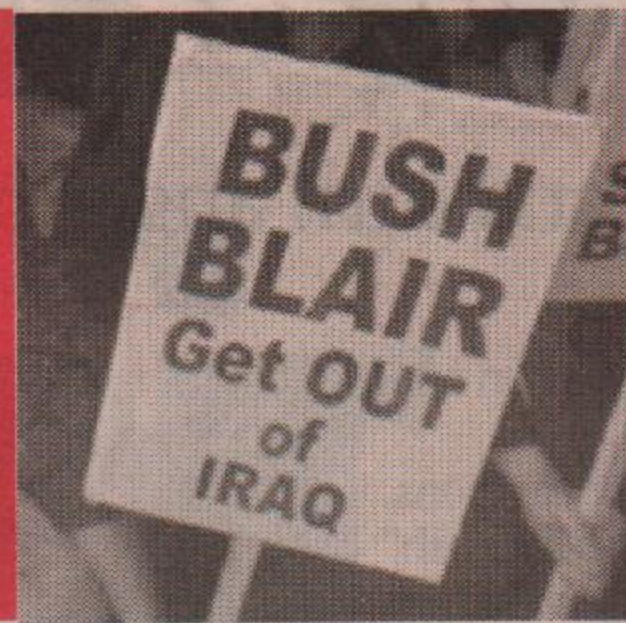


Trotsky and the call for a Labor Party in the USA page 7



The long war of the imperialists pages 8 & 9



Who benefits from Labour's childcare reforms? page 14



# Boycott Israeli products

**I**srael has imposed an economic state of siege on the Palestinian people. Their crime? Electing an Islamist Hamas government.

Israel is to steal an estimated \$50m (£28m) a month in customs revenues, owed to the Palestinian Authority (PA), as well as banning elected Hamas representatives from travelling outside the Gaza strip.

The United States supports Israeli actions. It is demanding the PA hands back unspent US-donated money. The European Union, Russia and the United Nations are threatening to cut off their more substantial funds from the end of February, when a Hamas-led cabinet is announced.

The EU's foreign policy head, Javier Solana, echoes Israel and the US. He says Hamas must recognise Israel and "renounce terrorism" - or he will direct funds to Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, rather than the PA.

The *New York Times* on 13 February quoted Bush administration officials, that the US and Israel were "discussing ways to destabilise the Palestinian government so that the newly elected Hamas officials will fail and elections will be called again".

It is certain that a campaign of dirty tricks, economic sanctions, military provocations and attempts to force US allies to impose political isolation will take place in the coming weeks and months.

The US also believes that in the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, they have a willing tool for this process: willing to trigger the trap door under Hamas, as soon as the situation becomes desperate and, they hope, the Islamist movement's popularity collapses.

But since his disastrous defeat in the January elections, Abbas has concentrated as much power in his hands as possible. In a series of presidential decrees, he has placed the PA's security,

financial and media institutions under his direct authority.

The outgoing parliament, dominated by the president's Fatah party, gave him the power to appoint a new constitutional court, with the authority to "resolve any dispute between the presidency and the parliament" and "cancel any law approved by the new parliament".

Revolutionary socialists in Palestine and elsewhere should give not one shred of political support to the Islamist government, which will be a source of oppression and discrimination against women, youth and secular people and religious minorities. A struggle against all attempts to impose reactionary religious laws into social and family life, into the state educational and medical system, and so on, remains vital.

But the reactionary policies of Hamas are no pretext for the Zionists, the US and EU imperialists to refuse to recognise the democratically expressed will of the Palestinian people.

The antiwar movement has always recognised the link between the occupation of Iraq and the Israeli settler state's step-by-step robbery of Palestinian land. Now, with the refusal to recognise their democratic choice of a government, and the US-sponsored attempt to bring it down, we face a new and more urgent task.

Israel must be isolated. Trade unionists must respond to the imperialist sanctions on the PA, by isolating Israel, with an international boycott of its goods and services.

Firms that provide Israel with equipment, like Caterpillar, should also be boycotted. Workers should refuse to transport its goods. If the Church of England can do it, so should trade unions.

Unions in education should adopt policies to twin with and support Palestinian schools and universities. They should intensify their campaigns, and

call for a boycott of Israeli institutions, as long as the siege lasts.

Trade unions should join with other activists and youth organisations, in organising pickets of firms that are major Israeli trading partners, particularly those whose products come from the settlements in the occupied territories.

Demonstrations must call for direct action against the US-Israeli siege, and force the governments of the Arab states, the European Union, and so on to refuse to participate in it.

We reject with contempt the inevitable Zionist propaganda that actions against Israel are anti-semitic. On the contrary, a nation that oppresses another people can never itself be free. We salute those Israelis, who are also campaigning to break the siege!

- Break the US and Zionist siege on the Palestinians and the attempt to overthrow their elected government. Recognise the Palestinian government

- Workers' sanctions and blockade against Israel. Make 18-19 March a weekend of world protests by millions against the occupation of Iraq, but also against the strangulation of Palestine

- All imperialist forces out of the Middle East and Central Asia, immediately and without conditions.

**Boycott Israeli goods campaign.**  
<<http://www.palestinecampaign.org/campaigns.asp?d=y&id=100>>



## TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ NOW! DEMONSTRATE ON 18 MARCH



# Muslim protests against cartoons

Workers' action can stop racist press and turn anger on the real crimes against Muslims, writes *Dave Stockton*

The publication of racist cartoons that depicted the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, by the Danish paper Jyllands-Posten, sparked a series of protests from London to south-east Asia. One drawing shows Muhammad wearing a turban that contains a bomb, another is of Muhammad welcoming a queue of suicide bombers to heaven but telling them that there are no virgins left.

As usual, the publishers' first response was an old one: "Why can't they take a joke?" Muslims naturally reply that anti-semitic jokes are not printed in the western media.

Since the 11 September bombings on the World Trade Centre in New York, an Islamophobic backlash has spread across the western world. Taking advantage of the fear spread by terrorist attacks, the backlash emphasises that Islam is "radically" different to the Jewish and Christian tradition.

Portrayals of Muslims and Arabs as a backward people with hate filled expressions on faces, hooked noses, and as suicide bombers are common in the western media.

These racist stereotypes are remarkably similar to pre-1945 anti-semitic cartoons put out by the Nazis and also nearly all right-wing parties in Europe.

The editor of Jyllands-Posten justifies the publication of the cartoon by claiming to be reasserting the right of free speech. But, in the recent past, the paper has campaigned to censor an artist who produced an erotic image of Jesus and the editors refused to print a cartoon because it would provoke an outcry among Christians.

By printing the Islamic cartoons, the paper provoked a "Muslim backlash" of angry demonstrations, which in turn has confirmed their nasty stereotyping.

So far 12 people have been killed in protests in Afghanistan, and three in Pakistan. The Danish and Norwegian embassies were torched in Lebanon and Syria. Several hundred Iranians attacked the Danish embassy in Tehran.

## WHAT PRICE FREE SPEECH?

The millionaire media's claim to be defending the right to free speech is bogus. They "self-censor" images that might undermine their troops' morale. We saw no images of the effects of phosphorus bombs on the civilian population during the US storming of Fallujah. When al-Jazeera showed pictures of the bodies of US, British and Danish soldiers, George Bush considered "taking out" their headquarters in Qatar.

In the USA, five vast corporations control most of the media. Multibillionaires such as Rupert Murdoch dictate the news the American masses receive. In Britain, too, a small number of press and TV barons have a tight grip.

Even the BBC was brought to heel over the accusation that Blair and his spin-doctors had "sexed up" a dossier on Iraq. Piers Morgan, the editor of the *Daily Mirror*, too, was suckered into printing some fake photographs of British atrocities in Iraq, and dismissed. Trade unionists, youth, ethnic



Danish flag burned in Karachi

minorities and immigrants, who resist pro-war or neoliberal policies, are actively slandered in the "free" capitalist press.

## RELIGION, THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Marxists have no reason to cover up the slightest oppression and cruelty imposed in the name of religion. We defend the equal rights of women, gays, non-Muslims and non-believers. We condemn all forms of anti-semitism as the "anti-imperialism" of fools, playing into the hands of the enemies of the Palestinians.

We oppose religious laws and religious propaganda in state schools. Religion should be a matter strictly for believers. If they, as individuals, wish to submit themselves to the shariah, the torah or canon law, that is their own concern. But ancient religious codes can only have a reactionary effect when applied to modern society.

Freedom to criticise religion in the media and on the streets should be protected. No laws should be passed banning abuse of religion or giving offence to believers. Of course they have the right to protest, but they cannot dictate what is permitted to their critics.

Thus, while the Danish cartoons were Islamophobic and racist, we cannot and should not call on any state to ban them. The capitalist class will only use this power to ban the expression of views hostile to their system. Instead, we favour direct action to stop incitement to race hatred and attacks.

Thus, Tony Blair's repeated attempts to get a law passed, which makes "incitement to religious hatred" a crime, must be resisted. The support of Respect, the unity coalition, for this law is a scandal, another wretched attempt to win Muslim votes by trading principles.

Karl Marx said that "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions".

But the most effective way to fight against religion's reactionary effects is to fight against the exploitation and oppression that make religion "necessary".

## WORKERS' CONTROL

If there had been revolutionary printers at Jyllands-Posten, they would have stopped the presses. If the damage was already done, they would have demanded equal and prominent space for Muslims to explain their outrage, and their experience as victims of Islamophobia, and for antiracists, too, to record their views.

In the miners' strike in 1984, *The Sun* was forced to publish an edition of its paper with a blank front page, because workers refused to print a slanderous editorial, attacking the miners. This sort of action could have been possible even on a right-wing rag such as Jyllands-Posten, where the editorial staff have since claimed that they felt uneasy about the publication of the cartoons.

But what is confounding many in the West is the scale of the reaction across the Middle East. How can a few cartoons provoke such reactions? A campaign is under way to lay the blame at the door of Islamic fundamentalists for stoking up the outrage.

While reactionary fundamentalist clerics are undoubtedly making the most of the situation, it is imperialism and its Zionist ally in the region that are the real cause of the anger. The targets of the demonstrations are misplaced.

The crimes and outrages really worthy of protest are those committed against real, living Iraqis and Palestinians. It is the outrages in Gaza, Guantanamo Bay and Fallujah that should provoke demonstrations.

# Labour targets people with mental illness

By Keith Spencer

New Labour's welfare reform green paper is the biggest attack on claimants since the 1980s. It wants to force one million people on incapacity benefit, another million older people and 300,000 single mothers to go back to work.

To attack the 2.7 million on incapacity benefit, a whole raft of stereotypes have been deployed; they're faking their injuries; doctors are too gullible, they should really be on jobseekers allowance.

Minister Alan Johnson has said that people with bad backs "would be better off in work" – as if he is an expert. Former employment minister Jane Kennedy claimed that doctors had a culture of "protecting their patients from work".

In fact, the green paper admits the procedure to claim incapacity benefit is "one of the toughest in the world", involving GP referral and medical examination by doctors from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Also the single cause for people going on incapacity benefit is mental health problems: one in three claimants today, compared with one in five 10 years ago. In Derbyshire – an old industrial area, where supposedly claimants should be retained – 400 out of the 1,000 new claims a month are from people with mental health problems.

To get this growing number of the mentally ill back to work, the govern-

ment proposes new employment and support allowances of £76 a week from 2008, linked to work-focused tasks. Failure to complete these tasks – interviews, action plans, form filling – will mean benefits are cut by £24 a week.

There will also be more spot checks, despite low levels of fraud. The government also wants to put "employment advisers" in GP surgeries, and give doctors financial rewards for "helping" people back into work. How unethical is that?

Mental health and disability campaigners, and even the British Medical Association, have led protests against this coercion. Many point to the successes of the government's voluntary Pathways to Work scheme – although, even in the pilot areas, some benefits have been cut.

Charities are also concerned about the advice Jobcentre staff will give, especially as jobs are being cut, precisely at a moment when they have to help more people into work.

Absent is any attempt to give counselling or therapy to the thousands of people with mental health problems, or to help the disabled. They are expected to go through stressful interviews, find and hold down a job – or go through a long process of being accepted back onto incapacity benefit.

There is already evidence that such pressures are making people more ill, and in some cases driving them onto the streets.

The real reason behind the government's proposals is its manifesto desire

to get the percentage of the working age population in jobs up from 75 to 80 per cent – a figure exceeded only by Iceland – to feed the bosses' desire for cheap and flexible labour.

But the jobs aren't there. Currently, there are just over 600,000 job vacancies in the UK and 1.5 million unemployed. Furthermore, only 37 per cent of employers say they would employ someone with mental health problems.

The tragedy is that most people on incapacity benefit say that they would like to work. But what type of work should be provided? Well paid work, where adjustments and support are made for disabled people, and those with mental health problems. It should be far easier to come off and go back on benefits.

A massive programme of public works could provide such jobs, on trade union rates of pay, from house building to teaching, or working in hospitals. It could also provide care services for the disabled and mentally ill.

For those unable to work, better services should be provided, and higher benefits. According to disability charity Leonard Cheshire, three out five claimants live in poverty because of poor benefits. Benefits, paid at the same rate as the minimum wage, would help claimants to a decent life.

All this could be paid by taxing the rich and the multinationals. But we won't get any of that from Labour. Instead, we'll get more attacks on the poor and vulnerable, so the rich can get richer.

# Defend council housing activists

By a Lewisham Council Unison rep

The Defend Council Housing campaign has had increasing success over the last year, as tenants fight back against stock transfers, PFIs and Almos: three forms of privatisation. Out of 11 ballots last December, eight voted against sell offs. Now Labour has stopped all ballots, scared of an electoral backlash in May.

Although the government has announced a review to investigate ways to allow councils to retain their housing stock and gain extra investment, this will take 18 months.

Meanwhile, local authorities are spending rent money on PR campaigns, holding early ballots to stop debate, postponing ballots until a yes vote can be obtained, and, of course, denying tenants the right to stick with the council: the "fourth option".

Now they have started victimising council workers, who support DCH.

Sefton is trying to sack two Unison branch officers and four stewards. Tower Hamlets has deselected a leading DCH campaigner and Unison/NUJ member Eileen Short from the job she has done for 14 years.

The best way to defend these members is to go on the attack. Unison should unite with DCH to demand:

- No more transfers, PFIs or Almos: stop the ballots
  - For a massive building programme of at least 250,000 new council homes a year
  - Demand the right to vote for the "fourth option"
  - Strike to stop privatisation
  - Re-instate all staff victimised for campaigning to retain council housing.
- Contact Defend Council Housing: PO Box 33519, London E2 9WW. Tel 0207 987 9989 or visit [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk)

[www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com)

Weekly updates on politics, regular articles on Marxist theory and history plus extensive archives. Recent articles include PCS strike, Campaign for New Workers Party, racist cartoons, BNP court case and asylum conference, and eye witness report from Lebanon  
ALSO SIGN UP TO WORKERS POWER E-NEWS.



Campaign for a New Workers Party

The Campaign for a New Workers Party has kicked off with a series of public meetings around the country, almost all of which have been initiated by the Socialist Party. At the same time, its website ([www.cnwp.org.uk](http://www.cnwp.org.uk)) allows individuals to register their support. To date, over 400 trade unionists and other campaigners have signed up in little over a month, including 11 Natfhe NEC members and dozens of other leading activists.

Activists have linked the initiative to the successful RMT meeting on the crisis in working class political representation held on 21 January, which attracted 350 trade unionists and socialists. A hundred more were locked out, unable to squeeze in to the small room. RMT members need to keep the pressure on their executive to follow through on this success, and unite the two campaigns.

Union branches, and even trades councils, like Leicester, have started to support the campaign. The CNWP launch conference on 19 March looks set to become an important event, with union delegates as well as community activists. The support of youth organisations, Revolution and International Socialist Resistance, should also ensure strong support from the schools and colleges.

The CNWP is also starting to cause waves inside Respect, itself clearly in trouble, with George Galloway heavily hinting that he is on his way out of politics and the Socialist Workers Party making ever more crass concessions to the Muslim clergy, including support for state bans on "inciting religious hatred". Respect's most prominent trade union supporter, PCS leader Mark Serwotka, is speaking at the CNWP conference. The CNWP should now go out of its way to win the rest of Respect's base amongst the working class and racially oppressed, including importantly from Muslim communities.

Obviously, this is just a start. The campaign must direct its agitation and propaganda towards those workers, youth and campaigners already in struggle against Labour and the bosses, whose interests it serves. It can win directly to its ranks the most clear sighted activists, who are being radicalised by this neoliberal, warmongering and thoroughly racist government.

A new party cannot be built by simply "uniting the left". It needs to recruit and organise the emerging vanguard into a fighting party.

Future tasks

This beginning of the campaign is a good start. But, if the conference does not map out a clear plan for building the campaign, and set up a democratic structure, then it will simply be another flash in the pan, like the Socialist Alliance proved to be and Respect will.

The conference must set out to do three things.

First, it must broaden support for the call for a new workers party. We must organise fringe meetings at all the union conferences this season.

Union branches and working class campaigns should follow Bristol Rail RMT's example, and set dates for citywide and regional conferences to discuss the way forward. We need to campaign for other unions to join up with the RMT, break the link with Labour and debate the founding of a new party.

In the RMT militants who support the CNWP need to make sure that the promised August recall meeting to re-discuss the question of working class representation does take place, is better planned and can take resolutions.

Second, the CNWP should initiate a debate about the programme and structure of a new party. Of course, we should not try to force this crucial discussion to a premature conclusion, but neither should we delay it. It is vital to show we have broken from the approach which suppresses and smothers political debate and that this can be conducted in a loyal and comradely way. It is clear from these pages where we stand, but we want to hear other tendencies' ideas. Better still we want to see if we can unite in action to test them out in the real world of struggle against new Labour.

Third, the CNWP must adopt the same principles as we would expect and desire in a new party: full democracy and accountability, no restrictions on the articulation of different tendencies' views, unity around agreed tasks.

We look forward to the CNWP playing an important role in bringing a new workers party into existence, and urge all our readers to sign the declaration online and attend the conference.

**Campaign for a New Workers Party  
National Conference  
Sunday 19 March 2006, 11.30am to 4.30pm  
University of London Union,  
Malet Street, London WC1**

# Our health, their profits

By Clare Heath

Labour's commitment to radical transformation of the NHS shows no signs of flagging. We already have foundation trust boards, which own hospitals, independent treatment centres performing substantial amounts of elective surgery, and, earlier this year, a private company won the contract to provide GP services in parts of Derbyshire.

At the end of January, another White Paper - *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* - was launched. A large part of medical care is to move out of hospitals into the community. GP surgeries will have longer opening hours, health care may be delivered in convenient locations such as Tesco, and local clinics will provide out-patient care and day surgery.

More money will be spent on prevention and health promotion. Health MOTs are to be brought in. We can fill in a questionnaire online to find out whether we need a health trainer to help us smoke, drink and eat less. Unfortunately these trainers will not address the biggest causes of poor health - social inequality and poverty.

Many of the proposals are good. Local services will be more convenient. Over the past two decades, local services have been vanishing. A quarter of the

remaining cottage hospitals face imminent closure. Campaigns have been launched with demonstrations, petitions and even strikes to save local hospitals.

But the government is deaf to these voices of struggle. Rather than listen, the government employed a company, called Opinion Leader Research.

Surprise, surprise, they found that people would value more convenient local services.

Improved access to care, better co-ordination of health and social care for the chronically ill, extra investment for deprived areas, more money for health checks and health promotion are all positive proposals.

But these progressive reforms will be delivered in a way that promotes the interests of big business. According to Tony Blair, "This White Paper is an important new stage in building a world class health and social care system".

What he means is huge investment and reform in the NHS will appeal to voters, through flexibility and initiatives to reduce ill-health, and to the bosses by providing a flexible workforce and great opportunities for private profit.

Blair argues that the White Paper fits the NHS around the needs of the patient, not the patient around the NHS. The plan is to make it easier for people

to choose a more convenient GP practices.

The document refers to making services fit in with "our busy lives", a reminder that people in the UK work longer hours than anywhere else in Europe. Rather than tackle these poor working conditions, more and more NHS workers will be required to do unsocial hours.

The White Paper gives the private sector a massive opportunity to increase its share of the health market.

Over the next 10 years, 5 per cent of the total budget is to shift from hospital to community care. Who will deliver these new services? They will be put out to tender and private and voluntary care organisations will be encouraged to apply.

These new services will need new premises. Who will pay? Through the Local Improvement Finance Trust (LIFT), the cash is provided by the private sector, on favourable terms, and leased back to the NHS on a 25 year lease.

Tax payers' money will be "lifting" the banks' profits for 25 years. More convenience for the banks; more long hours for poorly paid staff.

• For more on the NHS: go to [www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com) and search for NHS.

## Being young is not a crime

By James Roberts

Following weeks of mass meetings, stunts and leafleting schools and colleges, the Leeds Anti-Asbos campaign took to the streets on 21 January, to protest against police harassment.

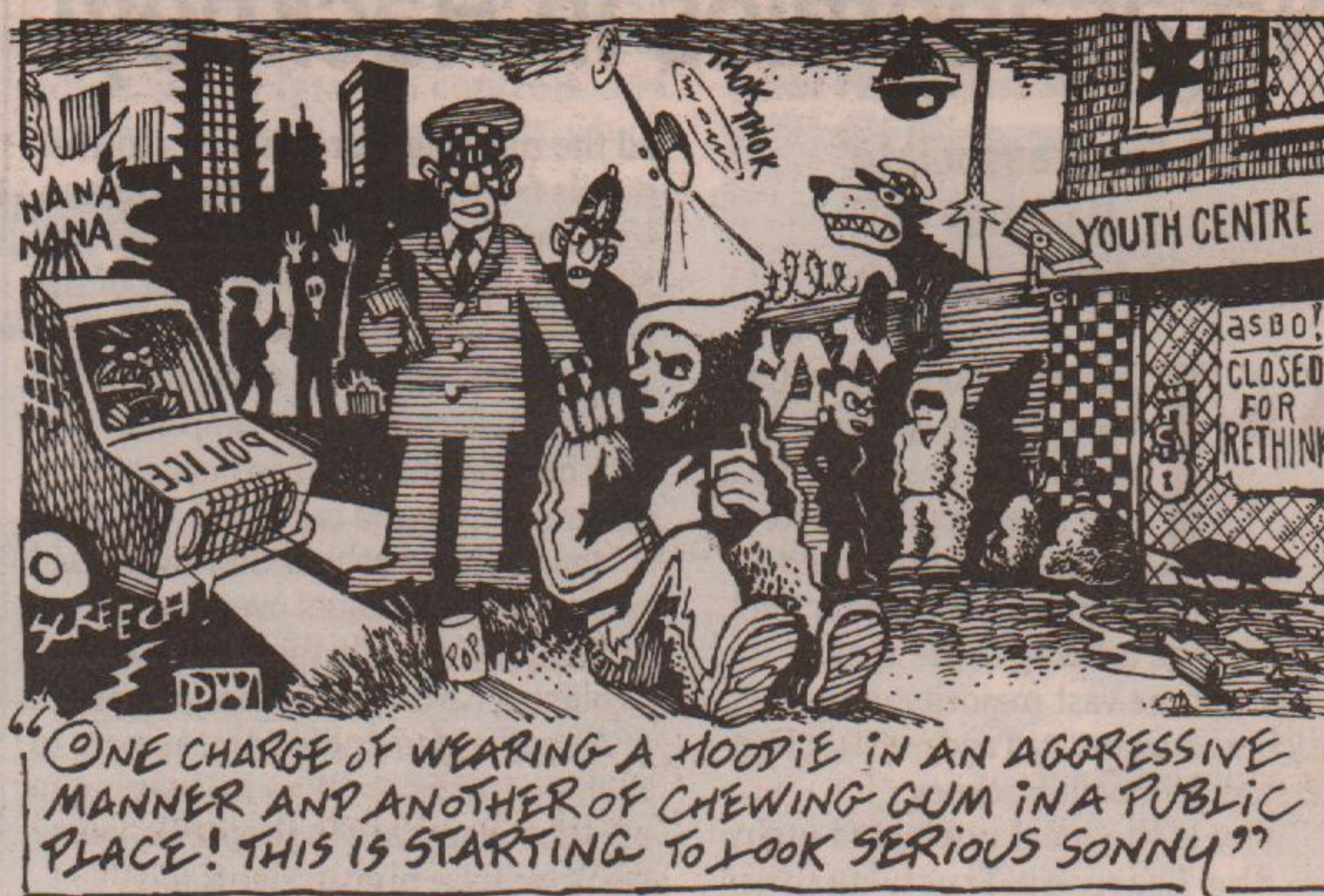
Around 200 militant youth marched, with banners reading 'NOZASBOS' and 'Whose Streets? Our Streets!' The police were completely taken by surprise and unable to stop us, as we blocked city centre traffic, and made our way to Milgarth police station.

Once outside the cop shop, we began a loud protest with drumming, a swathe of red flags, and chants of "ASBOS, waste of time, being young is not a crime!" Then, we were off again, heading back to the Corn Exchange for an impromptu rally on the steps.

Several people took the megaphone to talk about building the campaign across the country, bringing in residents' associations and trade unions. Others said that Tony Blair's Respect Agenda was trying to turn workers against youth, when we should be uniting against the common enemy: the government.

Since then, the council has informed us that the police have put their plans for a city centre dispersal order on hold - on the condition that people reported "troublemakers"!

The Anti-Asbos group



responded with the following demands:

1. The plans for a city centre dispersal order to be immediately and permanently scrapped. Any further planning should be done in open meetings, with representation by young people of our choice, not between the council and police behind closed doors.
2. The withdrawal of dispersal orders and curfews already in place in local areas across Leeds, and the scrapping of plans to implement new dispersal/curfew orders.
3. An end to the harassment of young people by the police and council operatives in Leeds. This includes the police dropping any conditions set by them in return

for "holding back" dispersal orders.

4. An end to privatisation of public property in Leeds, and the free provision of youth clubs, sports centres and music venues to be managed by young people themselves.

An organising committee has been elected, and at the first meeting we agreed to build the campaign in schools and colleges around Leeds, seek the support of working class organisations, and plan a student strike and demonstration outside Leeds City Council Chambers.

• For more on Asbos, see: [www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=77,717,0,0,1,0](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=77,717,0,0,1,0) [www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=60,491,0,0,1,0](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=60,491,0,0,1,0)



# Posties must deliver blow to bosses

By a CWU postal rep

**F**orty thousand jobs to go, 5 per cent cuts across the board, restructuring, casualisation. And this is just the beginning! The Royal Mail's Short-Term Savings plan (STS) is the first step in a major restructuring of the workforce to make us "fit" for competition - and ultimately privatisation. Royal Mail is seeking to create casualised, part-time delivery staff, which could be a blow the CWU's strength in the post. Management says it doesn't want

compulsory redundancies and it will achieve these cuts through "natural wastage": a recruitment ban, or replacing those, who leave, with part-timers on as little as 20 hours a week. Management are speeding up this process by harassing staff over work and trying to get them disciplined and then out of a job. The militancy and determination of the Belfast strikers (see back page) shows how postal workers can stop the drive to privatisation. But where is the CWU leadership? It refused to support the Belfast posties telling workers to get back to work -

apparently to avoid being fined by the courts under the anti-trade union laws. The strikers rightly ignored this and stood fast, paving the way for their victory. The union leaders have not called any action over Short Term Savings. Socialist Worker reports that Royal Mail has already imposed changes in conditions without agreement in more than 50 offices. There have been up to 30 or so requests for ballots for action over implementing STS in local offices. But only now is CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward talking about a national strike - at some point in the future. But there is a worrying amount of

agreement between Royal Mail and the CWU leaders. Look at the CWU's January 2006 national briefing to union members, *The Whole Picture*. Echoing Royal Mail, it said workers must to "be realistic"; there will be changes because of competition and automated walk sorting. Jobs will be lost, but pay will rise for those who remain. There are two roads forward: the rank and file initiative of the Belfast strikers or the stifling inaction of the CWU leadership. Workers need to take action now not later. We need a rank and file movement to push the struggle forward and control it.

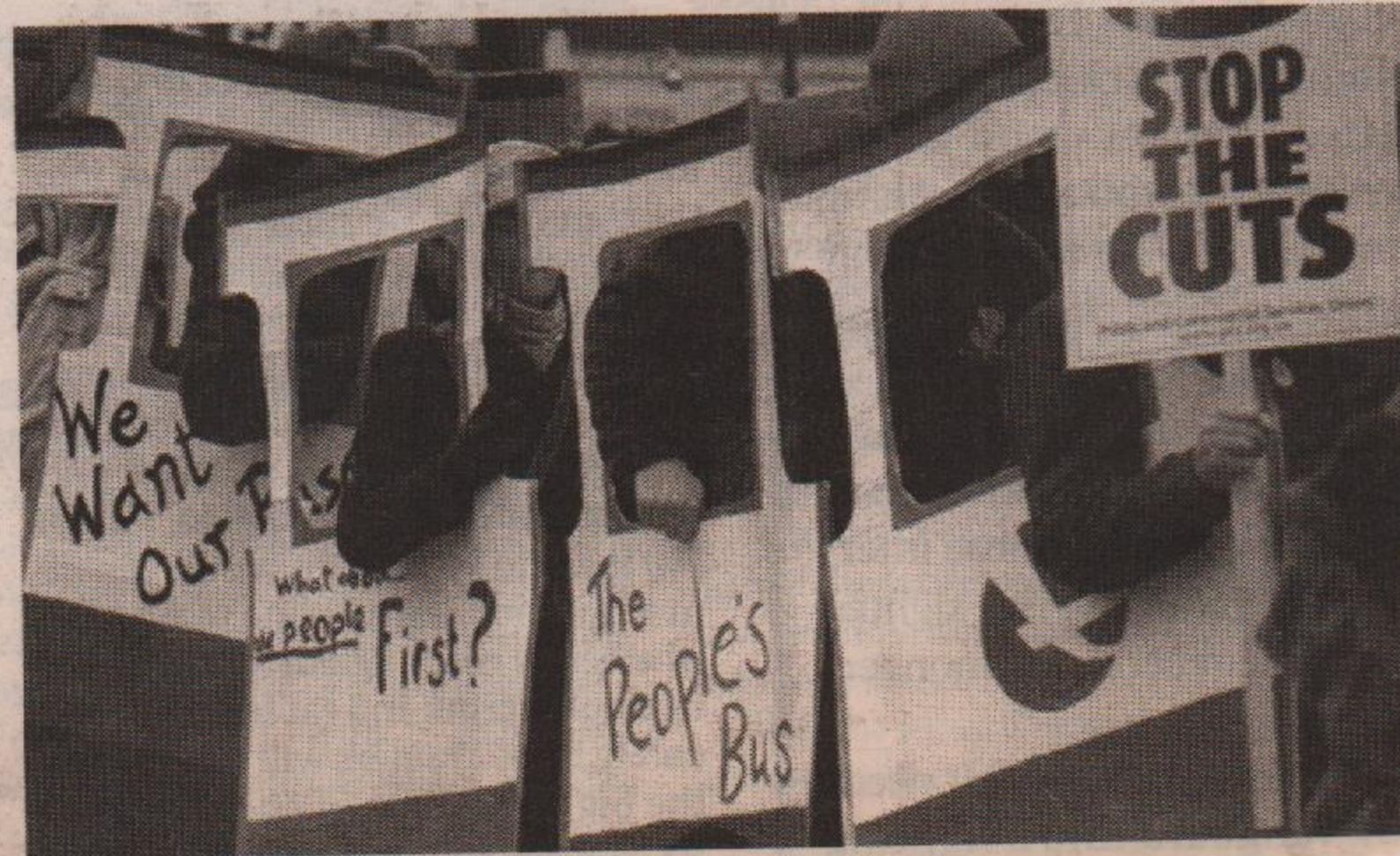
Every office balloting for strikes should include a call for a conference as soon as possible, with reps and delegates from offices and branches, who believe we need militant action to stop STS. That conference should hammer out a plan of action to fight for in the union, and an emergency motion to this May's annual conference. It should campaign for a national strike under the control of elected strike committees, and demand immediate strike ballots in the 30 offices that have asked for them. That way we can stop Royal Mail's plans in their tracks!

# Jobcentres strike against job cuts

By a PCS branch secretary

**M**ore than 80,000 Public and Commercial Services Union members (PCS) went on a two-day strike in Jobcentres, benefit offices, pension centres and the Child Support Agency on 26 and 27 January. More days were lost to strike action on these two days than in the first 11 months of 2005. The strike was strongly and actively supported; "The strike has been the best-supported so far" according to PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka. Second, that it was the first action to be called against the cuts for over a year - since 5 November 2004 - during which time 15,000 of the projected 30,000 job cuts have already occurred. The job losses have now started to cut services to the bone. More and more unemployed clients, with queries or needing advice, are directed to phone out-of-town call centres.

Examples of the worsening services include in Sheffield there are over 500 jobseekers allowance claims waiting to be processed and in Plymouth there are about 2,800 claims awaiting processing. Added to the drip-drip effect of dwindling staff numbers is the direct threat of privatisation such as at National Savings, which is seeing a third of its jobs being siphoned off to India. But the well-supported strike in January was not a ringing endorsement of the strategy pursued by the PCS group executive in the DWP and, by implication, of the Socialist Party, whose members and supporters dominate it. The PCS leadership in fact stopped strikes taking place last summer and told London offices. Even now, talk is about work-to-rule, overtime bans, selected walkouts, a series of one-day or two-day strikes. At a London rally during the strike, Mark Serwotka simply made a plea for the DWP group leadership to consider calling a strike on 28 March



Sheffield march against cuts in civil service and local bus service (credit: indymedia)

(two months away!), so that the union could strike alongside those unions - FBU, Unison, GMB - who still seeking a deal to safeguard their pensions. What Serwotka failed to mention was that he was one of the leaders

who broke the united front with these unions back in September, when he and the executive accepted a shabby deal. PCS cannot run away from a fight with the government over job cuts. But an all-out indefinite strike across the

DWP, building on the strikes in January, could quickly paralyse the department. The union should also organise claimants to demand an end to the harassment and cajoling into low-paid jobs, to win them to support the strike, rather than turning against it. The union also needs to develop a political response by fighting for a new party of the working class. Mark Serwotka has made a personal stand by supporting the Respect coalition. The Socialist Party, with seven members on the PCS national executive, has launched a Campaign for a New Workers Party. The PCS should join this campaign and lend its voice to the growing call for a new, mass workers party. Any such party should not just support workers fighting against job cuts and defence of pensions or defend claimants but link these struggles to the need for a workers' government and the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. • For full article go to: <[www.workerspower.com/index.php?nws](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?nws)>

## No academies in Hackney!

By Kate Ford, associate secretary, Hackney NUT (personal capacity)

**"I** like the school as it is and if they change it then I'll be upset...Forever!", wrote a year seven pupil in response to proposals to change her school from a girls' to a mixed school. The change is being made against the wishes of the vast majority of parents, teachers, support staff and pupils at Haggerston School in Hackney. Why is the local unelected quango, the Learning Trust, pushing through the proposal? Because a city academy will replace a Hackney boys' school and another city academy is to be built on Haggerston's doorstep and the school has been told it will have to "compete" by going mixed. This is just one example of how education provision is being skewed by the city academies programme. If the the government's white paper on education goes ahead, schools will compete with each other for pupils - some will expand and others close. Business or faith groups will control new schools; increased selection will lead to children being treated as commodities - some more valuable than others. But campaigns against city academies and the white paper are flourishing. Last month, there were large meetings against the white paper in Hackney and Camden. Many more are planned. On 2 March there will be a London-wide demonstration, followed by a rally in Central Hall, Westminster. More than a hundred people attend-

ed the meeting. Parents and a former pupils from Haggerston and Homerton schools spoke. Tony Benn and Baljeet Ghale, vice president elect of the NUT, also addressed the meeting. The determination of people at the meeting reflect the lively campaigns that have been organised. When pupils at Haggerston first found out about the plans to change their school they organised spontaneous walkouts over two days of protest. Some made their views known by blitzing parts of the school with pieces of A4 paper demanding the answer to such questions as "Who is listening to us? What happened to the pupils' voice? Don't we have human rights too?" So far there have been two demonstrations at the Learning Trust, led by pupils from the school. Amina sums up the feelings of her fellow pupils: "From what I have heard about the future of this school it all sounds like a competition with other schools. It should be about our learning, not competition!" Pupils like Amina aren't fooled. They know that Blair's agenda for schools isn't about improving education; it's about improving the opportunities of big business to make a profit. On 30 March the proposed change to Haggerston will be discussed at the Hackney Schools Organisation Committee. Another demonstration is being planned. The sell off of schools and our children's education can be stopped. Local campaigns must mobilise all those involved in schools and in the wider community. We also need a national campaign of action which should include strikes by school staff and occupations where attempts are made to take over our schools.

# Pensions: united action can defeat government

By George Binette, Camden Unison convenor (personal capacity)

**T**he government plans more attacks on public sector pensions. Currently workers can retire at the age of 60 without any substantial loss to their pensions. But Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott put plans before parliament in February to scrap this so-called Rule of 85 from 1 October. Workers covered by the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) will be expected to work to 65 in order to get a full pension and if you want to retire at 60 you stand to lose a third of your pension. In a crude attempt to divide public and private sector workers, New Labour minister Douglas Alexander claimed that pensions eat up 26 per cent of Council Tax revenue - the actual figure is closer to 5 per cent - as part of a campaign being waged by the government against the LGPS. The government is attacking some of the lowest paid workers in the public sector; workers such as classroom assistants care assistants and nursery nurses. The vast majority of these workers are

women. The average pension for women in the LGPS is just £31 a week. In contrast, a survey conducted for the TUC last year revealed that eight out of 10 senior executives in Britain's biggest (FTSE 100) corporations had the right to retire at 60 without detriment and found that the average annual payout to such top bosses was more than 40 times the average local government pension. But it is not just the public sector pension that is being attacked. Last month, IBM announced that only two-thirds of future pay increases for employees would be pensionable. Amicus has estimated that this will mean someone who is now 40 and earning £30,000 will lose a quarter of their expected pension. Is it true that we just can't afford to pay decent pensions? The Pensions Commission estimated that if the much-hyped pensions gap were to be filled the cost by 2050 would be £57 billion a year or 7.5 per cent of GDP. Sounds like a lot of money, but actually it would only bring public spending in the UK into line with other European countries. And this could be done if the millions siphoned off from

investments in bonuses for shareholders were used to fill the gap. In these circumstances, action by Unison members and other LGPS trade unionists could spark a much wider fight on pensions. A battle to stop the attempts to steal that part of our wages we - both public and private sector workers - set aside for our future security. Among the welcome signs of resistance is news that in Scotland delegates to the Scottish Labour Party conference at the end of February passed a motion, much to the anger of the leadership, criticising the Scottish executive for attempting to remove the Rule of 85 from local government workers in Scotland. Mass strike action, with public and private sector workers linking up with pensioners' campaigns in committees that can co-ordinate action in towns and cities across the UK, could also help axe the Turner Commission's proposal for an increase in the basic state retirement age to 69. Every worker across Britain should support the LGPS action. It is a battle that we cannot afford to lose. One million public sector workers on strike could be just what is needed to inspire a wider pension rebellion.



# Abolish all immigration controls

Keith Spencer answers some of the common objections to removing all immigration controls

## Immigration controls have always been with us

Britain did not discover immigration controls until 1905, when parliament passed the Aliens Act to restrict Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe, as they sought safe haven from anti-semitic pogroms. Sadly, the British TUC supported the Aliens Act, and helped put the cancer of racism into the workers' movement.

Hungry for labour in a booming economy after world war two, government agencies, led by racist Tory Minister for Health Enoch Powell, set aside their prejudices, to recruit Afro-Caribbean and Asian workers to staff transport, textile mills and the NHS.

The first law, brought in against black and Asian people, was the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. This act came in on the back of the Notting Hill riots in west London, where racist gangs attacked black people.

It wasn't until the Wilson government in the late 1960s - as unemployment started to shoot up - that the Labour Party favoured immigration controls, including the notorious "vir-

gin" tests, where Asian women, who wanted to join their partners, had to prove their virginity, to get into the country.

So immigration controls are a reactionary political response to racism and economic demands. The attacks on asylum seekers are motivated by Labour seeking to pacify a racist media, and obscure the capitalist cause of unemployment.

## You have to have immigration controls to stop everyone coming to this country and taking "our jobs"

Each year about half a million migrants settle in the UK, and about 350,000 leave to settle elsewhere. Business moves investment freely around the globe to take advantage of cheap labour and make big profits, so why shouldn't workers be free to seek out the best opportunities for their advancement?

Anyway, the Treasury says that mass migration increases GDP by about 0.5 per cent a year, because most immigrants are young, dynamic, hardworking and ambitious.

In May 2004, the UK opened its borders to workers from ten new EU member states, since when more than 300,000 (half from Poland) have arrived to work. The EU and UK have welcomed them. There is no evidence they have taken British workers' jobs.

## Immigrants and asylum seekers are illegal. We have to stop them

It is only the law that criminalises people who want to migrate. There is no "victim". Abolish the law and there is no crime.

An asylum seeker is fleeing his or her country, and by definition that country would refuse to give a person the correct papers - after all they are persecuting them. The Geneva Convention obliges all countries to accept asylum seekers.

## We could have non-racist immigration controls

All immigration controls are racist. They only exclude certain people, and therefore the state must decide which people to exclude and which to let in. There are laws that regulate labour

from former white Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, Canada and South Africa.

But you rarely, if ever, hear a politician or a newspaper complain about too many white people coming over here.

The easy way to identify someone is by colour, ethnicity or religion. That is why laws were aimed at Jewish people, then Asian and black people, now people from Muslim countries.

## Shouldn't we drop opposition to all immigration controls in order to "broaden" the base of the anti-deportations movement?

Those people who come to the UK to escape war, famine and poverty often do so because their countries have been blighted by decades or centuries of colonial occupation or the destructive effects of investment and trade policies of rich countries. Opposing all immigration controls says all have the right to escape the negative consequences of this history.

Opposing all immigration controls broadens the movement. Many people may be sympathetic towards one

family, because of its role in the local community, or towards people from particular war-torn areas, such as Iraq or the Congo. Or people may be opposed to certain destitution measures or forced deportations.

But a campaign that only opposed "nasty" measures, or deportations to war-torn countries would not challenge the system that creates these injustices. It would not stem the flow of miseries. It would, in fact, make the anti-deportations movement smaller.

## But you could never win workers to opposition to all immigration controls

The lecturers union Natfhe already has a position of opposition to all immigration controls, so it is possible. To build such a campaign means patient argument and militant action to defend asylum seekers and migrants.

It must seek to win the support of other campaigns and workers, who have to carry out immigration measures: from dawn raids and denial of benefits through to passport controls and housing legislation.

# Campaign launched to fight asylum laws

By Stuart King

Trade unionists and asylum activists have joined forces to resist the Labour government's offensive against asylum seekers. The conference, held at the end of January, reflected mounting resistance to Section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004.

Section 9, which is being piloted in the north west of England and London, withdraws welfare, housing and educational support, and threatens to take the children of asylum seekers into care.

It aims to use destitution as a key weapon in its attempts to increase the

number of deportations of "failed" asylum seekers.

The conference, initiated by the Bolton-based Sukula Family Must Stay Campaign, attracted about 170 participants from both trade unions and anti-deportation campaigns, with delegates coming from Bristol and Wales, London, Nottingham, Sheffield and the north west.

Asylum seeker children opened the conference with a poem, followed by Flores Sukula speaking about government attempts to bar her from college and deport her family.

The conference also heard from the MSP Rosie Kane, who spoke about

the campaign the Scottish Socialist Party and others have mounted around the UK Home Office facility in Glasgow. This is the nerve centre for the operation of deportation snatch squads.

During a trade union workshop, conference heard from social workers, who face the prospect of enforcing Section 9, and other legislation that threatens to strip all support from individuals and families, subject to immigration control.

In several areas, a trade union boycott is in place, with workers refusing to carry out these inhumane laws, such as in Unison's north west region.

This has forced the Association of Social Services Directors and councils

to protest against the new measures, and lobby for their reform.

The conference threatened to descend into a row, when supporters of the Socialist Workers Party argued against any discussion of a draft resolution, presented to the opening plenary, which included calls for the scrapping of all immigration controls, and organised defence for refugees and asylum seekers. The Sukula Family Campaign had discussed the resolution and agreed the draft.

SWP members moved a resolution, seeking to delete the reference to abolition of immigration controls, and remove a series of action points, which

commanded the support of the vast majority of those in attendance. This attempt to replace the main motion was defeated by 56 votes to 18.

Conference delegates also agreed to organise a campaign, linking the various networks, trade unions and local groups, fighting against deportations and attacks on asylum seekers.

A national demonstration is planned in June, and the campaign will fight against any new attacks on asylum seekers that might replace Section 9.

To get involved with the campaign, contact Jason Travis, chair of the Sukula Family Must Stay Campaign, on 07976 476 181

# Stop deportations - open the borders

## Resolution from the Defy Section 9 Fighting the Asylum and Immigration Acts Conference

1. This conference condemns the escalating war against all refugees and migrants, launched by Blair's government. Dispersal, withdrawal of benefits, dawn raids, splitting up families, prison-like removal centres - these are just some of the methods being used to achieve the government targets for deportation and forced repatriation.

2. The implementation on a pilot basis of Section 9 of the 2004 Asylum and Immigration Act in parts of the country is among the most vicious tactics yet in this war, as it seeks to make families seeking refuge in the UK homeless and destitute, and to take their children into care.

3. Conference applauds the actions of teachers, social workers, council workers and others in Bolton, Manchester and Newham, in seeking to make Section 9, and similar legislative attacks on basic benefits for all refugees and migrants unworkable. Trade union action - boycotts, protests and strikes - will play a vital role in defeating

this attack and forcing the government to repeal it.

4. But Section 9 is just part of the government's armoury under the four anti-asylum seeker Acts of Parliament, passed under the Blair government. Conference recognises that these attacks against all refugees and migrants, alongside Britain's immigration controls, are inherently racist, and place a powerful weapon into the hands of organised racists and fascists.

5. We need a mass campaign against all attacks on all refugees and migrants under the slogan: All refugees are welcome here! Here to stay, here to fight!

6. Conference commits itself to helping to build a united campaign, working with local anti-deportation and anti-racist campaigns, to defeat these attacks. We seek the repeal of all anti-asylum seeker legislation, and all immigration controls, which are the roots from which the asylum seeker "issue" arises. If capital has the right to move freely, so should labour.

7. We will support and promote

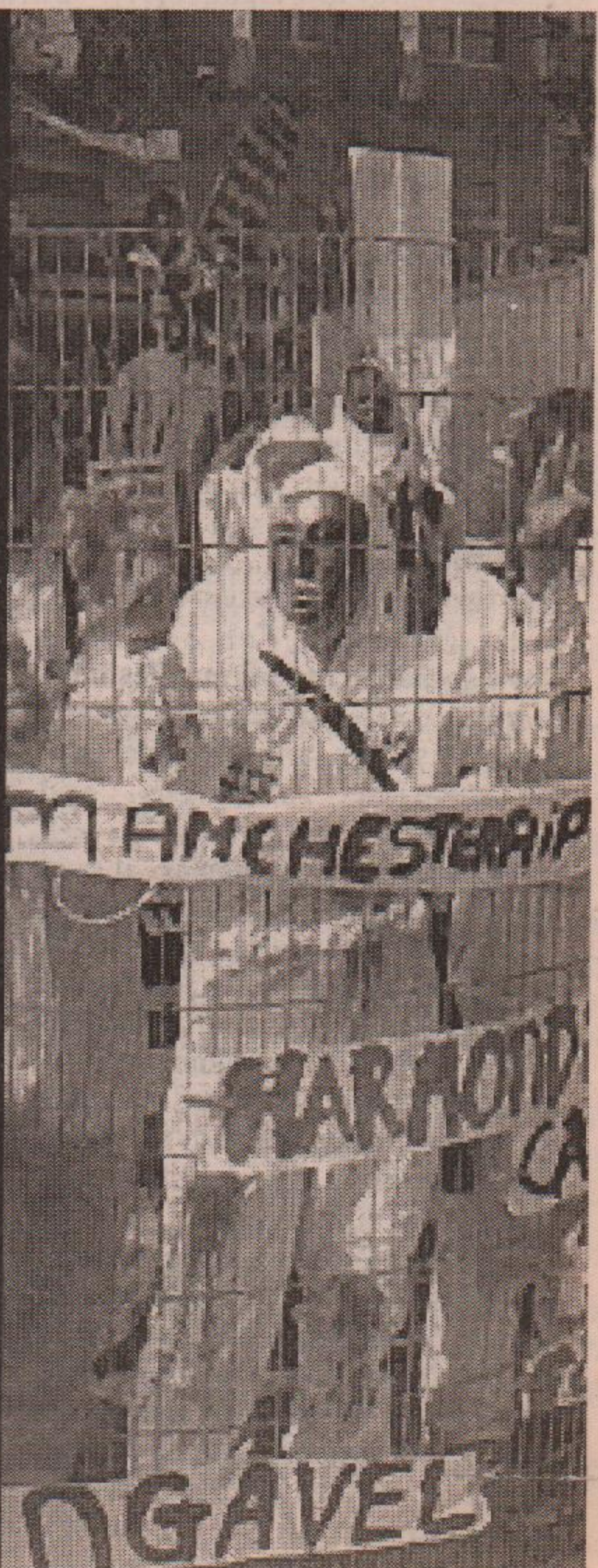
the following campaigns and actions:

- Trade union action against these attacks, including boycotts, obstruction - up to and including strike action. We call on the TUC and national unions - especially the public sector unions, Unison, PCS, Natfhe, NUT - to support members in taking such action, instigating official ballots, if necessary, for strike action, and to lead a national campaign
- Trade unions and the TUC to lead a campaign for the recruitment and organisation of refugees and migrant workers, for equal rights for work, welfare and pay for all, irrespective of immigration status
- Giving aid, material and physical support to local campaigns to prevent forced deportations of families and individuals (including the creation of a network that can give sanctuary and safe houses to those who have to flee their homes)
- Active defence of all refugees

and migrants under threat of deportation, through political campaigns, physical obstruction of snatch squads (as in Scotland), demonstrations, including civil disobedience at airports, and organised protection of communities against state and fascist harassment and attack

- Campaigning in the labour and trade union movement to expose the impact of these ongoing attacks on asylum seeker families, and initiating lobbying and direct action campaigns against MPs who support them
- Seeking to combine with all campaigns, around defence of all refugees and migrants, to organise a national demonstration in June, around the slogans:

"Stop the deportations!  
Close down the detention centres! Scrap Section 9!"  
Towards this end we will elect a steering committee from organisations and individuals at this conference, to further these aims.





# Campaign for a New Workers Party

## Rail union must take campaign forward

On 21 January, 350 trade unionists and socialists crammed into the small hall at Friends House in London, to discuss the crisis of working class representation. A hundred more were locked out, unable to squeeze in.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) meeting on the crisis in working class political representation proved far more successful than its organisers had dared to hope. Now the union, which has been expelled from Labour in 2004 for supporting other parties from its political fund, is considering a follow-up conference in August.

RMT president Tony Donaghey explained that the meeting should not take any resolution, and certainly not become a forum to launch a new working class party. This was a serious weakness. Nevertheless, nearly every speaker expressed the crying need

for such a party, and described the forces in the workplaces and localities that could be won to its ranks.

In truth, the RMT executive had been under pressure to hold the meeting from its own rank and file, as well as wider forces on the left. As a result, general secretary Bob Crow gave one of his most left speeches for a while. He roundly denounced Labour and mocking the idea that Brown would be any better than Blair.

But instead of drawing the logical conclusion of calling for a socialist and working class alternative to the Labour Party, he stopped short.

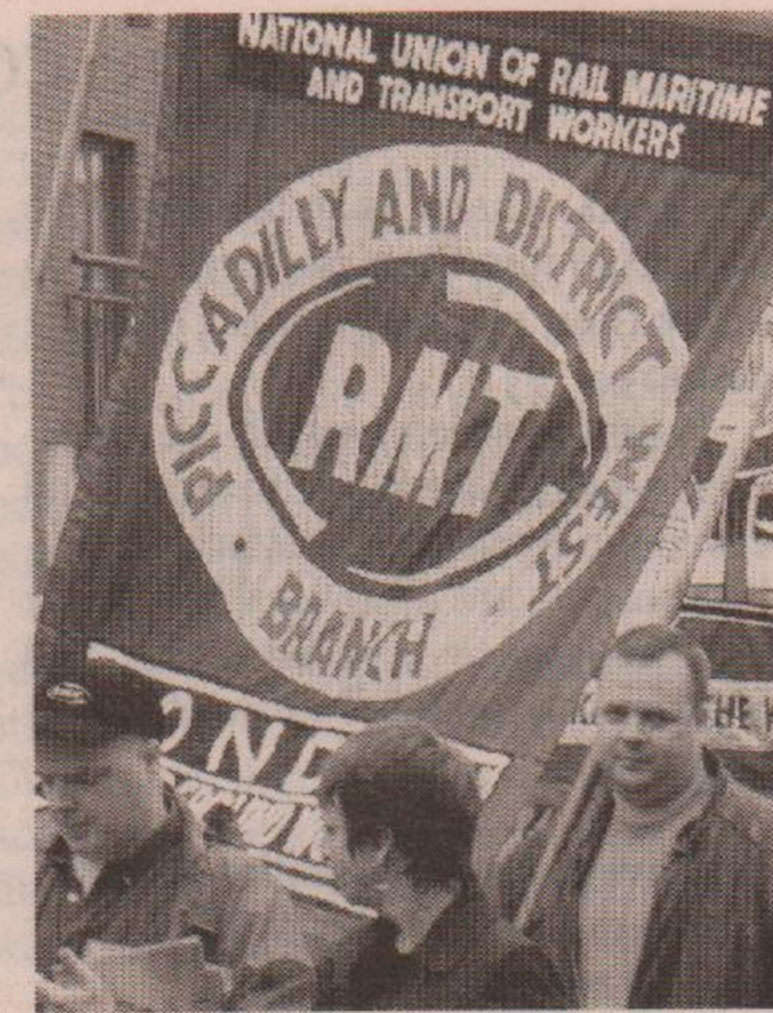
Now RMT members in the Campaign for a New Workers Party are agitating to remove references to the Labour Party (which the union founded 100 years ago) from the union rule-book, and to commit it to campaigning for a new workers party. Rail militants also need to make sure that union does hold a conference on the new workers

party in August and which is better planned and can take resolutions.

At the same time, union militants need to use every struggle in the coming months to point out how the Labour Party is serving the interests of big business, and is prepared to stick the boot into the unions.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone, for example, has gone from union darling to union buster. According to the *Evening Standard*, a Greater London Authority report, dated 16 January, has mooted the goal of imposing a no-strike clause on the capital's transport system in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics.

This is how Livingstone behaves since rejoining Labour. This is what is behind the spate of disputes on the underground. This is why the RMT should abandon the formal goal of rejoining the Labour Party and start funding a campaign to build a new, working



class party. If the union's AGM takes these steps between now and June, it will increase the likelihood that Matt Wrack of the FBU, Mark Serwotka of the PCS, and significant forces in other unions, like the CWU, join in.

### Campaign for a New Workers Party Conference

Sunday 19 March 2006  
11:30 - 4:30pm

University of London  
Union, Malet Street,  
London WC1

#### Speakers include:

Mark Serwotka, PCS General Secretary  
Dave Nellist, Coventry Socialist Party Councillor  
A WASG councillor from Germany

## Socialist Party programme: no manual for action

The Socialist Party claims to present a socialist programme to the class, but one that stems from workers' own experience. *Jeremy Dewar* investigates their record

In recent weeks, since Workers Power has joined forces in the CNWP, the SP has made it clear that it does not want to recreate "old" Labour, which, it now correctly says, was "undoubtedly a workers' party at its base, [but] was a party of big business at the top" (Campaign for a New Workers page 26).

Unlike the Respect coalition, it presents the capitalist system as the root cause of all the great miseries and injustices in society, and socialism as the solution. And it also calls for accountability of elected representatives, who should only receive a worker's wage, rather than the bloated salaries of bureaucrats and parliamentarians.

In meetings, leading members of the SP also stress that they want to build a combat party, for which elections should be a subordinate tactic, and even that they, themselves, never hide their support for a revolutionary strategy. It is only that they do not want to foist this strategy on the workers, who must draw this conclusion from their own experience.

But it is on this last point, that the comrades are least convincing. In practice, the SP consistently presents themselves as reformists, and not even left reformists.

#### Manifesto

Take the SP's 2005 election campaign. Their *Manifesto For Socialism* ([www.socialism.org.uk/manifesto/intro.html](http://www.socialism.org.uk/manifesto/intro.html)), condemns the profit system, supports strikes, anti-cuts and anti-privatisation campaigns and denounces war and poverty. "As well as these day-to-day struggles," it says, "we also fight for socialist change."

How these struggles can be linked to, or grow into a fight for socialism is never explained. This is what Marxists call the method of the "minimum-maximum programme": limited struggles for reforms today, the push for socialism sometime in the unspecified, but certainly far distant future.

Frederick Engels was the first to criticise this trend in the young Marxist German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1891. It later led to a reformist wing, which demanded the party abandon its final goal of socialism, which it never fought for anyway. In 1914, this wing eventually won out and led the SPD to vote for war credits, which split the Second International, and sent millions

of workers to their deaths in trenches of World War I.

In other words, for revolutionaries to lead with demands for reform does not automatically lead to workers gaining confidence in struggle, and taking up more socialistic demands. If socialism remains little more than a ritual belief, then workers will not see it as relevant in the day-to-day struggle. The link between the two is never made.

But the SP election manifesto is even worse than this. It does not even contain any demands for nationalisation, for a living wage, for troops out of Iraq, against deportations. In fact, the manifesto does not contain a single demand! It is just a series of short statements. In this very important sense, it is a worse manifesto than Respect's, because it does not even use the election campaign to draw workers into struggle.

#### Transitional demands

Of course, the SP knows that socialists have to raise demands for the struggle, not simply tail workers' spontaneously generated actions. Formally, the party agrees with Leon Trotsky's "system of transitional demands stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat" – *Transitional Programme*.

Trotsky is using the term "transitional" in a double sense: transitional from capitalism to socialism, but also transitional from workers' current reformist consciousness to a revolutionary consciousness.

It is a serious weakness that the SP refuse to use this system, when it is addressing "wide layers of the working class" in elections and in the trade unions. After all, it was precisely for such circumstances that Trotsky developed the method. But in longer programmatic works, like Hannah Sell's *Socialism in the 21st Century*, the SP claims to follow in Trotsky's tradition.

At the end of Sell's book, there is a section, Our demands, which is clearly meant to be a transitional action programme of: 35 hour week with no loss of pay; abolish business secrets, open the books; renationalise the privatised utilities under democratic working class control. The SP's crowning slogan, as it has been, with few alter-

ations, for more than 30 years, is:

"Take into public ownership the top 150 companies, banks and building societies that dominate the economy, under democratic working class control and management. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need." (*Socialism in the 21st Century*)

Workers Power disagrees with a number of the demands in Sell's list. The constant linking of nationalisation to "compensation on the basis of proven need" are unnecessary, and a concession to capitalist property rights, when the point is to expropriate the expropriators. The call to scrap the Asylum and Immigration Act and "all other racist laws" sidesteps the fact that all border controls are racist and need to be scrapped.

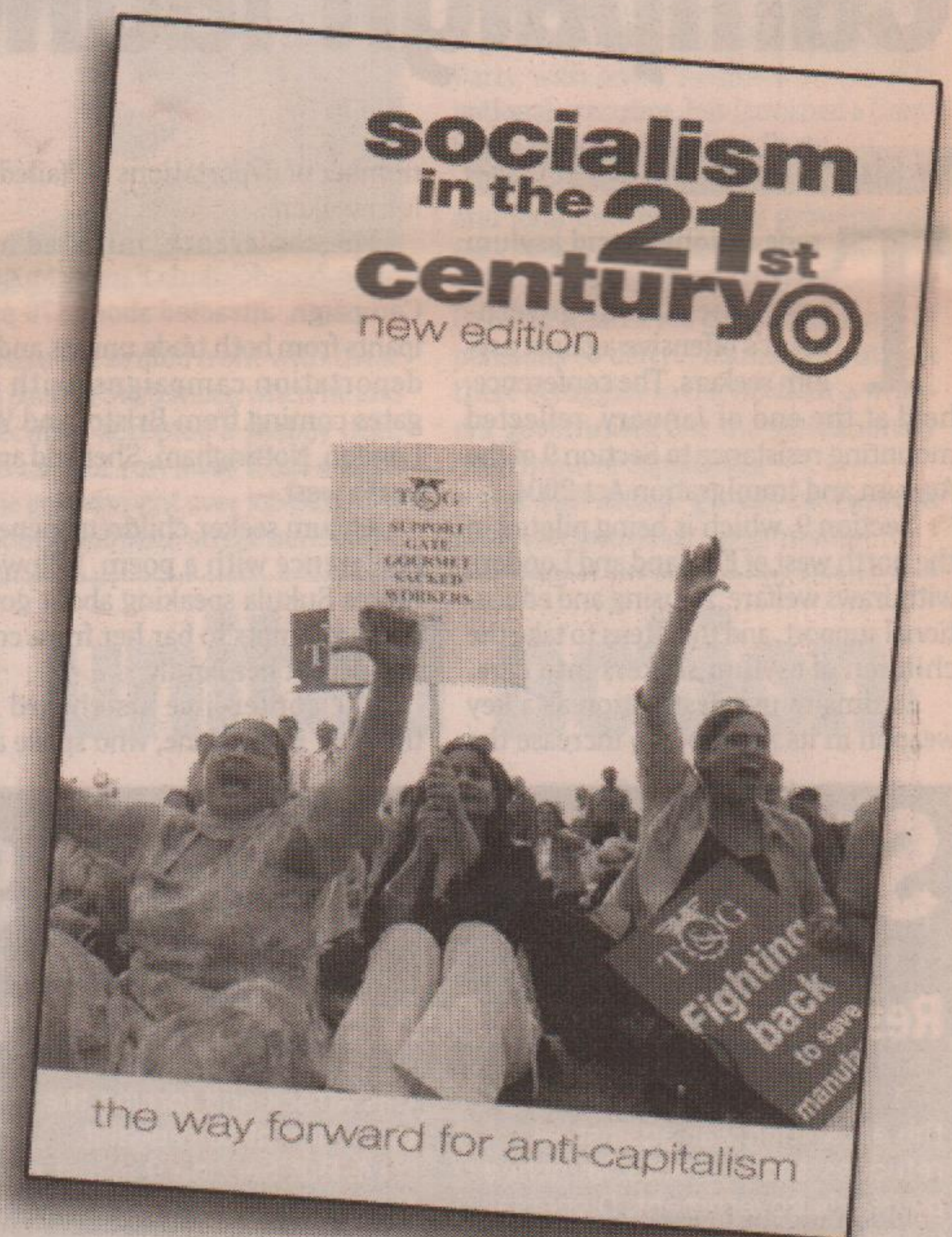
Ending "police harassment" and implementing "an immediate and drastic cut in military spending worldwide" are necessary but on their own insufficient – and therefore dangerous – because they sow illusions that the capitalist state can be reformed. Revolutionaries would support demands to disarm the police or disband units such as SO19 but know that the working class cannot simply reform the police, or get rid of the armed forces through budget cuts. They need to be smashed, and replaced by workers' defence guards and a militia.

#### Linking struggles to socialism

Of course, Sell can answer that workers in Britain today are nowhere near ready for such demands. They never will be – unless revolutionaries prepare the working class, organisationally and politically, in the prosecution of today's struggles, for the overthrow of capitalism. It is this link that is missing in the SP's method, but which was central for Trotsky:

"The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution... The old 'minimal program' is superseded by the transitional programme, the task of which lies in systematic mobilisation of the masses for the proletarian revolution." (*Transitional Programme*)

That's why we fight for rank and file organisation in the unions, so that workers can overcome the dead hand of the union bureaucracy; for action



Hannah Sell's *Socialism in the 21st century*

committees to unite the pensions struggles, so that workers are not divided, section by section, by their general secretaries; for self-defence squads against the BNP, so that black and Asian youth do not have to rely on the racist police.

None of these tasks get a mention in the SP's arsenal of literature, and so the link to factory committees, which can implement workers' control; to workers' councils, which can expropriate the capitalist class and plan the economy; to a workers militia, which can disarm the police and split the army – is broken.

#### Silent revolutionaries

Instead, workers are left wondering how the SP's programme will be realised. The nationalisation of the top 150 companies sounds good, but who will do it? With no route to the formation of workers councils, the answer can only be parliament. But as every student of history knows, parliament is, in the last analysis, a talking

shop. Any attempt to use it to build socialism will lead to a military coup.

Sell alludes to this in her account of the 1973 military coup in Chile, which remains one of the most vivid illustrations of reformism's tragic limitations.

"In the run up to the coup Allende made a number of mistaken decisions, including trying to pacify the generals by bringing Pinochet into the cabinet. As Marxists argued at the time, had he taken different decisions, the tragic outcome could have been prevented." (*Socialism in the 21st Century*)

But what were the "different decisions" Allende should have taken? Sell silently moves on, but we are not afraid to spell it out: arming the workers, building soviets and organising a revolution. If the SP seriously believes that it can spring this historic task on the working class at the last minute, without the slightest preparation, then it has misunderstood not only the lessons of Chile, but the whole of Trotsky's writings.



# Trotsky and the call for a Labor Party in the USA

Dave Stockton looks at the tactics Leon Trotsky proposed to the American SWP in relation to the call for a Labor Party in the USA in the late 1930s and the lessons that can be drawn for today's struggles

The American working class movement has failed to create a stable or long lasting Socialist or Labour party, such as those common in Europe. The nearest it came to this was the American Socialist Party in the period between its foundation in 1901 and its peak around 1912, when it had 125,000 members. However it did not long maintain this mass character.

In 1917, severe repression after the entry of the United States into the First World War and the split between revolutionaries and reformists, provoked by the Russian Revolution, sent it into crisis and decline. The Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), between 1936 and 1940 also reached sizable proportions (70-90,000 members) and it had considerable influence in the trade unions but it too fell a victim to the Cold War repression after 1948.

But besides the US Socialist and Communist Parties there have been repeated attempts to follow the British and Australian model and win the trade unions to setting up a Labor party (US spelling). The earliest attempt on a national scale was the United Labor Party in 1886. This had the blessing of none other than Frederick Engels. He had been advocating such a course of action in England since 1881.

Engels argued that the trade unionists should stop supporting parties like the Liberals and the Democrats and form their own parties – even if the programme they first adopted was inadequate and non-socialist. He believed that if they went through the experience of forming their own party and debating its policies this could lead them towards socialism. It was also essential that Marxists advocate and intervene into the formation of Labor Parties.

In the pre-1914 Second International both Karl Kautsky, the leading Marxist of the period, and Lenin supported this approach for such countries. Moreover this tactic was continued even after the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the foundation of the Communist International. In the United States in 1922-3 the CPUSA was advised to fight for the unions to break from the Democrats and form a Labor Party.

In the mid-1920s, as the Communist International collapsed into centrism, its American section changed this principled position and called for a two-class "Farmer-Labor" party. Trotsky criticised this pointing out that a party cannot serve two classes simultaneously and that the small farmers, as small capitalists, could not support a fully anticapitalist programme.

When the American Left Opposition was formed in 1928, it readopted the position of the early 1920s calling for a Labor Party. However, the weakness in this position was that it could be taken to mean that the formation of such party was a necessary step towards a revolutionary party and moreover that it must at first be a reformist party. Clearly this would make the Labor party an obstacle to revolutionaries trying to build a mass revolutionary party in the here and now. The formation of a reformist party by the trade union



Sit-down strike at Fisher Body plant in Flint, Michigan 1937

bureaucracy could under certain conditions be a deliberate obstacle to the creation of a revolutionary workers party.

In the midst of the great depression at a time when the trade unions were greatly weakened, under a right-wing craft unionist leadership with a declining membership Trotsky did not see any immediate prospect for forming a party based on the trade unions. But he did not at all rule out using the slogan if circumstances in the trade unions favoured this and the weakness of the revolutionary organisation made it necessary.

### Upsurge

By mid-1937, Trotsky had changed his mind about the applicability of the tactic. Why? First, from 1934 onwards a wave of successful strikes, in Toledo, Minneapolis and San Francisco kicked off a movement to unionise the mass production and transport industries such as steel, rubber, automobiles, truckers and the waterfront workers. In 1936, a huge wave of factory occupations (sit-down strikes) began, culminating in the spring of 1937 when 400,000 workers staged 477 sit-downs. General Motors, US Steel, Chrysler, General Electric were all forced to recognise the unions.

A new force within the AFL, the Committee for Industrial Organisation (CIO) had emerged in 1935. At the top was John L Lewis of the United Mineworkers and 10 other union leaders. At the base plant committees in which communists, syndicalists and Trotskyists played a vital role drove it. Eventually it split from the AFL. By the end of the decade there were nearly nine million – up from three million in 1929 – trade unionists in the CIO and the AFL together.

Trotsky also saw the approach of a new economic crisis in August 1937.

Within nine months, production in the USA fell 30 per cent and there were 10 million unemployed again. Re-armament had already begun in Europe. Japan had invaded China. It was clear that a new imperialist world war was only a few years away. At the same time a deep crisis of working class leadership persisted. The proletariat's organisations – the mass parties of the Socialist and the Communist Internationals – were now both reformist in their strategy. Events in Germany and Spain showed they were unable to fight fascism or prepare for the coming war. Trotsky embodied this perspective in the *Transitional Programme* (1938).

Although the number of revolutionaries only stood at a few thousand it was vital for them to actively intervene in movements of the working class, such as the great union upsurges that began in 1936, the huge waves of factory occupations in France and the United States and the Spanish Revolution. It was necessary in order to win the workers' movement to tactics that could win these battles and to a coherent revolutionary strategy.

Where mass workers' parties existed Trotsky argued for revolutionaries to enter them and fight for a revolutionary programme. Even in the heat of mass battles an alternative leadership could be forged and the crisis of leadership surmounted. In the USA it was the rise of the mass industrial unions – the CIO movement – in the mid 1930s, and the political crisis it generated, which laid the basis for Trotsky's re-elaboration of the Labor Party tactic.

By 1938, when Trotsky began to discuss with the American SWP, the upsurge of economic class struggle was over and the workers' movement turning to questions of politics and workers representation. This was reflected

in the resurrection of what appeared to be a Labor Party movement, organisations like Labor's Non-Partisan League (LNPL), the American Labor Party in New York, and others. For rank and file trade unionists, LNPL and the ALP were a move by the unions towards independent political action, but for the CIO leaders like John L Lewis, they were meant as a vehicle for supporting Roosevelt and the Democratic Party in the presidential elections.

For Roosevelt – increasingly deserted by the main forces of big capital who felt he had encouraged a huge upsurge in unionisation and class struggle at their expense – it was an additional means of support, part of his New Deal Coalition, which included Jews, Catholics, northern black people, "progressive" sections of the Republican Party, and so on. This new form of class collaboration was enormously strengthened within the unions by the Communist Party's adoption of the class collaborationist policy of the Popular Front. In the USA this took the form of uncritical support for the New Deal and Roosevelt.

Trotsky saw that, even though millions of workers in the CIO had turned to political action, their reformist leaders were channelling this into support for Roosevelt. Revolutionaries could not afford to abstain from any stage of the workers' political development if they were to have a chance of shaping it in a revolutionary direction. To this end they could unite with the millions of reformist-led workers to say to their leaders: "Yes, form a Labor Party but not as a vote catcher for Roosevelt – break with the bourgeois parties." In doing so they could place themselves in a favourable position to advance the revolutionary programme as the content of the political break with the Democratic Party.

### Elaboration

Trotsky now significantly developed the Labor Party tactic, transcending the method that Engels, Lenin and himself had envisaged by linking it to the struggle for a transitional programme. He combined the elements of a united front with militant but not yet revolutionary workers in the unions, willing to build an independent party, with the fight for a transitional programme for that party. In a discussion with the leadership of the American Trotskyists, held in Mexico City in April 1938, he explained the new tactic and its relationship to the transitional programme he was writing for the Fourth International, whose foundation congress was upcoming.

Trotsky: "Are we in favor of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. Are we in favor of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of the forces? Yes. It can become a reformist party – it depends upon the development. Here the question of program comes in. I mentioned yesterday and I will underline it today – we must have a program of transitional demands, the most complete of them being a workers' and farmers' govern-

ment. We are for a party, for an independent party of the toiling masses who will take power in the state. We must concretize it – we are for the creation of factory committees, for workers' control of industry through the factory committees. All these questions are now hanging in the air. They speak of technocracy, and put forward the slogan of 'production for use.' We oppose this charlatan formula and advance the workers' control of production through the factory committees."

Cannon, a leader of the American SWP: "Do we put forward this transitional program in the trade unions?"

Trotsky: "Yes, we propagandize this program in the trade unions; propose it as the basic program for the labor party. For us, it is a transitional program; but for them, it is the program. Now it's a question of workers' control of production, but you can realise this program only through a workers' and farmers' government. We must make this slogan popular." (*Leon Trotsky On the Labor Party in the United States* Merit, NY 1969 p14-15)

By fighting for its own transitional programme as the programme of the Labor Party, the SWP could have, Trotsky insisted, have opened up the possibility of either shaping it into a revolutionary party or giving birth to one. It was for this reason that Trotsky believed that, if realised, in practice, the Labor Party "can preserve progressive significance only during a comparatively short transitional period."

That is, until the battle between the reformists and revolutionaries was decided. If the latter won, it would "inevitably break the shell of the Labor Party and permit the SWP to rally around the banner of the Fourth International, the revolutionary vanguard of the American proletariat". If the reformists won, then a counter-revolutionary social democratic party would be the result. In fact, thanks in no small measure to the actions of the Stalinist CPUSA the entire potential for an independent class party was frittered away and the US workers were tied back into class collaborationist block with the Democrats, which last to this day.

Thus, by 1938, Trotsky had developed the Labor Party tactic into its most refined revolutionary form. The guidelines that he laid down remain valid today. They can be summarised thus:

- The demand for an independent party, founded by and based on the trade unions, with the accompanying demand on the bureaucracy to break with the bourgeoisie, does not mean a call for a reformist Labor Party.
- The fight for a transitional programme as the programme of a Labor Party is essential to secure its revolutionary development and defeat reformism.
- The maintenance of a revolutionary organisation within a Labor Party movement is essential for waging this struggle.
- In no sense is a Labor Party a necessary stage in the development of a mass revolutionary working class party – i.e. it is a tactic not a strategy.



## Iraq: occupation fuels sectarian killings

Stuart King looks at the political crisis the Iraqis are facing in forming a government

The bombing of the al-Askari shrine in Iraq led to outbreaks of horrific sectarian killing in February. In one of the worst incidents, 47 factory workers were dragged from their buses just outside of Baghdad, and slaughtered. Over 130, mostly Sunni Iraqis died, and 126 of their mosques were attacked before the government imposed a curfew.

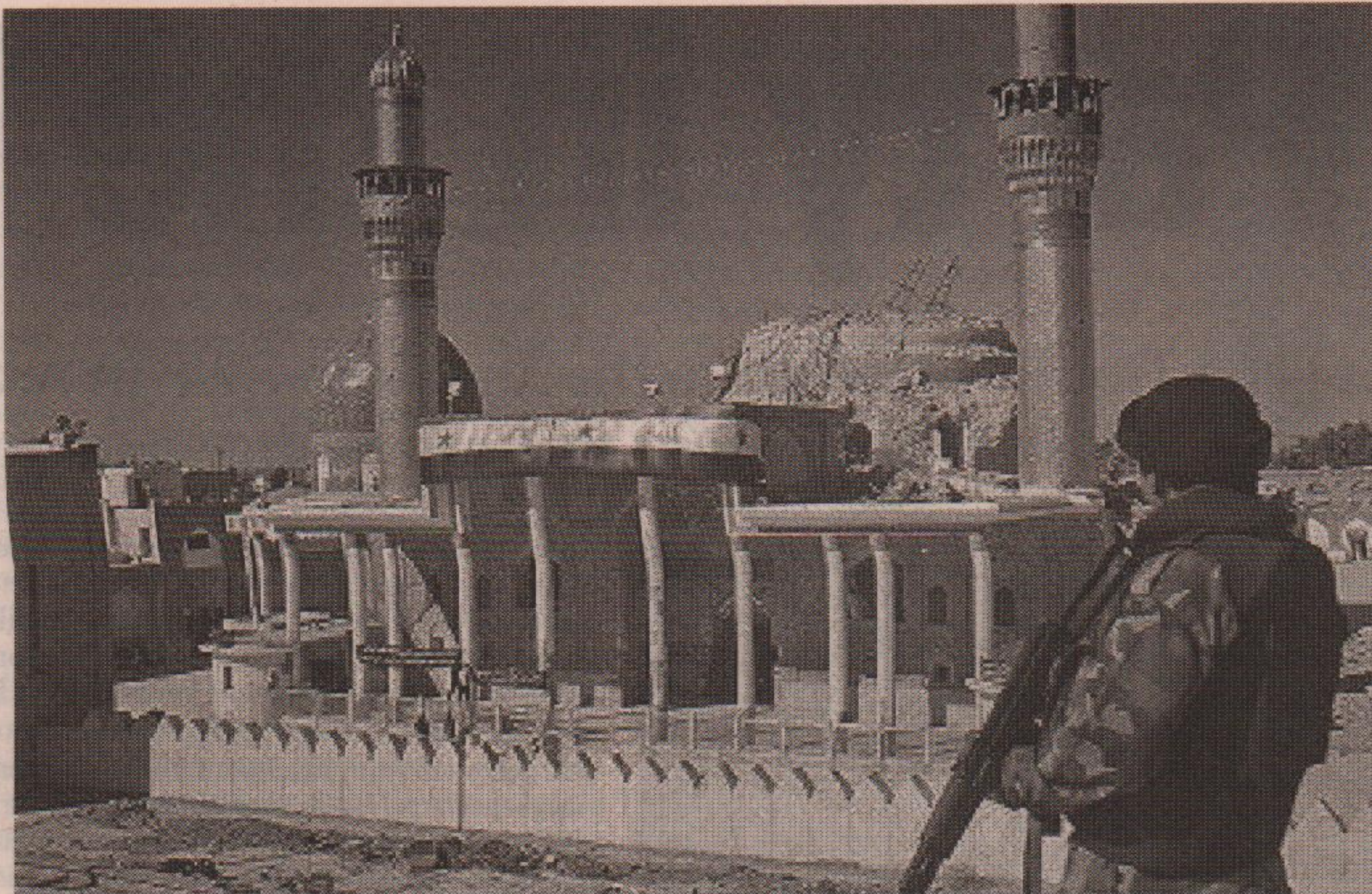
Yet, while these killings hit the headlines, the regular sectarian murders in Iraq get little coverage. The Shia dominated government has been turning a blind eye to death squads, operating out of the interior ministry for more than a year, in reply to the attacks on US and Iraqi security forces. At night people from the Sunni minority are rounded up, tortured and regularly found dead in the streets the following morning.

The occupying powers, led by the US and Britain, have cynically played up the latest crisis and threats of "civil war" to get their way on the make up of the new government. The elections last December have left the country in a state of political paralysis, with no agreement on the make-up of a new government and months of wrangling ahead.

The victor in the elections was the Shia coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), but the faction within it that made the most gains was that of the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. This was bad news for the imperialists; al Sadr's Mahdi Army has fought battles with the US occupiers in the past, and he declared recently on al-Jazeera that the withdrawal of foreign forces should be "the priority of the future Iraqi government".

This is not the position of his allies in the UIA, the Supreme Council for Islamic Resistance in Iraq (Sciri), who control the defence and interior ministries and rely on the US and British to protect them against the insurgency. Al Sadr's grouping has also blocked the idea of including the west's favourite, former prime minister Ayad Allawi, and giving him a key ministry.

This type of "democratic outcome" to elections is not to the imperialists' liking. As with the elections in Palestine, the US reserves the right to decide on the government, whoever the electorate votes for. The US ambassador made his decision clear; if the Iraq government wanted continued aid and support, then it would



The ruins of the Askari shrine

have to give "key ministries", like defence and the interior ministry, to "non sectarian" forces like

Allawi. The last thing the US will tolerate is for these ministries to fall into the hands of pro-

Sadr forces. Jack Straw, like the White House errand boy he is, scuttled off to Baghdad to echo

the message, demanding "a broad government of national unity".

The British are in a particular bind; their area of control in the south is the Shia heartland. They only hold control with the co-operation of the Sciri's militia, the Badr Brigade, and, to a lesser extent, the tolerance of the Mahdi Army. This, rather than the "friendly" beret-wearing image, is the real reason they can posture as the professionals.

Together, these two militias effectively control the police forces in the south. In exchange for this co-operation, the British handed over local political control to the islamists who have repressed women, imposed the veil, banned alcohol and are well on the way to imposing sharia law on the population by force of arms.

But since the recent exposure of British troop brutality, and the increase of sabre rattling against Iran, which exercises considerable influence on the Badr Brigade, British troops have been

virtually confined to base. In the middle of February, Iran's foreign minister demanded "the immediate withdrawal of British forces from Basra".

### Economic collapse

Meanwhile, the economic and security situation is deteriorating. A recent report by the IMF and UN said that living standards have declined since the invasion. A fifth of the population is living below the poverty line, existing on less than a dollar a day. Half the population is unemployed and 60 per cent are dependent on government subsidised rations.

The US ambassador, without a hint of irony, recently explained that Iraq was going through "a period of state and nation building." Building? "Nation destruction" more like: something the entire antiwar movement predicted before the invasion.

Such "nation building" as the US is describing is little more than neoliberal looting of the country. In the near future, the subsidised food rations are due to be phased out and fuel prices are to be hiked to meet the World Bank and "donor country" conditions. The US is also fast-tracking Iraq to join the World Trade Organisation this year. The profit bonanza for US multinationals and security companies continues apace, while the Iraqi masses suffer the agonising consequences. Taxpayers in the USA and Britain, meanwhile, pay the rocketing operating costs of this private plunder.

The way out of this crisis lies in the hands of the Iraqi workers and peasants, and the global antiwar movement. Iraqi militants desperately need to organise a revolutionary socialist party that fights against religious sectarianism. It must be one that supports the right of self-determination for the Kurds, rights for women, for the separation of the schools, the courts and the hospitals from all religious organisations.

A party that fights not only neoliberalism, but also the imperialist occupiers. One that struggles to place the oil wealth and other industries at the disposal of the people, and under workers control.

A revolutionary workers government is the way forward in Iraq, not a set of squabbling bourgeois politicians in the pocket of imperialism, or reactionary Islamic republics, Shia or Sunni.

## The untouchable secret state

**C**omplicity with CIA rendition, 28-day detention without trial, army beatings and torture of Iraqi civilians - all in a day's work for a New Labour government and its security services. It is remarkable how the "rule of law" is unceremoniously thrown out of the window when the government is faced with serious resistance to its imperial policies.

Archbishop Tutu, a campaigner against apartheid in South Africa, recently declared himself appalled to learn that a Labour government was trying to introduce a measure, 90 day detention, that the Apartheid regime used to break ANC activists.

UN human rights investigators reported last month on the Guantanamo detention centre, the US military base in Cuba where 500 individuals are kept without charge or hope of trial. They called for its closure. They pointed out that the force used in transportation of prisoners and treatment meted out at the prison, such as forced feeding of

hunger strikers through large nasal tubes, amounted to torture.

The US state department's response? The allegations "were largely without foundation" and "discredited the UN". Tony Blair was only prepared to call it an "anomaly", which had to be "dealt with sooner or later". He signally refused to call for its closure sooner, rather than later.

In fact, he obviously hopes it will be "later", because British security services have been regularly supporting it. A case is before the High Court, because the British government is refusing to request the release of three British residents held there. The CIA in Gambia seized two of them, with the help of British agents, transported them to Afghanistan, and then onto Guantanamo: a process called "extraordinary rendition".

The practice of rendition is a good example of how powerless parliament is. The Commons Foreign Affairs committee has been trying to find out for months how many CIA flights have been landing in Britain, taking people to be tortured in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Ministers have just

stonewalled, declaring they were "unaware of any such flights". The National Air Traffic Services has been more forthcoming, revealing that two CIA planes have made 200 such journeys from civilian airports.

When MPs asked the Ministry of Defence how many such flights were made from military airports, they were told the information would not be provided, as it would involve "disproportionate costs". In other words: shove off and mind your own business.

But, whenever abuses and torture are revealed, like those at Abu Ghraib, or when British troops assault civilians, we are told that action will be swift and martial. A few rank and file soldiers, NCOs and junior officers are made fall guys. This is absolutely necessary to maintain the fiction that it is only a few "bad apples", not the commanders and their political masters, who are responsible.

Even then, the penalties have been laughable. A US Chief Warrant Officer was recently found guilty of killing an Iraqi general under interrogation. The

Iraqi had been stuffed headfirst into a sleeping bag, and then sat and stamped on. He died of a heart attack. The officer was fined \$6,000 dollars, given a reprimand, and restricted for 60 days to his "home, office and church".

John Reid, the thuggish defence secretary, has attacked those, who make too much of all this. Critics should be "a little slower to condemn and a lot quicker to understand". This defender of "our boys", of course, does nothing to investigate the brutality which has led to the loss of young soldiers lives in training barracks like Deepcut.

What we have to "understand" is that an imperialist army, occupying a foreign country, where the population is trying to chuck it out, is trained and encouraged to be brutal. Repression is its job. The "winning hearts and minds" stuff is for the gullible (or cynical) media back home.

Imperialism is brutal - and life under its iron heel is nasty and short. That's why we must sweep it, and the profit system that promotes it, off the face of the earth.

## Afghanistan: Blair's second front

By James Thorne

**B**ritain has deployed 3,000 troops in southern Afghanistan, for a three year stint, at a cost of £1 billion. Tony Blair, who famously said about Iraq that the price in British lives was "worth paying", is again asking working class 22 year-olds to stomp up the "blood price".

Of course, the army is trying to lull the public with non-

sense about how the greater professionalism and "friendly" character of the British troops will win hearts and minds and minimise casualties. But they are working not with Badr brigade allies as in Basra, but up against hardened Taliban and al-Qa'ida jihadis.

When British troops joined the serious fighting in Iraq, during the November 2004 assault on Fallujah, the Black Watch battlegroup suffered four deaths in as many days, before pulling

back to the south to lick its wounds. There will be blood spilt in large quantities. Perhaps Blair might like to persuade his son Euan to quit his internship with a Republican congressman and go shed a little blood for his country.

Blair claims that it is worth all this blood to create a "democratic Afghanistan" under Mohammed Karzai. Just like the democratic Iraq that is descending into bloody chaos. In fact both invasions and occupations

have nothing whatsoever to do with democracy.

The US-UK invasion of Afghanistan used the pretext of 9/11 to secure control of routes along which to extract the oil and natural gas of the Caspian basin, an area otherwise encircled by imperialist rival Russia, potential rivals, China and India, and hostile Islamist Iran. The neo-conservative Bush-Cheney team also has closer ties with Big Oil than any previous administration.

But their strategy is looking increasingly ragged. Last July, the Uzbek dictator (and well known torturer and murderer) Islam Karimov renounced his alliance with the US, and closed down their airbase in the country. Subsequently, he has moved back into the orbit of Moscow, signing major contracts with Gazprom.

In Afghanistan, too, things are getting worse. In 2005, 99 GIs killed, nearly half the total (214) killed in Afghanistan since

the invasion. Last year saw a record number of aid workers and civilians killed, too.

The Pentagon must reduce the mounting casualties and plummeting morale of its volunteer military, if it is to solve its recruitment crisis, and prepare for further adventures - in Iran or Syria. So Blair is now being forced to pay for strutting the world stage as the close comrade in arms of Bush, with the blood of more British soldiers - and many more Afghan villagers.



# US preparations for the long war

US generals are talking openly about the need to withdraw the bulk of Western troops from Iraq. But, as *Jeremy Dewar* points out, this is no cause for the antiwar movement to demobilise

At the G8 summit last year, antipoverty campaigners hoped the US government could be persuaded that it was in its long term interest to give money to Africa. And, last month, billions of dollars were, indeed, earmarked for the continent in 2007 - but they will be spent by the Pentagon, not USAid.

The four yearly Pentagon Review has asked for \$513 billion for the 2007 defence budget, compared to the \$453 billion for 2006. Remarkably, this is in spite of the fact that the occupation of Iraq is expected to become a fading item of expenditure - at least according to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

US imperialism is learning lessons from the humiliation of being fought to a standstill in Iraq by the insurgency. Out goes "the war on terror", in comes "the long war".

"Long duration, complex operations involving the US military, other government agencies and international partners will be waged simultaneously in multiple countries round the world, relying on a combination of direct (visible) and indirect (clandestine) approaches..."

Above all they will require persistent surveillance and vastly better intelligence to locate enemy capabilities and personnel. They will also require global mobility, rapid strike, sustained unconventional warfare, foreign internal defence, counter-terrorism and



counter-insurgency capabilities. Maintaining a long term, low visibility presence in many areas of the world where US forces do not traditionally operate."

In other words, the US is turning towards covert operations: assassinations, spies, sabotage, kidnappings and (more) torture. But, so far as the Senate, Congress, foreign governments, the media and the global antiwar

movement are concerned, the stock answer will be, "War? What war?"

The Middle East remains the immediate focus of US concern. Ironically, a phased withdrawal from Iraq could increase the likelihood of Iran and Syria facing sanctions or military strikes.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recently granted \$70 million to Iranian opposition groups,

nearly all of them in exile. This mirrors the policy of backing Iraqi "dissidents" Ayad Allawi and Ahmed Chalabi, who quickly turned into hate figures after the fall of Saddam.

Iran's support for Hamas and the Palestinian Authority could become a pretext for a military strike or covert attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Similarly, Syria's support for Hizbollah - and hence,

Hamas - will be quoted to justify moves towards regime change.

Further afield, Muslim countries in North Africa, the horn of Africa, and South East Asia are also targets of the long war. What unites them for the neoconservatives is that they are fertile areas for militant Islamist groups, like the Salafists (Algeria), al-Ittihad al-Islami (Somalia) and Jemaah Islamyah (Indonesia).

But this is not a war of civilisations. It is a war of globalisation.

US imperialism needs to dominate key areas of the globe in order to ensure its access to cheap labour, natural resources and open markets for decades to come. It will certainly seek to avoid unilateral, conventional wars of colonisation - at least while it remains bogged down in Iraq - and seek temporary allies to "share the costs and responsibilities", as the review puts it. But the military strategy remains one of specifically US domination:

"[The US] will attempt to dissuade any military competitor from developing disruptive capabilities that could enable regional hegemony or hostile action against the US and friendly countries."

This is the continuation of the Project for a New American Century by other, more covert, means. Instead of stealth bombers, aircraft carriers and tens of thousands of troops: long range bombers, unmanned aircraft and special operations forces will fight the wars. Soldiers' coffins won't be flown home,

because "they're not there". Pictures of torture camps won't flood cyberspace, because "they don't exist".

But this, of course, is fantasy, just as the cheering crowds greeting the invasion of Iraq were. First, US plans will meet resistance on a mass scale, as they have done in Iraq. Second, the inevitable consequence of attempts to build a new American century will be increased rivalry between the major powers. The European Union also has plans for an integrated rapid deployment force.

Most commentators look towards growing tension between the US and China as a source of future conflict. It is certainly significant that the Pentagon is moving to improve linguistic skills among its forces, not only in Arabic and Farsi (the major Iranian language), but also Chinese.

US globalisation is pushing the world to greater and greater conflicts. There will be resistance and it may sometimes be victorious, as Vietnam was and Iraq can be - but, ultimately, defeating US imperialism means destroying the global economic system that it dominates. That is why it is necessary, through all the struggles against globalisation, to build an international organisation around an international strategy that can lead and coordinate an international struggle for socialism, in short, an international revolutionary party, a Fifth International.

# Israel's oppression of the Palestinians

The occupation of the West Bank has brought the plight of the Palestinians to the attention of millions. But, *Marcus Chamoun* argues, their oppression is built into Israel's existence as a specifically Jewish state

The key demand of the Palestinians and their supporters world-wide is for an end to the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Even Hamas, which famously does not recognise the right of the state of Israel to exist, has made it clear that it is fighting for the return of these lands, and that it would be content with that.

But the oppression of the Palestinians pre-dates Israel's invasion and conquest of these lands in the Six Day War with the Arab states in June 1967.

Israel was born in a war, in 1948, that pitted a Jewish state, recognised and supported by the world's two superpowers, the USA and USSR, against an almost unarmed Palestinian population, backed by weak and squabbling Arab states. Jordan, in particular, opposed the creation of a separate Palestinian state, seeing itself as the natural ruler of the Palestinian Arabs, and preferring to come to an agreement with Israel for the partition of Palestine.

The result, for the Palestinians, was Al-Nakba; the Catastrophe. Following well publicised massacres of civilians, such as in Deir Yassin in April 1948, the siege of Jaffa and Haifa in the

same month, and expulsions from Lydda and Ramleh in July 1948, over 750,000 Palestinians found themselves stateless and dispossessed, living in squalid camps, behind the armistice lines established between Israel and the Arab states.

Israel confiscated their property, prohibited their return and stripped them of citizenship.

Even the few Arabs (just over 100,000) who remained behind in the new Jewish state, and whose citizenship it had to recognise, were dispossessed. The Palestinian-Israelis, while formally equal citizens of a democratic state, were subjected to a form of apartheid that was a prototype for the treatment of their fellow Palestinians under occupation after 1967.

They played no role in the new state, except as a cheap, captive labour force for the kibbutzim and private farms, established on their confiscated property. They had the vote, but were prohibited from forming political parties that opposed Israel's character as "the state of the Jews". They were kept under tight police surveillance. The Israeli state discriminated against them in the provision of education, healthcare and infrastructure, while pouring resources into absorbing new Jewish immigrants from across



the world.

At the centre of this policy, of course, has been the matter of military service. Conscription is not compulsory for Arab Israelis, although the Bedouin and the Druze minorities do serve in the Israeli army. However, access to the welfare system, and eligibility for most well-paid jobs is dependent on having done military service.

The Israeli state tried to extend this policy to the Palestinians under occupation after 1967. Here, however, it ran into two difficulties.

The first was demographic.

The Palestinians had not fled Gaza or the West Bank on the scale that they had fled Israel in 1948. Even with massive Jewish immigration into the occupied territories, the Palestinians could not be turned from a majority into a minority.

The second problem was political. The Palestinians in the territories had just lived through a period of revolutionary turmoil that affected the whole Arab world. They were politically self-confident, due to the PLO's guerrilla struggle and the mass actions of Palestinian "civil society".

The Catch-22 of either ruling or expelling a compact and

militant Palestinian society in the occupied territories has forced Israel to adopt a policy of encouraging Jewish settlement, bringing about a slow expulsion of Palestinians from their land, combined with the periodic search for a collaborator to control them. Until the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987, Israel sought to use the Jordanian monarchy for this role, but its credibility had already been damaged by its own brutal suppression of Palestinians in "Black September", 1970.

The defeat of the PLO's armed struggle, following Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, encouraged Israel to by-pass the Palestinians altogether and "make peace" with the weakened Arab states, one-by-one, while holding onto most of the occupied territories. But the first Intifada (which went on until 1993) shattered this strategy.

Arafat's PLO eventually emerged as a plausible partner in continuing the occupation, alongside the trappings of Palestinian statehood. His corruption and inability to squeeze any meaningful concessions from the Israelis eventually undermined any pretence that he could lead them to liberation.

The second or al-Aqsa Intifada (2000 onwards) erupted as a result of the failure of the "Oslo

accords". Sharon's response emphasised military force and unilateral actions as a way of forcing the Palestinians to accept "facts on the ground", and can be seen as a return to a previous policy of pure reliance on brute force.

But in essence the policy remains the same. The issue is the land. Unlike apartheid South Africa's relationship with its black working class, the Jewish state has no long-term plans for the Palestinians. Without new land to attract Jewish immigrants, Israel cannot maintain itself indefinitely as a Jewish state. This places it in permanent conflict with the Palestinians, whether Israel's domination takes the form of military occupation, formal equality, a drawn-out "peace process" or the pretence of "two states". The issue is not the presence of Jews in Palestine, but of Zionist settlers occupying Palestinian land.

Only the revolutionary overthrow of Zionism by the workers and peasants of the region can end this destructive dynamic. The struggle to end the occupation, therefore, can only be part of a broader struggle for a workers' state for Arabs and Jews in Palestine, as part of a broader federation of workers' states in the Middle East.



# A tale of two labour movements

By Keith Harvey

On 15 February, Unite Here, the US service sector union launched a national campaign of rallies in 120 cities aimed at recruiting tens of thousands of hotel workers in the Hilton Hotels group.

The campaign is the first by the new union federation – Change to Win – since it was formed after five unions split from the AFL-CIO last summer. The campaign will be hard but they begin with confidence, having had success in previous recruitment drives in the expanding service sector.

Contrast this dynamism with the fight at Delphi Corporation, the largest US car parts manufacturer, which declared bankruptcy last October.

Delphi's bosses demanded that the 33,000 workforce accept a wage cut from \$27 an hour to \$9, pay more for their health insurance and cut holiday entitlement. Delphi, which also plans to cut its US work force to 10,000, has threatened legal action to cancel all existing contracts if the workers' union, the United Auto Workers (UAW), does



not agree to the package. The UAW has threatened to strike but, so far, has only implemented a work-to-rule in some of Delphi's plants. The Delphi conflict is part of the wider crisis in the US car industry. The main US-owned giants, GM, Ford and Daimler-Chrysler have announced plans to shed 80,000 jobs in the US and Canada.

On top of this they want big "give-backs" for those that keep their jobs. Indeed, this pattern of attacks has

become generalised among those sectors of US industry that are most exposed to globalisation or domestic deregulation.

The union movement has taken a battering over the past two decades. Union membership today is barely 12 per cent of the workforce. In the private sector it accounts for a smaller percentage (8 per cent) of the workforce than in the 1920s. The number of strikes involving more than 1,000 work-

ers has fallen from 288 a year in the 1970s to 34 in the 1990s. Under Bush's administration, it has averaged 24 a year.

Workers in the US also face a hostile federal government. Anti-labour laws are among the worst in the world; 22 of the 31 states which voted for Bush in the 2004 election have "right-to-work" (i.e. scabbing) laws and the growth in the car plants that has taken place in the past 10 years has largely been in these states.

Many workers have seen their living standards decline. The minimum wage of \$5.15 has not changed in seven years; it is now 61 per cent of poverty level.

Forty-five million people lack health insurance; for those who have it, premiums have risen 33 per cent, more than eating up most pay raises. Productivity and profits have stormed ahead in the US economy in the past 10 years but the gains have gone to shareholders and the bosses of the big corporations.

## Change To Win

It was against this background that Change To Win was born last year. At the AFL-CIO convention in July, the service workers' union, SEIU, proposed a 10-point plan – "Unite to Win".

Its central idea was for recruitment campaigns against the main firms in particular sectors so that no capitalist could gain an advantage by undercutting the wages of workers.

As a strategy it was geared towards the expanding service sector from which jobs cannot be "exported".

But, although leaders like Andy Stern, of the SEIU, have a strategy of campaigning and recruitment, they are as committed to the "business unionism" that developed in the late 1940s and fifties as their opponents in the AFL-CIO.

Under that system, employers tolerated unions and unions respected managerial control.

Union chiefs supported US imperialism's foreign wars in exchange for a middle class standard of living for their members and privileges and power for themselves.

The employers tore up this agreement in the 1980s as US capitalism entered crisis but Stern thinks he can re-establish it, at least in those sectors not affected by globalisation.

## Key period

The struggles ahead could define the shape of the US labour movement for years. The key to rebuilding the unions is to make them relevant to workers by fighting for deals that improve their lives. Andy Stern understands this much at least. Unionised hotel housekeepers in the US get \$13 an hour compared to \$8.67 for non-unionised workers.

But the effective creation of two labour movements by last year's split does not serve the interests of US workers – it is a recipe for disunity, scabbing and defeat. Overcoming that divide will need rank and file campaigns to unionise the unorganised and spread solidarity for those in struggle across the whole of the working class.

But the working class also needs its own political representation. Militants and activists should demand that their union leaders end their "barren marriage" with the Democrats. What is needed is a workers' party that is clear that capitalism itself, and not simply the Bush administration or a particular employer, is the enemy. In short, it needs to be a revolutionary socialist party, part of a new, Fifth International.

## Website links:

**Split in the AFL-CIO see:**  
<<http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=78,785,0,0,1,0>>  
**Delphi rank and file group see:**  
[www.futureoftheunion.com](http://www.futureoftheunion.com)  
<<http://www.futureoftheunion.com>>  
**The Wobblies history see:**  
<<http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=83,818,0,0,1,0>>  
**Trade unions and the onslaught of globalisation see:**  
<<http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=20,36,0,0,1,0>>  
**Trade union bureaucracy see:**  
<<http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=20,37,0,0,1,0>>  
**What are trade unions?**  
<<http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFiles/unions.html>>

# USA: prison nation

By Kam Kumar

The US has a long history of black oppression, which began with slavery. Today, the racist persecution of black people continues through social and economic discrimination that condemns blacks to live with the highest US poverty rates on record.

As recently as the 1960s, blacks in the southern states were denied the right to vote, systematically terrorised and degraded through segregation laws. Despite decades of struggle, the US justice system still reflects, and reinforces, horrific inequality.

According to *Prison Nation: the Warehousing of America's Poor*, a collection of studies into America's criminal justice system, a young black man aged 16 stands a 29 per cent chance of spending time in prison while the probability for a young white male is 4 per cent. Black offenders are eight times more likely to be imprisoned than whites and there are an estimated one million black Americans currently in prison. Among black males aged 20 to 29, 30 per cent are under "correctional supervision", either in prison or on parole.

The operation of the death penalty illustrates the racism of the system. Black offenders are more likely to be sentenced to death than any other race. A black person is four times more likely to be sentenced to death if the victim was white than if the victim was black.



Many American prison researchers have commented whether someone is given the death penalty is down to the quality of legal defence, not the facts of the crime. It is a fact that most of those on death row could not afford their own lawyer. Lawyers allocated to them by the state often have not researched or prepared their cases, leading one commentator to liken the courts to "fast food restaurants". Furthermore, it is the District Attorney (DA) who decides whether to apply for the death penalty. More than 80 per cent of DAs are white.

Many adults who cannot afford a lawyer plead guilty and are sent to prison without benefit of legal advice. When they are allocated lawyers, they are often advised to plead guilty, leading to unfair trials and questionable verdicts. In many cases, black people have no representation at all, forcing them to defend themselves. In many courts this can be to a mostly white jury even in states where black people make

up a large percentage.

Parole also traps black people in prisons. Of the total prison population, 70 per cent are there because they have broken their parole – and breaking parole is very easy. In some states, a stretch of unemployment is grounds for re-imprisonment for up to three years. In others, a \$100 overdraft is enough. Poverty is the root cause of most crime yet the state makes it practically impossible for black people to find a job if they have a criminal record, and those that do find employment earn dramatically less than those who have no record.

The crimes of the poor have long been more harshly punished than those of the middle and upper classes. Drug dealing and prostitution, crimes of the poor because they are used as a way of survival, are consequences of America's discriminatory economic policies. Gun crime, a consequence of ghettoisation, is on the increase because corporations stand to make millions out of the gun trade – gun shops have always been strategically placed in black, poor neighbourhoods.

The US criminal justice system is systematically racist because US society is systematically racist. Alongside fighting for equality of treatment within the justice system, therefore, socialists have to fight for the transformation of society itself through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, which is built on racism and continually reproduces it.

# The return of toryism and the religious right in Canada

By Ellen Ramsay, Canada

Stephen Harper, Canada's new Tory Prime Minister, was sworn into office clutching his personal bible, symbolic of this arch right-wing reactionary party.

He heads a minority government pledged to cut the size of government, cut taxes, transfer more spending for social services down to the provinces where they are already being privatised, introduce a law and order agenda with minimum mandatory sentencing,

bolster the military, withdraw from Kyoto and end plans for a national child care programme. He has pledged to try and rescind the same sex marriage bill and may try to introduce a bill restricting abortion.

The election was dominated by the "Federal Sponsorship Scandal", a \$100 million pay-off to supporters of the previous Liberal government. An investigation revealed that the money was paid as fees and commissions but no actual services were delivered. The Government had intended to use the money to promote Canadian unity

and undermine sovereignty in Quebec so the scandal not only enraged voters across the country but particularly boosted the Bloc Quebecois, which is now the third party in Parliament with 51 seats to the Conservatives' 124 and Liberals' 103.

The National Democratic Party (NDP, Canada's Labour Party) has never been a federal contender for power and, while it did better in this election than previous ones with 21 seats, it has historically missed the opportunity to become a third player because of its anti-sovereignist position. It has vir-

tually no support in Quebec.

Despite the importance of this lurch to the right, Harper's government is not in a strong position. Not a single Tory was elected from any major urban centre other than Quebec City. Even to form a minority government he had to bring in an unelected member of his campaign team and an opportunist defector from the Liberal Party.

The other Cabinet ministers are a range of fiscal and social conservatives, including some bible thumping fundamentalists, and former members of the arch reactionary regimes in

Ontario and Alberta.

While the immediate priority must be a campaign of mass mobilisations against Harper's programme, a more fundamental necessity is to fight within those campaigns for the building of new mass-based workers' party.

In order to fight effectively for the interests of all Canada's workers, that party will have to be built on a programme that recognises the right to self-determination of Quebec and of the Inuit peoples while itself fighting for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism across the whole country.



# Germany: generalise the public sector strike!

The attack on German public sector workers is a class-wide attack, reports *Martin Suchanek*

Public sector workers in Germany have been on a rolling strike since 6 February against moves to increase the working day.

The communes and Länder (regional states) in most parts of Germany are raising the working week of their employees from 38.5 to 40 hours, without any increase in pay.

This is a major political and economic attack by the state on public sector workers and their union Verdi. German capitalism is not only trying to increase the rate of exploitation but also inflict a political defeat on the giant union, similar to the one it imposed on IG Metall in the strike for the 35 hour week in East Germany in 2003.

The strike started in Baden-Württemberg and has now been spread across West Germany. About 40,000 workers are involved. After years of retreat and more than a decade of stagnating wages, many workers want to fight. In many towns, large numbers have joined, or rejoined the union, before and during the first strike days.

In addition to the strike, there have been sizeable demonstrations against the European Union's proposed Bolkestein directive, for example on 11 February 50,000 in Berlin.

There is a real chance to repel the current attack on the working week, by combining the forces of different sec-

tors in struggle, and connecting it to other attacks such as raising of the retirement age and attacks on unemployed youth.

In the current situation, the Verdi leadership is playing to the "left". The union's chair, Frank Bsirske, and other leaders have given radical speeches. But workers should be in no doubt that they are also prepared to sell out, should they be offered a compromise. They have made it clear that they would agree to more flexibility, if they could maintain the 38.5 hour week.

Compared with this narrow, trade union approach, the bosses are clear-sighted. They see the dispute as a political one. They don't want to make any major concessions, but to defeat Verdi.

Local governments and city councils have already started to try to break the strike by forcing the unemployed to scab: threatening to scrap their benefits, if they refuse to break the strike. In a number of towns, the police have attacked picket lines, in order to open the gates for scabs.

The bosses' strategy is certainly encouraged by Verdi's own tactics – or, rather, lack of them. First, Verdi wants to prevent scabbing by purely legal means. It has no strategy to defend picket lines.

Secondly, the union's official strike literature has confined itself to only the workers directly affected. Such a strat-

egy almost invites the bosses and their press to try to rally workers in other sectors to side against the "privileged" public sector workers.

Divisions can only be overcome if the union recognises that their struggle is a political one, part of a broader struggle against a general onslaught on the working class. The demands for defending the 38.5 hour week have to be generalised to those sectors where longer hours have already been pushed through. The struggle has to be combined with other workers' struggles.

With such an approach, the pickets could be defended, not only at the workplace gates, but also in factories and the dole offices, among the millions not covered by collective agreements or still in education – wherever workers and youth live, work and discuss politics.

Against the bosses' attempts to use the unemployed as scabs, a campaign is needed, reaching out to the unemployed and organising them to refuse to scab and to fight for their own demands.

In return, the strikers should similarly demand the scrapping of the Haartz IV laws, and inscribe "Work or full pay!" on their Verdi banners.

It is necessary, not only to put these demands on the leadership of

Verdi, but also to organise rank and file members to fight for them. We urgently need a rank and file movement in Verdi and across the unions, which fights for effective action:

- For an all out indefinite strike
- Combine the strike with other struggles, and build towards a mass national mobilisation against the government's attacks
- Elect strike committees, recallable by and accountable to all striking workers
- For the election and accountability of all negotiators
- Form solidarity committees in every town and city to support the struggle, and build links with other sectors.

The public sector dispute in Germany demonstrates that the ruling class wants to speed up its neoliberal attacks. Already, the government's attacks on pensions and on the young unemployed have been brought forward.

Chancellor Angela Merkel and former SPD leader and Minister of Labour, Franz Müntefering, have grown more confident in their agenda since the formation of the Grand Coalition. A defeat or sell out could further shift the balance of forces towards the capitalists. A successful mass strike, on the other hand, could mark the beginning of the end of Merkel's government.

## French youth fight back

Across France 400,000 youth and workers took to the streets on 7 February. The protests were called jointly by the high school and university students' unions and all the main trade unions. Their aim was to protest against the government's Contrat de première embauche (CPE) or First Job Contract.

The government's measure would allow small firms to sack young workers at will during the first two years of their employment. Students say the initials CPE should stand for Contrat de Precarité et d'Exclusion (contract for social insecurity and exclusion).

More than one in five of France's 18 to 25-year-olds are unemployed – a figure double the national average of 9.6 per cent. In the country's most deprived areas, such as the outer suburbs of Paris, youth unemployment stands at around 40 per cent, a fact widely blamed – along with racism – for the riots that swept across these banlieux last November.

The main French employers' association, Movement of French Enterprises (MEDEF), sees these freedom-to-sack contracts as something to spread to all sectors of the population. The government has been encouraged by the feeble opposition from the trade unions to the Contrat nouvelles embauches (CNE), contract for the newly employed, passed by parliament last August for workers in businesses with fewer than 20 employees.

Bernard Thibault, leader of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), France's largest union federation, admitted: "We did not

The mobilisations of youth against the CPE is another opportunity to launch an attack on the de Villepin government

manage to prevent the CNE because we could not build a follow-on of the unified day of action on 4 October." (Le Monde, January 17) Would not it be more accurate than could not.

The mobilisations of youth against the CPE present another opportunity to launch a counterattack on the de Villepin government. Unfortunately, the French reformist left is obsessed with trying to stitch together a new parliamentary alliance. The French Communist Party (PCF) is doing all in its power to refurbish the left credentials of the discredited Socialist Party, which launched many of the neoliberal attacks in the first place.

Whilst Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) militants are to the forefront on the streets, in the schools, and on the campuses, LCR's leaders are trailing along behind the PCF, calling for "unity of the left", instead of calling for all out direct action.

These splendid mobilisations have shown how unwilling the union and "left" leaders are to front an all out fight. School students and young workers are showing the way. They deserve a better leadership, but experience shows they will have to start building it themselves.

A further national mobilisation is planned on 7 March.

# Strikes and demonstrations force Europe's bosses to retreat

By Dave Stockton

January and February witnessed an upsurge of struggles across Europe against the neoliberal offensive on workers' rights and public services.

There have been strikes and demonstrations by dockworkers across Europe and demonstrations against the Bolkestein Directive on Services.

The dockers faced an attempt to casualise labour, allowing ships' crews to unload cargoes, and to introduce private firms into Europe's still mainly nationalised ports.

On 16 January, thousands of dockers from 16 European Union countries descended on Strasbourg to demand the rejection of the liberalisation of port services. It was accompanied by a 50,000 strong Europe-wide strike. Antwerp and Hamburg, Europe's largest ports, were crippled. Marseilles was completely shut down, as were Piraeus and twelve other Greek ports.

In Strasbourg, at the European parliament, there were violent clashes between dockers and French riot police. One hundred square metres of the glass facade of the parliament were broken by stones hurled by dockers.

Two days later, Euro MPs rejected the plans to liberalise port services by a staggering 532 votes to 120. A clear victory for the dockers.

The only really weak links in the Europe wide strike were Britain, Italy and Poland. Mike Gibbons, a member of the T&GWU executive and a dockers' convenor in Southampton, present in Strasbourg, was quoted by



14 February demo in Strasbourg

*Socialist Worker:*

"What we are missing in the British unions is a recognition that an ideological model of neoliberalism is being pushed through Europe. When it comes to the Bolkestein services directive, I am surprised that the public sector unions aren't up in arms."

### BOLKESTEIN DIRECTIVE

One of the Bolkestein Directive's main measures is its "country of origin" principle. It allows private companies

to provide services on the basis of the laws of its country of origin, rather than in the country, where the services are delivered.

The result would be "social dumping" – firms and jobs either relocating to low-cost and less regulated economies of eastern Europe, or corporations from relatively deregulated countries like Britain undermining higher standards for workers and social service users in western Europe.

Fifty thousand people demonstrat-

ed against the "country of origin" principle in Strasbourg on 14 February. Although the European parliament passed the first reading of the directive by 391-213, it did so in a significantly "watered down" version.

Public healthcare, broadcasting, postal services, social services, and public transport were exempted and the "country of origin" principle was deleted. However, the directive will enable firms to go to the unelected European Court of Justice, and challenge which country's labour laws apply in each case. The reactionary judges will probably try to apply the "country of origin" principle there.

### ESF

Across Europe, resistance to the bosses' offensive under the Lisbon Agenda needs to be met by co-ordinated resistance. Where can this be discussed and a plan of action developed?

The European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence in 2002 launched a worldwide antiwar movement, calling for a day of action that drew 20 million people onto the streets. Since then, the ESF has passed up opportunities to mobilise against the Lisbon Agenda, mainly out of fear of offending the union leaders. This cowardice needs to be thrown off.

The Fourth ESF will take place from 4 to 7 May in Athens. One of its main tasks must be to co-ordinate the fight against the neoliberal attacks on social rights, and to develop a revolutionary action programme for a Socialist United States of Europe.



# Mexico: another populist president?

The US State Department is worried it could lose another Latin American neoliberal ally, writes *Dave Ellis*

Presidential elections are due in Mexico this July and again it is the candidate making populist noises against the domination of the free market who is leading opinion polls.

PAN - the National Action Party- of the incumbent president Vicente Fox, is deeply unpopular thanks to the neoliberal policies he has carried out. Fox came to power at the head of the leading pro-business party in Mexico. He ousted the authoritarian and corrupt PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) which had been in power in Mexico for 71 years without a break.

Mexico is an oil rich country where half the population exists on less than \$5 a day. He promised to tackle corruption, bring about a fairer distribution of income and to create a million jobs a year and a growth rate of 7%. Fox achieved none of these goals. Indeed, in his first three years in office, growth rates averaged less than 1 per cent. Only in the last two years has it crept up to between 3 and 4 per cent.

He attempted to break the state oil monopoly by bringing in private investment and proposed to expand the tax take with a new "sales tax" which would have applied to both food and medicines. These measures were frustrated by the congress, as Fox had suffered massive losses in the 2003 congressional elections and was dependent on all party support. The PRI has supported many, but not all, of his measures, for example the PRI-PAN bloc in Congress voted to slash the budget for pensions and the social security system for the elderly.

The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), of Andres Manuel López Obrador (former mayor of Mexico City) has been the gainer. The PRD is a populist party founded in 1989 by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the famous populist president in the 1930s. Obrador is currently leading in the opinion polls for the presidential elections. Obrador opposes the privatisation of the oil industry. He has called for the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and



Mexican presidential candidate Andres Lopez Obrador of the left wing Party of the Democratic Revolution

promised to prosecute the banks that swindled ordinary people when the Mexican peso collapsed in 1995. His policies include universal pension provision and a public works programme to create jobs. His main campaign slogan calls for "putting the poor first."

In 2005, both the PAN and the PRI attempted to disqualify Obrador from running for the presidency. They tried to indict him on a charge of ignoring a 2002 court order barring construction of a road to a hospital - if he had been under threat of trial it would have barred him from contesting the presidential election. In April 2005, half a million people demonstrated in Mexico City's main square and Mexico's rulers hastily backed off.

But the ruling elite of Mexico is still determined to prevent him winning. Romulo O'Farrell, an 88-year-old billionaire publisher, recently convened

a meeting of leading Mexican capitalists to tell them that Obrador must be prevented from becoming president at all costs.

Yet Obrador is no wild-eyed radical. He has been described as being much closer to a Lula than Chavez. In his fiefdom in Mexico City, strikers have been gaoled and protesting students arrested and beaten. Obrador does not want to abolish capitalism nor even really challenge globalisation. Rather he has said that Mexico should be "taking advantage of globalisation, and not just suffering from it." Critics from the left have pointed out that the leadership of the PRD is increasingly full of corrupt politicians and opportunists. Many of the PRI's old supporters have jumped ship hoping to take advantage of López Obrador's popularity.

The main opposition to Obrador from the left comes from the Zapatistas. The

Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) hit the world headlines with a guerrilla uprising in Chiapas in 1994. They demanded an end to the ongoing oppression and exploitation of Mexico's indigenous minorities and called for autonomy for their region. While some reforms have been granted, the PRD joined forces with the PAN and PRI to vote down proposals for autonomy for indigenous people in Chiapas.

Last year the Zapatistas launched what they call the 'other campaign' with a six month long series of meetings and rallies around the country. It caused a stir among the Mexican left because it refused to endorse the candidacy of Obrador who has the support of the left, even of some who call themselves Trotskyist.

The leader of the Zapatistas, Subcomandante Marcos, who now likes to be called "Delegate Zero", said of the PRD

and Obrador, "We're not going to remain quiet, and not only because the return of the PRI can be already seen in the higher ranks and circle around López Obrador, and because the right today dresses in black and yellow [the PRD's colours], but also because what is at stake isn't just a set of jobs and appointments, payrolls and budgets that are put up for sale during elections, but the existence of a nation and the sovereignty of its inhabitants."

One left intellectual and supporter of the Zapatistas was so incensed he suggested Marcos needed to see "a psychiatrist". Clearly a case of "from hero to zero".

The real weakness of the Zapatista campaign is not their forthright criticism of Obrador but the fact that they refuse to put forward a real anti capitalist alternative that could unite workers and revolutionaries against all the bourgeois parties. The Zapatista's "other campaign" is designed precisely to ignore the elections, leaving the field open to the likes of Obrador and the PRI. This is undoubtedly why Vicente Fox's presidential spokesman welcomed the Zapatista campaign as a "contribution to democracy".

The Zapatistas are lionised by those like John Holloway, who think that anticapitalists can "change the world without taking power" - i.e. by building little local utopias. They have no strategy to mobilise the enormous discontent with the current government's policies into a mass movement that could sweep away the corrupt and capitalist regime in Mexico.

Yet all their attempts to win autonomy for the indigenous people of Chiapas, land redistribution and social development end in demands on a central government that refuses them point blank and regularly uses its troops to break up the Zapatista local utopias. If the Zapatistas convince large sections of Mexico's exploited and poor to leave politics to the parties of the élite they will demonstrate that their programme is not simply utopian but reactionary too.

# Chávez ignites World Social Forum

This year the World Social Forum is meeting in three locations: Bamako, Mali; Caracas, Venezuela; and Karachi, Pakistan. *Mike Evans* reports on the impact made by Venezuela's Hugo Chávez

The World Social Forum in the Americas attracted some 70,000 participants. Some 2,200 organisations held nearly 1,800 seminars, panels and workshops over five days. Big contingents came from all over Latin America, especially the host country, Venezuela. Several hundreds came from Cuba. Representatives from Canada, Australia, Italy, France and Britain were also present.

In contrast to previous WSFs, there were really substantial contingents from the United States too, like the 150 strong delegation from the San Francisco based Global Exchange, and Jobs with Justice. US peace activist Cindy Sheehan, whose one woman protest outside George Bush's ranch has inspired a powerful revival of the anti-war movement, spoke several times, to denounce Bush and imperialism.

But the big focus of attention, natural for an event held in Caracas, was without doubt Hugo Chávez. Speaking before 10,000 people at the Polihedro



Stadium on 27 January, he said he hoped the WSF would not turn into a "revolutionary tourist event". He urged all the participants to "transform the WSF into a tool of struggle", not "a discussion forum with debate but no conclusions".

Chávez said that, unlike Karl Marx, when he first issued the call for socialism in the 19th century, "we do not have much time left". The 21st century has now come, "when the dilemma must be finally resolved".

"We should go toward setting up a worldwide anti-imperialist movement. We have already taken steps in this direction," Chávez told the enthusiastic audience, "We are not here to waste

our time. We must urgently build a new socialist movement."

He continued, "Injustice and inequality are losing; it is now up to us to define the formula of unity for victory. We need unity of all our currents. While respecting the right to autonomy of the movements, including the green movement, and the various political and national movements, all of us should get together in a victorious offensive against imperialism."

Revolutionaries should take up such calls for mass action, since they clearly raise the horizons, hopes and fighting spirit of millions in Latin America and beyond. They take the very name of revolution and socialism

out of the exclusive preserve of small sects, and back onto the streets and squares where the popular masses are in action.

But support for Chávez, when he denounces Bush or Tony Blair, and calls for action against them, must be accompanied by frank criticism, when he puts forward his utopian programme of a united front of Latin American presidents, most of whom are actually implementing IMF policies, not fighting them, and shaking Bush's hand not seizing him by the throat.

This applies to Evo Morales, as well as Lula, though it can be expected that the mobilised masses of Bolivia will make it difficult to keep some of the promises he is so freely giving to the capitalists since his inauguration.

Thus, referring to the US offensive against the new governments of South America, Chávez said, "They have tried to classify us as two different 'lefts'. The madmen are Fidel and me, while Lula and Tabaré Vázquez, [president of Uruguay] are statist."

Here the views of the imperialists are a bit more realistic than those of Chávez. The non-capitalist character of Cuba (a bureaucratic workers' state) and a situation with elements of dual power in Venezuela, where the local

bourgeoisie does not hold undivided power, and the masses are mobilised and partially armed, make these countries very different to Lula's Brazil or Vázquez' Uruguay. The same will be true if Obrador wins in Mexico. That is why Blair denounces Chávez for his links with Castro but welcomes Lula like an old friend.

It must also have alarmed the CIA agents present when Chávez' speech, and the rally ended with a thunderous singing of the Internationale.

Revolutionaries, both in Latin America and in the imperialist heartlands, must mobilise support for Cuba and Venezuela against the threats and sabotage of Bush and Blair. But they must not regard either Castro or Chávez as the "leaders of the revolution" - even if millions now do.

Their strategy remains one of class collaboration, of an "anti-imperialist" front with bourgeois regimes and forces, which are very far from being anti-imperialist. It means subordinating the working class struggle for power to maintaining bonapartist regimes. Thus, throughout Latin America, the central task is the creation of revolutionary parties, linked in a new, revolutionary International - the Fifth International.



# Nepal: election fraud backfires

The attempt by King Gyanendra to legitimise his rule, by holding nationwide local elections on 8 February, failed spectacularly. In a quarter of the seats, not a single candidate could be found to stand. Out of a total of 58 municipalities, only 36 held any election at all, and, even in those seats, only established supporters of the king stood for election.

The low turnout reflected the widespread opposition to the king, and support for the opposition parties, who had called for a boycott. It also underlined the de facto power of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist), which controls some 80 per cent of the country's territory, and called a general strike for the week of the elections. In effect, the king created an opportunity for the people of Nepal to express a vote of no confidence in his rule, and is now in a weaker position than he was before.

This is as true internationally as nationally. India's external affairs ministry questioned the credibility of the elections, and noted that they had taken place "against the backdrop of a boycott by the major recognised political parties, and a sharp curtailment of the legitimate activities, and the continued arrest and detention of many of their leaders".

Even the US, which provided \$20 million in aid for the king's campaign against the Maoists, as part of the "War on Terror", described the elections as a "hollow attempt" to legitimise the king's power.

Yet, just five days after the electoral fiasco, in a speech to mark Democracy Day (!) the king referred to "our belief that multiparty democracy cannot be made meaningful in the absence of sig-



King Gyanendra

nificant popular participation in governments". The speech marked the first anniversary of an army backed coup, which vested all power in the king. The justification for this was the previous, elected government's failure to deal with the Maoist insurgency.

The royal dictatorship has been no more successful. On the contrary, by alienating the major political parties, the king effectively drove them into the Maoists' arms. Last November, seven parties, including the parliamentarist Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), the bourgeois Nepali Congress Party, and even one of the royalist parties, formed a united front with the Maoists for the "return of democracy".

Despite the political incompetence of the king, he still holds power, and commands an army, which has always been loyal to the throne. Now, the parliamentary parties, and the

foreign powers, such as India, China and the US, who exercise influence in Nepal, have to calculate how a stable and "acceptable" regime can be created, given that the only other forces on the ground are the Maoists.

For their part, the Maoists have made it clear that they would accept a compromise. In an interview with the BBC, timed to coincide with the elections, their chief ideologue, Prachanda, explained that the Party would accept a constitutional monarchy, if it were voted for by a democratic constitutional assembly.

Such a position is a signal that the Maoists realise that they can make no further gains from the strategy of "surrounding the towns from the countryside" and have to relate to the forces based in the towns.

In the agreement, reached with the other parties in November, the Maoists agreed to place their arms under the supervision of a "credible international force" for the duration of an election to a constituent assembly. For their part, the other political parties agreed to drop their demand for the recall of the existing Parliament, and accept the Maoists' demand for a constituent assembly.

Given the national and international isolation of the king, such a package may prove acceptable, in particular, to China and India, who are increasingly collaborating both diplomatically and economically. For them, as for the Nepali bourgeoisie, its main advantage would be to ensure the controlled transition to a stable system of government, which would minimise the possibility of the independent mobilisation of the peasantry, the oppressed minorities in the countryside, and the working class in the towns.



## A history of poverty and oppression

Nepal is a landlocked country, sandwiched between India and China in the Himalayas. Its population of 26 million contains some of the poorest people in the world. 80 per cent of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture on small farms, indebted to landlords and moneylenders. Unemployment and underemployment runs at 50 per cent, and desperate Nepali women emigrate to India to seek work - an estimated 7,000 Nepali women end up in Indian brothels every year.

The country has a long history of political instability. The absolute monarchs were only forced to relinquish power to a parliament, through large scale protest in the early 1990s. In February last year, the current King Gyanendra effected a coup, with the support of the army, and seized absolute power. Political parties were banned and party leaders arrested. Four hundred journalists were jailed.

The country has faced a civil war in the countryside since 1996, with Maoist rebels fighting landlordism and the country's rulers. Twelve thousand have died, and 100,000 people have been displaced. Repression and torture has been widespread.

The Nepalese army has received arms and training from India, China, the USA and Britain, which retains strong links with its former colony, from which it recruits its "mercenary" Gurkha regiment. Arms supplies were suspended by most powers after the coup, but both the US and India continue to supply "non lethal weapons" and training to the dictatorship.

Faced with growing opposition to his dictatorship, and isolation internationally, in February the king tried to improve his democratic credentials, by calling local elections.

# The Maoists and their strategy

Peter Main looks at the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, and explains why the Stalinist stages theory of revolution spells disaster for the masses

The formation of a broad united front with the "democratic bourgeois" parties in Nepal has always been one of the strategic aims of the Maoists. It has its basis in the party's Stalinist origins.

The Nepal Communist Party was founded in 1951, and its programme always accepted that Nepal would have to go through a long stage of capitalist development, one that necessitated an alliance - or popular front - with "patriotic bourgeois forces". Revolution on the land and the struggle for socialism would have to take a backseat, during this period of development in alliance with the bourgeoisie.

In this schema, the immediate objective was the overthrow of the "feudalist" forces, symbolised by the monarchy, and the creation of a democratic republic. The operative programme of the party, therefore, could not go beyond demands that were compatible with capitalism. In subsequent decades, although the Communist Party suffered a number of internal crises and splits, and sided with Beijing in the Sino-Soviet dispute, this fundamental element of the programme was never questioned.

The leadership of today's Maoists was forged in the mass movement for democracy, which forced King Birendra to grant a parliamentary regime in 1990. In the general election, held the following year, several left splinters from the Communist Party of Nepal formed

the United People's Front, and won nine seats, including three in the mid-west of the country.

The government of the Nepali Congress Party, which won a majority in the elections, used its control of the police to harass supporters of the UPF in those constituencies. This resulted in widespread hatred of the police, and the consolidated support for the UPF.

As a result, a section of the UPF called for a boycott of the 1994 elections, and went on to form the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The elections themselves produced a hung parliament, and a minority government of the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist), which soon collapsed, opening a period of parliamentary paralysis and a succession of ineffective governments.

In 1995, the Maoists produced a charter of 40 demands to establish a democratic republic, as the proposed basis for a broader united front government. When the proposal was rejected, the party declared its "people's war".

Militarily, the objective was to create "base areas" where they already had popular support, by forcing representatives of central government, especially the police, to withdraw. By 1997, they were able to enforce an elected government in 83 villages, and then establish their own "people's governments", which organised communal work to build roads and bridges, regulated the sale and purchase of land, operated peo-

ple's courts and ran schools.

A villager described the impact of the Maoists to a Western observer thus,

"We heard the Maoists were starting to break into the houses of wealthy people, tax collectors and moneylenders, stealing their money and property and distributing it to the poor ... [They] had even burnt all the papers and accounts kept in banks and were breaking the arms and legs of moneylenders and tax collectors in the west of the country and were taking control of villages. How amazing!"

By 2001, the Maoists were operating across the whole of the country, although the degree of control exercised varied greatly. They were helped by the political paralysis in central government, and the rivalry between government and king.

This was particularly important, because King Birendra had retained control of the army, which was far better equipped than the government-controlled police. The Maoists even kept their lines of communication open to the king, as they assessed him as a potentially "progressive force", because he had agreed to a parliamentary constitution, against the advice of others in royal circles.

Any hopes in this direction were dashed, when, on 1 June 2001, the king and most of his family were slaughtered during a family gathering, apparently by the Crown Prince, the heir to the throne, who then killed himself. Only

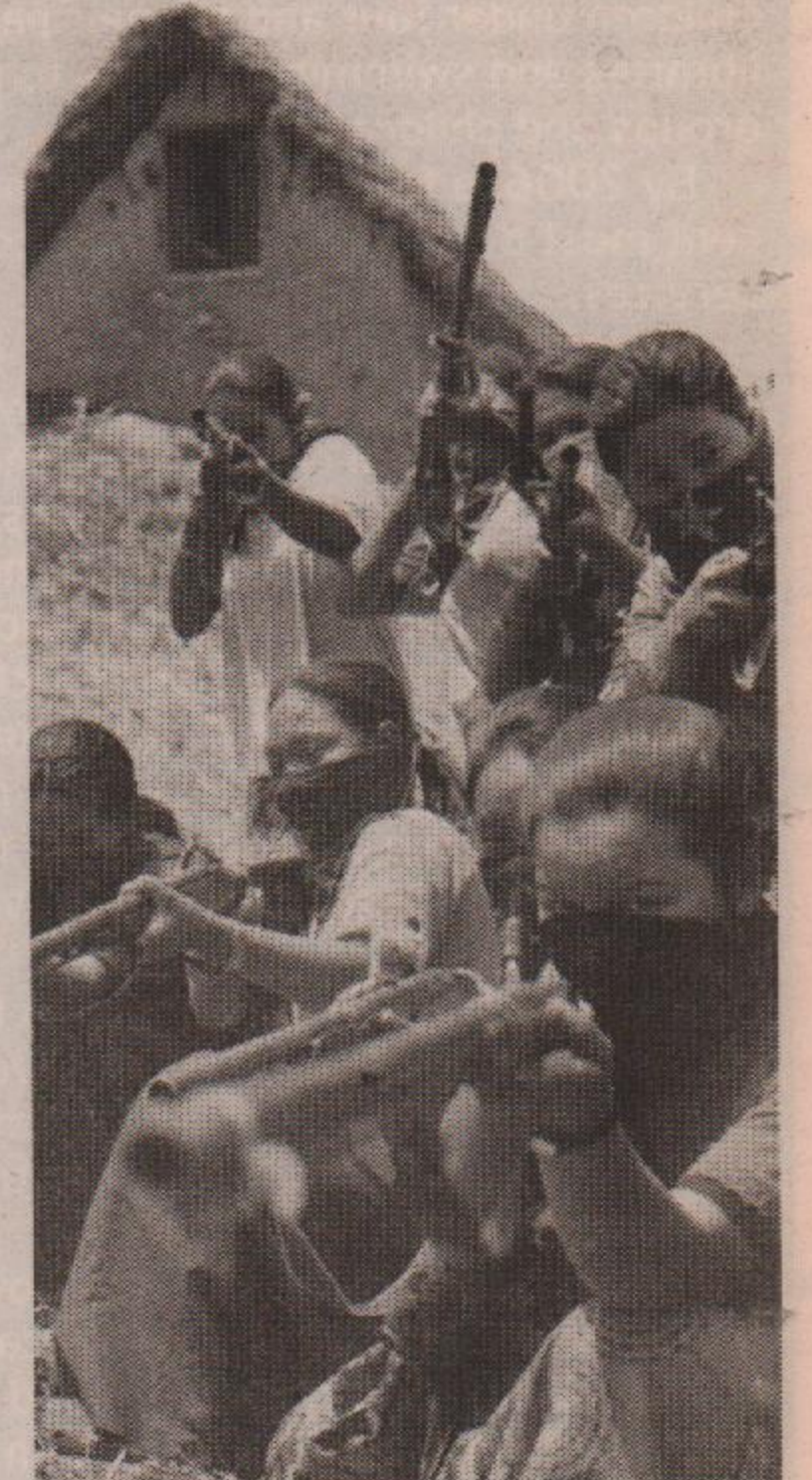
the king's brother, Gyanendra, survived, and took over the throne.

The Maoists concluded that the "royal massacre" was a plot, involving the US and India, to bring Gyanendra to power. They demanded the formation of an interim government, a constituent assembly and the declaration of a republic. In July, the government mobilised the army, but representatives of the two sides agreed to a ceasefire.

A new government was appointed in August, and it agreed to negotiations with the Maoists. However, these were immediately overshadowed by the 11 September and, despite the Maoists withdrawing the demand for a republic, negotiations ended. In November, the king declared a state of emergency, and ordered a full-scale army offensive against the Maoists, now classified as "terrorists".

Over the next year, against a background of mounting opposition to the army's repressive operations, the king first dissolved the lower house of parliament, then appointed a government, his own supporters, and finally, last year, took all power himself. For the Maoists, this created near ideal conditions for the creation of their proposed "united front" of all progressive forces.

As all past history has shown the bourgeois elements in such a front, together with their international backers, will demand that the Maoists use their forces to "maintain order" in the



Maoist insurgents

transition to a tightly controlled democratic reform. Thereafter, the Party's commitment to capitalist development, no doubt endorsed by the Chinese "Communist Party", will be used to justify the repression of working class and peasant movements, fighting the exploitation that such development will require.



# Labour's family values

The government has spent £17 billion on childcare reform since 1997. On the eve of International Women's Day, *Karen Marshall* asks for whose benefit are these reforms - Britain's babies or bosses?

Recently the Observer ran the headline "UK baby shortage will cost £11 billion". The article revealed that more women are delaying giving birth because of financial and professional costs. It argued that the fall in births would in time provide fewer workers to pay for the increasing numbers of older people and lead to a deeper pensions crisis. The think-tank, Institute for Public Policy Research, published the results and proposed free nursery places for children up to the age of two, paternity leave and three months of paid parental leave, which would cost an estimated £11 billion.

Daycare Trust research also showed that the cost of care for a child under two was on average £142 a week or a third of average earnings, with children over two years old the cost was slightly less. In inner London, the figure rises to £197.

Why has childcare become such an important issue? It comes down to increasing the size of the workforce. Currently about 75 per cent of people of working age are in work. The government wants to raise this to 80 per cent, but has hit a problem: the number of people economically inactive has now reached eight million, about a quarter of the people of working age and higher than at any time since 1971. In order to reduce this figure, the government has targeted disabled people, single mothers and the older unemployed in the Welfare Reform Bill and now wants to push childcare for par-

ents to go back to work.

New Labour's strategy has been to offer incentives to help parents - mainly mothers - back into work by offering tax credits, money for childcare and boosting the provision of nursery places. One in four children have access to a childcare place, compared with one in seven in 1997. Most recently Beverly Hughes, the children's minister, unveiled a £250 million plan to subsidise wages in private and public sector nurseries to improve childminders' training and qualifications.

But with 60 per cent of mothers with a child aged under five now in employment, full-time professional childcare is an option only for a minority given the costs. A 2003 report from the Daycare Trust found that the lack of affordable childcare to match their hours at work is still hampering many poorer parents from finding work.

## Women in work

In 1971, 57 per cent of mothers worked; by 2001 the figure had risen to 64 per cent. But two out of five of these were working part-time. The link between motherhood and part-time work is stronger in the UK than in any other OECD country. In Scandinavian countries, 80 per cent of women work - nearly all full-time.

The government's 10-year child care strategy published last year aims to transform the nature of women's employment from one characterised by low pay and part-time work to one where women are in better paid, full-time jobs, and are supported and feel

confident about leaving work, having a child and then returning back to work - just like Scandinavia. Hence the 10-year strategy is full of statements about "enhancing parents' choice", "giving families control", "flexible child care", and giving "children the best possible start". The strategy states: "There are substantial public benefits to be gained from helping parents reconcile the demands of work and family life."

The current provision is none of these things. It is expensive, inconvenient and a drain on money and relationships. Forty-four per cent of working mothers want to stop working and look after their children, and 63 per cent want to reduce their hours.

The Labour strategy ignores these problems: "For parents to work, they need access to childcare services that are suitable for their desired working patterns." In short, what Labour is saying is that childcare will be moulded around the needs of Britain's bosses for labour rather than around families' requirements for work patterns that fits in with their social needs.

## Tax credits and nursery places

Major schemes deployed by the government since 1997 include tax credits and the new deal for lone parents. Tax credits can pay 70 per cent of the cost of childcare, up to £175 for one child and £300 for two or more, but to claim the childcare scheme must be registered or the child carer must have a national insurance number. Several studies have shown that middle class parents may benefit from these credits for formal care but working class mothers rely on informal care from friends and family, which may be free or cheap but not necessarily better.

The expansion in formal childcare places was taking place in the voluntary or private sector and, even with credits, many poorer parents were unable to afford the costs. A national Audit Office report in 2004 found that of the 626,000 new child care places created since 1998, less than half had gone to specially council-run schemes and the rest were privately run.

## Is the strategy a success?

About 70 per cent of full-time and 62 per cent of part-time working mothers use formal childcare - but three in four mothers who use it say their arrangements are not adequate. The cost is shared unevenly with parents paying about 85 per cent of childcare costs (more than £3 billion a year) while the state picks up the rest. In the more successful Scandinavian scheme, it is the state that pays about 80 per cent of costs.

Another hurdle to overcome is that UK workers work longer hours than their European counterparts, making child care more expensive and putting severe emotional strain and stress on parents away from their children.

But even under the government's "child friendly polices" and its increase in nursery places, the emotional and financial costs are so great that many more women are postponing or putting off ever having children.

As revolutionary socialists we recognise the benefits work can bring to women, such as independence, wages, friendships, self-respect and more confidence. It can also help women escape from the drudgery of home life. But under capitalism, women enter the labour market in two roles: frequent-



Free, high quality, flexible childcare is what working mothers need

ly as under-paid workers and often burdened with most or all of the tasks of raising a family. To overcome this, we need to fight for full equality of women, both legally and economically, and for measures that remove the barriers to their full participation in work, play and politics.

- For free, high quality, flexible childcare that is open 24 hours a day and provided by the state. This would allow parents to use it for work and for recreation;
- Parents must be reassured about leaving their children in the care of others so the childcare workforce must be professional, well trained and with good pay and conditions;

- Women workers must have the same rights as male workers. Full pay and equal rights with jobs kept open for them to return after giving birth;
- Nurseries and child care centres should be under the control of parents and workers, not central government, to decide on hours, rules about use and care of children;
- Flexible maternity and paternity leave of one year over the first five years to allow for work and family balance, which includes right to fulltime leave for the first six months on full pay.

We can pay for this by raising taxes on the bosses so they pay the real price for bringing parents into work.

## Sure Start - bad beginning

At the 2003 Labour Party conference, Gordon Brown declared the Sure Start child support programme, then five years old, was the "government's best kept secret".

By then, 486 Sure Start programmes were up and running, bringing together midwives, health visitors and playworkers to provide a variety of services and activities to more than 300,000 children under four and to their parents. Activities ranged from toy libraries and swimming lessons to postnatal depression support groups and childcare places.

By 2006, a further 200,000 young children living in the 20 per cent most deprived wards in the country were receiving Sure Start services.

The stated aim was to improve poor, working class children's prospects at school and beyond by directing health, education and help for pre-school children and their mothers. About 15 per cent of children (1.8 million) are in workless households with lone parent families particularly vulnerable. The Sure Start programme was part of the government's drive to reduce child poverty by half by 2010.

Initial targets for Sure Start included a 10 per cent reduction in the number of mothers who smoked during pregnancy, a 20 per cent drop within 12 months in the proportion of under-3s re-registered on the child protection register, and a 12 per cent cut in the number of 0- to 3-year-olds living in households where no one was working.

After several years, apart from the child protection targets, results were mixed at best. A survey conducted last autumn suggested that the best results have been achieved in the least deprived areas where those with time and knowledge have been able to access the services.

It was around 2003 that the government changed the purpose of the scheme from being a small-scale, targeted programme to help children develop better health and skills to being a national scheme to provide childcare and education for parents to get them back into work.

Last year Norman Glass, the Treasury official who led the programme at its outset, stated: "So Sure Start is now seen as part of the childcare employability agenda. The 'what parents need is work' policy line has come to dominate it."

The government is now planning on rolling out 3,500 children's centres by 2010, with a lot less funding on average than the original centres and none of the parental involvement in their management boards. Their aim is clear: to raise the numbers of lone parents in work from the current 54 per cent to 70 per cent by 2010.

### Weblinks to other articles on women and work:

- Global capitalism and working women  
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFIfiles/womenWP246.html>
- From reserve army of labour to frontline troops  
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFIfiles/women2.html>
- Marxism and women's oppression  
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFIfiles/womentheses1.html>

## Fifth International Issue 3 OUT NOW! £4 €6 \$9



- Apres le Non!  
The left in Europe
- The Left Party in Germany
- Making poverty sustainable: the G8, NGOs and debt relief
- The road to Respect: the SWP's march to the right
- 1905 and the origin of the theory of Permanent Revolution
- Bolivia: power within grasp
- Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution...

Buy online from <http://shop.fifthinternational.org>



## Betty Friedan (1921-2006)

By Lesley Day

**B**etty Friedan, who died last month, was a key figure in the modern women's movement. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in the United States in 1963, galvanised women into action and shook up the picture of the ideal family that dominated US life in the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

Friedan came from a radical background and was involved in the 1940s in writing for union and left wing publications. Her early sympathies were with the US labour movement and the fight of Afro-Americans for civil rights. She was influenced by the Communist Party. She wrote about the issues facing working women in the unions and at home.

It was after a period of being a homemaker in the 1950s that she turned to the research that resulted in *The Feminine Mystique*. In this book Friedan wrote about the experience of housewives generally, rather than working class women specifically. She described the experience of suburban women, trapped in lives bounded by home and family.

This "mystique" encouraged women to marry younger, have more babies and leave the workforce. They helped preserve the status quo, preserving the ideal American family, and acting as consumers for booming businesses. But, in reality, women were frustrated and dissatisfied, not knowing how to deal with "the problem that has no name".

Some of Friedan's statistics were wrong or misleading. Although the immediate post-war period had seen a shakeout of women from the workforce, the rising birth rate was short-lived and women started returning to work. Nevertheless, Friedan had identified an important truth, that North American women were being trapped in the home or in low paid and low status work.

Paradoxically, it was the increased participation at work, together with changes to domestic labour and birth control that meant Friedan's call to arms found such a response. *The Feminine Mystique* became a best seller and, despite its errors, deserves its reputation as a seminal work. It spoke to women's lived experience - not only to middle class women, but to working class women, too. It gave women arguments against the reactionary ideology of the post-war years, calling on



women to break out of the stultifying existence in the home.

Friedan was propelled to the head of the emerging women's movement. In 1966, she and some labour and civil rights activists formed the National Organisation of Women (NOW) and took up the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment, aiming to outlaw discrimination at work, in the family, and in financial matters.

By 1969, Friedan had taken up the fight for abortion rights. The next year, Friedan launched the New York based "women's strike" for equality, which involved half a million women.

Friedan came in for a number of criticisms, as the women's liberation movement grew, and then fragmented. Radical feminists criticised her attitude to sexual politics and gender issues. Certainly, Friedan was open to criticism on her early attitudes to homosexuality - *The Feminine Mystique* is infused with old-fashioned prejudices, which veer towards homophobia, although she later shifted her attitudes.

Other critics have accused her of hiding her Communist sympathies, fearful of witch-hunt, and unwilling to court unpopularity. This is hardly fair given that Friedan showed considerable courage in her campaigning, especially over the issue of abortion.

Friedan's politics did, however, carry the imprint of the Communist Party

and their sympathisers. Friedan sought to reform the family and society. While she did see that women's oppression was rooted in social relations as a whole, not just in sexual relations, she stopped short of a thoroughgoing Marxist analysis. Her strategy ended up tying campaigners to the limits of bourgeois reform. Instead of returning to her earlier radical, working class roots, she moved further to the right.

But Friedan's 1963 call to arms still resonates with working women today, forced to rely upon expensive or poor quality child care, or staying at home with young children, encouraged to worship empty celebrity lifestyles, while images of women's bodies are used more than ever to sell products:

"Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love? Who knows of the possibilities of love when men and women share not only their children, home and garden, not only the fulfilment of their biological roles, but the responsibilities and passions of the work that creates the human future? It has barely begun, the search of women for themselves. But the time is at hand when the voices of the feminine mystique can no longer drown out the inner voice that is driving women on to become complete."

## Betty Heathfield (1927-2006)

By Keith Harvey

**B**etty Heathfield, who died aged 78, will be chiefly remembered for the work she did to organise the miners' wives movement during the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-85. As chair of Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC), she helped pull together a mass movement of women, essential to raising money and food for the besieged mining communities, and who stood shoulder to shoulder with their men on the picket lines.

Heathfield was brought up in a typical Chesterfield Labour Party family, excelled at school, but like so many of her pre-war generation - men and woman - had to leave school early to bring money into the household.

At 18 she heard Communist Party leader Harry Pollitt speak at a local meeting, which persuaded her to join the Young Communist League, before becoming a full member of the party.

She married Peter Heathfield in 1953, when he was still a working miner. He became an official for the National Union of Mineworkers in 1966, and they worked closely together for the NUM, crucially through the strike of 1984-85, by which time he was NUM general secretary. They separated in 1989.

Unfortunately, her early political experiences proved decisive during the miners' strike of 1984-85. She acted as an auxiliary of the NUM bureaucracy, in ensuring that WAPC remained a tightly controlled annex to the NUM.

During the strike hundreds of miners' wives groups sprang up, involving thousands of women. Many women wanted to do more, much more, than collect food and money, make speeches at solidarity meetings, and support the picket lines; they wanted to be part of a mass democratic movement that could help determine the direction and outcome of the strike.

But Heathfield, together with Ann

Scargill, Arthur's wife, obstructed such attempts. The NUM officials were extremely grateful for the support of the wives, but, at the same time, wary of the dynamic of the uncontrolled character of the movement.

At the second national miners' wives conference, on 9-11 November 1984, in Chesterfield, Ann Scargill and Betty Heathfield - self-appointed leaders, never elected - ensured that a mere 40 wives were allowed to be present, to represent the hundreds of groups. The energy of the miners' wives was frittered away, in frivolous exercises, like petitioning the Queen.

None of this detracts from the fact that Betty was widely admired and loved by the miners' wives, precisely because she was one of them. She could have done so much more with the movement she inspired.

• See "We are the women of the working class"; the miners' wives movement: <<http://www.fifthinternational.org/L/FIfiles/minerswives.html>>

## workers power 5

### 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!



# Striking to win

## Belfast victory shows way forward

**B**ullying and abuse of the disciplinary system provoked a walkout of up to 800 postal workers in Belfast - the biggest wildcat strike in years. After 18 days the strike ended in victory as Royal Mail were forced to accept most of the strikers' demands. What a great start to 2006!

This success shows the way forward for postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) at a time when Royal Mail is inflicting a vicious programme of job cuts and work changes in Delivery Offices and Mail Centres across Britain.

The strike began in Belfast's Tomb Street depot on 31 January when 200 workers walked out. A series of incidents, involving heavy-handed managers, came to a boil when a worker, who had used a diary to keep a record of management harassment, had it taken off him, photocopied and then was accused of harassment and intimidation himself!

The wildcat strike quickly spread to the West and South Belfast depots and, by 3 February, the main sorting office at Mallusk joined in: altogether more than 600 were out.

The strike hit Royal Mail where it hurt. Deliveries were halted - North,

West and South. No mail left the city, and all post going abroad piled up, unsorted.

At one point the Mallusk workers blocked the road, before the cops forced them to back down.

Royal Mail used every trick in the book. They refused to negotiate until the strikers went back to work. They spread disinformation - claiming, early on, that the Mallusk centre had gone back to work.

They tried intimidation, threatening four reps with legal action to make them personally responsible for the financial costs of the strike!

In desperation the management even played the sectarian card, and claimed "sinister" forces lay behind the strike.

None of this put a dent in the magnificent determination of the workers.

The strike was solid and united Catholic and Protestant workers. Their demonstrations deliberately rejected the lies, by marching from the Protestant Shankill Road to the Catholic Falls Road, breaching the infamous dividing line between the two communities.

Royal Mail flew in managers from across Britain to try and get the mail sorted, putting them up in the local Hilton. But they failed to shift the grow-

ing mountain of mail, which will take a month to completely clear.

The company was finally forced to back down and concede two of the strikers' main demands: for an independent review of employee relations in Belfast, and for no victimisation of strikers or their officials.

However, Royal Mail is still insisting that the workers sign up to a 12-month no-strike agreement, something that should be rejected outright.

The rank and file leadership and workers' unity, forged in the strike, will be needed to ensure the victory is a lasting one.

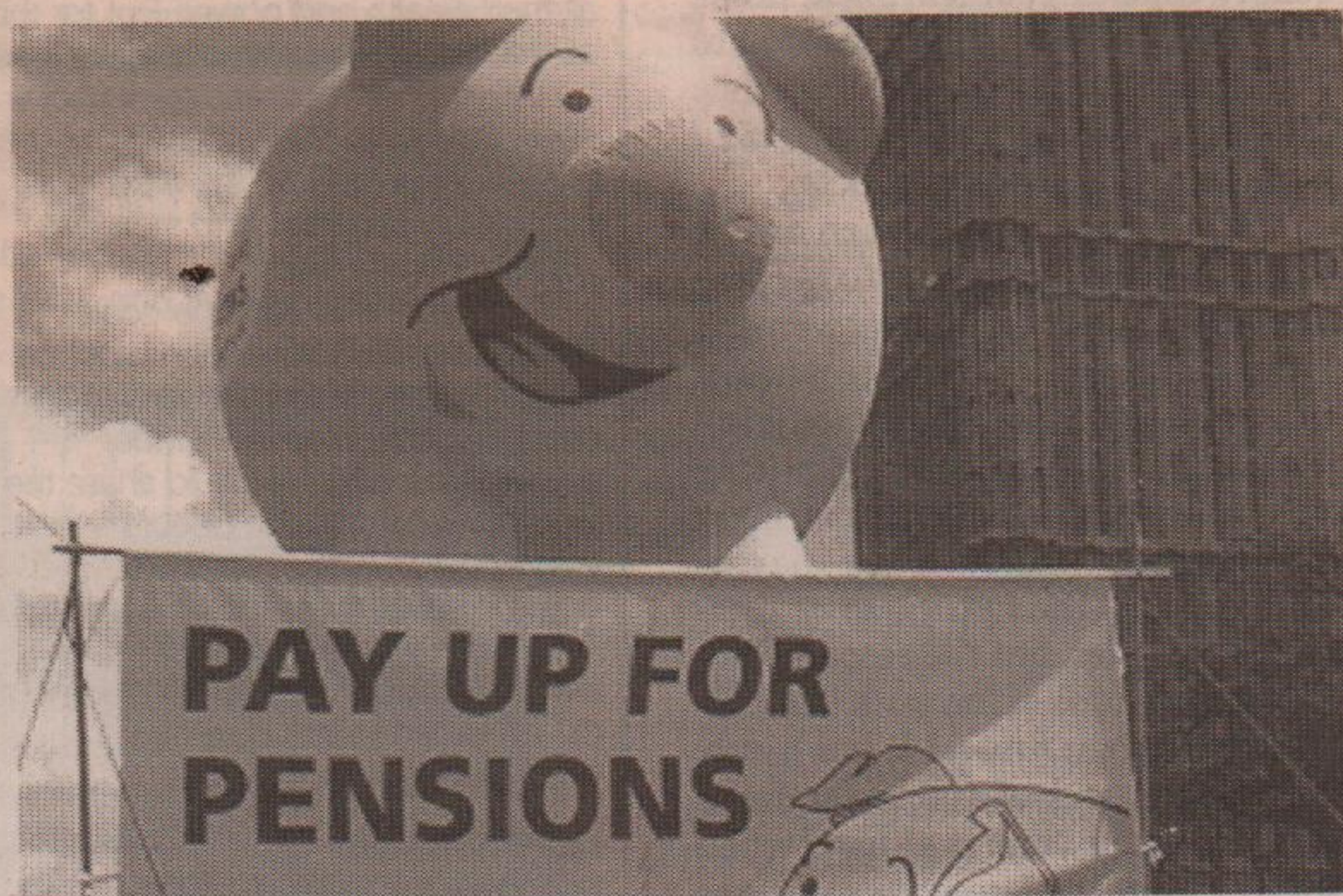
# Defend local government pensions

by George Binette,  
Camden Unison  
convenor (personal  
capacity)

**T**his month one million local council workers could be on strike. Unison - and seven other unions - are balloting their members for strike action to defend their right to retire on full pension at 60. The workers are part of the local government pension scheme (LGPS) and include some of the lowest paid public sector workers. 73 per cent are women and 60 per cent of them work part time.

The most immediate task is to win a massive "yes" vote on a high turnout. Activists will be crucial in ensuring that the ballot result provides no excuses for those at the top of the union seeking to delay action any further. That, of course, means building for well-attended branch and shop meetings, preferably with guest speakers from other unions that are now part of the fray.

We should also be seeking to activate or renew links with other unions both locally and regionally, through trades



councils, where they are more than empty shells, and with pensioners' organisations like the National Pensioners Convention.

It is essential to start building the type of co-ordination at a rank and file level that can deliver united action across the unions over the coming weeks and, if necessary, months.

This should include the creation of elected and accountable joint union

strike committees that could develop effective strategies for action, agree provision of emergency cover where workers deem it appropriate and, above all, pose a check on the national bureaucracy's all but unfettered control of the pensions dispute to date.

Members of other unions, such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT), should ensure solidarity, not just with messages of support, but in the most

practical way by making a commitment to respect picket lines set up by strikers.

Unison members must establish ties with the FBU rank and file to convince them to reject a deal offered them last month.

In a blatant attempt to divide and rule, government minister Jim Fitzpatrick offered firefighters a deal similar to that swallowed by bureaucrats in the other unions - not least Unison - representing health workers, teachers and civil servants.

The government's offer appears to safeguard the pensions of existing scheme members, while effectively imposing a two-tier scheme with a substantially worse deal for new recruits.

Likewise pressure must be kept up on the deeply divided leadership of the GMB which may have not even have completed a ballot by the end of March.

And we should do all we can to get PCS members in jobcentres striking alongside Unison members in local government in their own fight against massive job cuts.

The national executive of the lecturers' union, NATFHE, rejected the two-tier "framework agreement" on other public sector pension schemes.

This decision creates another chance of co-ordinated action on pensions.

Unison officials must also be made to withhold payments from the Affiliated Political Fund that go to Labour and withdraw support in kind for council candidates in the 4 May elections unless and until Labour withdraws in full its threat to the LGPS.

Finally, there needs to be mounting pressure exerted on Unison's leadership to call on the TUC to name the day for its long-promised national demonstration in defence of pension rights and to have it coincide with the strike action in defence of the LGPS.

To win the pensions battle will almost certainly require more than one or two-day protest strikes. There needs to be a clear call for a programme of escalating strike action up to and including an indefinite strike involving all members across local government and other employers covered by the LGPS.

Our goal must be to defend pension rights for both current and future council staff. In opposition to the Unison leadership, we must reject any offer of a two-tier version of the LGPS, a concession to the government and employers that the membership has never endorsed.

# 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 at 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 020-7407 2907 or email us at [workerspower@btopenworld.com](mailto:workerspower@btopenworld.com)

## JOIN US!

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel no: \_\_\_\_\_

## SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month.

I enclose:

- £13.50 UK  
 £19.50 Europe  
 £26.00 Rest of the world

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel no: \_\_\_\_\_

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International (L5I)

Mail: Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 020-7407 2907

Email: [workerspower@btopenworld.com](mailto:workerspower@btopenworld.com)

Print: Newsfax, London  
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)  
ISSN 0263-1121