. There has been successful opposition to academies, particularly where they are to be run by fundamentalists. This needs to be built upon and expanded. In both Burnley and Birmingham, local authorities have come out against faith schools and are actively discouraging their further development. All the teacher unions are against the "Blairite" agenda on paper but now they need to take concrete action both with publicity campaigns and strike action. Activists need to energise the debate and the struggle and not allow it to be diverted by the union leaders' weasel words. We must ensure the promised demonstration against academies goes ahead and then make it as big as possible. It should be the beginning of the fight. We must move to defend our children's education before it is pawned off to the highest bidder and returned to the Victorian era.

Multiculturalism, assimilation or class integration

By Dave Stockton

After the July 7th bombings, the right wing press and think tanks launched a fierce assault on the policy of multiculturalism. They claimed this policy had been practiced by left wing Labour local authorities since the 1980s and by the New Labour government since 1997, and it had failed disastrously.

The Tories demanded its replacement by the promotion of assimilation by immigrant communities to a British national identity. Shadow Home Secretary and Tory leadership contender David Davis told the Daily Telegraph that the government must scrap its "outdated" policy of multiculturalism, which had allowed the "perverted values of suicide bombers" to take root. Instead, he insisted, the state should "build a single nation" and demand "respect for the British way of life".

A right wing think tank, Civitas, produced a report, written by Patrick West, *The Poverty of Multiculturalism*. This argues that the concept of multiculturalism is not only divisive of the nation, it actually encourages racial hatred and probably produced the 7 July suicide bombers too. It thunders against the view that "no culture is better than another" and the failure to "celebrate" the superiority of Western culture "for fear of causing offence".

This assault by the right is hardly surprising but the Labour government and its agencies have quickly hopped

on board. The Home Office has set up a "Commission on Integration and Cohesion" and Trevor Phillips, head of the Commission for Racial Equality, has suggested that multiculturalism may now be counterproductive.

The discovery that the London bombers came from Beeston not Baghdad made the ruling class realise that the immigrant communities - especially Muslim ones - were not only alienated but some were organising as a military/religious force. They could not admit that it was their wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, their support for Israel against the Palestinians - coming on top of the endemic racism endured by these communities - which produced this alienation. No, they decided the bogeyman was multiculturalism and the "failure" of ethnic minorities to assimilate.

Now they want to weld the British nation together by a process of state sponsored nationalist propaganda pumped out through the media, the schools, the churches and suitably reformed mosques. Effectively Blair and co have set out to conduct a "reformation" of the mosques.

They must preach in English, have licensed and "trained" imams, report to the police any "radicals", pay homage to British values. In short, the government wants a Muslim version of the Church of England. In return they could be guaranteed some of the Anglican and Catholic privileges: religious broadcasting, separate religious schools, an effective inclusion in the

blasphemy legislation through incitement to religious hatred laws.

Marxists support neither multiculturalism nor assimilation. At its best, multiculturalism recognised that "English culture" wasn't superior, something that immigrant communities had to aspire to assimilating into. In multi-ethnic schools, for example, marking and explaining other religious festivals, like Diwali and Eid became acceptable. This was certainly better than denigrating or excluding such festivals from school life as "un-English".

But, at its worst, multiculturalism collapsed into "cultural relativism", where it was considered wrong or even racist to criticise cultural practices within minority communities - the oppression of women, forced marriages, clitoridectomy operations on young girls. It often positively celebrated the cultural and geographical isolation of minority groups, designating them "communities", downplaying the differences within them, between different classes, the small employers and their exploited workers, and between the more integrated youth and the elders.

In London, Ken Livingstone has operated a multiculturalist politics, seeking to create a series of communities and "community leaders" beholden to grants and handouts. His model is the US Democratic Party, where community leaders deliver the votes in return for favours given.

Marxists certainly oppose all assimilation based upon force or pressure,

the type of assimilation, preached by the likes of David Blunkett, that glorifies "Queen and country". For example, we defend immigrants' rights to use their own language and have information from central and local government services, including the courts, translated. We believe that religious observance should be allowed in the workplace and in schools - religious holidays, prayer times, dietary laws etc.

However, we do not seek to actively preserve communities from the normal integration processes, which arise in the school and workplace, and through sport and entertainment. Just as we think attempts to preserve or regenerate Britishness or Englishness is reactionary, so we think attempts to preserve immigrant and ethnic communities from the spontaneous and voluntary integration (social intermixing, secularisation, "loss of faith", inter-ethnic sexual relations and marriage) is reactionary too.

It is more understandable and less aggressive than racist nationalism but it too is oppressive to the young, to women, to the working class sections of the communities. For this reason we are opposed to religious or community schools and all other segregation whose aim is to keep these communities together and distinct.

Of course we stand with such communities against every sort of discrimination and harassment by racists and fascists, and also by the police and the state - including all attempts to purge or transform their religious and cul-

tural organisations, to pressure people into learning or using English, to forcibly secularise (banning religious symbols or clothing at school or work).

The grouping of ethnic and racial groups into geographical areas is natural, especially for recent immigrants - in order to feel at home, attend places of worship, have access to their own food, shops and restaurants, to speak their home languages. But it is also for protection and self help in a racist society that excludes, oppresses and occasionally physically attacks such communities.

It is only the working class that can bring about the genuine and voluntary integration of the majority of the immigrant communities because the historical and fundamental character of the working class is to have no country, no father or motherland. British culture is not the culture of the working class (though British workers bring their own specific contribution to it and to the international working class). It is the culture of our rulers, the bosses. It is only the racists and those duped by nationalism, who glorify Britishness and its bloody history.

We should resist the bourgeois and chauvinist assimilationism of the Tories, Blair, Blunkett and Phillips. "Racial tensions" are not the product of multiculturalism but of white racism - to fight back, to resist is justified. But we should also criticise the utopianism of those who want to build a permanent mosaic of ethnic or religious communities.

Birmingham riots: fight capitalism not each other

By Birmingham Workers Power

The riots over the weekend of 22 and 23 October in the Lozells district of Birmingham had their roots in the racism and exploitation endemic in Britain's second city. It pitched two different communities, the Asian and Black Afro-Caribbean, both which are the victims of racism, into confrontation with one another. Two young men have been killed, with scores of others injured. Shops and businesses were looted and damaged, while Lozells and the surrounding areas have been flooded with riot police.

The trigger for the riots was a rumour that a 14-year-old Jamaican girl had been gang raped after being caught shoplifting at an Asian-owned local shop selling black beauty products. This rumour was spread by word of mouth and by at least one black pirate radio station. No girl has yet come forward; the rumour said she had migrated to Britain illegally and feared to do so.

The rumour was the spark. The fuel was the long growing tensions between different ethnic minority communities in the area struggling to remove themselves from poverty and unemployment. It is no surprise that it centred around a dispute over who was

running small shops and businesses in a poor area - often the first step up for individuals and communities who are kept out of mainstream employment by discrimination and cultural barriers.

Millions are being spent on the regeneration of Birmingham, but little trickles down to working class areas like Lozells or Handsworth. The unemployment rate in Lozells is 20 per cent. Institutional racism is still pervasive among the police and public services. Black people like Mikey Powell die in police custody. Racist immigration controls divide families of Afro-Caribbeans, Sikhs and Muslims alike. This month saw the case of Melissa Reid, a Jamaican nurse refused the right to stay and work in our hospitals.

The riots have meant that the media has suddenly "discovered" that racism exists between different minority ethnic communities. Right wingers and white racists will be rubbing their hands with glee; they will attempt to exploit the idea that racism is "natural" and exists amongst all groups.

In fact such clashes between oppressed communities are nothing new. The whole system of US racism is based on dividing one immigrant community from another, on using the political system and pork barrel community politics to promote one group or community leader against another. Britain had a



Young protester calls for an end to inter-racial violence

history of governing its colonies on the very same basis - in Africa promoting one racial group, often Asians, as low level administrators, so they were slightly better off, providing a decoy for mass discontent and making them dependent on the colonialists.

The only ones who benefit from events like those in Lozells are the rich and privileged who make their profits from the work of others and use racism to divide communities and prevent them coming together to change the system. They like to see

working class people divided. They know that when we are divided we can't fight for our rights.

The police have their own agenda as well. They found it tactically expedient to ignore a community's cry for help when houses, pubs and people were systematically attacked by a gang on the rampage in Handsworth on Saturday night. Even the ambulances were advised not to enter the area! Many residents on the Austin estate in Handsworth are now completely disillusioned with the

police and have taken steps to organise their own self defence instead.

Instead of fighting each other we need a united grassroots campaign for justice:

- For a community enquiry made up of working class people from Lozells and Handsworth. The authorities must announce and guarantee immunity from deportation for any young woman who has been raped. The wider issues of poverty and oppression in the area must be exposed.
 - For organised multi-ethnic community defence. Stop the violence against each other. No reliance on the police.
 - Stop all deportations. Stop dividing families. Open the borders.
 - For massive investment in the area paid for by taxing the rich and big business.
 - For the right to work or education at a living wage.
 - Build decent schools, don't privatise them. Say no to selection or segregation by religion. For secular comprehensive education in which all are given respect.
- Most of all we need to fight against the whole capitalist system that gives rise to poverty and injustice. Labour has betrayed us. We need a new working class party to fight for real socialism - a society that guarantees equality and is run for the benefit of people not profit.

What drives privatisation

By Jeremy Dewar

Privatisation is no longer a popular word. It is a contaminated brand to use the advertising jargon. It suggests cuts in services, rising prices and sometimes catastrophic neglect of safety, as on the rail. Marketisation is losing its gloss too. The latest euphemism for the same thing - is contestability. Quite apart from degrading our public services, Labour is doing the same to our language. Deceit, as we shall see, is an essential part of the privatisation process.

But truth will out. Tony Blair recently admitted, "In both the NHS and in education, there will, in one sense, be a market."

Blair likes to claim that the drive to privatise is the inevitable result of globalisation. No one can buck the market. Yet, far from being helpless victims of global market forces, governments have driven the globalising agenda through domestic legislation and international treaties. The opening of spheres formerly completely or largely excluded from the market - primarily essential public services hitherto provided by the state or local government - has profoundly altered the political and social landscapes of countries.

The subordination of health, education, recreation, entirely to the profit motive originates not in the supposed superiority of services which private capital can provide but to its failure in the core of production. As profit rates tumbled in the 1970s, capitalists looked for new arenas for investment. Overproduction in



Labour gave £1 million of "aid" to the Adam Smith Institute to promote water privatisation in Ghana

traditional markets, turned its attention to non-market areas. The race was on to commodify all those aspects of life which had hitherto resisted big capital.

This required a thoroughgoing restructuring of not only the economic and financial spheres, but also of the political, social and cultural arenas. It required breaking the elements of democratic control that existed in these areas. The idea that you could vote for a local council or a national government to spend more on services had to be

broken. After all the poor were far more numerous than the rich. What if they voted to make the rich pay for these services? They had to be put well out of the democratic reach of the masses.

The prime movers were the US and UK governments under Reagan and Thatcher. Their desire to defeat "socialism" in Russia, was matched by their desire to do the same at home. The mid-century social reforms won by the working class - a living wage and a retirement pension, shorter working hours, safer working

conditions and above all public services were intolerable. We, or rather the billionaires, could not afford them.

So they were remorselessly run down whilst at the same time slashing taxes and restrictions on capital. The deeply unpopular nature of the attack can be seen from the fact that the laboratory for privatisation was Chile under the jackboot of General Augusto Pinochet. In Britain too, the unions had to be defeated, then shackled by the worst anti-union laws in a democratic country -

apart from the United States - before government could really let rip on privatisation.

The growth of the multinational corporations throughout the 1980s and 1990s led to an accumulation of private capital that rivalled that of the major powers and dwarfed that of small and medium national economies. Instead of national governments regulating the behaviour of capital, the global markets and the cabals of the MNCs became the regulators of national economic policy.

To facilitate the triumph of market values, social cohesion and collectivism were replaced,

through relentless attacks on the working class and ideological "brainwashing" to instill consumerist values, with services as well as goods in terms of commodities.

After coming to power in 1997, Blair's New Labour considerably extended Thatcher's legacy. Having accounted for 20 per cent of GDP in 1975, state operations had been largely sold off by 2000, on terms which left all the profits with the private buyers and all the risk with the taxpayer. Those services that remained were those that defied immediate commodification, largely because they were perceived to provide a public good rather than a product susceptible to commercial pricing. Core public service functions would therefore take more time to marketise, and the initial step was to insist on internal markets and competitive tendering for goods and services, by setting terms inherently disadvantageous to existing in-house provision.

What matters in privatisation is not whether the result is better value for money, but who pays the cost and who makes the profit. A system that costs more and delivers less can generate substantially greater profit once the costs have been thrown onto the individual "customer". Hence the Private Finance Initiative is demonstrably more expensive than traditional public sector procurement and management, but it generates profits. Indeed, the construction industry was in the doldrums before PFI, with profit rates languishing around 1-2 per cent; now the big monopolies enjoy margins of 12-15 per cent.

Privatisation is always portrayed as putting the consumer first, increasing choice, tackling

International treaties

The triumph of privatisation in the US and Britain coincided with the fall of Stalinism in the Soviet bloc. This opened up not only potential markets in Eastern Europe, where crash privatisation programmes were imposed on a working class that had been denied any independent organisations for decades, but also whole areas of Africa, Latin America and Asia to a victorious imperialist capitalism. The multinationals soon turned their beady eyes to these untapped markets.

The instruments for this new form of colonisation were the global agencies: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and what became the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The IMF, freed from the constraints of having to appear humanitarian for fear of losing influence to the USSR, imposed structural adjustment programmes on indebted and struggling countries as a condition for debt rescheduling or granting of new debts. The World Bank wrenched similar concessions in return for development loans. While this led to the privatisation - by the western multinationals - of manufacturing and extractive industries, which were often the

backbone of third world economies, this too more or less reached its limitations by the turn of the century. It was time to turn to services.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) emerged at the same time as the WTO in 1995, and was effectively merged with it at the WTO's 4th ministerial conference in 2001. All 140 WTO members are members of GATS. The service sector more than doubled in size globally in the 1990s, and now accounts for two-thirds of the world economy, spending on health care and education alone now accounting for \$3.5 trillion. The more this is opened up to private profit, the better for the multinationals.

GATS covers 12 broad categories of service, which are subdivided into 160 subcategories, ranging from transport and the environment to tourism and entertainment, from architecture to refuse collection. General and specific agreements are made to supply services in one country (which requests the service) by another (which offers the service). Its defenders claim that it is completely voluntary, involving bilateral request-offer agreements between member states, and that poor countries benefit

from more efficient, improved services. However, these claims do not bear up to scrutiny.

GATS agreements increasingly form a key part of the conditionalities imposed by the IMF for loans. In 2002 the World Bank published the Private Sector Development Strategy and Water Resources Sector Strategy, both with a strong privatisation bias. Even where publicly owned water facilities are efficient, clean, and deliver to every household, the European Union presses for privatisation through GATS. The UK government even used so-called aid to produce pro-privatisation leaflets via the Adam Smith Institute on behalf of Biwater in Ghana - until it was exposed by the World Development Movement.

The bilateral nature of the agreements also works against the poor countries, who are subject to all kinds of bribes and threats behind closed doors to open up their services, since they are unable to co-ordinate their efforts, as they did in Cancun conference of the WTO in 2003. The G20 countries, led by Brazil and India, demanded an end to the rich countries agricultural subsidies before any further liberalisation of services was relinquished. But even this rebellion has since been beaten down.

Brazil and India agreed a framework for non-agricultural market access in July this year, predictably ditching their "allies" for some crumbs from the imperialist table.

GATS is used as a battering ram against national protective laws. Article 1 states that it only covers services "supplied on a commercial basis, in competition with one or more service suppliers," which defenders claim amounts to an anti-privatisation clause. However, as we have seen, almost all public services are today provided with an internal market and alongside a smaller private sector, so this clause is useless in protecting public or indigenous services. Thailand was recently forced to abandon its Retail Business Act because it was an obstacle to the right of Tesco and Carrefour to use their economies of scale to grab the market.

GATS is a central component of globalisation itself. Its effects are only just beginning to be felt. But already it has drawn the anger of activists around the globe. That's why we must use the protests against the Hong Kong 6th Ministerial Conference of the WTO to educate, agitate and organise resistance to it.

Labour and E

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have made it their personal mission to drive this liberalisation agenda into the heart of Europe. In 2000, they were prime movers of the Lisbon Strategy, which called for the privatisation of utilities, telecommunications and transport. This is why whole sectors like energy and postal services are being opened up to competition or privatised simultaneously. The resulting job losses, closures, pay cuts and erosion in employment rights have led, and are still leading to massive strikes across the continent. However, they and Europe's bosses are content with neither the pace of the "reforms" nor their reach.

The Bolkestein directive, which has recently been introduced into the European Parliament, is designed to extend both. The directive, which will override national laws, applies to all services

except the police, the army and lawyers (no surprise there!) Public services - in particular education, healthcare, employment services, television and local authorities - are expected to be hit hard.

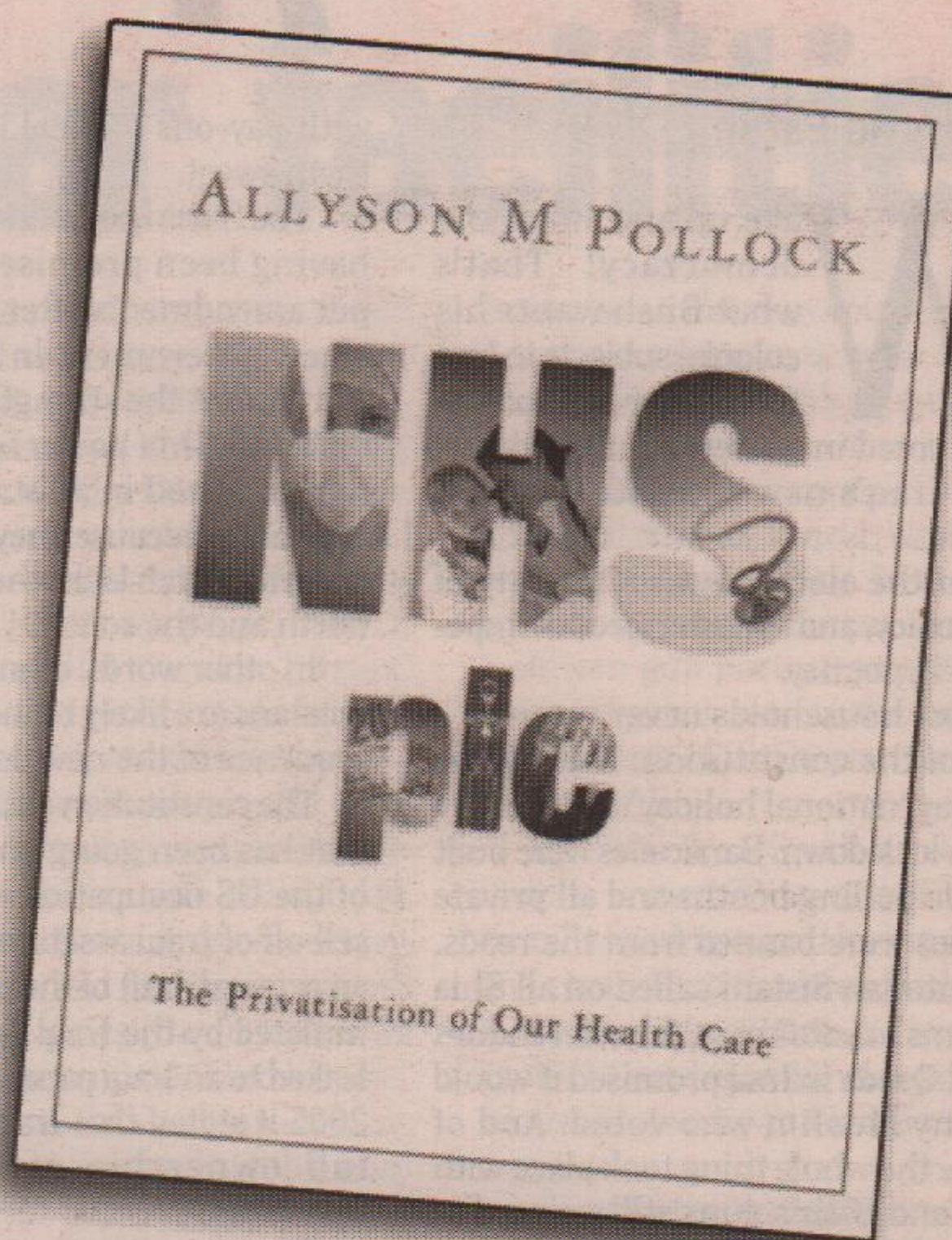
The directive aims to eliminate all obstacles to the completion of the internal market in services. So, for example, restrictions on pharmaceutical companies regarding quantity, quality or pricing of drugs will have to go, making any kind of subsidised and universal healthcare impossible. Employment policies designed to facilitate the integration of racial minorities or people with a disability into the labour market will also be affected. The national states with their laws and regulation often influenced by decades of labour movement pressure will be suddenly overridden by the continent-wide open market rules.

The other principle of Bolkestein is that of the

on?

NHS: not safe in Labour's hands

John Bowden reviews *NHS plc* by Allyson Pollock, Verso 2004



er-centralised inefficiency. In fact, it is nothing of the sort. Far from being the triumph of the market, it is the result of the failure of the market. Far from improving efficiency, competition inevitably constrains planning and produces waste. Far from providing real choice, it imposes the private sector solution. And far from benefiting service users, it is its profit first, second and third the pecking order.

But the failures of past privatisations have awakened millions of workers - both as service providers and users - to the destruction they cause. They can and must unite to defeat privatisation. Teachers, postal workers and nurses should build broad campaigns uniting in opposition to the latest proposals to turn their public services into commodities. Finally, we should lead global fightback against the global privatisers.

As left Labour MP Alan Simpson says, "What we need is a huge solidarity campaign between social movements in the north and countries in the south to pull the rug from under this. We have to break the WTO agreement and start again."

Indeed, we should go further, and destroy the WTO, IMF and World Bank in their entirety. We should rip up the Bolkestein directive and defeat every national plan for the dismantling of our public services. Solidarity with the current strikes across Europe, protests against the WTO in December, the gatherings of the World and regional social forums in 2006 must all come staging posts on the road to ending the commodification of our lives and beginning the socialisation of the world's sources and production.

Since 1948, the National Health Service has been a source of pride, a service which offers free healthcare on the point of demand (with the exception of pharmaceuticals and dentistry) free from market pressures, treating young and old, rich and poor alike. The NHS has also been a source of controversy with the bosses raising issues such as cost and bureaucracy.

These excuses have been used by Labour to promote privatisation, dressed up as "competition", "choice" and "private investment". But its "reforms" are leading to monstrously expensive, inefficient and lower quality healthcare for millions, whilst corporations stand to make billions.

The government has made sure of corporate success in the NHS by employing the overseers, advisors and managers from the private sector on huge salaries - and dubious kickbacks. For example, millionaire healthcare tycoon Dr Chai Patel became a member of the Department of Health's taskforce for older people, a position from which he expanded his already large private residential homes business.

The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) also helps financial and construction companies to a large slice of the NHS cake. PFI invites bankers, builders and service operators to put up money to buy a new hospital or hospital building. This loan is then paid back by the hospital trust along with large amounts of interest, - by making cuts in the budget for patient care.

As Allyson Pollock points out in her book *NHS Plc*, the higher

rates that private companies must borrow at, the dividends which must be passed on to the shareholders and the new bureaucracy monitoring the process make this a mockery. Pollock cites the example of the new Dartford and Gravesham hospital, which cost £115 million when fees and finance were added, led to the cost of servicing capital rising from "6 per cent of the annual budget to 32 per cent".

While the cash injection into new buildings may seem as if it is producing new hospital capacity, the opposite is true. The costs to the hospital of PFI results in redundancies, ward closures, and a reduction in bed capacity. This in turn results in cancelled operations. To free up beds, patients are discharged too early, which inevitably leads to patients being re-admitted to hospital at a later stage. To complete the vicious circle, hospitals are providing more bed space for private patients to fund these new expenses.

The lack of investment in genuine hospital capacity has been supplemented by the large scale contracting out of NHS operations to the private sector. Private "treatment centres" take NHS funds to provide low risk operations such as cataracts and hip replacements, which could be carried out far more cheaply on the NHS. Minister of Health Patricia Hewitt would like these centres to carry out 15 per cent of routine operations by 2008 - although she does not add that this will cost the NHS over £7 billion. Pollock points out that, to encourage the private companies to get involved, they are guaranteed a supply of patients and

sometimes paid upfront even if they do not treat the agreed number. They also turn away a fifth of prospective patients, whom they deem high risk (i.e. unprofitable). The private sector also takes doctors from the NHS, leading to shortages.

While these operations cost 40 per cent more than NHS rates, quality of care is also a major issue at the new treatment centres. One privateer, Netcare, is responsible for double the average rate of eye infections in cataract patients. Another, Medical Alliance, was not even registered with the healthcare commission.

Commercialisation of NHS hospitals as "Foundation Trusts" has also gathered pace since 2002. An independent regulator can grant foundation status to "high-performing" hospitals. When given the status, the trust get to own its assets, and is free to set wage levels, borrow from the private sector, and enter into private contracts. Pollock explains that, although foundation trusts cannot charge fees to NHS patients, and private patients cannot become a larger part of their income than at the point they gained the status, joint ventures are simply used to get round these obstacles to profit.

Labour's emphasis on "patient choice" puts these hospital in competition with other NHS hospitals. The freedom to set wage levels could pull doctors in from other trusts, leading to an increasingly uneven quality of service across Britain. By focusing on cost-cutting rather than patient care, Foundation Trusts act like private companies, and force other hospitals to follow suit or close.

Pollock points out that "they will be under no obligation to cooperate with in service planning covering regions or even the country" and there will be no incentive for Foundation Hospitals to focus on complex and costly care such as geriatrics, chronic diseases or the health of refugees. The National Health Service is disintegrating.

New Labour's changes to the NHS have snowballed over their years in office. Their policies have led to a denial of the founding principal of the service which was "free healthcare on the point of demand" as foreign patients and asylum seekers have been excluded until they have passed eligibility tests. Privatisation has destroyed quality of care and hospital capacity, as corporations

from across the world make fortunes out of Britain's best loved public service.

Labour spin uses terms such as "patient choice", but if the public had a real choice, we would certainly not choose to spend taxes on making the rich richer at the expense of quality free healthcare for everyone.

In the coming years, money wasted on agency nursing, PFI schemes and private operations will result in a crisis of funding, which will finally destroy the NHS. Then the "choice" will be the private healthcare or a bare minimum for those who cannot afford health insurance. This is why the trade unions and working class must fight privatisation head on and reject the Labour Party once and for all.

Royal Mail: countdown to competition

By a postal worker

New year's day 2006 is the date set for Royal Mail to be opened up to full competition from multinational operators. At the moment competition extends only to companies handling bulk mail in batches of 4,000 letters or more. These still rely on Royal Mail's infrastructure to sort and deliver "the final mile" to individual household and business addresses, leaving the state operation with a market share in excess of 99%.

Full competition will mean that other companies can deliver any mail, from single letters to huge bulk mailings, and provide any service, even setting up collection boxes. Multinational operators are queuing up to get their cut. TNT, the giant privatised Dutch postal group, is considering developing its own door-to-door, collection-to-delivery system. Deutsche Post, the privatised German service, has made a \$6.8 billion bid for the biggest logistics company in Britain, Exel, threatening Royal Mail's parcel market.

This competition will put immense pressure on Royal Mail, forcing it to cut up to 40,000 jobs and attack wages and conditions. Royal Mail will be thrown in the

deep end to sink or swim. In Britain's business press, the debate is frank about the consequences: can Royal Mail catch up, should it remain a single integrated business, or be broken up into its component parts - letters, parcels and post offices?

Free markets and a rigged market Postcomm, the postal regulator, was set up by Labour supposedly not just to create competition but also to ensure a good service for the public - in particular, the Universal Service Obligation (USO) which obliges Royal Mail to deliver to every address in Britain, no matter how remote and costly. In fact from the beginning it has been driving the neoliberal agenda forward. That should come as no surprise. After all Labour has appointed a director of the London Stock Exchange to head Postcomm and stuffed it full of bureaucrats specialising in the private sector, business executives and financial consultants.

Labour and Postcomm like to pose market liberalisation in terms of consumer "choice", a "level playing field" and "vibrant markets". Yet Postcomm has actually opened up the market two years before the 2007 European Union deadline, making it especially vulnerable to giant



DHL: one of the companies looking to compete with Royal Mail

multinational postal operators.

Postcomm has rigged the market in other ways, setting stamp prices much lower than the average in Europe and lower than Royal Mail claims it needs to compete and maintain its USO. At the moment Royal Mail is sustained by business mail delivery, which accounts for as much as 85 per cent of its business and subsidises postage stamps for the public. But with the final opening of the postal market, other operators will increasingly skim the cream off the profitable business contracts, leaving Royal Mail the unprofitable job of delivering letters to every address.

Between the low stamp price

and high costs of the USO, something will have to give after 1 January 2006. It will be the service in poor and working class areas that are hit hardest, while businesses in the city centre and industrial estates will get a premier service, provided by cherry-picking firms. No doubt in the future, once the profitable custom has fled, Postcomm will see the need to "reconsider" and raise the stamp prices.

Competition leads to privatisation Market competition will mean death by a thousand cuts to Royal Mail: immense pressures on our jobs, wages, and workload. This will test the strength

of postal workers and the Communication Workers Union (CWU). If we cannot stand up to the battering that competition will bring, the union won't be in any fit state to defeat a privatisation bid.

And that is what is on the cards. Royal Mail chairman Allan Leighton and Alan Johnson, head of the DTI, are agitating for an employee share scheme, giving employees a 20 per cent "stake in the company". The bosses see this as the best way to weaken the union and pave the way for outright privatisation through the backdoor. After all, it doesn't make sense for employees to be the only ones allowed shares; surely others with a "stake" in Royal Mail - consumers, stockbrokers, businessmen - should be able to buy shares too?

To ensure that doesn't happen, CWU members needs to be educated on the issues and organised for strike action, our strongest weapon, to stop the privatisation juggernaut. Tory MP Kenneth Clarke once said the failure to privatise the Post Office in 1994 was the last turning point of the Conservative era. Let's make sure that New Labour's attempt to do the same ends with them in the same dustbin of history, and marks the renaissance of the workers' movement in Britain.

Iraq: hypocrisy and democracy

By Kirstie Paton

Wake up and smell the democracy! That's what Bush wants his colonial subjects in Iraq to do after millions of Iraqis voted in a referendum to determine Iraq's new constitution last month.

But the election was a travesty of democracy, and a masterpiece of imperialist hypocrisy.

Most households never received a copy of the constitution. During the four day 'national holiday' the country was in lock down. Barricades were built outside polling booths and all private vehicles were banned from the roads.

Ayatollah Sistani called on all Shia Muslims to vote Yes in the referendum and Al Qaeda in Iraq promised it would kill any Muslim who voted. And of course the whole thing took place with Bush and Blair's guns still pointed at the head of the country.

All of this meant that whatever the result it certainly was not the product of democracy.

The majority vote approving Iraq's constitution looks impressive - 79 per cent to 21 per cent - but the results hide a strong vote against by the Sunni population which was not far from derailing it. In the end, the Sunnis got a two-thirds negative vote in two provinces - Salahuddin and Anbar - but a majority of just 55 per cent in a third, Nineveh. They just failed to get the two-thirds in three provinces to block the constitution.

What will the adoption of this constitution mean for the Iraqi people? Will it solve the political and economic crisis? No - it will deepen this crisis.

The constitution cements the growing ethnic and religious divisions that have developed since the occupation of Iraq by US and British troops. It proposes to give greater power to federal based governments and weaken the role of central government. Regions in the north, based on the Kurds, and the south, based on the Shi'ites, will have greater control over local militias and greater freedom to use Islamic law. This will spell disaster for women.

Kurdish and Shia leaders hope to do well out of the constitution, getting regional governments with a high degree of autonomy and exclusive access to future oil fields. Current oil production would still be shared among all provinces. But the mass of the population will not enjoy any of the proceeds. The oil production will be run from offices in London and New York

with pay-offs to local leaders to keep them sweet.

The Sunni population, who despite having been promised the right to put amendments after the election of a new government in December, are fearful that the strengthening of Kurdish and Shia power will leave them marginalised in a future Iraqi state, especially because they populate central Iraq which lacks the oil wells of the north and the south.

In other words, ethnic and religious tensions are likely to increase as a consequence of the new deal.

The constitution enshrines a process that has been going on since the start of the US occupation - the wholesale sell off of Iraqi assets, above all, oil. In an original draft of the constitution formulated by the Iraqi government and leaked to an Iraqi paper Al Mada in June 2005 it stated that Iraq should "...have full ownership of their natural resources."

That sentence proved too much for the Bush administration. They ensured that the constitution was rewritten to state that the oil industry has to be subject to "...modern techniques and market principles." - read privatisation. The Bush rewrite also insisted that the public sector must "involve the private sector and be within the limits of government resources."

This will spell disaster for millions of Iraqi people - who are already suffering 70 per cent unemployment rates. A UN Development Report published in 2004 paints a tragic picture of a nation quite literally destroyed by 10 years of sanctions and two years of brutal occupation:

- 20 per cent of the population live in inadequate housing conditions - housing that has been destroyed by bombing
- 3.2 million suffer from instability of electricity supply - oil pipelines have received countless investment under the "reconstruction programme" while electricity cables remain in disrepair
- only half the population has access to safe drinking water and the health service, once the best in the region, has been destroyed by sanctions and war
- the education system has suffered too. Illiteracy is now higher than it was ten years ago and only 54 per cent of women are enrolled in school.

The constitution - and the political regime that proposed it - will do nothing to tackle these problems. The neo-liberal agenda at the heart of the

"reconstruction" of Iraq will bring further hardship and oppression to the Iraqi people.

The strings are being pulled from Washington and until those strings are cut all Iraqi governments will be puppets doing the bidding of their masters. That is why there can be no talk of democracy for the people while the US have over 161,000 troops and the British 8,000 troops in the country.

The Iraqi government will continue to oversee the US and British neo-liberal agenda because they care more about lining their own pockets than the people they were elected to represent. Corruption is rife. During the same week the elections were taking place 27 Iraqi officials from Bremner's provisional government were arrested on embezzlement charges to the tune of \$1 billion dollars - this is peanuts compared to the estimated \$8 billion of "reconstruction" money that simply disappeared during Bremner's reign.

None of the political parties who supported the constitution or who will be standing in the elections in December are prepared to fight for what is necessary to rescue Iraq: the expropriation of key industries, especially oil, and the use of this enormous wealth to implement a programme of genuine reconstruction which could be used to rebuild Iraq and meet the needs of the masses.

The US and British governments have declared the adoption of the constitution as yet another triumph on the road to "democracy". They desperately hope that a new government in December will lead to a stable Iraq. But all the indicators suggest the opposite:

- The Constitution and the election of a new government in December will not resolve the political, ethnic and religious tensions that weaken the ability of the Iraqi ruling class to oversee a stable transition to neo-liberal democracy
- Bush's war is losing support at home. The US body count has reached the 2000 mark. Casualties are much greater, especially amongst reservists who have been called on so that Bush can avoid conscription. When mothers in their thousands have to collect their sons in body bags and are told that this war could last a decade you can see why the march in September mobilised hundreds of thousands against the war. This is having an effect on the morale of those troops serving in Iraq.

The reason why the death toll continues to rise is that, contrary to US and

SAT 26 NOVEMBER 05
VOICES
from the OCCUPIED IRAQ
 an international teach-in
 ORGANISED BY IRAQ OCCUPATION FOCUS
 HASSAN JUMA'A [Basra] RAHUL MAHAJAN
 KAMIL MAHDI ISMAEEL DAWOOD [Baghdad]
 GILBERT ACHCAR HAIFA ZANGANA
 SAMI RAMADANI ... and others
 10.00-17.00
 University of London Union
 MALET STREET, LONDON WC1E 7HY
 REGISTRATION: £7 / £3 (UNWAGED)
 www.iraqoccupationfocus.org.uk
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Workers Power sponsors the second IOF teach-in

British propaganda, the resistance is growing. Fresh recruits from the war zones of Baghdad, Mosul and Baquba replenish the ranks of the militias who have been relying on a strategy of guerrilla warfare. Some of these militias, such as Moqtada Sadr's Mahdi army, and Ba'athist militias rejected the constitution. They have set driving out the US and British forces as their immediate goal. The resistance has support amongst the mass of Iraqis. A poll conducted in August 2005 by an Iraqi research team reported that 45 per cent of Iraqis believe the attacks on occupation forces are justified. And the figure rises to 65 per cent in Maysan, one of the areas where UK forces operate.

We stand 100 per cent in solidarity with this resistance struggle and for the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops. Any concession on the nature or timing of withdrawal (let's wait until Christmas) is a slap in the face of the Iraqi people. They haven't got the luxury of waiting until the imperialists decide that the time is right to leave the country and they face misery and brutality on a daily basis now.

They want to end that now.

Our support for the struggle does not mean that we support the politics of the resistance. A "long war of attrition" based on guerilla tactics, and in some cases sectarian attacks on civilians, will undermine the resistance of the masses themselves. Moreover, the dominant factions in the resistance offer reactionary, pro-capitalist political solutions that will maintain the inequality and oppression that exists in Iraqi society.

We must do everything in our power to support the struggle in Iraq to forge an independent working class national resistance movement. Such a movement can deal a decisive blow to the occupying forces and rally the masses to a programme of socialist revolution to end poverty, exploitation and dictatorship.

And we can best develop support for this strategy by bringing the truth to workers and youth in Britain about what the "democracy" of Blair and Bush means for our brothers and sisters in Iraq and redoubling our struggle to end the occupation now.

INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE Saturday, 10 December 2005

Royal Horticultural Hall
 80 Vincent Square, London SW1
 10am - 8pm

Delegates from Iraq include:

Ayatollah Jawad al Khalissi, (Gen Sec, Iraqi National Foundation Congress), Sheikh Hassan Al Zargani, (Al Sadr Movement), Hassan Juma, (President, General Union of Oil Employees, Basra), Hana Ibrahim, (Women's Will Association), Dr Khair Eldin Hasseeb, (Centre for Arab Unity Studies)

Delegates from USA include:

Cindy Sheehan, Medea Benjamin (Code Pink), Judy Linehan, (MFSO), Kelly Dougherty (IVAW)

The Stop the War Coalition (StWC) has called an international peace conference in December in response to the "grave danger to world peace posed by the continued occupation of Iraq" and in order to "renew our bonds of solidarity and to express our joint opposition to war".

We encourage all antiwar activists to get delegated and build the conference. It could be a great opportunity to revive the movement - but only if it goes beyond the remit set by the organisers, effectively the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of Britain.

The conference should make clear what kind of peace we are fighting for. The imperialists have imposed reactionary peace settlements on Bosnia and

Northern Ireland, for example, and they would like to do the same in Iraq. We should demand an end to the war, based on self-determination for all the Iraqi people, which can only be achieved by getting the troops out now and expropriating the multinationals, who have asset stripped the country.

Linked to this, it needs to become a working conference. StWC leader Andrew Murray says he would like it to resemble the People's Assemblies of 2003. But these assemblies did not lead to a single action or initiative to take the movement forward. At the conference in December if we can begin to hammer out a strategy for winning our demands - both in the West and in the Middle East - then it could be a great step forward.

Blair softening up the public for attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities

By Sean Murray

Bush and Blair have been using the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comments the Israel, should be "wiped off the face of the earth" to soften up the public for possible military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Addressing an audience of 4000 students at a conference titled 'The World Without Zionism' in Tehran, the Iranian president described Israel as a "disgraceful blot" and that a new wave of Palestinian attacks would be enough to finish off Israel and "wipe this stigma from the face of the Islamic world".

Of course all this is empty bluster. Iran does not represent the slightest real threat to Israel beyond funding some Palestinian and Lebanese guerrilla operations. Israel on the other hand, with the fourth strongest army in the world and armed with nuclear weapons, is capable of wiping states off the face of the earth.

It is Israel that has wiped the state of Palestine off the map and is doing all it can to ensure that all that remains is a sort of gulag archipelago, surrounded by walls and watchtowers.

Noxious anti-Semitic views only provide the Christian Zionists in Washington and Downing Street with a cover for their collusion with Ariel Sharon in carrying out the most sustained national and racial oppression since the holocaust.

While the ruling theocracy of Iran has rightly recognised that Israel is the local gendarme of US imperialism, experts on Iran have pointed out that even in Iran, Ahmadinejad is in a minority within the theocracy and the ruling classes, amongst whom the consensus



Anti-US protest in Tehran

is that Iran cannot afford the global isolation that such remarks about Israel can lead to. A statement from Iran's foreign ministry said Tehran has no intention to attack Israel despite the comments by the President.

Many see Ahmadinejad's comments as playing to a domestic audience with some anti-Israeli rhetoric to cover up his political failings at home. Ahmadinejad, who was surprisingly elected as the President of Iran last year, has so far failed to deliver on election promises to redistribute the wealth generated from Iran's oil and natural gas resources and create jobs.

But Britain, Israel and the US, were not about to let an opportunity to soften up the public for possible military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities like

this pass.

Speaking after the EU summit in Hampton Court, Surrey, Blair said that instead of people "telling us you are not doing anything about Iran, the question people are going to be asked is 'what are you going to do about Iran?'" He went on to say "can you imagine a state with an attitude like that having nuclear weapons" and that "if they continue down this path they may be a real threat to world security."

This is plainly what diplomats call a *casus belli* — a justification for war. It is the beginning of a propaganda build up to undertake another regime change on the pretext of destroying weapons of mass destruction.

The Israeli defence minister Shaul Mofaz said that Iran could be capable

of developing a nuclear weapon within months and that there is a need for urgent action to prevent that. Israel, which views Iran as its main security threat in the Middle East, has repeatedly issued thinly veiled threats against Iran's nuclear programme if diplomatic efforts fail to halt the programme. It is also buying 500 "bunker buster" bombs from the US that could be used to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.

In 1981 Israeli war planes were used to destroy the half complete Osirak reactor 18 miles south of Baghdad.

The White House press secretary, Scott McClellan, said that the president's remark "underlines the concerns we have about Iran's nuclear intentions."

Only a few weeks ago Iran had been accused of having supplied the Iraqi resistance with sophisticated armour piercing bombs that have been used to attack British forces. Producing not a single shred of evidence to back up this accusation, Blair sought to link attacks on British troops with Iran's nuclear programme by saying that Britain would "not be intimidated" into giving up its demand that Iran should abandon its nuclear programme.

Tensions between the US, the EU and Iran over Iran's nuclear programme have been rising for the past few months ever since Iran restarted a uranium processing plant at one of its facilities. The US has accused Iran of using the plant to further enrich uranium which can then be used to produce a nuclear weapon even though a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in August, found no evidence that Iran has been working on a secret nuclear weapons programme.

But of course this week's sabre rattling has nothing to do with Ahmadinejad's comments about Israel or even

Iran's plans to develop a nuclear weapon. It has everything to do with a grab for oil and US imperialism's aims in the Middle East.

Iran has 10 per cent of the world's known oil reserves in fields where extraction is cheap and easy. Iran can also potentially provide access, through its southern gulf ports or westward into Iraq's infrastructure, to the land locked oil reserves of its Caspian neighbours to the north.

By 2025 the US will be reliant on imports to meet 70 per cent of its domestic oil consumption. Having access to and controlling the known oil reserves in the world is of strategic importance to the US and was the real motivation for overthrowing Saddam and occupying Iraq.

Recently the Pentagon is reported to be updating its battle plans for an invasion of Iran. If Iran were to join the elite club of nations with a nuclear weapon it would rule out any invasion of Iran by the US and be an enormous set back for the US's plans for regional domination.

Just like the lies Bush and Blair spun about weapons of mass destruction to justify the invasion of Iraq, the imperialist spin doctors will take every opportunity to talk up the threat posed by Iran to the security of the world to justify an attack.

Any future attack on Iran and its nuclear facilities by the US/UK imperialists or via their local gendarme, Israel must be condemned. The right of Iran to defend itself, including by the possession of a nuclear bomb, must be defended. The possession of these weapons by the imperialists and their Israeli ally is infinitely more dangerous to humanity than their development by countries such as Iran.

Syria: UN report into Hariri assassination steps up pressure for regime change

By Marcus Chamoun

George W Bush did not actually name Syria as a member of the "Axis of Evil" in his infamous speech during the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, but he may as well have done. Syria's Ba'athist regime has been under continuous imperialist pressure ever since the neo-con hawks in the Bush administration embarked on their "War Against Terror".

Syria's support (even if only verbal) for the Palestinian uprising; its provision of sanctuary to Hamas and other Palestinian movements opposed to the Oslo agreement; the use of its influence over Lebanon to prevent it from signing a separate peace with Israel; its support for Hizballah's struggle to eject Israel from Lebanese territory; even before 9-11 this was enough to label Syria as a "terrorist state".

Since then, its refusal to sign a peace agreement with the Zionist state without Israel's full withdrawal from the Golan Heights, occupied in 1967; its decades-long friendship with the USSR during the Cold War; its close relations with Iran; its failure to open its economy up to the multinationals in the epoch of "globalisation"; its still largely state capitalist economic policies; its opposition to the invasion of Iraq; and its status as the last bastion of old-style secu-

lar Arab nationalism following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein; all of these factors have combined to make Syria a highly suspect member of the international community in the eyes of the United States.

The regime's stalled process of "democratic reform", its lack of democracy and poor human rights record is, of course, a secondary concern. Washington has proved quite capable of cooperating with Syria at the height of the Ba'athist regime's internal repression, most notably during its support for the US in the Kuwait war in 1991.

It does not help that the regime still engages in some rhetorical defiance of the new world order, even if it always stops short of a confrontation. Accused during the invasion of Iraq of supplying the Fedayeen Saddam with night-vision equipment, Syria's foreign ministry denied all knowledge, while emphasising that its sympathies were "with the Iraqi people". Signing up to the worldwide crackdown on "terrorism" following the 9-11 atrocities, it dismissed claims that it also harboured terrorists by referring to its Palestinian guests as "publicity agents" and their Damascus-based headquarters as mere offices, while taking the opportunity to denounce Israeli "state terrorism" against Palestinian civilians.

Even its attempts at accommodation with the West have fallen short of Wash-

ington's expectations. Blamed with alarming regularity for allowing "foreign fighters" to cross its highly-porous desert border with Iraq, it has taken steps to clamp down on foreign and domestic Islamists on its territory, and has even recognised the stooge Iraqi government and its powerless predecessor, the Iraq Governing Council. And yet, the insurgency continues, and is at its strongest in Iraq's al-Anbar province straddling the border with Syria.

The turning-point in Syria's worsening relations with imperialism, however, has undoubtedly been the assassination on 14 February in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, of former Lebanese prime minister, Rafiq Hariri. This has been widely blamed on Syria. The spontaneous mass reaction to it, combined with intense international pressure, forced Syria to withdraw its troops and intelligence services from Lebanon, ending a presence established since the beginning of Lebanon's 15-year civil war in 1976. The Lebanese parliamentary elections in May, the first held without Syrian involvement since before the civil war, have led to the formation of a Lebanese government composed of the former "anti-Syrian" opposition and led by the party of Rafiq Hariri's son, Sa'ad Hariri.

On 7 April, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1595 authorising the establishment of an independent commission to investigate Hariri's assassina-

tion. Its findings published on 19 October have been seized upon as proof of Syria's involvement in the assassination. In fact, they prove little of the sort. Their factual findings merely report that the assassination had been meticulously organised and that its perpetrators had tracked Hariri's movements for some months beforehand. It implicates Syria merely by alleging Syrian obstruction of the investigation, by recounting the political situation leading up to the assassination, and by making the tendentious claim that it was so well-planned that it is impossible that the Syrian and Syrian-trained Lebanese security forces did not know of it.

As anyone familiar with the highly-questionable conviction of two Libyan intelligence officers for the plot to blow up Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988 will be aware, investigators in "terrorist cases" can and often do use the most sophisticated-looking forensic evidence to implicate uninvolved parties for political purposes. In particular, given Israel's long history of infiltration and assassinations in Lebanon, it seems unnatural to assume that Syria's intelligence services were the only possible masterminds of a plot on this scale. Nevertheless, there is still some plausibility in the accusation. For all the obviously counter-productive effects of killing Hariri, there are still elements within the Ba'athist regime who might have imag-

ined that they could get away with it. The picture has also become somewhat murkier since the reported "suicide" of Syrian interior minister Ghazi Kanaan in the week before the publication of the Mehlis report.

Regardless of the Syrian regime's guilt or innocence in this case, what is clear is that the United States is trying to use Hariri's killing and the changed political situation in Lebanon to increase Syria's regional isolation. Already, US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice has warned of severe consequences, including possible economic sanctions, while President Bush has spoken of the use of force as a possible "last resort" in forcing Syria to cooperate with the ongoing UN investigation. The tone of British and US statements on Syria has been so threatening that even Sa'ad Hariri has had to come out in public against sanctions on Syria, while Russian president Vladimir Putin has threatened to use his veto in the UN Security Council to block any moves in this direction.

It is only a short step from talk like this to the agenda of "regime change". And that, for revolutionary socialists, should be the real issue. Socialists in the West should resist every attempt by our governments to open up a "second front" in their Middle East adventure, whether it takes the form of bombing or starving a country into submission.

Venezuela: how much of a socialist is Chavez?

By Stuart King

Hugo Chavez was elected President of Venezuela in 1998 and again in 2000 under a new constitution. He survived a military coup in April 2002, a two month long bosses "general strike" launched at the end of 2002 and defeated an attempt to remove him in a recall referendum in August 2004. During these hectic six years Hugo Chavez, the ex-parachute colonel, has changed.

He arrived in power with a commitment to end the corruption that afflicted Venezuelan political life - symbolised by the two bourgeois parties, Action Democratica (AD) and the Christian Democracy (Copei), who took it in turns to loot the state when in power.

Chavez promised a new and more democratic constitution - a Fifth Republic; a fairer use of the countries oil revenues by distributing more of it to the poor (40% of the population lived in critical poverty, 80% on the minimum wage or less) and a reformed economy - developing agriculture and industry in the interior of the country, halting the drift to the cities and ending an over reliance on oil revenues.

One of his heroes was Simon Bolivar, the 19th century nationalist who led the struggle for independence from Spain. Chavez dubbed his movement "Bolivarian". His aim was to unite the countries of Latin America - this time against the United States and its attempt to impose neo liberal policies on the continent through the IMF and the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas.

In other words Chavez was a reforming nationalist, one with only a vague political and economic programme - he was taken for a while with "the third way" of Schroeder and Blair. He had not come to power at the head of an organised party, but rather as a populist figure that promised change for the poor and an end to poverty and corruption. His political vehicle, the Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR), was a cobbled together coalition of different leftist and reforming parties.

On reforms he has been true to his word. He has democratised the state and is taking measures against the most corrupt judges, politicians and policemen. He has introduced medical clinics in the slums with the help of 20,000 Cuban doctors, free education for hundreds of thousands of children and adults and redistributed thousands of acres of land to poor peasants.

In early 2005, in a speech to the World Social Forum (WSF) in Brazil, Chavez was declared himself a socialist, "Everyday I become more convinced ... that it is necessary to transcend capitalism ... through socialism, true socialism with equality and justice."

However what matters is not what leaders or parties say they are, but what they do - what programme they are implementing.

Assessing the revolutionary period in Venezuela and its leader has caused confusion even amongst those who declare themselves Marxist and Trotskyist. The International Marxist Tendency (IMT), who initiated the Hands off Venezuela Campaign, has an affiliated group in Venezuela, the Revolutionary Marxist Current (RCM) and one of its leaders Alan Woods is a regular visitor to the country.



Hugo Chavez: according to Alan Woods he has "an unerring revolutionary instinct"

The IMT has collected a number of his articles from its website - www.marxist.com in a book *The Venezuelan Revolution: a Marxist Perspective*. Written between 2002 and 2005 they give a good idea of the politics of this tendency.

The articles rightly point to the role of the masses as the driving force in pushing the government leftwards. At every crucial point since 1998 it has been the blows of the counter revolution and the masses response that has emboldened Chavez and made him take more radical measures.

During the attempted coup of April 2002 when Chavez was locked up, it was the masses organised in the Bolivarian Circles who took to the streets and gave heart to the presidential guard and the paratroop regiment to move against the coup mongers. During the bosses lockout many workers took over the empty factories, while parents restarted classes in schools deserted by teachers.

The problem is the IMT turns these developments into a schema, a "revolutionary process" in which Chavez and the left of the Bolivarian movement can become, in the absence of a revolutionary Marxist party, the instrument of socialist revolution. We are told, "In the absence of a mass revolutionary Marxist party, the forces of revolution have gathered around Chavez and the Bolivarian Movement" (p68). An analogy is drawn with the Portuguese revolution of 1975 when a left officers' movement, the MFA, overthrew the Caetano dictatorship. Ted Grant, previously a leader of the Militant and now the IMT is quoted approvingly by Woods, "In a twisted version of permanent revolution this lower officer caste becomes - for a period - the unconscious agent of history, carrying through the necessary task of the statification of the economy." (p76)

Woods and Grant stand in the tradition of a Fourth International (FI) in the late 1940s that labelled the Stalinist leader of Yugoslavia, Marshall Tito,

an "unconscious Trotskyist". This outlook led to one leading figure in the FI, Michel Pablo, becoming a government adviser to Algerian President Ben Bella, a left nationalist head of state in the 1960s.

Chavez is able to follow such a path, according to Woods, because "In reality, the state in Venezuela is no longer controlled by the bourgeoisie." (p70). Woods argues that the state in essence its "armed bodies of men" - army, police etc, is no longer under the control of the bourgeoisie.

It has acquired under Chavez a large degree of independence "lifting itself above society" - as Marx would have described it, it has become a bonapartist state! What Woods and the IMT forget, or rather cover over, is even where this is the case the state and its armed bodies of men still defend a set of property relations, in this case a capitalist Venezuela.

It is not under the control of the bourgeoisie because, "A section of the army has gone over to the Bolivarian revolution. This includes the overwhelming majority of the soldiers, non-commissioned officers but also a significant number of the officers." (p117).

Not only is this an exaggeration but Woods neglects to say that the Bolivarian Movement itself, and in particular its leader Chavez - does not seek to overthrow capitalism.

However much he may declare himself a socialist Chavez's actions and the government's policies have been limited to reforming capitalism - with land reforms, fairly minor restrictions on the movement of capital and only nationalising (buying out) capitalist companies that have gone bankrupt. No attempts have been made to expropriate foreign capital or nationalise the banks. Indeed compared to the 1970s MFA in Portugal or the Sandinista's in Nicaragua in the 1980s, Chavez has been much more favourable to private and foreign capital.

As long as the army keeps its hier-

archy and its chain of command it will continue to be a force in defence of capitalism despite the removal of a few score generals implicated in the 2002 coup. Indeed there are regular and ongoing incidents where army officers and police side with landowners against peasants attempting to seize land, and cases where they collude with landlord-organised death squads.

Alan Wood's belief that Hugo Chavez can be the "blunt instrument" through which revolutionary change takes place in Venezuela leads to gross opportunism when it comes to maintaining independence and criticism of the government. In a situation where Chavez is under attack from imperialism, especially the US, and from internal counter-revolutionaries, revolutionary Marxists certainly should fight alongside the Bolivarian Movement against every anti-democratic and sabotaging action. But to step over the line, to give political support to such a government, to fail to criticise its weaknesses, worse to sow illusions in the steadfastness of its leaders, is to betray the interests of the masses.

By January 2005 Woods declared "President Hugo Chavez has consistently revealed an unerring revolutionary instinct. He has striven to express the revolutionary instincts of the masses. That is his great strength!" The unfortunate truth is that President Chavez has not shown an "unerring revolutionary instinct" as even Woods is forced to admit on occasion. For example after the coup attempt Chavez called for conciliation and told the masses to go back to their homes. He retreated on some reforms and reinstated some opposition managers in PVDSA - the opposition of course proceeded to launch the two month long lock out that nearly brought the country to its knees.

The articles do make clear that a revolution cannot stop halfway, that if the masses do not destroy the economic power of the oligarchy and capitalists,

they will use those enormous sources of power to throw back the gains made since 1998. Yet when Woods comes to put forward a programme for socialist revolution it is a remarkably confused and inadequate one.

It calls for the nationalisation of the land, banks, insurance companies and big industries but does not talk about the expropriation of them - a very important point as the government pays out large sums to employers for their bankrupt factories. Seizing assets is only mentioned in relation to the property of counter-revolutionaries.

Nowhere in the *Theses on Revolution and Counter Revolution in Venezuela* (p110-133) is the need for workers and peasants' councils (soviets) raised or explained. The nearest the theses approach it is raising the demand for "action committees", but their role, composition, purpose is left unexplained.

While the IMT regularly calls for the arming of the workers and for the formation of a peoples' militia - "The revolution can only defend itself against its enemies if it arms itself" (p124) - nowhere does it call for rank and file soldiers' committees. Yet this is essential both to undermine and break up the command structure of the army and as a source of arms for the militia. The fact that this is not raised is no doubt connected to Woods belief that the army has somehow already gone over to the revolution. Instead Woods praises Chavez' various utterances calling on every person to learn to use a rifle. The RCM in Venezuela should be saying "Fine Mr President when are you going to distribute the arms!" Talk as revolutionaries know is cheap.

Woods constantly tries to deflect criticism of his grossly opportunistic approach to the Chavez movement by shouting "They would like us to denounce Chavez as a bourgeois Bonapartist ... it would immediately cut us off, not just from the masses who are firmly behind Chavez but also from the activists, most of whom remain loyal to Chavez, even if they have doubts and criticisms."

But this is setting up a straw man. Undoubtedly Chavez is extremely popular at the moment. A revolutionary policy would support every progressive measure introduced, but argue it should go further - for example not just take over unused landed estates but all large estates for distribution to the landless.

Revolutionaries should certainly criticise Chavez and his government when they fail to take measures to further the interests of the masses, or when they retreat before the banks and big industrialists. They should issue warnings about where such vacillations will lead. While defending the government against attacks of the counter-revolution they should tell the workers clearly that Chavez and his government are not revolutionary socialists and in a period of crisis will either split or side with the capitalists rather than the workers.

This might make Chavez and the Bolivarian ministers less friendly, and Alan Woods less welcome at the Miraflores Palace, but it will make the critical workers respect the revolutionaries for their directness. In times of crisis it could make the difference between tailing a failing populist and leading a successful workers' revolution.

UN report highlights gender inequality

In the second of a series of articles looking at issues affecting women, *Clare Heath* reviews a recent UN report on women and poverty

Last month the director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) launched her annual report with a warning that "...world leaders will not make poverty history until they make gender discrimination history." The report, *The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals* makes for grim reading, providing page after page of evidence about how women remain systematically oppressed.

The report is clear: millions of women live in poverty, suffer avoidable death or disability in childbirth, work unpaid in the home or family businesses, receive low pay and endure discrimination at work, enjoy fewer educational opportunities and remain vulnerable to violence and rape. The report focuses on the situation for women in the poorest countries, but the oppression catalogued applies across the globe to poor, working class women.

The world's political leaders signed up to the Millennium Development Goals five years ago, to be achieved by 2015 (see box). They are very worthy and include increased gender equality and empowerment of women. As the World Bank has explained, "gender inequality is inefficient and undermines the effectiveness of development policies".

The UNFPA report shows how progress to many of the goals is blocked by the continued discrimination against women, and it urges leaders to do better. The trouble is that women's oppression is not an unfortunate blemish on the otherwise unsullied reputation of capitalism, it is an integral part.

Women's oppression under capitalism results in economic, social and political inequalities. At its heart lies that division between the socialised production of commodities, that takes place in the fields and factories, and the privatised reproduction that takes place in the family. In the sphere of economics, women's opportunities remain constrained by their role in the family.

Although an increasing proportion of women have paid jobs outside the home, these jobs are lower paid, less



A memorial to the victims of domestic violence

secure and often part-time. In addition to looking after children, cooking and doing other household tasks, women make up 62% of unpaid family workers - working in the home or on the farm in family businesses. Women do a lot of work, inside and outside the home, but it is often not recognised and they often lack rights. "The labour of rural women accounts for 60 to 80 per cent of food production in developing countries, but many face restrictions on the rights to own, use and inherit land," says the report.

The systematic social oppression of women is constantly reproduced by lack of opportunities, by social and religious norms that repress women's independence and sexuality and by overt sexism and violence. Violence against women is not sporadic or occasional, it is systematic - a physical expression of women's subordination. While not all men abuse, beat and rape women, these things happen in all communities, and are more or less tolerated in most.

Worldwide, one in three women is likely to experience physical, sexual or other abuse during her lifetime - usually by a family member or acquaintance. Adolescent girls are particular-

ly vulnerable, with nearly 50 per cent of sexual assaults across the world harming girls aged 15 years and younger.

Women's social oppression is also shown by their relative lack of access to education, leading to higher levels of illiteracy. Eight hundred million

The Millennium Development Goals

- 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2: Achieve universal primary education
- 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- 4: Reduce child mortality
- 5: Improve maternal health
- 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8: Develop a global partnership for development

adults, 18% of the adult population, are illiterate, and 64% of these are women. In some regions the proportion is much higher: 77% of illiterate adults in Central and Eastern Europe (6.5 million) are women.

One of the most graphic demonstrations of capitalism's continued commitment to women's subordination is in the sphere of reproductive health. Some 529,000 women die and up to 20 million suffer serious disability each year from complications of pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of these deaths could be prevented. In poor countries less than one-third of women have a skilled attendant present at childbirth compared with almost 100% in most developed countries.

Lack of access to modern contraceptives is the major factor behind an estimated 76 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world alone, and an estimated 19 million unsafe abortions worldwide each year. Many of these lead to permanent disabilities or death. And there is plenty of money to institute good health care programmes to reduce these avoidable deaths - using some of the US\$1 trillion spend on military expenditure each year, for example.

One final example highlighted by the report is the differential impact of HIV/AIDS on women. Young women are 1.6 times more likely than young men to have HIV, and for many women this is an inevitable part of their social situation. In men HIV risk comes from having many sexual partners. In contrast, it is marriage and fidelity that presents one of the biggest threats to women. "I didn't understand how I, as a submissive woman, could be infected, having been faithful to the one man in my life", explained an HIV-positive woman from Burkina Faso.

She is not alone - in sub-Saharan Africa an estimated 60 to 80 per cent of HIV positive women have been infected by their husbands - their only partner. In India, some 90 per cent of women with HIV said they were virgins when they married and had remained faithful to their husbands. Just improving sex education and distributing condoms will not tackle this fundamental problem - married women would often

rather risk HIV infection than ask their husbands to use a condom, thereby confronting them over infidelity. In two districts of Uganda, only 26 per cent of women said it was acceptable for a married woman to ask a husband to use a condom.

This unequal burden of HIV infection is just one more dreadful illustration of women's oppression, rooted in their position in the family. The double sexual standard in which women stay at home and are faithful, while men are free to sexually roam is killing millions of women, and men, worldwide.

The UNFPA urges world leaders to sort all of this out. Unfortunately for the world's women, and men, the MDG goals will not be achieved in the next 10 years or in this millennium unless these leaders are ousted along with their economic and social system. It is possible that some of the goals, universal primary education, for example, could be approached since it is in the interests of business that a workforce is largely literate, but eradicating poverty, even just the extreme kind, is utterly impossible under a system that cannot tolerate systematic planning of production and distribution.

The world leaders want a largely unregulated market economy to deliver poverty reduction, but the free market creates increased inequality inside every country, and global competition drives wages down and undermines conditions in the more economically developed nations such as the United States. While the state, both national and global, has to offset some of these effects through welfare and health programmes for example, governments refuse to consider the massive hike in taxes on business that are necessary to significantly alleviate poverty. Still less will these governments expropriate the wealth and property of the capitalists and plan production for need not profit which is a precondition for abolishing poverty.

They can't, but we can. The millions of women affected by poverty, sexism and violence are the only ones who can challenge it through joining with their exploited brothers, sons and fathers to overthrow the system that creates these horrors.

Malawi starves as West looks on

By Keith Spencer

Remember Live 8 and the G8 in the summer? Heads of the world's most powerful countries gathered supposedly to reduce world hunger and poverty. Since then we have had famine in Niger and growing food shortages in southern Africa. The worst hit country is Malawi with half of the population of 11 million facing starvation. The worst harvest for 10 years has added to previous shortages and led to appeals by the World Food Programme for \$88 million in aid to buy another 150,000 tonnes of maize to feed the population of which only about \$27 million has been promised so far.

But this famine is not simply a natural disaster; it is a function of policies that the World Bank and IMF have forced onto Malawi.

In 1999, the IMF and EU pressurised the Malawi government into setting up the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA), an independent body that

replaced the state-owned Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (Admarc), which provided cheap fertiliser and seed and stored grain enabling it to survive previous droughts. NFRA had to buy the 167,000 metric tonnes of maize reserve from Admarc. The IMF ensured that NFRA borrowed the money for the purchase from a South African bank at 56 per cent interest.

But worse was to come. The crops were already beginning to fail when the IMF told the government to sell 100,000 tonnes of grain reserve in order to meet its debt repayments incurred in setting up NFRA. The grain was to be sold outside of the country - to prevent the price of grain falling in Malawi even though there was an impending food crisis in the country. Because of corruption, profiteering and accident, the government actually sold 130,000 tonnes of NFRA's stock. By early 2002 when it was clear to everyone that a famine was occurring and the government had already declared a state of emergency,

there was only 37,000 tonnes of maize in reserve.

The maize price had risen by 400 per cent by early 2002 while production fell by 40 per cent.

All these reforms were supposedly meant to introduce the market, which the IMF and World Bank claimed would solve problems of famine. But then, as now, as the crops failed the price of maize increased and more and more people couldn't afford the food.

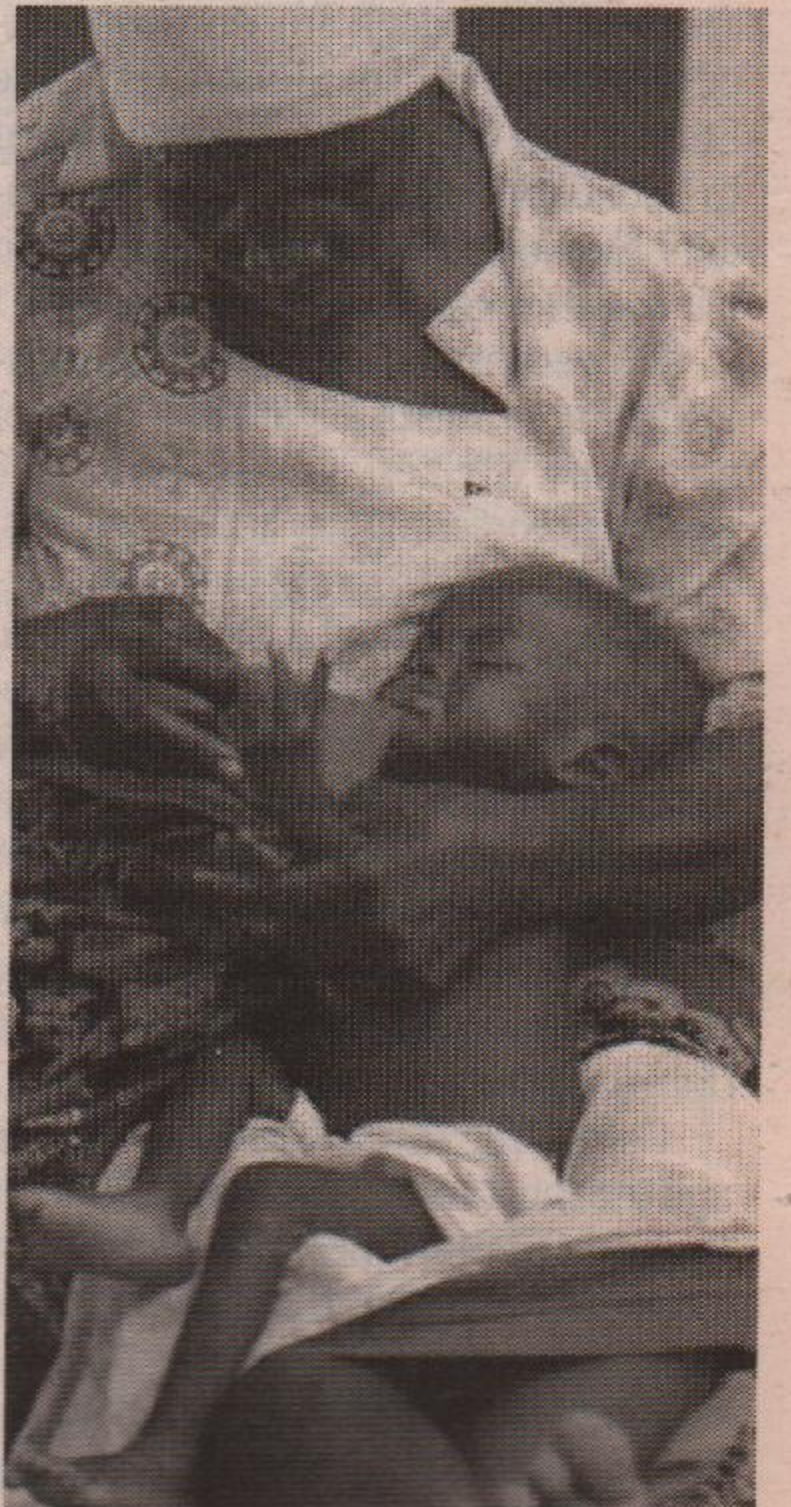
Malawi has been the recipient of several loans by donor countries and the IMF. And along with loans come debt repayments. In 2002 Malawi was paying \$70 million a year in debt repayments or 29 per cent of government spending - a figure higher than its agriculture, education and health budgets combined. It was put on the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries relief programme in 2000 owing about \$2.6 billion which has since increased to \$3 billion.

Malawi is typical of many southern African countries. Its people are poor, mainly work on the land and about 15

per cent are infected with HIV/AIDS. This hits agriculture especially hard as women, who in Malawi are 87 per cent of the rural workforce, are ignored and offered little help. Health services are patchy if they reach into the countryside at all.

Institutions like the IMF and World Bank ruin its economy, destroy its ability to feed its population and then offer more loans and add on more charges. In effect the organs of world capitalism are brutal loan sharks: offering loans that they know can't be repaid, bleeding countries dry, starving nations into submission and finally killing hundreds of thousands of people.

For Malawi, and other African countries, a revolution of the oppressed workers and peasants is the only way to renounce the debt, collectivise the big farms and break with the capitalist system. And to do this it is necessary to have a world party of socialist revolution. Utopian? It's a lot less utopian than expecting the G8 countries to eradicate poverty, famine and war.



Austrian school students strike

By Michael Gatter, AST

On 19 October, thousands of school students went on strike against education cuts in Austria. More than 1,500 school students demonstrated in Vienna and 3,000 school students also went on strike in two other provinces.

The strike was protesting against a decree of the right-wing government that limits the number of students who are allowed to enter university. But the protest and many speeches and slogans at the demonstrations went beyond this decree to attack the capitalist education system.

In Vienna, the strike was organised by several student action committees. The driving forces behind the building of these committees and the strike itself were ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (AST, the Austrian section of the L51), Revolution and a left-wing opposition group inside the social democratic youth organisation "Funke".

The leadership of the social democratic youth organisations were hostile and tried to sabotage the strike. For example at one school, the former school student representative (and social democratic functionary) tried to stop us from distributing leaflets and called on the



Austrian students take to the streets led by socialist youth group Revolution

vice-director of the school to kick us out. On the day before the strike the official school student union, dominated by the social democrats, said that the strike was organised by "violent, left-wing extremist groups". At a university student meeting with 100 students attending, the bureaucrats tried to stop voting on giving the strike support. After one and a half hours, they had to give in, and the majority voted in favour of the strike.

The mood of the demonstration was very lively and militant. The speakers at the demonstration were from AST, Revolution and Funke and speakers from

the various action committees.

The organised AST and Revolution-contingent had between 250 to 300 people and led the march in Vienna. It had banners calling for a general strike against the education robbery and for a common struggle of the students and workers. The contingent – and the whole demonstration – gave a lively and militant impression.

The media also covered the strikes and demonstrations. On 17 October the state television interviewed school students, many of whom were from AST and Revolution, and the daily paper "Der

Standard" (comparable to the Guardian or the Independent in Britain) reported on the demonstration, including the AST and Revolution contingent.

At the end of the demonstration, demonstrators went to the university and held a brief assembly. Two resolutions were discussed and both adopted.

The resolutions from the AST and Revolution explained the relation between the education cuts and capitalism, and stressed the need for mass strike actions of school students, university students and young workers and apprentices.

It also proposed a mass school and university strike against the education summit of the European Union on 16 and 17 March 2006, and called on youth organisations in Europe and the preparatory meeting of the ESF in Vienna (6-8. January in Vienna) to support and organise days of action.

It also called for mass protests against Bush's visit to Austria in June 2006.

It proposed that the action committees should continue and organise the coming actions, and to fight against repression and problems in the schools themselves.

The resolution also criticised the official school and university student leaderships for not supporting the strike and demanded that they support the actions in March 2006.

This strike was a huge success being

the first time in many decades that revolutionaries organised a school student strike against the official social democratic leadership. It reflected both the potential for militant youth resistance against cuts in education and also the progress we have made in building Revolution as a well-rooted youth organisation in the past two years.

The strikes and demonstrations showed that revolutionaries do not just make propaganda but can take independent actions, particularly in the youth.

Trotsky's approach in 1934 when he explained the orientation towards building a new international after the political bankruptcy of Stalinism in Germany is particularly true today when we are building the Fifth International:

"In its work the nucleus of the new party and the new International must attempt to go beyond the bounds of propaganda at every opportunity and to prove the seriousness and value of our revolutionary determination through independent action or through participation in action. In this, we must take as our starting point the fact that the only way to convince broad masses of the correctness of our ideas is in action." (Writings, Supplement 1934-40, p. 511)

• More news and pictures of the strikes and demonstration at www.revolution-austria.at and www.arbeiterInnenstandpunkt.net

Italy: Berlusconi under siege

L51 Bologna

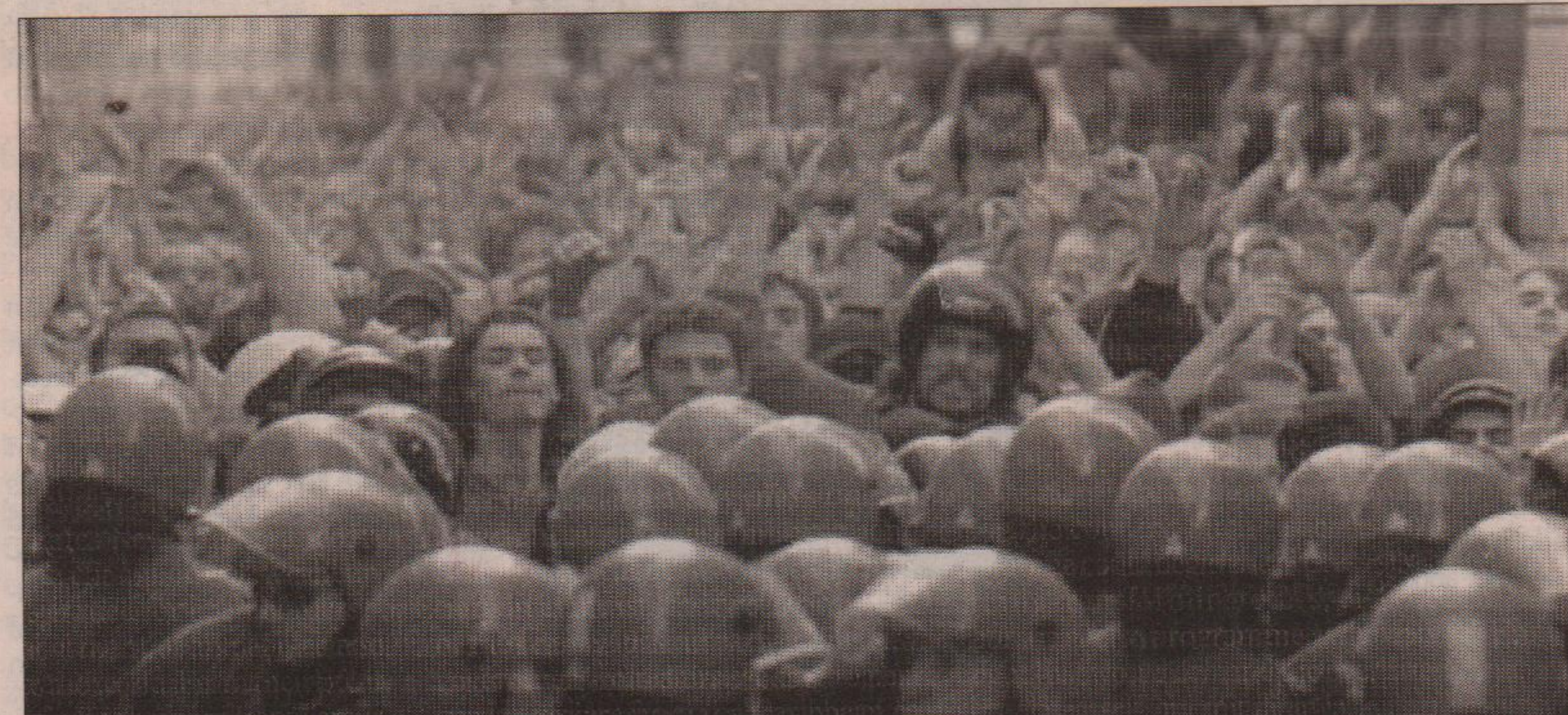
One hundred thousand teachers, university and high school students from all over Italy marched through Rome on 25 October to the doors of the Italian parliament. It was one of the most militant and angry demonstrations seen for a long time.

They were protesting against a new law from minister of education Letizia Moratti, which will drastically worsen the conditions of work and study. Millions already suffer from precarious and poorly paid work in Italy's schools and universities. Armed police were unleashed on the defenceless crowd outside the parliament. Young people, from the growing number of occupied universities and high schools across Italy, were mercilessly beaten by these thugs in front of national TV cameras.

The protests were organised by a united front of the Union of the Students (l'Unione degli Studenti-connected to Democratici di Sinistra (DS); the Student Left (Studenti di Sinistra, linked to Rifondazione Comunista and the Student Network (Rete Studenti, linked to left squatter community centres)

The recent wave of student occupations and protests is part of a wave of struggles. Strikes against workplace closures, worsening pay and conditions, struggles against soaring rents and evictions are widespread. On 29 October, a mass demonstration of 600,000 homeless families took place against the rise in prices of consumer goods, especially basic necessities. A rash of consumer organisations have sprung into life in all the major cities, with local and national boycotts planned to occur in the coming days and weeks.

Cobas, the syndicalist trade union and the most militant opposition to the Berlusconi government, has announced a one-day strike on the 25 November. It is demanding the return of the scala mobile – the sliding scale of wages. This should be supported with the creation of a working class cost of living



A taste of Prodi in power

We have already had a foretaste of what a Prodi government could do at a local level in Bologna. The mayor, Sergio Cofferati, ex-leader of the largest trade union federation Cgil heads a coalition made up of the Democratic Left (DS), Greens, independents and Rifondazione Comunista, and part of the "social movements." He unilaterally revoked a legally

binding wage contract, agreed by the previous mayor with the council workers. He has branded as "subversives" those in the social movement who have occupied empty houses owned by speculators on the chronic housing shortage and sky high rents in Bologna. Worse, he sent in the bulldozers to clear Roma families living in tents along the banks of the river Reno.

When the students were marching in Rome, a contingent from the university occupation in Bologna decided to widen their protest to include the Mayor's brutal removal of the Roma community. They marched to the council chambers, but were met with armed police, who without warning attacked them, injuring many. Cofferati called this a victory for "legality."

index to challenge the fake figures of the existing one.

That same day, the big union confederations – Cgil, UIL, Cisl – have called for a four-hour strike against the 2006 budget. This includes the slashing of 26 billion euros from the public services of the cities where the Berlusconi government was forced out 18 months ago.

But if it is left to the leaders of the major federations, their response will be both too little and too late to stop Berlusconi. Half-day strikes and then

weeks or months of inaction and sell-out deals have kept him in power so far. The leaders of these unions have already sold out millions of public sector workers by accepting a paltry 90 euro increase in the face of rampant inflation, and recently did exactly the same to the teachers. In both cases they sought to head off action from below. As one of the union leaders was reported as saying, "If it weren't for us, this country would be in open rebellion."

The most striking crisis of leadership in Italy today lies with the so-called

radical "communist" opposition. This is true in the unions and in the movement of the social forums, which have been allowed to decay into talking shops. From none of these centres of opposition has come anything like a clear call to action.

WHAT WORKERS NEED

• The launching of a wave of strikes, protests, occupations, demonstrations against the whole range of economic, social and political attacks on workers and youth!

- The building of committees of action, drawing in delegates of all those engaged in struggle, to co-ordinate these struggles and create a working class action programme.
- A general strike to bring down Berlusconi!
- A government of workers and the struggling masses – not a "social liberal" coalition of class collaboration, under Prodi.

But instead, the left is limiting itself to important but local struggles that ignore or dismiss the question "who governs". The militants are being misled by Fausto Bertinotti, leader of Rifondazione Comunista. The idea that a centre-left coalition can be pushed to the left by a series of half-baked demands on Prodi ignores both principle (a government within the straightjacket of capitalist state will always do the bosses bidding) and experience (the Olive Tree government in the '90s).

The centre left and Prodi, who recently won the left primaries, have made it clear that they will not close the detention centres for immigrants; will keep and modify the laws which enforce EU neoliberal directives; will not restore the full value and security of pension funds, and will only gradually withdraw troops from Iraq but not from Kosovo or Afghanistan and remain faithful ally of the USA.

With such a record from the centre left it is plain nonsense that Bertinotti can pressure Prodi to the left. The role of the RC is to offer nothing in the way of strategy to unite and mobilise the masses in today's struggle.

Consciously or unconsciously the RC leadership is trying to defuse the present situation. They actually fear an outbreak of mass struggle by workers and youth because this would bring a serious confrontation with the bourgeois state. That is why the militant youth and workers of Italy need a revolutionary communist alternative – a vanguard party of the class struggle – not preparations for a Prodi-led popular front.

Mark Hoskisson looks at some of the crucial events covered by *Workers Power* in 300 fighting socialist editions of the paper

Late September 1978, fascists were marching through the Asian community in London's east end and Ford workers were limbering up for an eight-week strike against the Labour government's pay policy. The storm clouds that were to eventually break into the "winter of discontent" – mass strikes across the public sector – were gathering.

And *Workers Power* was preparing the first edition of its newspaper dated October 1978. Using a hired typesetter, scalpels, scotch tape, hireset and glue, our lay-up "artistes" turned the hand-written articles of members into an impressive eight page tabloid that sold out within a week of rolling off the cheapest north London printing press we could find.

Production methods have changed over the years but the consistency of purpose that was always at the heart of our paper stays the same. If we were to sum up that purpose it would fall into three areas:

- Outlining a way forward for the struggles of the working class in Britain and internationally – a strategy that can take them beyond their starting point to challenge to the capitalist system.
- Educating our readers in revolutionary communist politics.
- Organising our supporters around a body of ideas, a set of campaigning priorities and clear tactics for the class struggle – the better to build a revolutionary party through the paper.

This has always been the purpose of all the best revolutionary papers the



and File must fight for a general strike," we said in May 1984. And we also warned "Beware the TUC" in September of that year when the miners' leaders announced to their members that the TUC was now going to help them.

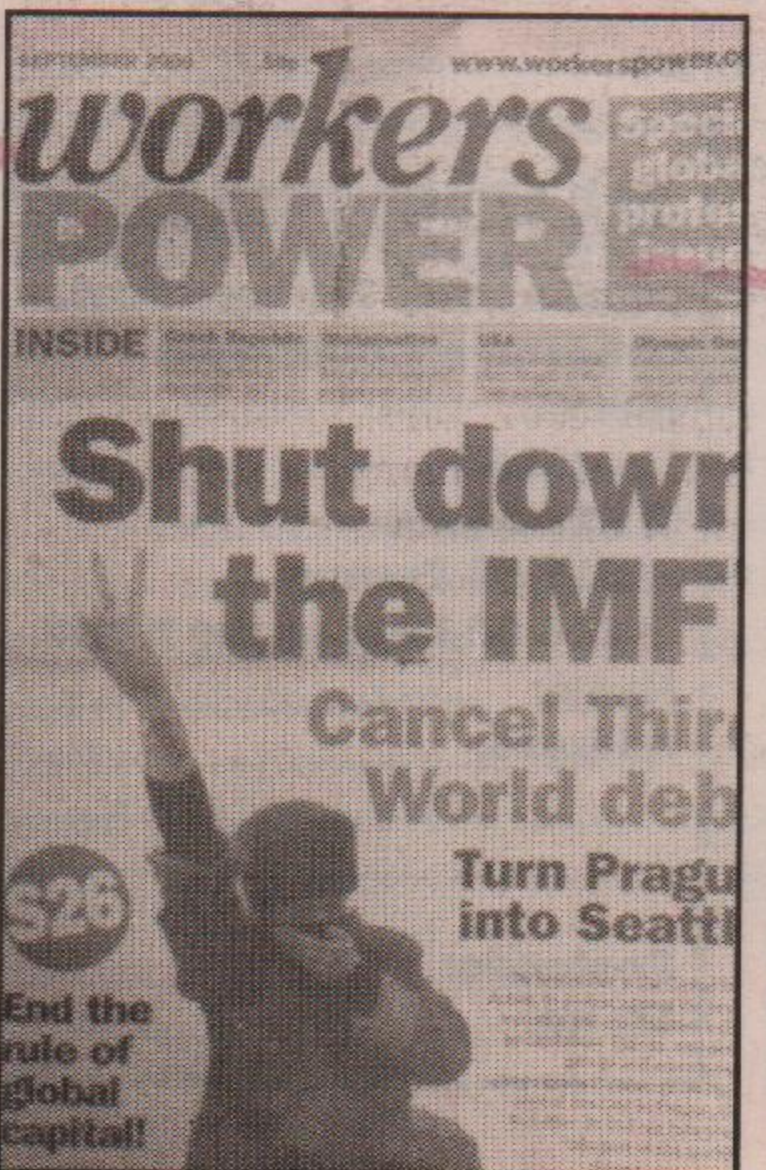
We didn't leave any of this at merely the level of front-page slogans. Both working class history and contemporary politics were marshalled to explain in detail why the strategy of rank and file independence and a general strike were vital for a miners' victory. We used clear examples of how to spread the strike, in particular by campaigning for joint action committees of miners and dockers when the latter struck during the summer of 1984.

We campaigned hard with miners, using the paper to convene meetings in pit villages around the country, to build a rank and file organisation. And we were vindicated when a conference of over 100 miners and their wives established a National Rank and File Miners' Movement, a gain that was swept away in the defeat.

Faced with a second great challenge, the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Workers Power* was a singular revolutionary voice. *Socialist Worker* regarded this event as merely the "collapse of state capitalism" and proved incapable of recognising that an unprecedented assault on the workers' of the former Stalinist states was about to be unleashed by a capitalism restoring itself. They saw a downturn where there wasn't one and missed one when it hit them full in the face!

Others mourned the death of Stalinism, regarding it as a second best option to genuine socialism. They saw only counter revolution, another "midnight of the century". They ignored and denounced the mass workers and democratic struggles against Stalinism. Still others joined with the reformists in claiming these events vindicated every critic of the Russian Revolution and blamed the workers for taking the revolutionary road in the first place.

What united each and every one of these trends in world socialism was that, in the face of the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the bourgeois ideologi-



cal assault on socialism that followed it, they began a journey to the right.

As against this *Workers Power* dug in and fought the class enemy over every inch of territory they tried to claim. Where they blamed socialism, we explained the twin evils of Stalinism and imperialism. Where they castigated revolution we pointed to the need for a revolutionary struggle against the spread of their system: "At present building a party to fight for that [revolution] in the former USSR, and supporting every partial struggle of the workers against their new masters, is the most vital task for anybody who wants to see real socialism triumph over the ruins of Bush's new world order." (*Workers Power* 150, January 1992)

In fact the new world order started to unravel faster than many expected. The decade that began with the imperialists promising the "end of history" and the class struggle, closed with their World Trade Organisation being closed down by massed ranks of workers and anti-capitalist youth in Seattle, November 1999. A new world movement had risen to challenge their new world order.

Once again *Workers Power* was at the forefront of charting a way forward for the burgeoning anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movement. And as this movement developed into a powerful anti-war movement after 9/11, we pressed ahead with a sustained campaign to turn the new internationalism into a new, organised and revolutionary Fifth International.

When the brutality of capitalism revealed itself in Genoa, Italy in 2001 with the police murder of anti-capi-



talist protester Carlo Giuliani and the repression of protestors, the movement asked itself: where now? The reformists said turn away from street protests, the liberals said turn to lobby politics and our paper that declared in September 2001, issue "After Genoa we need a new revolutionary international."

As ever this was no mere declaration. Armed with arguments in favour of such an organisation, *Workers Power*, along with our sister organisations from across the world in the League for a Fifth International, helped build the World and European Social Forums into mass movements. We strove to turn the anti-capitalist youth towards the workers' movement and the workers' movement towards anti-capitalism. We explained the need to take steps towards internationally coordinated action and we helped fight for the momentous day of international struggle against the imperialist war on Iraq, 15 February, 2003, when millions took to the streets world wide.

Just three examples that illustrate that, while our audience may change, our message remains fundamentally the same: working class revolution is the route out of capitalist chaos and misery. Our paper is above all an organ of working class revolution. It was in 1978. It is in 2005. It will be stay that way for the next 300 issues and way beyond.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

CAPITALISM

Long ago capitalism developed the material and human resources to end poverty and inequality on a world scale. Yet it will not do this. It cannot because of its fundamental features: private ownership of production and the division of the world into competing nation states. The factories, the land, the mines, oil fields and banks are all owned by a tiny handful of billionaires, whose power and wealth is defended by national armies, police forces and security services.

To liberate humanity from hunger, insecurity, war and disease this tiny ruling class must be overthrown. Only the working class has the strength, the centrality to production and the interest to carry this through. Capitalism must be abolished by a workers' revolution, and a society without class divisions, without bureaucratic, military and police repression, must be created. Only in such a society will the last traces of national and racial oppression, the oppression of women, youth, lesbians and gays finally disappear.

The exploiters will resist this revolution with savage ferocity. But their resistance can be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution, disintegrating the forces of repression, the capitalist state.

The capitalist politicians, top civil servants, judges, the police and army chiefs must be swept away – the army and the police force must be smashed and replaced with a militia of the armed working people.

All power must pass into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, directly elected by the workers and poor farmers and subject to instant recall by them. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For the exploiters it will certainly seem oppressive, indeed they will lose all their wealth and power. But for the all the formerly exploited classes it will be the most democratic society ever seen. And even this state will only be a transitional form on the road to a completely classless and stateless society: communism.

To achieve this, all large-scale production and distribution must be taken into social ownership and be democratically planned. Under workers' control, we could share the work between all able people and every improvement in productivity could be used to reduce the length of the working week. Poverty, social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents could be systematically overcome.

IMPERIALISM

Imperialism is the highest and most violent stage of capitalism. In the imperialist system a few great capitalist powers and corporations exploit billions in all countries and use their vast military machines to crush anyone who resists them.

For this reasons we support all resistance to their invasions and occupations. We demand an end to the occupation of the Iraq and we support the Iraqi people's armed resistance. We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland of Zionist occupation. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all other imperialist pacts.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION

We fight all racism and national oppression and defend refugees and asylum seekers. We demand the opening of the borders, giving all migrants the right to work, social security and full citizenship rights. We fight to deny the fascists any platform for their views and support organised self defence against fascist gangs and racial attacks.

We fight for women's liberation from physical and mental abuse, from bearing the sole or main burden of domestic labour, from suffering sexual exploitation, unequal pay and discrimination at work. Women must have control over their own fertility, including the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians and gay men must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We must fight the oppression of young people. We demand an end to the harassment of young people by government, state and press. Young workers should get equal pay and the same rights as other workers. Schools and colleges must be run by the representatives of school students, education workers and local working people. We fight for independent revolutionary youth organisations linked to a revolutionary youth international.

DEMOCRACY

We must fight for the abolition of all the many undemocratic elements in Britain today: the monarchy, the House of Lords, the unelected judiciary, the state church. There should be no privilege for any one religion. The rights of all faith groups to practice their religion must be protected but all religious schools must be abolished. All blasphemy laws must be abolished and restrictions on the right to criticise religion opposed.

TRADE UNIONS

We must fight the privileged officials in the trade unions who sell out our struggles. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice and earn the no more than average pay of their members. Rank and file unionists must form a movement in and across all unions to dissolve the trade union bureaucracy.

REFORM AND REVOLUTION

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist actions of the Labour Party in government and in opposition. Labour, for all its organised links to the trade unions, is a capitalist party in its programme, and leadership. It is a bourgeois workers party.

To lead a social revolution the working class needs a new type of party which unites its most conscious and active militants, giving a lead in the trade unions and other mass organisations in their day to day struggles and directing them towards the social revolution. For this purpose an action programme of transitional demands is essential.

STALINISM

For decades Stalinism was wrongly described as Communism, has betrayed the working class. It established a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite. It blocked the road to democratic planning and socialism. This led eventually to the collapse of the USSR and other so-called socialist states.

Where Stalinist states survive – such as Cuba and North Korea – they must still be defended unconditionally against imperialist blockade, attack and the restoration of capitalism. But without a political revolution of the workers and the establishment of workers' council democracy they too will eventually collapse. The theory that you can build 'socialism in one country' has been plainly falsified by collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states.

We must reject the strategic legacy of Stalinism: 'democratic alliances', 'popular' fronts' with capitalist parties or a 'democratic stage' which obliges the working class to renounce the struggle for power in the here and now. In every country, the workers must organise independently and fight to come to the head of the struggle. In the age of imperialism and globalisation only an international, global revolution and permanent (i.e. uninterrupted) revolution can consign capitalism to history.

THE INTERNATIONAL

With the goal of revolution and communism, advancing along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International – a workers' party organised across national boundaries to fight for world revolution.

If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist – join us!

Europe's workers turn up heat on bosses

October saw major strikes in France, Belgium and Italy and November could be even hotter. On 28 October, Belgium ground to a halt for the second time in a month as 100,000 striking workers marched through Brussels to protest against government plans to raise the age for retirement from 58 to 60. The Federation Generale du Travail de Belgique (FGTB) organised the strike among its 1.3 million members. The Christian CSC union supported the walk-out and mass demonstrations and the unions have threatened to call more strikes if they get no satisfactory response from the government.

On the Monday before the general strike the major industrial centre of Charleroi was halted by a local general strike. Big protests have been held recently against the Bolkestein directive and the threat it poses to public services.

The 28 October general strike, and an earlier one on 7 October which was the first for more than 10 years, attacked prime minister Guy Verhofstadt's plans to raise the minimum age for early retirement to 60. Verhofstadt ruling coalition includes the Socialist Party to which the FGTB is linked. This is putting strain on the union's - Socialist Party links and, as in so many European countries, is posing the issue of a break with the social democratic parties.

Most European governments, including those of Germany, France and Italy, are seeking to slash their pension systems using the excuse that "people are living too long" and thus straining the social security and national budgets.



80,000 workers take to the streets of Brussels in defence of pensions

Also in October, the major French union federations took to the streets in force. On 4 October more than a million workers struck and demonstrated in 150 cities and towns: 150,000 in Paris alone. Militant youth joined workers to show their hostility to the right-wing government and more than half the schools in France were shut.

The action was in protest at the new prime minister Dominique de

Villepin's plans to privatise more of the public sector. The strikers were joined by private sector workers who are facing falling wages, and the threat of job losses and the closure of many companies.

The day of action came against the background of a rash of disputes: the SNCM ferry workers, Hewlett-Packard, British Airways and Citroën Aulnay. A strike over wages at Total's Gonfreville

refinery - coinciding with the ferry workers' blockade of the port of Marseilles - shut down production of refineries in the region, owned by Shell, BP, Exxon Mobil, as well as Total.

The real prize for Dominique de Villepin is the privatisation of Electricité de France (EDF). EDF is a huge public enterprise, which the unions regard as their stronghold. Storming this bastion would be a big boost for de

Villepin, and strengthen him against his rival for the presidential succession, Nicholas Sarkozy.

Italy too has been in turmoil with militant university and school students strikes and mass demonstrations against privatisation (see page 14).

In Florence on 12 and 13 November representatives from the unions, political parties and social movements, which make up the European Social Forum will meet to discuss a draft Charter for Another Europe. This aims to aggregate demands on a number of areas: opposition to war, Europe's relations to the world, civil and democratic rights, participative democracy, a social economy, the environment and so on.

In addition to debating what sort of Europe is needed, the assembly must discuss co-ordinating the mass struggles developing right across Europe and how to spread them to other countries whose labour movements are far more conservative (such as Britain).

The failure to do this at the European Social Forums in Paris in 2003 and London in 2004 has left divided the struggles against the offensive of the bosses. A day of united action across the entire continent - such as the ESF called for 15 February against the war in Iraq is both possible and necessary.

If the more militant unions and the anti-neoliberal left parties called rank and file trade unionists, the unemployed, the homeless, the sans papiers, the youth onto the streets they can throw back the bosses offensive and advance the struggle for "another Europe" - a socialist united states of the whole continent.

Gate Gourmet: the resistance continues

The TGWU's full-time officials have sold the idea that the Gate Gourmet dispute is finished since the supposed deal in September. But dozens and dozens of workers sacked on 10 August by Gate Gourmet continue to turn up for protests at Beacon Hill, by Heathrow airport.

Many of the sacked workers, all TGWU members, have realised that they were stitched-up by their own union leaders. Even as TGWU general secretary Tony Woodley was parading sacked Asian women workers around

the TUC and Labour Party conferences to back a resolution in support of secondary action, his officials were selling out the workers.

The deal allowed the company to choose 144 workers for compulsory redundancy using questionnaires and effectively signed away hundreds of jobs in exchange for the equivalent of a few months pay.

Workers Power supporters visited the 23 October demonstration at Beacon Hill where several workers reported that the stewards, presumably at

the behest of full-time officials, had told them "not to demonstrate" and that they were being "manipulated by extreme left-wingers".

Workers have to decide whether to take the redundancy money, ranging between £3,500 and £7,000 about twice the statutory minimum, or reject the deal and lodge an employment tribunal claim by 9 November.

Gate Gourmet has indicated that if anyone rejects what is on offer, the whole deal with the TGWU may be off, which could mean the company could get

away without paying a penny in compensation to the sacked workforce.

Meanwhile, the TGWU, having squandered the solidarity action by BA baggage handlers in support of the Gate Gourmet workers, now finds itself under attack by the airline. BA has indicated that it may still sue the union for millions in damages because of revenue lost during the unofficial action at Heathrow.

The sacked workers of Gate Gourmet desperately need a mass meeting, which they themselves rather than full-time

officials control, in order to work out a unified strategy. Even at this late stage they should demand that their union tears up the deal with Gate Gourmet and pushes for its members at BA and elsewhere at Heathrow to take action, whether directly in solidarity with them or in support of victimised union reps at BA.

The failure to revive this dispute will leave Gate Gourmet workers bitter at their union and the TGWU in a much weakened position in the face of the coming onslaught on terms and conditions.

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

Even the onset of war did not stop the global revolt against it.

Across the world the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence and Paris, in Asia at Hyderabad and Mumbai, and in South America at Porto Alegre.

Together with the L5I, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New

World Party of Socialist Revolution - the Fifth International.

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against war and capitalism, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or email us at workerspower@btopenworld.com

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