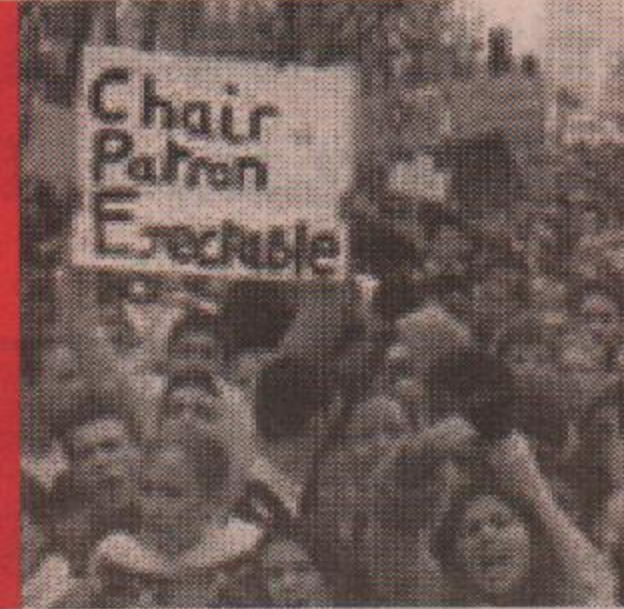


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Workers' history: 1916 Easter Rising page 14



# Stop the pensions robbery Spread rebellion from France to Britain!

**W**hy has the Foreign Office warned British citizens to avoid areas of France that are convulsed with mass demonstrations? Not to "protect the public". Unless you're planning to march through the streets of Paris in police riot gear, you'll be fine. The demonstrators - workers, students and unemployed youth - will do you no harm at all.

On the contrary, they'll set a fantastic example of militant struggle - one that British workers should learn from and follow back home.

The Foreign Office is afraid - scared that rebellion could spread across the channel to Britain. They're warning you off, so you don't get ideas, don't get infected by the "virus" of rebellion that is sweeping France and could halt its government's attack on young workers.

They know that British workers and youth could learn a hell of a lot from the French example of mass demonstrations, of link ups between workers and students, of strikes, of resistance on the streets to the bully boy riot police.

As we go to press, British unions are planning a massive one day strike against the government's attack on public sector workers' pensions. People are becoming more and more aware that everywhere - in Europe, in the USA and here - our pensions are under attack. It's part of a worldwide policy of the capitalists - neoliberalism - that wants to boost profits by removing workers' rights.

In France, the latest of these attacks is prime minister Dominique de Villepin's new law to remove employment protection from young workers - so that anyone under 26 can be sacked at will. In Britain it's a big push by private companies and the public sector to scrap final salary pensions, even for existing members, to raise the retirement age, and to scrap pension rights across the board.

In Britain and in France it's the same struggle - the struggle of the working class to resist the capitalists, who are always attacking our living standards and inter-

ests, always trying to keep us divided, always trying to hold us down.

That's why British workers, fighting against the attack on pensions, should deliver real solidarity now to the struggle of the French workers and youth. A victory for the French workers would bust a hole through the bosses' plans and prove that resistance is fertile. If we fight back with militant street demonstrations, and above all coordinated political strikes, we can force them to back down.

We can do this by sending delegations from unions and colleges to the French marches, delivering messages of support and then holding meetings all over Britain to give eye witness reports of how the French workers are making the capitalists tremble.

And the best way to deliver solidarity is to raise the temperature here. Why are we limiting our action against the pensions robbery to a single day of strike action? Why aren't all the unions joining in? Why aren't they reaching out to every section of the people, including the youth, whose right to a secure life is being sold away by Labour to their friends in big business?

We should demand that the TUC and our union leaders call a series of mass demonstrations and an indefinite strike to crush the government's plans. And we should build joint committees of action, based on delegates from all the unions, the pensioners and the youth, to coordinate the struggle from below and even to bypass the official leaders if they try and hold back the struggle.

The big businesses, the multinationals, banks and corporations that rip us off are international. So too is the struggle of the working class for a better world, one where they can't work us into old age and then throw us onto the scrapheap in poverty, one where young workers are treated equally, one where no-one should live an uncertain existence just because of how old they are, what sex they are, the colour of their skin. That means a socialist society, where the workers not the bosses call the shots, and where the economy is planned democratically for public need not private greed.



## ALL OUT STRIKE TO DEFEND PENSIONS



# Pensions: stop the drive to 65

More than a million workers stopped work on 28 March in the single biggest strike in Britain since the May 1926 General Strike. *Geroge Binette*, Unison member, argues the "pensions crisis" is all about making us work longer

**W**orkers from 10 unions covered by the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) have voted overwhelmingly for strike action. It is no wonder that over 80% voted to strike and that in many workplaces the largest union meetings in a decade have taken place. There is widespread anger at the prospect of losing the possibility of retirement at 60. Extending the age to 65 is the equivalent of a swingeing cut of up to 30 per cent in retirement benefits.

Contrary to the media image of LGPS members enjoying a gold-plated scheme, the average annual payout under the existing scheme falls below £4,000, with many women workers receiving as little as £31 a week.

## The real pensions scandal

There is a worldwide attack on workers' pensions, in Britain, across the European Union and in the USA. An international neoliberal campaign to increase the working lifetime and cut pension benefits in retirement, has sparked two one-day general strikes in Belgium, while France, Italy and Austria have also seen national strikes.

Britain's workers, with one of the most complex – and stingiest – pensions system in Europe, have lagged behind until now, with only limited resistance to the widespread closure of final salary schemes in the private sector, most recently by GMB gas engineers at Centrica in December 2005. But there is opposition at Harrods department store among both maintenance staff and shop assistants, and the three main rail unions have started a campaign over pensions.

Now, British Airways is seeking to make cabin staff work till 65 and increase their pension contributions, promising another hot summer of airline disruption. The British pensions system currently leaves elderly people in grinding poverty on a weekly state pension of less than £85 a week



Spot the difference: Police officers can retire at 50, after 25 years of service, on half their final salary, or after 30 years on two-thirds. All other local authority employees must work till they're 65, and receive half their salary after 40 years' service

– pensioners are forced to fill in humiliating means tested benefit forms to get a few pounds more. More than one in six retired people survive on less than £5,000 a year, while the incomes of another 40 per cent fall below £15,000.

Meanwhile, just over 200 directors of the largest companies are grabbing pension payouts in excess of £100,000 a year, with 43 of them chalking up post-retirement rewards of more than £400,000. At least five, including the former top bosses of BP, Cadbury Schweppes and Unilever, are on more than £700,000. These are the same people who are telling their workers that the multi nationals can no longer afford the workers' "over generous" pension schemes.

Against this background, the dispute over the LGPS could act as a lightning rod for much wider discontent at levels of inequality. While the government,

the CBI and the local authority chiefs will bleat about demographic changes, increases in life expectancy and economic "reality", union militants need socialist answers for addressing the supposed "pensions crisis"

Our starting point should be that all workers should have the right to retire at 60 on a state pension, equivalent to the minimum wage. This must be raised to the European Union decency threshold currently £360 a week. The rich and the giant corporations should be taxed to meet this demand. If Gordon Brown can spend billions on invading Iraq, he can raise money for Britain's elderly workers, too.

All current employee and private schemes, including early retirement clauses, should be guaranteed by law. No workers should be swindled out of their pensions when their firms declare bankruptcy – the employing class as a whole should foot the bill. There is no

immediate "crisis", except in a handful of pension funds, often triggered by prolonged pensions holidays ... for the bosses! Workers have always continued making their contributions. The bosses should be forced to payback the missing contributions immediately.

The current system of tax relief on pension contributions, which means some £11 billion goes to the richest 10 per cent of taxpayers, should also be closed down. This would pave the way to a dramatic rise in the basic state pension.

Above all the pension funds, which are only our deferred wages, should be removed from the control of the bosses and combined into a single state fund under the democratic control of the workers themselves.

But none of this is on the cards under a New Labour government. The continued privatisation of pension provision and reduction of the state's

overall social welfare tab are central to its neoliberal agenda. Ultimately, the key to resolving any pensions crisis, real or fabricated, will require taking the enormous wealth, concentrated in pension funds, away from the banks, and other giant financial institutions.

In Britain these funds contain more resources than in the rest of the EU combined and, if nationalised under the control of workers and pensioners themselves, would provide the basis for the swift elimination of poverty for all generations. These funds are currently invested in the casino of the stock exchange and property portfolios, where they are vulnerable to the vagaries of the market and are used by speculators chasing an easy buck. Instead, they should be used to create unionised jobs for the million and a half unemployed workers, building council homes, and regenerating rundown inner city and rural communities.

# For an all-out indefinite strike to win

**S**trikers and pensioners must stand firm in defence of retirement for all at 60 and for a massive campaign to ensure decent pensions for all. There is a danger of the strike being "resolved" on the basis of a climb-down on the principle of no extension in the pension retirement age – as happened last autumn, and recently in the fire service.

In Unison, by far the single largest union involved with some 830,000 members covered by the LGPS, nearly 80 per cent of those voting supported a call for strikes to fight back against the proposals. These changes would strip all those below the age of 53 of the possibility of retirement at 60 with a full pension. Some of the smaller unions, with little or no history of industrial action, recorded still higher "yes" votes.

At present, there is the promise of a rolling programme of one-day regional strikes across a fortnight in April and another two-day national strike in early May, possibly coinciding with the English local authority elections on Thursday 4th May.

Union tops are also pledging indefinite selective action across "strategic" sectors of the workforce involved in activities ranging from meat hygiene inspections through to staffing bridges and ferries and collecting the Council Tax. Here, the unions' weakness in not having stopped previous rounds of privatisation means that traditional strongholds, like the bin collectors, who brought the 1979 winter of discontent to a head, can no longer be counted on.

The stakes in this battle have become higher over the past year. Blair's right wing proposals on education and eroding civil liberties have seen his parliamentary majority slashed. He is mired in sleaze allegations and council elections due in May are likely to deliver Labour yet another kicking. If the current pensions struggle is victorious, it will be another blow to Blair and Labour's neo liberal project, it would inspire the workers, civil servants, teachers, health workers, who had a rotten compromise foisted on them, to struggle to throw it out.

For union members, defeat would undoubtedly mean further attacks on

the LGPS, and other terms and conditions in the near future. It could even give the green light to employers, keen on ending national pay bargaining and in some cases eager to derecognise unions altogether.

Under pressure, however, the "united front" of union bureaucrats in charge of the dispute could disintegrate. Or, as they did last year, they could sell the rights of future workers in return for a compromise on early retirement rights: know as the rule of 85. This will only encourage the employers and the government to come back for more a few years down the line once the workers are divided along different conditions.

Only co-ordination at the base of the unions can combat this danger – by wresting control of the dispute from the officials and running it ourselves. Within every union the rank and file need to organise to hold the leaders to account and continue the action, even over the heads of the officials where necessary. And militants need to establish links across union boundaries and elect local strike committees that are accountable to members but also

empowered to develop a strategy to win.

These co-ordinating committees should seek to involve private sector workers, those whose pensions are under attack and those who have been robbed of them by employer bankruptcies. Pensioners' groups and students, tomorrow's workers, whose future rights are threatened, should also be drawn in. On a national scale, they could provide a democratic and militant alternative to the unaccountable negotiating officers and bureaucratic general secretaries, who strike deals behind members' backs and dictate the calling of strike days. The quickest and surest way to victory would be an all-out indefinite strike on a scale not seen in Britain for many years. Such a shutdown would hit a vulnerable government very hard just before the local elections. This would have a far better chance of a complete and swift victory than Dave Prentis' "long haul" strategy of a day here and a sector there – actually designed to exhaust and soften up the workers for a sell out.

Indeed, there could not be a better time for an all-out local authority strike.

It would coincide with the German local government union Verdi's strike against lengthening of the working week, and with the mass strikes and marches in France against worse contacts of employment for new young workers.

A wave of united strike action from the British, French and German workers could bring Europe's three main economies to a grinding halt, and deal a real blow to the European capitalists' drive to lengthen our working lives and increase job insecurity. Such an outcome would pose the need for a different kind of Europe: a Europe free from the madness of the market and capitalist chaos – a Socialist United States of Europe!

- For an all-out indefinite strike, under the control of the rank and file
- Defend the LGPS, including the rule of 85
- Full and equal rights for younger, newer and future members of the scheme
- For a state pension of £360 a week
- Link up with the French and German workers
- Workers of all countries – unite!



## Working migrants to death

Last month a British court found Lin Liang Ren guilty of the unlawful killing of 21 Chinese migrant cockle pickers. The workers were trapped and drowned by the tide in Morecambe Bay in February 2004. All of them were from poor backgrounds.

But, while the British state was incarcerating one gangmaster, it announced plans to regulate many, many more. Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, has published a new White Paper, Making Migration Work for Britain.

Clarke drew his inspiration from Australia, which has one of the most racist immigration policies in the world. The paper advocates a points system for migrants who want to come and work in Britain. Although it does not engage in the old racist smears about migrants "swamping Britain" with "alien culture", it replaces them with immigration solely and exclusively to meet the needs of business.

Applicants will be awarded points, according to British capitalism's labour needs: 30 points for a degree, 50 for a PhD; 5 points for previous earnings of £16,000 to £18,000 a year, up to a maximum of 45 points for professionals on £40k. Those with enough points can come and look for work, bring their families, and become citizens after two years.

To anyone else the door will be slammed shut. If you want to work in Britain and you're poor, then you'll have to get a temporary job offer, buy a fixed return ticket, and then, if the quota for that job has not been filled, you may be allowed in. The government is even considering making payments for these new guest workers into bank accounts that they can only access in their home country.

Here is the anti-working class core to Labour's immigration policy. If you're rich and your skills are in short supply, come and settle. If you're not, then short-term super-exploitation only.

The NUJ joined Natfhe last month in rejecting all immigration controls. This is a real step forward which other unions should follow. Workers should also follow the example of GMB members on Cottam power station in Nottingham, who have been on strike for three weeks in support of decent contracts for Hungarian migrants on their construction site.

*Workers of the world, unite!*

## No vote for Labour

On 4 May, England will go to the polls again. Or, more accurately, it won't. In the past decade, the percentage of those who voted in local elections have ranged between 28 to 33.

Workers will have a double incentive not to vote this time. First, because local government has been increasingly stripped of its powers. Starved of funds from Whitehall, it has simply become a tool for cutting back on services. A recent Local Government Association survey found a £1.76 billion black hole across the councils' social services budgets. Housing provision, the other remaining service provided by town halls, has simply been reduced to endless ballots to hand over our estates to private associations.

Secondly, Labour has for years been the principal privatiser and slasher of services – locally, as well as nationally. It is the party of imperialist war, neoliberalism and racism. It made sense in 1997 and even in 2001 to vote Labour to put it to the test in front of its working class supporters. Now is the time for workers to draw the conclusion. Stop voting Labour and get the unions to stop funding it, too. Instead they should use their large financial and human resources to start the process of creating a new working class party.

In some areas, Respect will appeal to workers and ethnic minorities as a left-of-Labour alternative. It is pledged to end the council housing sell-off, reclaim city academies and defend local government pensions. And, of course, it demands the troops get out of Iraq.

Unfortunately, however, Respect is fundamentally a blind alley. It has made concession after concession to the Muslim clergy and propertied classes, some members of which have now, ironically, defected to the Liberal Democrats. Its MP, George Galloway, is free to make up policy as he goes along, from denying women the right to abortion through to tough immigration controls. Why should workers think that Respect councillors would be any more accountable or principled?

We will have to redouble our efforts to ensure that the working class soon gets a real mass party – to represent it in local and national elections, certainly – but, more importantly (since no real power over the wealth and resources of society can be won in councils or parliament) to offer leadership in every aspect of the class struggle – and in the struggle for state power.

# Fight NHS cuts

The recent job losses in hospitals are a result of the government's privatisation of the NHS, writes *Helen Watson*



## Keep our NHS public

The last two weeks of March saw major cuts in jobs, beds and services in the NHS across the country: 480 at the Royal Free in London, 400 at NHS Direct, 300 each at New Cross hospital, in Wolverhampton, the Royal Cornwall and in Telford and Shrewsbury, 200 in Plymouth, 180 at Peterborough, and 190 at St Mary's hospital, Sidcup. Many more job cuts and service closures will be announced in the next few weeks, as budgets are agreed for the next financial year.

The most dramatic example so far is the University of North Staffordshire Hospital, with a £17 million cuts package including 1,000 job losses, up to 750 of them compulsory, including 370 nurses and midwives, and 15 consultants.

By mid-March there were operating theatres standing empty because there was no money left to pay for more operations. At the end of the financial year, the NHS has a deficit of between £750 million and £1 billion.

The scale of these cuts is unprecedented in recent years and suggests massive under-funding of the NHS.

But it is not only a financial crisis. It is a political crisis, engineered by the government in its attempt to drive through a radical transformation of the NHS.

The end of year deficit amounts to only 1 per cent of the £76.4 billion NHS annual budget. But Patricia Hewitt has insisted that there will be no bailing out: "The way the NHS has been run for nearly 60 years is that areas that have overspent, and some have done it for a very long time, have not had enough incentive to make themselves more effective because they have known they will be bailed out by areas that were under spending."

She thinks that by making trusts reveal their losses they will suddenly become more efficient.

Not long before he left in January, NHS boss Nigel Crisp issued the NHS with its framework for 2005/6. It stated that, by the end of March, all Strategic Health Authorities, Primary Care and Hospital Trusts had to produce budgets that balanced for this year and next. But that was not all. "As a first step along this path, next year, for the system as a whole, we expect to recover any overspend from 2005/6, and we are planning for a surplus".

Surplus is another way of saying operating profit, the first time this has been a requirement of NHS organisations. A profitable NHS? But how can you make profit when the national service is paid for out of taxation and free at the point of need?

But the NHS is no longer a national service. It has been broken down into organisations and trusts. Some are

already independent foundation trusts, and community services are being pushed in the same direction. These independent providers can now compete with each other, and the private sector, for "business".

The NHS is being steadily transformed into a series of customers (patients, or rather the GP consortiums who will purchase services) and producers (health care workers who sell packages of care - commodities). Payment for individual items of care is extending to 80 per cent of services this month. Trusts will be expected to make a profit, by competing with other local hospitals, and by driving down costs through sacking workers and cutting corners.

All services can then be opened up to competition and the private sector can cherry pick the most profitable bits.

Therefore, workers and users of the NHS need not only to defend jobs and services, but also to reverse the privatisation and put the NHS under their control.

At a recent meeting in London, SOS NHS, former health secretary Frank Dobson blamed the crisis squarely on privatisation.

He explained that around £12 billion was being spent on introducing the market. He estimates that around 16 per cent of the NHS budget is now spent on such administration, compared with 4 per cent in the days before the market. Dobson explained why all the talk of choice and a patient-led NHS was a smoke screen for privatisation: "To be honest, a patient-driven NHS makes about as much sense as a passenger-driven jumbo jet".

The same meeting called "for an immediate halt" to privatisation, and urged everyone to intensify opposition. An amendment from the floor called on the TUC to organise a national demonstration. Good. But not enough.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

All the proposed job cuts must be resisted through a militant campaign, linking the unions and local community organisations. Wherever job losses are announced, the unions need to build for action, including balloting for strikes. In addition to local action, we must call on the unions to organise nationally against privatisation and job cuts - national strike action across the NHS is essential if we are to reverse this break up of the NHS.

Local campaigns have been set up to resist specific closures and job losses or to oppose privatisation. Demonstrations have been organised across the country - Huddersfield, Manchester, Oxford, Cambridge, Ayr and London among them. This needs to spread - we need a national network of campaigns to resist.

### Did you know that...

- Independent sector treatment centres (ISTC) receive 11% more than NHS hospitals for the same operation.
- ISTCs have virtually "risk free" contracts, with a guaranteed income for at least 5 years, whether or not they carry out the operations
- The government has forced local Primary Care Trusts to place at least 15 per cent of hospital procedures with ISTCs, even if there is sufficient (and cheaper) NHS capacity, and patients prefer the NHS.
- 100 new hospitals were promised under the 2000 NHS Plan, almost all using Private Finance Initiative.
- At the end of a PFI contract, usually 25 years, the hospital belongs to the PFI contractors, not the NHS. As someone pointed out at the SOS NHS conference, it is like paying your mortgage off over 25 years and then the building society repossesses your house.
- The government has forced GPs to include a private provider in the four "choices" patients are offered when they need a hospital referral. This is all part of the patient-led NHS.
- The latest PFI hospital to be approved, at Barts and the London, will cost the trust £45 million a year, and it will open with three floors empty because they will be too expensive to run!

Healthcare workers need to be at the heart of these campaigns since we have the power not only to strike but also to resist the moves to private sector contracts.

Local campaigns and trade union activists will immediately come up against the problem of Labour. Pressure on Labour MPs, through affiliated unions and individual lobbying is important, and many Labour MPs oppose Hewitt and Blair on this. But, again, it is not enough. When asked about pulling the political fund away from the Labour Party, both union leaders at the conference said no, because there was no alternative.

But we need to build an alternative - a new workers' party. Everyone who understands what is happening to the NHS will see the need for a political alternative.

We need a party that will always put the interests of the working class first. We can start to do this through initiatives like the Campaign for a New Workers' Party, through working with the unions who are starting to break up their political funds, and, most of all, through massive militant campaigns which will mobilise workers and local communities against the invasion of big business into our NHS.



# Founding conference debates reform or revolution

The launch conference of the Campaign for a New Workers Party debated proposals on how to take advantage of the large numbers of activists wanting to break from Labour. *Keith Spencer* was there to hear the arguments

The Socialist Party (SP), which set up the Campaign for a New Worker Party (CNWP) in December, enjoyed the lion's share of the speakers at the conference, which attracted 430 participants. While there were eight resolutions, most the debate revolved around the SP's and Workers Power's (see below).

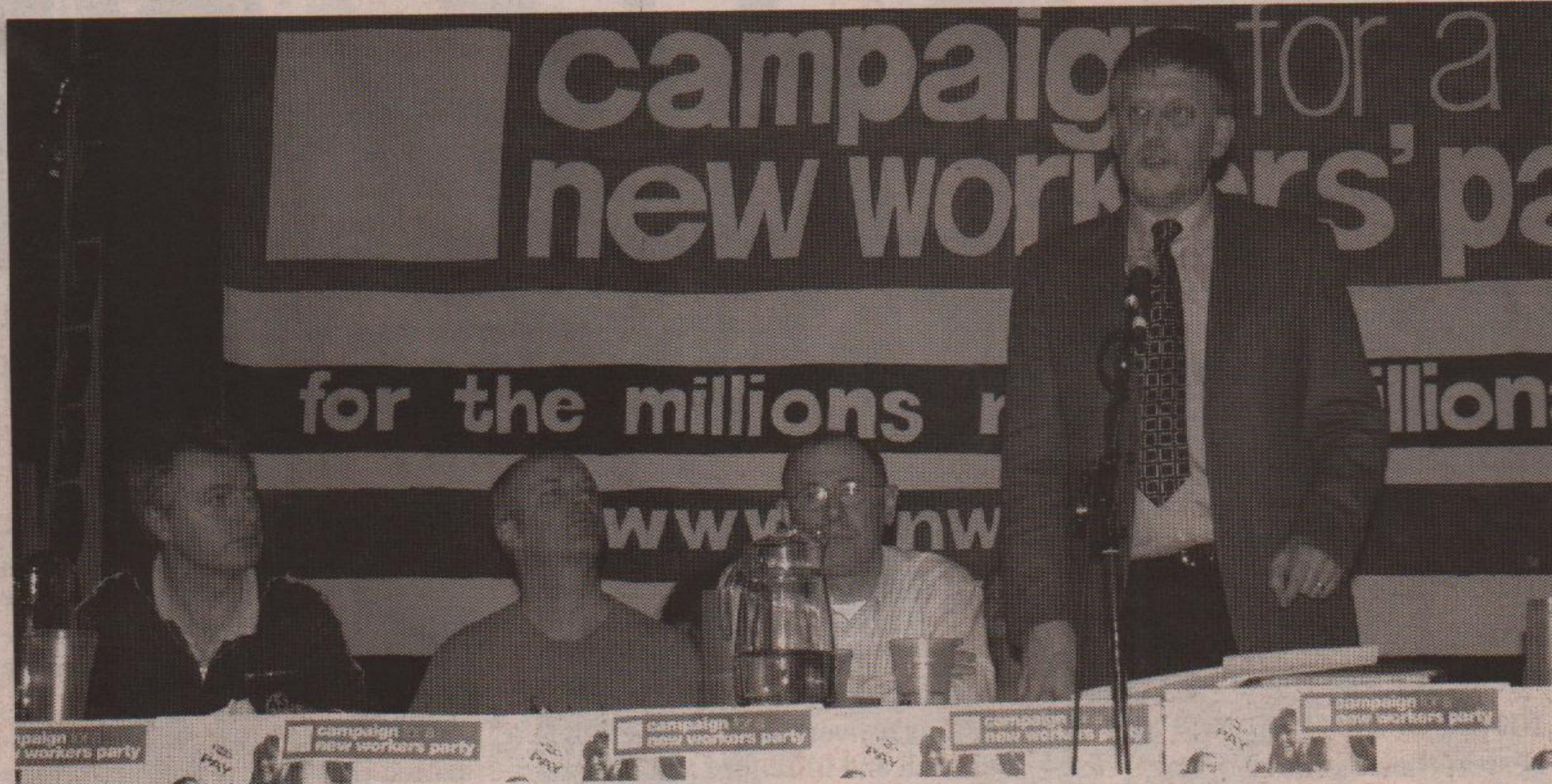
It soon became clear that the SP sees any new party emerging from the campaign as anti-neoliberal, but not anti-capitalist. It wants to be the midwife to a new, "old Labour" party, which it would then "enter" as its left wing, ready to emerge during a revolutionary crisis as its "Marxist" leadership.

In short, they want to return to their heyday of the 1970s and 1980s. As then, so now, they are silent on the need for revolution, and narrowly focus on economic issues – barely mentioning the war in Iraq, for example.

Unison NEC member Roger Bannister moved their resolution, which outlined a federal structure for the campaign, supported trade union initiatives for a new party, and called for 5,000 signatures to the declaration by the end of the year. Its weakness was its lack of politics. The SP reduced the socialist programme to demands "for a living minimum wage, full trade union rights and for fully funded democratically controlled public services". Subsequent speakers raised the historic Socialist Party demand of the nationalisation of the top 150 monopolies under worker control.

But, as Workers Power speakers pointed out, any attempt at wholesale nationalisation would bring the workers movement up against the army, police and international capitalism. In the face of such an attack, the workers would be left unarmed and unprepared.

By contrast, we argued for the campaign to take the need for a new party and programme into the unions. The discussion on programme should start from the need to overthrow capitalism, overcome the ruling class's inevitable violent resistance, and build socialism, i.e. a programme for social revolution,



linked to today's struggles.

To start from the other end – what would appeal to workers and youth, who still had illusions in reforming capitalism – would only end in confusion at best, capitulation at worst.

Jeremy Dewar from Workers Power pointed out that, while the campaign should debate these questions at every stage, this should not close off support among trade unions and the wider movement. He anticipated opposition by asking, if not now, "When would be a better time to engage workers breaking from Labour on the questions of programme and the limits of parliament?"

Socialist Party members could only reply during the debate that raising anything more than minimum reforms was a step too far, would "frighten people away" and mean that the party would be stillborn. But, as Workers Power made clear, such questions need to be debated openly, in front of the working class, and not covered up.

After two hours of debate, the Socialist Party resolution was passed overwhelmingly along with a couple of the other motions on democracy. The Workers Power motion lost, with 77 for (26.5%) and 213 against.

## Respect and Socialist Party: a shoddy pact

Respect was represented on the top table by Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, and Alan Thornett, supporter of the Fourth International and member of Respect's National Council. The real movers and shakers in Respect – the SWP and George Galloway – were, however, nowhere to be seen.

Thornett argued for a broad, pluralistic party. He specifically said that Workers Power's resolution was "a couple of years" ahead of its time. Just as it is for the Socialist Party, arguing for revolution, for this veteran centrist, is always too soon – until it's too late!

Thornett claimed that Respect still offered the best opportunity for a left of Labour party, and suggested that the rest of us should join it, while Hannah Sell of the Socialist Party replied by calling on Respect members to sign the declaration.

And therein lies their fundamental difference. Except... Dave Nellist, SP member and Coventry councillor, made the crucial point: that the CNWP was not calling on Respect to dissolve itself.

Indeed, the last thing the SP wants is for the SWP to join the campaign and challenge its leadership, like they did in the Socialist Alliance!

This truly is a shoddy agreement: not to stand against each other in elections; not to counterpose each to the other in the unions; but not to unite in a democratic campaign to break the unions from Labour and use their political funds to launch a new party. How truly sectarian to place the temporary interests of one's sect before the historic needs of the class.

## WHERE NEXT?

The conference was an important step in building a new workers' party. While modest in numbers, it did attract some youth and a significant number of blue collar and private sector workers.

About a hundred were unaligned to any of the political trends. Clearly the CNWP has only attracted to date part of the vanguard of working class militants breaking from Labour.

Others – in evidence at the RMT's January conference, in Respect – need to be drawn in.

To its great credit, the campaign is based on an unambiguous call on the unions to break from Labour and build a new workers' party – something that the Socialist Alliance constantly dodged.

Its weakness is that debate on the programme for the new party has been shelved, at least for a year, with minimal demands put as stop-gaps. Clearly, the SP hopes that these will become the new programme by default.

Workers Power members came away feeling there was an echo for our arguments, with around 40 to 50 comrades from outside our ranks supporting our positions. Our energies over the coming months will focus on three areas:

1. Ensuring the debate is taken into union branches, trades councils and regional committees, and onto the floor and into the fringe meetings at national conferences

2. Taking our message onto the picket lines and demonstrations, into the anti-privatisation, antiracist and anti-war campaigns, over the coming months

3. Initiating a widespread debate on the programme and structure of a new party, explaining what a revolutionary programme means in practice, how a party should struggle for real power, and why we need to link today's struggles to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

If we can carry out these tasks with energy and inventiveness, the campaign for a new workers' party can grow enormously in the coming months.

# Steps towards a new mass internationalist socialist party

Edited version of resolution moved by Workers Power to the founding conference of the CNWP

This first conference of the Campaign for a New Workers Party believes that...

3. The willingness of the RMT to suffer expulsion from Labour rather than bend the knee, the disaffiliation of the FBU, the election results of Respect in a number of constituencies and the RMT's meeting on the crisis of working class representation all point to the opportunity to found a new working class party.

4. A new party could be an instrument of the working class for its emancipation – not only resisting attacks, but challenging the system of exploitation itself. The party's goal should be the conquest of political power by the working class...

5. Such a party will need a programme to set out a strategy for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of working class power...it should state unambiguously how private ownership of the means of production can be abolished, what must replace it, what the revolutionary transformation of society will entail, and how the repressive apparatus of the capitalist class can be resisted

and overcome. It should combine immediate demands with our final goal, linking today's struggles to a fight for power.

6. A new party must be centred on action. It must be democratic, with regularly elected and accountable leaders.... Elections to parliament and councils must be means to an end... Any other sort of party will simply repeat the experience of the Labour Party.

7. Such a party, programme and structure cannot be imposed before the forces to make it a real mass party have been assembled. But they have to be discussed at every stage. At future conferences of this campaign and at any RMT recall conference, these issues must be debated.

This conference resolves to build the CNWP vigorously over the next six months by the following initiatives

8. An orientation to those unions, which have broken most decisively from Labour – RMT, FBU – and those most at war with Labour – PCS, CWU, Naffhe, etc. We urge the RMT to recall the

conference on working class representation

9. Fringe meetings at all union, TUC and Labour Party conferences, agitating for disaffiliation from Labour but retention of the political fund and official union backing for the formation of a new party and for the CNWP.

10. Appealing to Respect to join the CNWP, to base itself on the working class and, whilst drawing in workers and youth from the Muslim community, to reject all concessions to propertied classes and religious leaders

11. Approaching the Scottish Socialist Party also to join the campaign, arguing for a UK-wide party to combat the British capitalist state, whilst supporting Scotland's right to self-determination, including the right to a separate state.

12. Setting up local organising bodies of the CNWP, open to affiliation and participation from unions, trades councils, and campaigning organisations. As well as agitating for a new party, the CNWP should spread the message by fighting for:

• the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq

and Afghanistan and solidarity with the resistance

- halting privatisation and kicking private companies out of the public services
- defying and repealing the anti-union laws
- united strike action in defence of pensions
- halting all deportations and the abolition of immigration controls
- smashing the BNP
- free quality childcare and against women's low pay
- defending young people against Asbos and dispersal orders

13. Linking the CNWP to the fight for a movement of rank and file workers in the unions able to take action against the wishes of the privileged union leaders, a working class women's movement, an independent movement of revolutionary youth...

• Full text of motion and report at: <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,1009,0,0,1,0>



# Blair's loan sharks circle labour

Jeremy Dewar looks at how Blair is trying to turn the loan scandal into a drive to dump the unions



Labour's millionaire donors

Last month a light was shone on the murky world of Labour finances. What it revealed was not pretty. As another troop of Blair-nominated peers headed for the House of Lords someone smelt a rat. Four of the nominees were rejected. Why?

Bit by bit, piece by piece, a secret source of Labour Party funding emerged. By using a loophole in its own anti-sleaze legislation, the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, Tony Blair and a close circle of allies had disguised £13.95 million of donations as loans.

What was peculiar about these loans was that the lenders had often wanted to make donations to the cash-strapped party; it was Labour's fundraiser general, Lord Levy, who insisted on loans. Surprisingly, there were neither repayment schedules, nor security to cover them.

Not so peculiar really when you realise that, unlike political donations of more than £5,000, large loans do not have to be declared. A glance at the names of the generous lenders explains why such secrecy might serve both party and businessman.

Take Rod Aldridge (£1 million loan), until the scandal chairman of Capita. According to Capita's annual report this year the "UK's market leader in providing business process outsourcing services to the public and private sectors". In other words, Capita - and Rod - have done well out of New Labour, benefiting from the privatisation of huge chunks of central and local government services, the BBC and NHS.

The company report makes clear how much they made out of running what used to be not for profit, public assets, "Over the 10 years to 31 December 2005, the value of the Group has increased from £160m to £2.7bn. Total shareholder return (excluding dividends) in this period has been 17 fold, equivalent to a 33% compound annual return."

Then there is Dr Chai Patel (£1.5 million). He is a serial donor. Maybe he should book himself into his top-of-the-range Priory clinic for loan addiction. Chai made the bulk of his fortune, however, not from treating alcoholic footballers and pop stars, but running residential retirement homes that used to be the responsibility of local govern-

ment. He got his foot in the door as a member of the Department of Health's taskforce for older people - which not surprisingly recommended that the private sector take a major role in caring for the elderly.

Sir Gulam Noon (£250,000) sprung briefly to fame in 1997, when he provoked a strike by his largely female Asian workforce, sick of sub-minimum wage pay levels and dictatorial managers. Sir David Garrard (£2.3 million) and Barry Townsley (£1 million) have snapped up academy schools in Bexley and Hillingdon respectively, courtesy of Labour's education reforms.

Lord David Sainsbury (£2 million) and his family have, of course, benefited enormously from Labour's free market policies. Sainsbury is Britain's second largest supermarket chain and one of the big four, which last year accounted for 13% of all household spending, and are currently being investigated by the Competition Commission for operating a monopoly. Together with Sir Christopher Evans (£1 million) of Merlin Biosciences, Sainsbury, as science minister, has been central in pushing inadequately tested GM crops onto Britain.

### Rifts at the top

None of this is news in itself. Labour's big business backers have been rapidly growing in number as the party moved rightwards. So what caused Jack Dromey and John Prescott - fully paid up members of the Brown-Blair project - to hit the roof? Ostensibly it was because Blair and Levy did this behind their backs.

But Dromey, coming from the bureaucracy of the TGWU, knows very well that Blair and his acolytes would like nothing better than to end their dependence on trade union funding. They do not mind the pressure and lobbying of the millionaire businessmen, what they can't stand is when millions of trade unionists demand something from the party they fund.

In 2004, the most up to date figures available, the party received just over £11 million from affiliations and membership subs, i.e. from its working class base. It received nearly £9 million from donations and less than £1 million from fundraising. Obviously, an election year, as 2005 was, will see these figures grow considerably. Nevertheless, the £13.95

## Budget signals new attacks

Brown's latest budget had a sting in its tail. The public finances are squeezed because prudent Gordon is resolutely opposed to raising taxes for the fat cats who are benefiting from privatisation and globalisation.

Small increases in education expenditure will be paid for by cuts elsewhere. And public sector workers are first in the firing line. Four government departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that deals with benefits, are having their budgets cut by 5%. At the DWP the current round of cuts aiming to send 30,000 down the road are

already having dramatic effects on a deteriorating claims service for those in most need - the unemployed and sick.

Brown also made clear that it was not just jobs that were going to go. He specifically targeted wage increases saying they would stay within inflation limits - 2.5%. Given that the armed forces, dentists etc are down for inflation busting increases this means many public sector workers will be limited to less than 2.5% - they will be told to take a real pay cut.

But it is not cuts all round - there is always money for war. Brown announced an extra £800m for military operations

overseas, primarily for Iraq and Afghanistan, where an extra 3,300 troops will be sent next year. The real costs of the war in Iraq still remain shrouded in secrecy - the M.O.D. suggested that the cost of operations in Iraq last year would be around £1.3bn. The Iraq Analysis Group estimates that, since 2002, £6.4bn has been poured into Gordon Brown's "special reserve" to pay for military escapades.

Another typical new Labour budget then - billions for imperialist war, cuts to workers wages. Brown is obviously setting out his stall as a true successor to Tony Blair.

million loans clearly alter the answer to the question: Who funds Labour?

This is a vital question since, as we all know, whoever pays the piper calls the tune. Of course, Tony Blair and his allies have declared that this is all proper, that there is no question of these lenders buying peerages, that they simply support the Labour "cause". All of which beggars belief. If it is proper, then why was it all hushed up, out of sight of the public and of the Labour Party treasurer, cabinet and members? If these lenders were not buying peerages, then how come every bourgeois individual, who does Labour a financial favour, gets an honour?

### State funding

Just to show that Blair has not lost his touch, he very swiftly did two things. First, he set his dogs on his internal critics. Charles Clarke immediately blamed Jack Dromey, "Any competent treasurer would look at the finances of the organisation he was involved with. It should be part of the job to look at the finances. If he wasn't asking that question, you would have to ask how well he was doing that job."

Next, he proposed making it obligatory on parties to reveal the source of large loans (like he had any choice). But, in return, parties would receive state funding, and all donations over £100,000 would be blocked. Cameron jumped on the bandwagon, making clear that placing a limit on donations would scupper trade unions giving large amounts to Labour.

Blair and New Labour have always favoured state funding, their problem was they knew the public would not tolerate it. It would finally rid them of their financial dependence on the trade unions - it would allow them to sever the final link with their working class base, to be able to tell the TU leaders to sling their hook even when, as they do occasionally, they asked for moderate reforms in the interest of their members.

Blair is a past master at turning a setback into an opportunity. Remember when the French workers threw out the neo liberal constitution in a referendum? Blair argued this was a rejection of "old Europe" and demanded a new push for a new de-regulated one. Now he wants to turn the scandal of Labour Party funding into an argument for state funding, saying to the voters "there you are, if you don't give us state funding you will get sleaze".

### What we say

Britain's democratic system has once again been revealed as a charade. Money buys you everything, even - and especially - a government. Even the peerages scandal is a bit of a diversion it's a nice bauble for some but that is not the real gain.

Business leaders, however, do want government policies favourable to their profits. This is known as "partnership with the business community". They want "their" government to weaken and demolish the gains of the working class and to obstruct any seri-

ous new measures in its favour. That is why they complain endlessly about "over regulation". So, while Blair wants to make himself as independent as possible from his party's mass membership (what's left of it), it is only so that he can serve the billionaires more consistently and loyally.

Our union leaders, if they were not so frightened of their members debating the issue out, could have seen where this is all leading by now. Labour wants to reduce their role in the party and replace them with thoroughly bourgeois advisers and financiers. Stephen Byers, at the North West Union Link conference, recently revived the idea, first floated by Alan Johnson last spring, of reducing the unions' vote at Labour Party conference from 50% to 15%. A cut in their financial backing would make this seem "fair" rather than the attack on the working class that it is.

Of course, the unions, as mass organisations of workers, need political funds, need MPs that fight for workers interests in parliament. Working class people need a political party. But not one, which does the exact opposite of what they voted for, not one, which serves the bosses, the bankers, the generals and the judges. Otherwise, the millions they put in goes straight down the drain. That's why we say: not a penny more to the party of war, neoliberalism and racism. Unions, break from Labour and form a new working class party now: one which fights against capitalism, racism and war, one which leads a revolution to transform society.



Delegates of the National Union of Teachers will assemble in Torquay over Easter. *Kirstie Paton*, from Greenwich NUT and a conference delegate, outlines the key debates that are likely to occur

## NUT: teachers need to find a political voice

On 28 March, many NUT school groups supported the strike in defence of pensions of teaching assistants, catering, office and premises staff by refusing to cross picket lines, which led to many schools closing.

Teachers around the country will be wondering why we are not striking over pensions with the one and half million local government workers?

The reason is that on the eve of last year's NUT conference, the leadership called off national strike action against the attacks on pensions.

Instead, it negotiated a deal with the government in the autumn that protects the rights of teachers in post to retire at 60, but teachers that join from September 2006 will have to work till they are 65. Worse, the agreement abandoned the public sector united front, leaving local government workers to fight on their own.

Workers Power members argued that this was a mistake: strike action before the general election was just what was needed to win and now we have rotten deal.

The National Executive Committee should have the courage to tear up the framework agreement, ballot for strike action, and join other public sector unions to fight to defend pensions.

If it refuses, then, at conference activists must discuss how teachers can take forward the struggle and build on the solidarity shown on 28 March. Teachers must link up with activists in other unions to build committees in their schools and the wider area and draw in pensioners' action groups to support and spread action to fight for decent pensions. In Bolton, the NUT has linked up with Unison to build such a committee - this should be replicated around the country.

### PAY

This year the government has restructured teachers' pay by the introduction of Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs).

The new structure has led to a loss of posts, increased responsibilities with no extra money and cut pay. Many schools had successful ballots for strike action but have been left to fight on their own. In some cases union officials have negotiated deals with management that have failed to protect posts and workloads.

The failure of the NEC to oppose TLRs nationally has resulted in head teachers now having enormous power to determine teachers' pay, which threatens national agreements.

A national campaign of strike action is needed to get rid of TLRs.

### FAITH SCHOOLS

Faith schools hinder integration, foster religious divisions, and provide fertile grounds for religious and ethnic conflict. Workers Power along with many other teachers on the left have

long argued for a secular education system. This is not to deny individual students the right to express their religious beliefs, but religious institutions should have no right to determine educational policy.

However, some in the STA argue that, if the Catholic Church, the Church of England and Jewish religious organisations can run schools, then other religions should have the same rights.

On the surface this might seem democratic. But this is wrong. Instead, we should oppose the creation of new faith schools and demand that the government take over the running of all existing faith schools to make them secular.

### PALESTINE

The NUT has a long tradition of supporting the struggle of the Palestinians and the anti-war movement, calling for the withdrawal of US and British troops from Iraq. This year, Westminster submitted a motion calling for the NUT to boycott Israeli goods. Scandalously, the officers of the union took the view that the call contravened the union's rules.

The NEC wants to distance itself from the struggle for Palestinian rights because of the newly elected Hamas government. As socialists, we do not support Hamas, but that should not prevent socialists and trade unionists from supporting the just struggle of the Palestinians for self-determination and to support any initiatives that deal a blow to their oppressors. Delegates should demand that conference discuss the motion in full and that we are allowed to make our own minds up.

### POLITICAL VOICE

Delegates will be meeting this year under an unprecedented third term of a Labour government, a government that claimed to put education at the centre of its political agenda - and they were certainly true to their word. We have seen Blair and Brown push their neo-liberal agenda with the introduction of PFI, academies, performance related pay and now their Education and Inspections Bill.

Conference will be discussing its campaign against the Bill, but teachers have always fought with one hand tied behind our backs. The NUT has no political affiliation and no active political fund. Conference has recently rejected motions calling for a more active role on the political battlefield. As if education was above politics.

But surely three terms of a Labour government have taught us that education is highly political. Teachers urgently need a political voice. Many teachers in 1997 voted for Labour. They have been betrayed. We now need to fight for a new workers' party that could represent the interests of teachers, our pupils and working class parents as part of the wider workers' movement.

# Tony's Tory

The Education Bill made its way through parliament, courtesy of Tory votes. *Kate Ford* of Hackney NUT examines its measures and argues for a socialist alternative

Tony Blair won the crucial vote in parliament on 15 March to allow his controversial Education Bill to proceed. With 52 Labour MPs voting against the Bill, Blair only won because of the support of David Cameron's Conservatives.

It is no surprise that the Tories are voting for this legislation. It is in all but name a Tory Bill. Virtually all the key reforms proposed are ones originally thought up by Margaret Thatcher.

The Secretary of State for Education, Ruth Kelly, desperately tried to convince Labour rebels that the proposed Trust schools are somehow different to Thatcher's Grant Maintained (GM) schools, but they are remarkably similar. Both GM and Trust schools

- are out of local authority control
  - appoint their own governors
  - decide their own admissions procedures
  - directly employ their own staff
  - own and control the school's assets
- The only major difference is that the Tories suggested this model for just a few schools; New Labour wants it for every school!

Blair has even borrowed the word "trust" from Thatcher's plans to develop her education reform. In a paper written in 1990 by her education advisor, Lord Griffiths, the Tories outlined a proposal to transfer all schools into "the management of special trusts".

Thatcher wanted Local Education Authorities' powers limited, "leaving them with a monitoring and advisory role", almost exactly what Blair is suggesting. Blair's Bill displays New Labour's desire to ape private schools



All smiles: but teachers can wipe the smile of Kelly's and Blair's faces

through the establishment of Trust schools, describing them as "independent state schools", just the same phrase Thatcher used to describe her plans for state schools back in the 1980s.

No wonder the Tories are having a

laugh! Ken Clarke, Tory ex-education secretary, explained: "Labour members are never more ridiculous than when they go blue in the face trying to say that the proposed trust schools are not grant maintained schools."

## Labour's Education Bill: key points

**All schools will be able to opt out of local authority control. These schools will become self governing trusts.**

**New schools, including schools replacing failing schools, are expected to become trusts - though, in a concession to Labour rebels, it is not inevitable.**

**Trusts are likely to be formed by businesses, religious organisations or charities. Tony Blair has already paraded Microsoft and the accountancy firm KPMG as likely trust sponsors.**

**Trusts can appoint the majority of the governing body. They will then gain ownership and control of the school. This is rather like setting up an academy, but you don't even have to come up with any money.**

**Trusts can decide their own admissions procedure. Parental interviews are not allowed. There should be no selection by ability. However, it is easy to see how this can be subverted. The Mossbourne Academy in Hackney holds exams on a Saturday morning, hoping working class parents won't have the time or energy to ensure their children can attend. And whilst they take pupils from each ability band, they take the pupils at the top of each ability range.**

**Parents will get a Parents' Council,**

**if the trust taking over a school appoints the majority of governors. The Parents' Council will be consulted, but will have no power. LEAs will help parents choose a school. Again no power. So much for Labour's commitment to parental choice and control.**

**Obviously it is assumed that all parents will want to bus their children across town to get into the better school (just like Blair did with his kids), because free school transport to cover long distances will be available.**

**There is a lot of very authoritarian rhetoric aimed at pupils and parents.**

**Teachers are given the right to discipline, and can also hold detentions on a Saturday - if they really want to. Parents will be expected to supervise excluded pupils at home for up to five days. Presumably they won't be given time off work to do this. But if their child is spotted in a public place then parents can be fined and subjected to parenting orders.**

**About the only positive reform in the Bill is an improvement in the nutritional standards of school dinners. But, with privatised catering in the hands of firms like Sodexo, who knows what will be on the menu!**



Jamie Oliver's school dinners. But Labour's commitment in the Education Bill to healthy school dinners is undermined by its commitment to privatisation



# Education Bill

There is widespread opposition to the Education Bill. Many are agreed on what is wrong with the proposed reforms. But what future should we be fighting for?

## An Alternative Education System

### A comprehensive education system

Every child, whatever their background, deserves an equal chance to succeed. There should be no selection of pupils by schools, whether on social class, religion or ability. Children should be able to go to their local school. We must end the current lottery of the primary/secondary transfer system. Every local school can be a successful school.

There has never been a fully comprehensive system in this country. The existence of faith schools, grammar schools and independent (public) schools have all meant that the education system is inequitable, with a drain of resources to those schools designed to meet the needs of the middle class and bourgeoisie.

We must abolish private schools, Grammar and GM schools and all faith schools.

### An inclusive education system

Every school should be made accessible to all. Despite recent legislation, many schools have not yet made the changes necessary to ensure that children with a disability can attend their local school. We should make all schools inclusive.

Long term this means merging special schools with their local mainstream schools. This may mean building special units within mainstream schools, but our objective should be schools which can include everyone, including those with behaviour problems. Such pupils should be supported by professionals, not demonised, excluded and ultimately denied a future.

### A relevant curriculum

Thatcher imposed a National Curriculum on schools without consultation with pupils, parents or teachers. Labour has continued this and inundated schools with endless national strategies and initiatives. Politicians and DfES bureaucrats at the moment have decided that there is only one way to teach every child to read, imposing synthetic phonics on all primary schools.

The National Curriculum has led to demoralisation amongst teachers, a narrowing of the curriculum offered in many schools and a lack of experimentation. It has resulted in increased disaffection amongst sections of pupils, who struggle to find any relevance in what they are taught in the classroom to their lives.

We should have an entitlement curriculum. There should be an agreed basic curriculum that all pupils have a right to access. Such a curriculum should include anti-racism, anti-sexist and political education to ensure all

children are prepared to play a role in society in the 21st century. It should be based on materialism and aim to explain how our class-ridden society works, and how human societies have changed throughout history.

Beyond that, schools should have the right to control their own curriculum and to innovate and experiment with new ideas. We should reduce the divide between vocational and academic education. Pupils have the right to both.

### Smaller class sizes

All pupils benefit from smaller class sizes. We should limit class size to a maximum of twenty, with smaller classes in reception, at sixth form and for practical sessions. This is the single most important thing we can do to improve the educational chances for our youth. Forget the Numeracy Strategy or the interactive whiteboards – just make groups smaller. It is that simple.

Smaller class sizes, however, should not be at the expense of children's right to a qualified teacher. As part of the remodelling agenda, Labour abolished the legal right of pupils to be taught by a qualified teacher. Since this change many schools have tried to save money by employing Learning Support Assistants or Teaching Assistants. These workers are great assets to schools, but they do not have the training of a qualified teacher and should not be asked to teach whole classes.

### Scrap league tables and the testing regime

Children in England are amongst the most tested in the world. Estimates have been made that every child will sit over 100 tests in their school career. And these endless tests have nothing whatsoever to do with education. They are all about competition.

Test results are used to select pupils, to determine teachers' pay and to judge schools. And even this job they don't do accurately. Tests discriminate against certain groups of pupils – particularly working class and ethnic minority pupils.

The current testing regime pressurises teachers to focus on some pupils above others. For example, in the Key Stage 3 tests, the percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 and above is considered important, so extra classes are organised for those likely to get Level 5, whilst the less able lose out. Performance related pay for teachers has made this disgraceful practice even more widespread.

Meanwhile schools battle against each other to gain a better place in the league tables and attract more middle class pupils. Every statistical trick is employed. In the past few years this has led to some schools not entering pupils for GCSE English or GCSE

Maths (subjects required to get onto A level courses). Instead, they are entered for alternative qualifications, which carry more points towards the school's league table position.

We should abolish this costly and inequitable system. We need an assessment system focused around learning. Most assessment should be carried out in the classroom, centred on individual pupils and their learning.

### Qualified, motivated and well trained staff

The greatest resource of any school is the people who work within it. The Tories and New Labour have consistently attacked the pay and conditions of school staff. Every worker in schools should be valued. National negotiating rights should be restored for teachers' unions. We should aim for one education union.

We must scrap all forms of performance related pay. Teachers should have access to high quality training in school time, not expected to do a day's work and then go on courses in the evening or at weekends. LSA/TAs also deserve access to high quality training and the opportunity, if they wish to do so, to train as a qualified teacher. Pay for support staff in schools must be massively increased. Support staff should be paid during the holidays.

### Funding according to need

Of course this will all cost money. Socialists should welcome Gordon Brown's announcement to increase funding for state education to match the amount spent on each child to that spent in private schools. Unfortunately much of this money will end up in the pockets of big business through PFI and Building Schools for the Future, rather than being used to improve conditions for pupils and teachers.

There should be no place for private profit in the education system. We must reverse all privatisation from catering contracts to academies. Those who have put their snouts into the education trough, should have "their" assets (in reality, ours) seized with no compensation. All privatised contracts should be ripped up, with no compensation.

We do need a massive injection of cash into the education system – though much will be saved by ending privatisation and by stopping the tax breaks offered to private schools. Schools and pupils should be funded according to need. Of course, some schools in more deprived areas will need more money. In a leafy middle class suburb, you can expect that most pupils are able to do work at home on a computer. In the inner cities, schools will need to provide access to IT and homework clubs, if their pupils

are to get an equal chance to succeed.

All pupils over the age of 16 should receive a student grant set at the equivalent of the adult minimum wage, currently £202 a week. Too many working class youth are discouraged from doing A-levels and going to college for lack of funds. Equally, too many are forced to work 20 or 30 hours a week, while completing their studies.

The children of asylum seekers will require additional resources in terms of emotional support and teachers who specialise in teaching English as a second language.

The Tory government brought in a major change to school funding called Local Management of Schools (LMS). LMS was part of the Tory agenda of competition between schools, making it easier to put through cuts in education budgets. Labour has expanded this system. LMS/Fair Funding should be abolished. Schools should concentrate on teaching and learning. The LEAs should allocate funds and help schools run their budgets.

### Democratic control

None of the changes above can be made without changing the means by which we control education and schools. Big business has no place in education. Schools should be about education and opportunities to develop, not about training a future workforce. We must break all links with big business. All academies should be brought back into local authority control.

Every school should be directly controlled by those involved in the school. This includes parents, pupils, teachers, other education workers and the local community, including trade unions. School students should form their own democratic unions to combat bullying, unfair or oppressive behaviour by teachers and other staff, and to fight for improvements in their own conditions.

School action committees, like those formed to fight against closure or being turned into an academy, can and do transform the relationships within schools. They are, in embryo, the kinds of body that can run schools for the good of the whole of the community.

Education under capitalism is bound to reflect the needs of the ruling class: its need for certain kinds of workers, with varying skills in varying proportions. The middle class clambering to get their children into the "right" school is in fact another form of capitalist competition.

Our aim is to abolish all that and replace it with the socialist planning of education. It is an illusion that decent education for all can be won without tearing up the rotten system that demands inequality, selection and exclusion. The fight for schools suited to meet every child's needs must be part of the fight for a society where everyone's needs are met: socialism.

## Lambeth College - all out against the cuts

Lambeth College, in South London, has announced cuts of between £2.1 and £2.6 million. More than 60 redundancies are planned: over 10 teachers' jobs, but the majority are support staff in Unison. Courses would have to be cut, writes a Lambeth lecturer.

The college lecturers' union Natfhe has launched a campaign against the cuts. The branch committee agreed that, for the duration of the dispute, they would act as an action committee, and has invited the students' union and Unison reps to attend. They also called for mass meetings of Natfhe, Unison and NUS at every site of the college.

At the Natfhe branch meeting, attended by 120 members, a resolution calling for a ballot for action up to and including all out strike action was passed unanimously.

Unison, at first, were hesitant about a fight and seemed to be prepared to discuss with management how to make the cuts less painful, through redeployment and voluntary redundancies.

However, Unison members, heartened by the determined response of their fellow workers, are now also planning to ballot for action. They have also been boosted by building for their own strike on pensions on 28 March.

The campaign officially kicks off on 3 April, with a lobby of the college governors at Clapham Common. Later that week, on 7 April, the action committee has called for lobbies of MPs' surgeries.

If the Natfhe ballot is successful, strike action could begin before the end of April.

To stop the cuts, a militant campaign of action will be needed: demonstrations, strike action and occupations.

There are signs that Natfhe's full time officials are already dragging their feet, so it is important that activists fight for rank and file control of the dispute.

Also essential is unity between the workers and students. Any redundancies will affect the education of students at college. Loss of support staff and lecturers will affect everyone's working conditions.

The first opportunity to show that unity in practice will be the local government workers strike on Tuesday 28 March. Students and lecturers should not cross picket lines in solidarity with their Unison brothers and sisters.

**For more on NUT and Natfhe, and for other unions Workers Power supporters are active in, and our latest analysis of the workers movement go to**  
[www.workerspower.com/index.php?unions](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?unions)



# France on the verge of a

France was rocked by a series of mass demonstrations, occupations, strikes and battles with the riot police last month. *Marc Lasalle* of the League for the Fifth International in Paris recounts the days of action, while *Dave Stockton* investigates the left in search for a way forward

On Saturday 18 March a million and a half people – school and university students, workers and pensioners – demonstrated in France following weeks of mounting student unrest in the schools and universities. Naturally, the largest turnout was in Paris, where 350,000 took to the streets. In Marseille 130,000 marched, in Toulouse 50,000, in Nantes 45,000, in Rennes 35,000, and Lyon 25,000. Across France, there were 150 separate marches. The following week saw large student demonstrations, with many universities and secondary schools on strike, blockaded or occupied.

From the beginning of March, protests, occupations and other forms of direct action have been mounting, with school and university students plus unemployed youth from the banlieux taking action in ever-larger numbers. Railways have been blockaded, public transport and airports disrupted, as workers have taken action in solidarity with the youth. Clashes with the CRS riot police have occurred throughout the country. In Paris, on March 18, Cyril Perez, a 39-year-old telecom worker and activist in the SUD trade union, was taken to hospital in a coma after being attacked by riot police in Paris.

On Thursday 16 March more than 500,000 youth took part in mass demonstrations across France. In Rennes, the town hall was occupied. In Paris up to 120,000 youth marched. The unions, particularly the CGT, provided a service d'ordre (stewards) for the demonstration and consequently the CRS remained in the side streets. But as the march ended there were clashes with police involving, according to reports, many working class and



immigrant youth from the banlieux – commonly referred to as les casseurs. The police used tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon. In Paris, 150 arrests were made and 300 nationally.

## CHÔMAGE, PRÉCARITÉ, EXCLUSION

The protests centre on the CPE, the Contrat de Première Embauche (First Job Contract), dubbed "Chômage, Précarité Exclusion" (unemployment, insecurity, exclusion) by the students. Key to the success of the demonstrations was the combativity and determination of the youth, both university students and lycéens/lycéennes.

The government introduced the law in the National Assembly during the period of examinations and holidays, hoping to push it through quickly and without reaction. That is what it did last summer, with the similar Contrat Nouvelle Embauche (New Job Contract), which slashed employment rights

for workers in small companies.

But this time the students reacted promptly, went on strike in all the major universities, such as Rennes and Toulouse, and mobilised the students from the lycées. The youth mobilisations, in turn, are galvanising the trade unions into action. Indeed, the movement's success in forcing the removal of this reactionary law will depend on whether militants in the unions, as well as the youth, can bring about mass working class strike action.

Workers have every interest in doing so. These measures are the thin end of the neoliberal wedge, aimed at weakening and destroying legal protection for jobs and conditions and, beyond that, bringing down real wage levels. The CPE, like the CNE before it, is no minor attack. They both introduce special job contracts: for the first two years the worker can be sacked without any notice and without any justification. The CNE restricted these contracts to small com-

panies (less than 20 workers) while the CPE applies to young workers below 26, aiming, according to the prime minister, to increase youth access to their first job and so fight the high rates of unemployment among youth – 20 per cent, twice the national average.

Currently, French workers are hired, either indefinitely or on a fixed-term contract. In both cases, the employers' "right to hire and fire" is restricted: employers have to give reasons and notice of two months. The real goal of the government is exploiting youth – giving employers freedom to pressurise young workers, to deny them basic rights, thus forcing them into precarious and unstable existence.

France, despite the international boom phase of the economic cycle, remains close to economic stagnation, with huge structural unemployment and mounting social inequality. The employers can afford (in terms of their profit rates) no lasting concessions.

## Glossary: teach yourself revolutionary French

### BANLIEUX

The poor working class districts, usually in suburbs, surrounding the major cities. Huge, run down tower blocks dominate the skyline. Unemployment ranges from 20 to 40 per cent. The police regularly "crack down" – using small-scale drug dealing and petty crime as an excuse. Disproportionately, migrants and second and third generation immigrants from Africa, including the northern Arab countries, and the Caribbean live in the banlieux.

### LES CASSEURS

Literally the wreckers. Gangs of youths from the banlieux, who come into the major cities to riot and steal. Their fiercest anger is reserved for the hated CRS police. But in their hatred of French society, they have also fought workers and students and disrupted their demos.

Such acts by the most marginalised and downtrodden parts of the working class are revenge for the years of oppression and misery they endure. A revolutionary youth movement should aim to draw the most class conscious of the banlieux youth away from acts of reckless revenge, and into the struggle against their oppression, against capitalism.

### CRS

France's infamous riot police, the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (Republican Security Companies), are recognizable by their Robocop-style body armour. The CRS were used (murderously) against French Arab citizens during Algeria's war of independence, and against the students during the May '68 uprising.

### PRÉCARITÉ

Literally, precariousness. Précarité refers to low paid jobs, with temporary contracts, a high turnover, substandard working conditions and not a union rep in sight: McJobs. Précarité has increased dramatically as a result of neoliberalism, which has torn down labour regulations and undermined union rights in country after country.

### LYCÉE, LYCÉEN/LYCÉENNE

Secondary school, school student (m/f): the French school students have often been to the fore of the struggle

against the government in recent years: 1988, 1995, 2003.

Whether they enter universities or work, French youth face hard times on very low benefits or incomes, before they can hope to start to climb the wages ladder.

### COORDINATIONS

These are local bodies, which coordinate the struggle between the different unions, between the unions and the non-unionised workers, and between the workers and the youth and students. They have never been co-ordinated on a national level, thus leaving strategy and negotiations in the hands of the trade union bureaucrats.

### SERVICE D'ORDRE

French workers protect their demonstrations from the police with stewards, who wear protective gear, link arms and face outwards to foresee and prevent police attack.

### THE FRENCH UNIONS

CGT – The Confédération Générale du Travail is the second largest of the French union federations, but the most important, especially in industry. It cut its links with the Communist Party in 1995, though it still remains dominated by Stalinism.

FORCE OUVRIÈRE – A right-wing split from the CGT in 1948, it is strong among blue collar workers. It has moved to the left in recent years, under the influence of Pierre Lambert's International Communist Party.

CFDT – The Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail was a left wing – secular – split from the Christian union, the CFTC, in 1964. It has more members than any other federation, with 700,000, but is less militant and has fewer shopfloor activists than the CGT.

SUD – The Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques unions are federated under the name G10-Solidaires. The first SUD unions – in the post and health – were expelled by the CFDT, which sprang up in the 1980s. SUD unions multiplied during the 1995 struggle against the "plan Juppé" and are closely linked to the anticapitalist movement. The LCR and Maoist currents are strong within the G10-Solidaires.

# A revolutionary an

The immediate task is to continue and strengthen the school and university occupations – school students have taken over 400 lycées already. These can feed into the twice weekly mass mobilisations.

The students must urge the workers to participate and to defend them against police provocations and brutalities. Today the government is weakened and discredited. According to the latest opinion polls, 68 per cent favour dumping the CPE. Workers must join the struggle to force the government to surrender.

Following the example of the students, workers in both the private and public sectors should go on strike, occupying their workplaces, raising their own demands. In order to spread the movement effectively, they will have to organise and democratically elect their own co-ordinations of struggle. To rely on the trade union bureaucracy would be fatal. The slogan should be with the union leaders whenever possible, with-out and against them if necessary. As we go to press, a huge turn

out is expected on 28 March. Despite the threats to call a general strike by Bernard Thibault, leader of the CGT, and similar calls from Force Ouvrière, the unions for that date only called for an "interprofessional day of action" of public sector workers and limited groups from the private sector.

## GENERAL STRIKE

Revolutionaries, activists from the lycées and colleges, rank and file militants in the unions must do all in their power to make it a general strike. They must launch massive agitation that day for an indefinite general strike and the formation of coordinations or councils of action to direct it. Given the readiness of the CRS to crack the skulls of union militants and students alike, activists should form a mass service d'ordre, sufficiently equipped to repulse the attacks of the state forces.

At the same time the objects of struggle must be broadened to include the whole series of government policies, privatisations, plans to cut back public services,

"reforms" of education and the pensions system. They must all be thrown out. Indeed, so must de Villepin, Sarkozy and Chirac, the whole gang of them.

A major social upheaval has been simmering in France, since the right came to power in 2002. In fact the country saw a series of huge demonstrations against the Front National when Jean Marie Le Pen made it to the second round of the presidential elections, that year. Chirac only won, because of the terrible discredit of the Socialist party, and because the left (mistakenly) called for a vote for him to "stop Le Pen".

In 2003, a wave of mass protests on pensions erupted but the union leaders allowed it to dissipate in single days of action. The referendum on the neoliberal constitution on 29 May last year saw a series of huge "No of the Left" meetings in nearly every town and city of France. Defying both the Gaullists and the Socialists, the workers and youth rejected the constitution. On 6 October, a huge day of action against the government's privati-

sation plans for public services took place. Again there was no follow up from the union leaders.

In November the accumulated frustration and indignation of youth in the banlieux, where there is 40 or 50 per cent unemployment, many of them from the Arab and African communities, led to an uprising, which spread to 250 cities and towns. Three weeks of heavy police repression, and the first state of emergency since the 1950s were required to put them down. Now comes the largest social upheaval since 1995. Now we have another and even bigger mass movement which has the potential to throw back the whole neoliberal offensive.

Turn the present days of action into an all out general strike bolstered by occupations of the universities and schools and the workplaces. These can become fortresses against police repression, forums for mass assemblies to debate and take control of the strike from the bureaucrats and reformist politicians. Form local, regional and national coordinations that are in fact councils



# social explosion

Quite the opposite, they must press ahead with a neoliberal revolution, if they are to catch up with the USA and Britain. Hence the deepening social crisis in France.

The employers dream of a totally flexible workforce, forced to accept whatever working conditions they offer, expendable without restraint by the bosses. Laurence Parisot, recently elected head of the French bosses' association MEDEF, scornfully declared in a recent interview: "Précarité, but existence for all of us is précaire". The youth in the banlieux should offer Parisot a swap: their précarité for his.

Prime minister Dominique de Villepin has declared open war against the Code du Travail (work protection regulations), denouncing it as a "restraint on freedom". How neatly this remark shows that freedom for the bosses means slavery for the workers. If the CPE is applied, it will soon be extended to all workers and, step by step, the already weak regulations protecting workers will give way to freedom for the bosses to sack workers, lower wages, extend working hours and slash pensions. And the unemployed will continue to rot.

By forcing through CPE, Villepin reveals his real nature. He had been posing as a moderate, who cares about social issues, a man in the tradition of one nation Gaullism. This is just his pitch in his rivalry with Nicolas Sarkozy, minister of interior, an outspoken neoliberal and now openly courting racist National Front voters.

In a recent interview with *Paris Match* magazine, he indicated that he was worried that the youth of the banlieux might take to the streets again, encouraged by the mass movement of youth and

workers. Well, he was right on that score. The deeply oppressed Arab and African descendant youth will of course be targeted by the CPE, and have gone on the rampage for several nights in a row, using the only weapon they have to fight off attacks: the riot.

In November, the youth of the suburban ghettos, the banlieux rose up against police racism and brutality, after two young men died trying to escape the police. Sarkozy's previous provocative declarations to "cleanse the neighbourhood with a water cannon" were certainly meant to provoke the youth. But he got more than he bargained for.

A massive revolt against state racism raged for three weeks in 250 cities and towns across France. It only finally burned out because of its isolation, because the major reformist workers' parties (Socialist Party and the Communist Party) refused to actively champion the cause of youth. When the government declared a state of emergency, using again a law of the Algerian colonial war, their protests were entirely verbal. A fraction of Socialist Party mayors and MPs even approved the state's armed repression.

## UNIONS SLOW TO REACT

After the great success of last year's 4 October demonstration against the government's privatisation of public services, unions immediately stopped the mobilisations and did nothing. Their silence, when the youth of the banlieux were on the streets, when the government declared the state of emergency, was deafening.

Even the struggle against the CPE saw the major union federations dragging their heels and looking for compromise. When

the movement started, far from calling for its withdrawal, the unions were simply demanding serious negotiations to modify it. Their strategy has always been to limit workers' protests to isolated one-day strikes, with long intervals between them.

The truth is that they fear the workers' self-organisation and combativity and that of the "unorganised" youth like the plague. They fear it more than the government attacks. Indeed, they would prefer to negotiate with the government without pressure on them from the street. The problem they face is that, without this mass action, the government would not negotiate.

Trade union membership in France has dropped to 10 per cent of the workforce. Yet, when they call workers to action, the results are the most militant mass mobilisations in Europe. This is both the strength and the weakness of the French working class. By their swift actions, they can really scare the bosses and their government. But they have no means of controlling their leaders, and so get repeatedly poor results for all their militancy.

Implicitly, the union leaders are trying to restrain the mass mobilisations and thus, they hope, prepare a "left" victory in 2007 elections, a coalition of PS, PCF and other forces. The problem for them is that, whenever they demobilise a mass workers' movement, the government, far from showing its gratitude and throwing them a few concessions, resumes its attacks. Workers' and youth indignation mounts and the union leaders eventually have to take to the streets again. This time, the youth, as on several occasions in the past, have led the way.

As a result of the huge com-

binated turnout of workers and youth on 18 March, the union federations, meeting with the organisations of the students and the lycéens, have decided to call "a day of action with work stoppages, strikes and demonstrations." They also promised not to negotiate unless the government agreed to first suspend the CPE.

Yet within days they agreed to meet Villepin on Friday 24 March. Only Villepin's intransigence forced them to come out, empty-handed. But workers and youth will have to watch these time-servers like hawks over the coming weeks.

The CGT, Force Ouvrière and SUD – the more militant unions – are certainly willing to use limited one-day mass mobilisation and strikes to weaken and even topple Villepin, albeit strictly within the perspective of winning a future election. But it is a dangerous game playing with on-and-off mass mobilisations, hoping to discredit the right and achieve a "left" victory at the ballot box.

To repeatedly pull your punches in a serious fight with the bosses and the state, to frightening them but not overthrow them, combined with demobilising the working class could in fact lead to a major defeat. Then you could well get Sarkozy in 2007, armed with a mandate and the social forces to really do a Thatcher.

Alternatively, if the workers join the students and the youth in action, they could force the government to withdraw the contracts. That would open up another round of struggle, once the bosses had recovered from their humiliation. But it would be round two, with the workers and youth having gained valuable experience – and a much needed sweet taste of victory after several years of unnecessary defeats.

# answer to the crisis



of action of the all out general strike. Form a mass workers' and students' militia, able to put the CRS to flight.

Nor is this struggle one with relevance only to French workers and youth. In Italy last autumn, there were mass demonstrations of youth and workers against Berlusconi's neoliberal reforms.

In Germany, the public sector workers are engaged in a bitter struggle with the social democratic-conservative regime of Andrea Merkel, trying hard to be the German Thatcher. Greece has just witnessed a militant maritime strike and a huge one-day general strike.

Even in "peaceful" Britain, one and a half million workers will

take strike action on 28 March, the same day as the French workers. This widespread coincidence of struggles needs to be turned into concrete international solidarity. Militants – especially those planning the meeting of the European Social Forum in Athens – should call for Europe wide actions in solidarity with the

French workers. The ESF itself must thrash out a programme of action for fighting the bosses' offensive on a continental scale.

In France, as the struggle draws in all sections of the working class and the unemployed, its goals must broaden. Away with all the neoliberal reforms and privatisations. For the right to work at trade union rates and with full employment rights for all the unemployed. For a huge programme of socially useful work, building social housing, schools, hospitals in the deprived areas.

Who will pay? Make the rich pay! And as for Villepin, Chirac and Sarkozy away with the lot of them. Who should then take over? A workers and working farmers' government, based on the councils of action and a workers militia. But isn't that the revolution? Exactly!

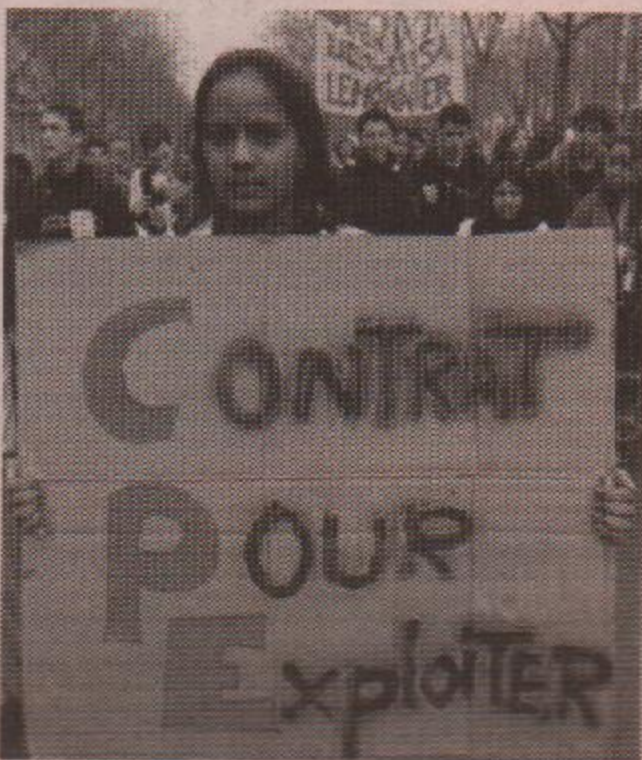
To prepare the way for such a strategy today, a revolutionary party, armed with a revolutionary action programme, is urgently needed. That is what the militants of the League for the Fifth International are fighting for today, in France and across Europe.

## LCR: aiming for a partial victory?

No wonder right wing papers have again talked of France being in a pre-revolutionary situation. They know that "behind every strike lurks the Hydra of revolution". Indeed the only real obstacle to this full development is the utterly non-, indeed anti-revolutionary character of the leadership of the workers' movement and the obstacles this repeatedly places in the way of the masses.

In the case of the unions, the CFDT is pretty open in its desire to slow down and sabotage the movement, but even the CGT is citing the difficulty of mobilising, because of ongoing workplace elections and its own conference at the end of April. Such bureaucratic cretinism will cost the CGT members dear, if it allows Villepin to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, the far left organisation best rooted in the



movement, correctly calls for broadening the action: "Transform the 28 March into a total cross sectoral strike, paralysing the country, which will oblige the government to give in, if this has not already happened by then. The uprising of youth against précarité has opened a social crisis, which obliges the trade union and political forces of the left together to support the slogan for the withdrawal of the CPE."

*Rouge*, the weekly paper of the Ligue, stigmatised the insufficiency of the union leaders' "interprofessional" strike on 28 March and called for it to become a real one-day general strike. But the LCR does not clearly call for an all out general strike or for the driving out of the government and the president, not just the resignation of Villepin. After all, Sarkozy could then replace Villepin. Some victory that!

This too can be seen in the whole drift of *Rouge's* strategy, tailing the spontaneous militancy, but giving no perspective beyond scrapping the CPE and getting rid of the prime minister as a bonus. Beyond this, for all their scorn at the SP and CP's "wait till 2007", the ballot box too is the only way mentioned to get rid of the right.

And what should replace them? The LCR is right, it should not be a coalition of the SP-CP and various bourgeois "republican" mini-parties. But what the LCR is yearning for is a "unity of the left" between itself, the PCF and the left wing of the SP. In short, the LCR's view of the present struggle is that it should basically win a "partial" victory over the CPE.

"We have proclaimed it for many months: we must win without waiting for 2007. We want a social and political victory now. To restore confidence to everyone who is fighting back. To

allow all those who suffered defeat in 2003 to raise their heads. So that a new generation begins its political and social life with a victory. Because an anticapitalist alternative cannot be built without struggle, without a victory – even a partial one – by the labour movement and youth. The right has understood this well enough: if it is defeated today on the streets, it will be tomorrow at the ballot box. Victory is possible. Now it is a question of not letting it slip away, of maintaining the pressure. Whether the Prime Minister gives in or resigns." (*Rouge* no 2,151)

In fact, LCR leaders should know that you cannot set out to win a partial victory. Partial victories may be won as a result of an unfavourable balance of forces between workers and the bourgeoisie and its state. More likely, they can be "partial" as a result of the selling out or selling short of the struggle. The duty of

**The rushing torrent of mass struggle, dammed and canalised into turning the little water mill of bourgeois elections! What a bankrupt approach for revolutionaries to take**

genuine revolutionaries, in a developing major social crisis, is to frankly and openly fight for the perspective of social revolution.

Daniel Bensaid, the principle theoretician of the LCR in an interview with *Socialist Worker*, correctly warned of the danger of: "letting the movement degenerate" and condemned the "bureaucratic stalling" that led to the defeat of the 2003 movement against pension reform. But he went on to see the political solution solely in terms of the election in 2007: "The crucial question remains continued identification with the themes of the campaign for a left "no" in the referendum on the European Union constitution, and that of a future governmental alliance."

He condemns a "scenario à la Romano Prodi" (in Italy, where sections of the left have formed an electoral alliance with mainstream social democracy). Obviously, he means a CP-SP coalition. But his alternative is an anti-neoliberal coalition of the PCF and the LCR.

Alas, this is not a revolutionary perspective but a typical centrist mish-mash of reformist strategy and revolutionary tactics. Militant class struggle, up to and including a general strike, combined with limiting its goals to the repeal of the CPE. A self-admittedly partial victory – in order to raise the confidence of the youth and the masses and prepare the way for a high score for the left in the elections. The rushing torrent of mass struggle, dammed and canalised into turning the little water mill of bourgeois elections!

What a bankrupt approach for revolutionaries to take. Genuine revolutionaries relate their tactics and strategy to the full potential of the present struggle.



# Come to the Athens ESF

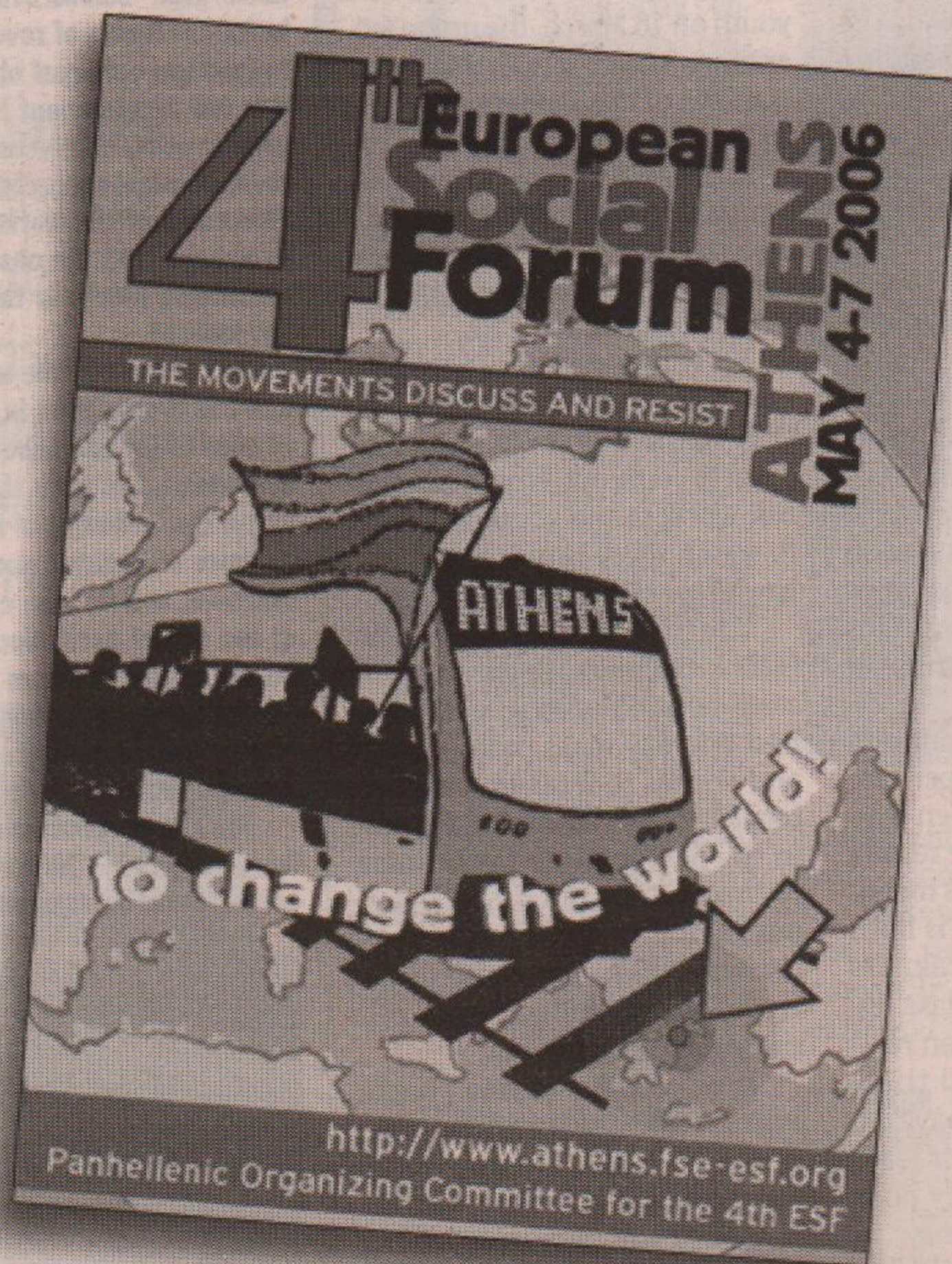
Dave Stockton looks at some of the issues that will be debated at the European Social Forum in May

**F**rom May 4 to May 7 the European Social Forum will meet in Athens. The Greek organisers expect around 50,000 to attend.

In Florence (2002), Paris (2003) and unfortunately to a much lesser degree in London (2004), the ESF showed the potential which exists for mobilising an international movement of resistance to both corporate globalisation and to the "new" imperialism of George Bush and Tony Blair. London was certainly a big missed opportunity, thanks to the sectarianism and bureaucratic bungling of the combined forces of the Socialist Workers Party and the London Mayoral team. It passed with little lasting impact in Britain, not least since the SWP sees the ESF as little more than a glorified anti-war movement and a loudspeaker for its shallow populist Respect project. Indeed, since then, the SWP has shown virtually no interest in the ESF.

Respect and its supposed breakthrough in the council elections is totally absorbing the SWP's attention. This is an example of their "Fog in Channel: continent cut off" approach to internationalism. This at a time when France is rocked by mass workers' struggles totally linked to the fight-back against the European Union's neoliberal offensive.

Within the ESF, the anarchist and libertarian forces too have departed to their hole in the corner miniature utopias where they can obsess about horizontal, anti-hierarchical structures to their hearts' content. On the other hand the forces of the trade unions and



the disguised European Left Party, have decided to use the ESF as a neo-reformist think tank.

For those who do not want to stay horizontal but get up and fight this sys-

tem, Athens presents yet another opportunity to do so.

A key task at the Athens Social Forum is to put the anticapitalism back into the European Social Forum and

to launch a coordinated European fight-back. Existing struggles, most notably in France, make it clear that the forces exist in more than sufficient numbers for this. The challenge is to unite these struggles consciously and in an organised fashion.

The sole decision-making body that exists within the ESF is the Assembly of Social Movements, the body that launched the multi-million protest of February 15 2003. The Assembly must radically reform its procedures so that it can debate and adopt a programmatic declaration, a veritable plan of action, which sets out to:

- Co-ordinate the pan European fight against the neoliberal Lisbon agenda and all the neoliberal attacks on social rights
- Resist the latest phase of the imperialist "war on terror", opposing occupation in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan and the threatened attacks on Iran and actively solidarising with the resistance to imperialist attack;
- Fight the attacks on democratic rights: the right of nations like the Basques and the Kurds, to self determination, defend asylum seekers and immigrants, defend the rights of women, youth, gays, all of which are under attack.

At the same time anticapitalist and revolutionary forces at the ESF must coordinate their forces to combat the attempt by the European Left Party to put the ESF on a reformist and class collaborationist programme.

The Italian party Rifondazione Comunista, the new Linkspartei in Ger-

many, the Greek 'post-Stalinist' reformist party Synaspismos, the French Communist Party, are seeking to dominate the ESF with their programmes. The Italian initiated Charter for Another Europe and the French initiated Petition are rival versions of this. Their strategy for implementing them is getting into government in coalition with supposedly "anti-neoliberal" bourgeois and social democratic parties.

Rifondazione hopes to get into government just before the ESF, through an new version of the Olive Tree Coalition of the 1990s. The French PCF is hoping to do the same in 2007. This rebranding of the old Stalinist idea of the popular front (with "anti-neoliberal" replacing "antifascist") would be a disaster for the anticapitalist movement.

In power they will, like the PDS component of the Linkspartei in Berlin today, carry out neoliberal cuts as the "lesser evil" to the right and obstruct and sabotage any effective fightback. Ask yourself, why do the most effective mass fightbacks come under right wing governments? Because then the sabotage and obstruction from the reformist parties and union bureaucrats is less because they are not protecting "their" governments.

In Europe the bourgeoisie simply has to "Americanise" its relations with the working class (reduce real wages, increase working hours, outsource to cheap labour zones, smash up the welfare state, privatise health-care and education) in order to compete.

The near stagnant character of the biggest European economies, even during a "boom", means that no serious or long lasting ruling class concessions can be made to the working class. This does not preclude short-term climb downs to demobilise a threat to their power if workers take to the streets in their millions. This means that the next few years will see a growing number of intense class struggles across the continent.

Globalisation makes the development of a new international political movement, new combat parties, essential. Any retreat to national isolation would lead to certain defeat. What is needed is a revolutionary Fifth International, which embodies the lessons and best revolutionary traditions of the preceding four working class Internationals.

The ESF is a forum where anticapitalist forces can be rallied to this task and organised to fight for it, providing a serious and honest debate is launched over programme, providing coordinated action accompanies this every step of the way, and, most importantly, providing revolutionary forces cooperate to drive this process forward.

That is why the League for a Fifth International will be advancing a revolutionary action programme for a Socialist United States of Europe in Athens and at the World Social Forum, due to be held in Nairobi in Kenya in 2007.

To trade unionists and youth in Britain we say - join us and come to the Athens ESF. There you will meet activists form the key struggles in Europe - east and west - from the Middle East and beyond. It is an invaluable school for internationalists and it can become the crucible in which something even more significant is formed - a new International to make capitalism history.

• For the Fifth International declaration to the ESF go to:  
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=14,383,0,0,1,01>

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

## Germany: public sector strike at a turning point

**W**hile millions take the streets in France, the longest public sector strike in Germany's post war history is at a turning point.

After seven weeks of the strike, public sector trade union ver.di is feeling the pressure of public sector employers. In some areas it has already conceded its original goal - the defence of the existing working hours - and has agreed to new contracts. These new contracts raise the working week from 38.5 hours to 40 hours for different sections of the workforce.

The strike, which started with tremendous support amongst the workforce and built up widespread sympathy and even solidarity actions from other parts of the working class, is now at the brink of defeat because of the tactics of the union leadership.

The struggle was a political attack from the very beginning. Against this political offensive, the ver.di leadership tried to insist that the strike was just an economic struggle. It did not counter the attack on the political level, via its strike agitation and, most importantly, via generalising the strike in an all out, indefinite public sector strike to repel the bosses attack.

Instead, the union leadership hoped that by taking a softer approach it would bring the SPD-led public sector employers closer and put more pressure on the "intransigent" CDU ones.

In response to lies and pressure from the press the union leadership caved in and called off strikes in different sectors so as "not to affect the public".

Instead they claim that their actions will now hit the state "more directly" with fewer workers. In reality it is a

political retreat, which may well be the start of a sell-out and a further, drastic weakening of the union.

For trade union leaders, in the end, the most important thing is to get some kind of deal even if this would mean further substantial concessions in working hours.

Only a massive push from below, from the rank and file workers and shop stewards can turn things round.

Only via an all out public strike can the attack be stopped and the 38.5-hour week defended.

To do this strike committees have to be elected in the workplace and coordinated in order to take control of the strike.

As the attack on ver.di is now clearly a political one aimed at inflicting a decisive, if not strategic defeat on and the trade union movement as a whole, active support and solidarity strikes by all the unions and the whole working class are necessary.

This crucial situation clearly shows the need for a national rank and file movement, an organised, class struggle alternative to the rotten and self-defeating politics of the trade union bureaucracy.

Whatever the final outcome of the strike and whether or not the rank and file will be able to prevent a sell-out, it is clear that the attack on public sector workers is only one major part of a general onslaught on the German working class as a whole.

And it is also clear, that the questions of the trade union and political leadership of the class will be crucial, if this ongoing class wide attack is to be beaten.

## Spain: ETA declares a permanent ceasefire

**O**n 23 March ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom), the Basque separatist group, announced a "permanent ceasefire", and called for a peaceful solution to the struggle for Basque independence.

The recent declaration comes after a 14-month ceasefire broke down in 1999, followed by five years of heavy repression of Basque nationalism by the Madrid government.

When the right-wing Popular Party was elected in 2000 Prime Minister Jose Aznar stepped up repression against ETA and its political wing Herri Batasuna (HB). Aznar used 9-11 to bring the Spanish state's long war against ETA under the rubric of George Bush's "war against terrorism". Batasuna was proscribed by the Supreme Court in 2003.

Since then the state has banned legal political and cultural organisations, closed newspapers and media outlets, disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of voters, and used so-called "preventative detentions."

That the Basques are a nation is abundantly clear. Yet all the evidence suggests that, if the people of the Basque Country were allowed a free vote, for or against independence, a clear majority would oppose separation. The parties in favour of separation have even less support in the province of Navarra and among the Basque provinces in France.

While we do not advocate or fight for independence of the Basque country, however, we are not indifferent to the many aspects of national oppression to which the Basques are subjected, first and foremost the denial of



# Greek workers on strike - again

By Keith Harvey

Greece may have won the European Nations championship for the first time only in 2004 but its workers have consistently been Europe's top performers when it comes to taking strike action to defend their jobs, pay and pensions.

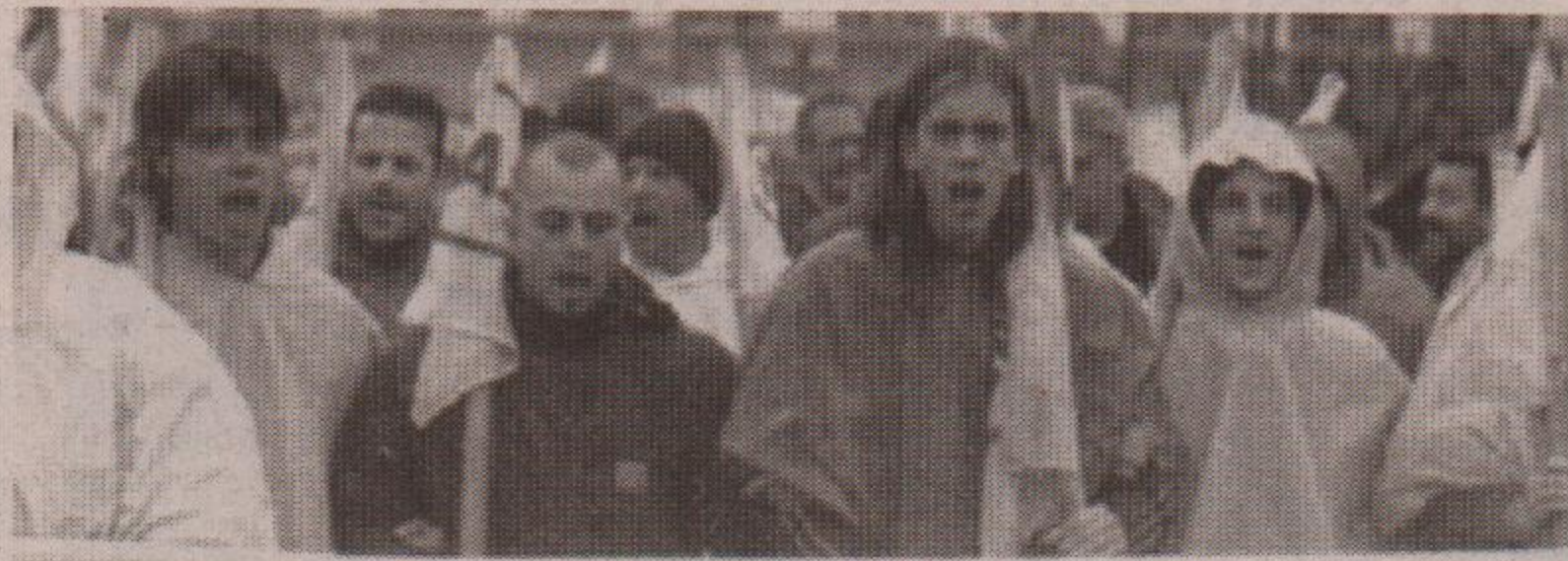
On 15 March this year, a 24-hour general strike ensured that public transport was paralysed. Government offices, banks, hospitals and schools were also affected, as were flights on state-run Olympic Airlines.

This was the latest of several general strikes against the right-wing New Democracy government.

New Democracy came to power after elections in March 2004 ending more than two decades of nearly uninterrupted rule by the populist and reformist Pasok, thrown out of office because of its record of attacks on workers and youth.

But, once the celebrations of 2004 were out of the way Greece's rulers and bosses woke up with a hangover.

Prime minister Costas Karamanlis - with a comfortable majority in parliament - set about addressing the crisis of state finances caused by the Olympics - the final bill came in at twice the budgeted £4.4bn.



## 1300 €

Greek workers demanding a minimum monthly salary of 1,300 euros

A two-year neo-liberal programme agreed with the European Commission agreed to cut Greece's budget deficit of more than 6 per cent of GDP to 2.8 per cent by 2006. But while growth is still above the EU average it is not strong enough to get the budget deficit down to within EU limits, especially with the scheduled cut in EU aid.

So Karamanlis has resorted to privatisation of state assets and an attack on public sector pensions and jobs. Since the beginning of 2005, the government has passed legislation abolishing job security for telecommunication

workers, increasing shop opening hours, reducing overtime pay. They have made jobs more flexible, and attacked the pensions of bank workers. They also increased VAT taxes by 1 per cent.

The Pasok controlled public sector trade union federation - GSEE - organised a series of protest 24-hour general strikes. But these were poorly organised and sprung on workers at the last minute.

In addition, the large and influential Communist Party (KKE), often adopts splitting tactics. The KKE regularly calls its own union demonstra-

## Greek strikes

**March 2005** - bank employees, railway staff and postal workers were among those part in one day strike.

**June 2005** - public sector strike against cuts in pensions and short-term civil service contracts.

**December 2005** - 48 hour general strike against attacks with thousands attending union rallies.

**15 March 2006** - General strike paralyses transport system

tions and strikes in an attempt to split the GSEE, which is dominated by Pasok, and to create another union federation that it would control.

To date, the government has shrugged of these protests, which have proving more inconvenient than seriously threatening.

But Karamanlis' programme is clear. He wants to privatise all the public companies left: the railways, the post office, the electricity company, and to subsidise private education and health. He aims to undermine public sector trade unions by ending security of employ-

ment. Newly employed public sector workers will have no job security and the government will fire them whenever they want. Their contracts will be short-term and no different from those in the private sector. This is a massive attack against the best organised section of the working class.

Resisting it will need more than ritualised 24-hour protest strikes. Only an indefinite general strike, at least of the public sector workers, will force Karamanlis to abort his programme. But this will only come about if the many sectoral strikes are linked up consciously by the rank and file to turn them into a co-ordinated mass strike movement, controlled by the rank and file.

Such a movement must demand no privatisation, the abolition of legislation already passed eroding security of employment, a programme of public works to employ the jobless on necessary projects for society and a big rise in pay and benefits to compensate for the consumer tax and price rises of the last few years.

To pay for all this the workers' movement must demand a huge wealth tax be levied against the bosses - especially the banks and construction and shipping magnates who have prospered so much under Pasok and New Democracy governments.

# Israeli elections: no support for Labour

By Marcus Chamoun

Labour is talking about fighting poverty and appealing to the poorer sections of society. But it is still welding the working class to the bosses to oppress the Palestinians.

The Israeli general elections on 28 March promise to be a new landmark in Israeli politics, both in the development of the Zionist state's strategy towards the Palestinians, and in its ability to placate its own working class and maintain its loyalty in the war against them.

For the first time in decades, the two juggernauts of Israeli electoral politics, Labour and Likud, will not be fighting for the loyalty of the smaller parties in order to build a coalition. Sharon's new party, Kadima, has reduced Likud to a rightwing rump, and seems likely to be the leading party in any new coalition government

despite its failure to build a mass membership.

Its programme is to "disengage" from Palestinian territory through the methods that Sharon used in Gaza, combined with some concessions to the Jewish settlers and a fig-leaf of participation in the US "Road Map to peace". On domestic issues, it has almost nothing to say, other than to state its support for "free markets with adequate welfare support", electoral reform and measures to reduce the influence of the Orthodox Jewish religious groups

In the meantime, Likud under its new leader Binyamin Netanyahu, condemns itself to an electoral ghetto by opposing any further territorial "disengagement" and promoting an openly neoliberal economic programme that will lead many to recall the austerity measures that Netanyahu imposed during his last term as prime minister.

But the most notable development

has been in the Labour party, led since November by the Moroccan-born Amir Peretz, previously the head of the Histadrut, (Israel's "trade union" federation and one of the country's biggest employers).

It is remarkable both because this is the first time that a Mizrahi (non-European) Jew has led what is regarded by most Israelis as the party of the middle-class Ashkenazi (European Jewish) establishment, and because of his rhetoric of placing welfare, unemployment and health at the top of the political agenda, in a country where national security has been the main issue in every election since its creation in 1948. He has compared himself to the Brazilian president, Lula, and has promised to eradicate child poverty "within two years of taking office".

It would be wrong to conclude from this that the Israeli Labour party has become a "normal" reformist workers'

party like the British Labour party or the German SPD. The history of its formation shows that, unlike these parties, it did not come into existence as an expression, however imperfect, of the desire of organised workers to have their own party counter-posed to those of the bosses.

Its vital role in the creation of the Zionist state, and its continuing position as the favoured home of Israel's privileged layers, mean that it cannot simply be equated with the reformist socialist parties in Europe, however pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist they are.

But it can act as a safety valve for working class discontent in Israel. The Palestinian uprising, ineffective as it may have been in military terms against the most heavily armed state in the region, has hit Israel's economy badly, devastating its tourist trade and adding to the problems in the country's biggest export earners.

And, while last year has seen the highest economic growth rates for a long time, this has simply widened the gap between rich and poor, the increased visibility of which threatens to undermine the alliance between classes that is the foundation of the Zionist project. The hardest hit of all have been the lower sectors of the working class, predominantly Palestinian-Israelis (about one-fifth of the population), and "Oriental" Jews from North Africa and the Arab countries.

Peretz has turned for support towards the "Orientals" hit by the economy and facing racism from the European Jews.

Despite their common experience of racism and economic deprivation, however, the "Oriental" Jews have not made common cause with the nationally-oppressed Palestinians, and are often more hard-line on "security" issues than their more privileged European counterparts. Also there is little indication that Peretz in office would be more "dovish" towards the Palestinians than the other parties.

With the Palestinian uprising seemingly defeated, at least for the time being, and the "peace process" officially on hold following the Palestinians' election of a Hamas-led government, a breathing-space has opened up in which the social and economic discontent of Jewish-Israeli workers can be expressed, without the threat of an immediate breach opening up in the bloc between Jewish workers and Jewish bosses that confronts the Palestinians as an oppressor nation.

For revolutionary socialists, however, the opening of that breach should be the main objective of any movement for change on the Israeli side of the Green Line. The wellbeing and security of the Jewish workers as well as the social and national liberation of the Palestinians will be enormously aided by such a class alliance. Their common objective should be a single, secular, worker's state.

For this reason, we must oppose every tendency to regard Peretz as a "lesser evil" to Sharon, Olmert or Netanyahu.



On 1 March, George Bush visited India and offered the country access to US nuclear technology, to share information on terrorism and to co-operate militarily. India already has nuclear weapons, and borders two countries that US strategists consider present or future rivals to its global power. This is what the Pentagon calls its "long war by proxy"



# Cuba: island of revolution

Part II: Dictatorship and National Revolution - *Stuart King* continues his review of *Cuba: a New History* by Richard Gott. (Part I appeared in the January issue of Workers Power).

By the 1920's Cuba had become a virtual political and economic colony of the USA. The Platt Amendment in its constitution allowed for US military intervention when "stability" was threatened, and sugar mills, landed estates, public utilities and many other enterprises were in the hands of US business.

One corrupt regime followed another as the economy, heavily dependent on the world price of sugar, staggered from crisis to crisis, with huge loans being taken out from US banks and government to keep Cuba's administration afloat and line the politicians' own pockets.

Gerardo Machado, elected as Liberal president in 1924, rapidly turned the country into an authoritarian dictatorship. A revolution in 1933, in many ways a rehearsal for Castro's revolution of 1959, was to bring onto the Cuban scene many of the forces and parties that would determine Cuba's future.

The basis for the revolution was a deep economic crisis in the country. The world slump had slashed the value of Cuba's sugar production - from being worth \$200 million in 1929 it had crashed to \$40 million in 1932. In the summer of 1933, a transport strike turned into a general strike - Machado receiving no support from the US embassy, fled the country. An interim president effectively appointed by the US ambassador inherited a revolutionary situation.

A delegation from the US Foreign Policy Association sent to examine the situation reported, "Within less than a month the number of mills under labour control was estimated at thirty six. Soviets were reported to have been organised at Mabay, Jaronu, Senado, Santa Lucia and other centrals. At various points mill managers were held prisoner by the workers. Labour guards were formed, armed with clubs, sticks and a few revolvers, a red armband serving as uniform. Workers fraternised with the soldiers and police." (Gott p136)

It was not long before the army joined the revolt. A rebellion led by sergeants broke out at the military headquarters - their leader was Fulgencio Batista, a mulatto (mixed race) sergeant from Oriente. The soldiers were quickly joined by the Student Directorate and a provisional revolutionary government proclaimed.

A leftist professor, Ramon Grau San Martin, was declared president as the head of a leftist coalition government. But as, Gott points out, even while the student revolutionaries stood before cheering crowds on the national palace balcony, Batista had slipped away to a meeting with the US Ambassador!

Grau's government lasted just four months. It had refused to service the debt on American loans made to Machado; it had nationalised two important US owned sugar mills and had ordered the seizure of the US owned Cuban Electric company. The US government naturally refused it recognition, and Batista, now fully in charge of the army, quickly moved against it - putting in a new President and forcing Grau into exile. A second general strike in 1935 against the new regime was brutally crushed. Batista, who organised the crackdown, was to dominate Cuban politics for the next 25 years - sometimes from behind the scenes, sometimes as president.

### Democracy to dictatorship

In the USA, Franklin Roosevelt was President after 1932 and progressive governments were tolerated in Cuba providing they did not threaten the USA's vital interests. Having defeated the revolutionary movement, Batista was elected president under a new and progressive constitution in 1940 and he was followed in 1944 by Grau, returned from exile, leading the Autentico party.

World war benefited the Cuban economy as it did the rest of Latin America as sugar production in Asia and Europe collapsed, Cuban sugar production expanded and fetched high prices. The "golden age" of progressive Cuban governments, however, did not last long. With the onset of the cold war in 1947, Grau moved rapidly to the right, mirroring events in the USA.

The Communist Party was repressed and the union movement purged of communists. Grau's right turn led to a split, with Eduardo Chibas leading an Orthodox party against him. It was this party, with its claims to represent a link to the radical nationalism of Jose Marti, that Fidel Castro was to join and remain part of until 1956.

By 1952, Batista was back in power, again as a result of a military coup. Much of the 1940 constitution was suspended and Batista presided over a typ-

ical Latin American dictatorship, completely corrupt and propped up by US arms and money. Opposition parties and cliques vied with each other to launch armed actions against the regime - Ortodoxos, the faction ridden student movement, even the Autenticos, all attempted to bring Batista down.

On 26 July 1953, a hundred armed guerrillas led by Fidel Castro, most from the youth of the Ortodoxo party, launched an attack on the Moncada barracks. The attack was beaten off with several dead on both sides. Fidel and his younger brother Raul were lucky; they were caught later and taken to police stations, whereas the 70 insurgents seized and taken to Moncada were summarily executed on the orders of Batista.

Fidel and Raul Castro were sentenced to 15 and 13 years in prison. Fidel's later "write up" of his speech in court, published as the pamphlet "History will absolve me" was pure Ortodoxo nationalism. It called for the re-instatement of the 1940 constitution, land reform, profit-sharing for workers in the sugar industry, and large mining and industrial enterprises, and an end to corruption and expropriation of property and land obtained by fraud. But Castro was also a revolutionary nationalist, he realised these reforms could only be achieved by taking up arms against the dictatorship and if necessary its Washington backers. It was this that led to him falling out with the leaders of the Ortodoxo party in 1956.

### The Communist Party

The Communist Party (in 1944 renamed the Popular Socialist Party - PSP) was founded in 1925 at the same time as the Cuban workers' federation (CNOC). The party had an inauspicious start by trying to do a deal with Machado and called off the general strike in August 1933, just days before the president fled; the workers ignored the party's call and the CP had to later acknowledge its "error".

The CP obeyed every twist and turn demanded by Moscow. By the late 1930s, following the popular front strategy of the Stalin-led Comintern, they were seeking a political alliance with Batista. The Comintern declared in 1938 "The people who are working for the overthrow of Batista are no longer acting in the interests of the Cuban people." By 1940 the CP was supporting Batista for the presidency and two CP members joined his cabinet.

This did not stop the PSP suffering repression during the 1950s under Batista's dictatorship, although they kept their organisation intact and dominated the trade union organisations. Unlike the revolutionary nationalists, the PSP argued that only peaceful and democratic methods should be used in "the struggle for democracy". They denounced Castro's attack on the Moncada barracks as "adventurist" and "putschist", but this did not save them from being outlawed by Batista immediately after the event and having their papers suppressed.

### The guerrilla struggle

The Castro brothers were released in an amnesty after only two years in gaol and soon moved to Mexico to gather forces for another attempt to overthrow Batista under the banner of the July 26th Movement (J26M). There they were joined by the Argentinian Che Guevara, a revolutionary much more sympathetic to Marxism and who had experienced first hand a CIA backed invasion of Guatemala in

order to overthrow the reforming Arbenz government in 1954.

Having obtained funds from his Ortodoxo contacts and a boat, the Granma, Castro and 82 guerrillas set off for Cuba in November 1956. It proved a disastrous adventure. By the time the Granma touched land, the planned diversionary rising in Santiago had been crushed. The guerrillas were ambushed and the remaining handful had to flee into the mountains of the Sierra Maestra.

Nevertheless, over the next two years, the guerrilla forces survived and strengthened, drawing support from the rural workers and peasants, and the growing unpopularity and disintegration of the Batista regime. Even the US realised that Batista's days might be numbered. Lines of communication were kept open with the J26M - Frank Pais, leader of the movement in the cities, held regular meetings with the US consulate in Santiago when he wasn't gun running to the mountains. As Castro's position strengthened leading figures from the Ortodoxo party agreed a common alliance. Gott even quotes one CIA desk officer saying that during this period "my staff and I were all fidelistas" (p160)

Batista launched an all out offensive against the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra in 1958; it turned out to be a fatal mistake. Despite outnumbering the guerrillas, the dictator's troops suffered heavy casualties in the mountain terrain - a thousand were killed or injured, 500 were captured or surrendered, their arms strengthening the guerrilla forces now numbering several thousand in total. Batista's forces were now on the defensive, different guerrilla columns led by Guevara, Camillo Cienfuegos and Castro himself closed in on Havana and other major cities at Christmas 1958.

On New Year's day 1959 Batista fled with his close entourage in a private plane. An attempt to put in place a transitional regime was broken by a general strike which paralysed the city for five days until Guevara and Cienfuegos' columns marched in, followed days later by Castro.

That Batista's government could be overthrown relatively easily by a guerrilla force was a testimony to the fact that the armed forces and bureaucracy were in an advanced state of disintegration by 1959 and the US government had effectively withdrawn its backing. The state was not smashed so

much as it fell rotten ripe into the hands of the 26 July movement.

### Wrong conclusions

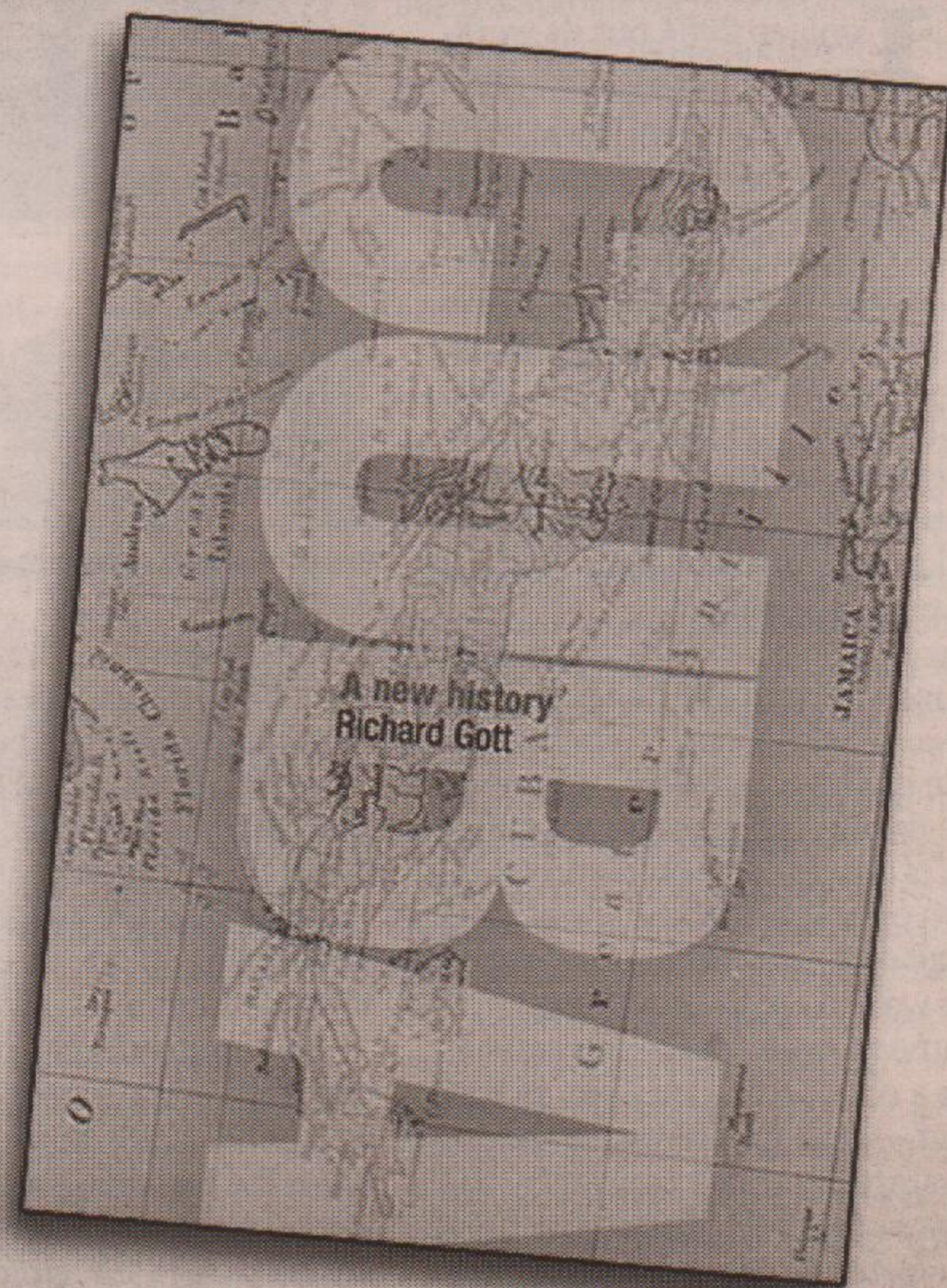
The 1959 revolution had an enormous impact on Latin America and the world. Here was a hated dictatorship, that had been backed to the hilt by the USA which had been overthrown in a revolutionary fashion and in a country right in Washington's backyard, dominated by its businesses.

Coming only 10 years after the Chinese revolution where a guerrilla, largely peasant army, under the leadership of the CCP had "surrounded the cities", many political parallels were drawn and new theories of "peasant revolution" spun. Guevara was to contribute to this, developing the lessons of the successful Cuban revolution into a theory of the "guerrilla foco" which was to have disastrous effects for revolutionary strategy in Latin America and led to his own death in Bolivia in 1967.

It has also led to the tendency to write the working class out of the history of the Cuban revolution. The International Socialist Tendency (IST - SWP in Britain) do just this. Reacting to theories of peasant revolution. Tony Cliff developed the "theory" of deflected permanent revolution in the early 1960s, using the revolutions in China and Cuba to prove his point. The working classes in these countries he argued were weak and often "non revolutionary". In their absence, the place of the working class which in Trotsky's theory would come to the head of the struggle of all classes, was filled by revolutionary intellectuals leading the peasantry.

Mike Gonzales, in his recent book *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution*, for example, does not even mention the Havana general strike and generally in his writing plays down the role of working class struggle in Cuba - because it does not fit the schema of "deflected permanent revolution". Gott, too, tends to downplay the role of the working class in 1959, fascinated as he is with the Castroite movement. Yet in the revolution of 1959 (and of 1933) the working class in the cities did have an important role in the struggle against dictatorship. The problem was their leadership, with the CP/PSP placing a reformist and democratic noose around their heads.

• For part one see: <[www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=117,939,0,0,1,0](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=117,939,0,0,1,0)>



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# Ireland: 1916 Easter Rising

Ninety years ago, the Irish Easter Rising was launched. While the reformist leaders around the world condemned it, VI Lenin and Leon Trotsky saluted the doomed insurrection. *Mark Hoskisson* remembers the lessons

**O**n Easter Monday 1916, the combined forces of the Irish Citizens Army, led by revolutionary socialist James Connolly, and the nationalist Irish Volunteers went to war with the British state in Dublin. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, a forerunner of the IRA, led the most radical wing of the Volunteers. Padraig Pearse was its commander.

Connolly and Pearse led their columns up O'Connell Street in central Dublin and gave the order to seize the General Post Office and several other strategic buildings. The rising had begun.

After a week of fighting, Dublin had become a war-torn city and, under the relentless barrage of British cannon, the rebels were forced to give themselves up.

A mere twelve days later, the British state executed 16 of the most prominent insurgents. Over 3,000 participants or known sympathisers of the rising were imprisoned. Martial law was declared and promoting republican views became a crime.

Connolly himself was injured in the fighting, but the British took him out to the prison yard at Kilmainham Jail on a stretcher, levered him into a chair, strapped him down and shot him.

Britain believed it could get away with this butchery because, to a large extent, the rebels' action did not have mass support. But things did not turn out quite as Downing Street expected. Britain's reign of terror in Ireland ignited mass resentment and the rebels – isolated when they launched their battle – came to be regarded as the first true heroes of the mass uprising that followed.

The respectable Home Rule party was totally eclipsed and the radical republicans of Sinn Fein swept the board in elections in 1918. The Sinn Fein deputies declared an independent Irish republic and the war with Britain commenced.

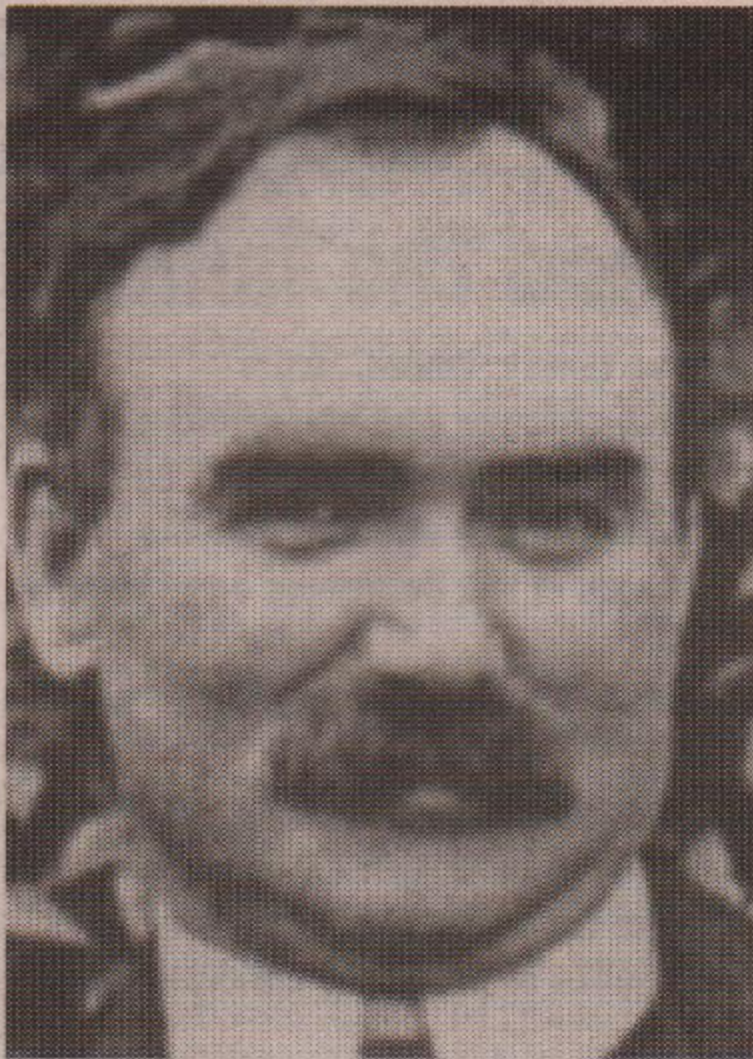
The Easter Rising became the first act in the Irish revolution. But the nationalists, not by the socialists, led the revolution, despite Connolly's role in the rising. They were based in, and representative of, Ireland's middle classes. And their struggle was – as it remains today – one limited to the goal of political independence, not economic or social justice for the working class.

To take steps towards that goal, the republicans thought compromises acceptable, even those with terrible consequences for the masses. And so in 1921, the nationalists of Sinn Fein, though not without division and a brief but bitter civil war, were party to the most criminal compromise with British imperialism – the partition of Ireland.

This created the Northern Irish sectarian statelet, with a Protestant majority loyal to the British crown, on the one hand; and an independent capitalist republic in the South, on the other. This situation resulted, as James Connolly himself had prophesied, in "a carnival of reaction, North and South".

Many politicians insisted this was the product of the rising itself. The Labour Party in Britain, along with the trade union leaders, condemned Connolly and Pearse as traitors. The pacifists of the Independent Labour Party said the rising was an act of violence on a par with the imperialist slaughter of world war one.

In short, these cowards and servants of the British ruling class denounced Connolly for daring to rise up against a foreign oppressor power. Genuine



James Connolly

socialists and democrats on the other hand saluted his willingness to fight. As the Russian revolutionary VI Lenin said, his struggle was of enormous value to the working class because:

"...only in premature, partial, scattered and therefore unsuccessful revolutionary movements do the masses gain experience, acquire knowledge, gather strength, get to know their real leaders, the socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught".

Connolly's mistake was not that he fought but rather that he adopted strategy and tactics, which were inconsistent for a socialist revolutionary, and which created conditions in which the nationalist middle class would triumph, instead of the working class.

## Connolly's programme

When James Connolly returned to Ireland from the USA in 1910, Britain looked as though it was about to give Home Rule to the Irish ruling class: limited self-government for Dublin but not independence and sovereignty. He set about building unions and a Labour Party, as a means of defending the working class in such an Irish state.

As an organiser for the Irish TGWU, he played a leading role in the Dublin general strike of 1913. In the face of military repression, Connolly organised strikers into a defence corps that became the basis of the working class Citizens' Army.

The strike was defeated and the mighty union movement that Connolly and his comrade James Larkin had built up was seriously knocked back. At the same time, the principal leader of the middle class Irish Volunteers, Redmond, pledged support to British imperialism in its war with Germany.

In the north of the island, the Unionist leader Edward Carson built the Ulster Volunteer Force to prevent the Home Rule proposal from happening. Reaction was on the march across Ireland. The socialists and radical republicans of the IRB found themselves increasingly marginalised.

All of this represented an enormous blow to Connolly's strategy of workers' revolution in an anticipated Irish Home Rule. He developed a new perspective. It was in part a version of Lenin's revolutionary defeatism – turn the imperialist war between nations into a civil war between classes. That was its strong point.

But, unlike Lenin, Connolly did not understand that the war between Britain and Germany was an inter-imperialist war, in which both sides were seeking to capture and plunder colonies and markets. Rather he saw it as an opportunity for other nations to



Irish Citizen Army outside Liberty Hall

## National question remains unsolved

Eighty-two years after the Easter Rising, the nationalist and unionist parties in Northern Ireland, together with the British and Irish governments, signed the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). It was supposed to represent a political settlement of the national struggle that had raged in the north-east, ever since partition occurred.

But it has only served to underline the fact that partition spawned a carnival of reaction and communalism.

A Northern Ireland Assembly was established under the 1998 GFA to take control of the province's affairs, based on partnership between the nationalist and unionist parties. For its part, the IRA and Sinn Fein agreed to postpone into the indefinite future their goal of a united Ireland and, indeed, agreed that the Unionists in

the north should have a veto on this. Step by step, they agreed to turn the ceasefire into full disarmament and, in effect, surrender.

But none of this has satisfied the Unionists. Gradually, the most hard line and reactionary wing of loyalism – Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists – gained more and more support among the protestant population. They have greeted each republican concession with scorn, and are determined to maintain their supremacist lording over the nationalist minority – even more so, now they can see a day not far away, when they will be turned into a minority in their "own" state.

Inevitably, the assembly ground to a shuddering halt, and has been suspended since October 2002. Loyalist attacks on nationalists

continue. Communal rather than class politics remain entrenched. In short the "national question" was not solved by partition; partition gave it a sharp expression.

Now, as it was 90 years ago, the working class must lead the struggle against national oppression. The recent Belfast postal workers showed the way, when the wildcat strikers marched up the Protestant Shankhill Road and down the Nationalist Falls Road.

A socialist, anti-imperialist, revolutionary party must be built to lead the working class across the whole of Ireland, including those sectors of the Protestants who break with their supremacist leaders, to drive the British out of the north-east, and put paid to the Irish neoliberal bosses in the south.

strike blows against the enemy of all – Britain. In March 1915 he wrote:

"I believe the war could have been prevented by the socialists; as it was not and the issues are knit, I want to see England beaten so thoroughly that the commerce of the seas will henceforth be free to all nations – the smallest equally with the largest."

But as Lenin pointed out, Germany's victory was no more preferable to Britain's. Workers everywhere needed to turn the war into a civil war against their own bosses.

Instead, Connolly treated England as the chief bastion of reaction. The urgency of defeating it was posed by the fact that, in Ireland itself, countless young men were being enlisted in the British army. The key question became organising to defeat it, even at the cost of sacrificing working class leadership.

This was the major flaw in Connolly's strategy for the Easter Rising. On the one hand, he was engaged in day-to-day struggles of the working class through the Irish TGWU. On the other he was training a much smaller and select group, separately from this, in the Citizens' Army, with the goal of an insurrection, with or without the support of the masses.

Driven by this flawed strategy, Connolly pushed Pearse into agreeing to a joint action. But they had no common goal for the rising. The nationalists – who were the majority of the insurgents – had a nationalist goal. The Citizens Army would go along with this for the time being, but, as Connolly told his men a week before the rising:

"The odds against us are a thousand to one. But if we should win, hold onto your rifles because the Volunteers may have a different goal. Remember we are not only for political liberty but for economic liberty as well."

The problem with this strategy was that it did not place the struggle for economic liberty – or to put it clearly, working class revolution – in the centre. Had it done so, the rising would have been delayed. For working class revolution would have required the rebuilding of working class organisations, the mobilisation of its support for armed action, and a general strike to coincide with the rising.

None of these things were considered or proposed in the lead up to the rising. In practice, Connolly subordinated the working class goal to the nationalist cause. And it was, therefore, the nationalists who profited most from

the rising.

Despite all this, the Easter Rising was, in a historical sense, justified. It was a military disaster for the rebels. It was carried out with the people of Dublin involved purely as onlookers – making their way through barricades to shop for groceries. And it led to the deaths of many brave Irish working class cadres from the Citizens' Army.

But it also set in motion a mass struggle against imperialism. It struck a blow for the oppressed around the entire world. It showed the world that there were men and women, who were not prepared to accept the lie that the world war was being fought for freedom, but for spoils by bandits. It showed the world that it was possible to turn the tables on the bandits and strike out for freedom.

That is why, despite the errors of strategy and execution, Lenin stood by the rising. The rising was premature, but better that than never to have taken place at all. And the lesson is that, for the Irish revolution finally to triumph, the red flag of the workers must replace the green of the nationalists, as the banner under which the workers go into battle against both the British imperialists and the Irish bosses.



# How safe are women?

The government has launched several initiatives to help women victims of domestic violence and rape. But they are more about controlling women than giving them freedom and equality, argues *Kam Kumar*

One in four women will experience domestic violence in their lives and one in eight women experience it in the UK every year. Around the world, women are subjected to violence: genital mutilation, honour killings, acid burnings, stoning, sex trafficking, rape and torture.

For years, Britain's courts and police have dismissed rape or refused to recognise it, if committed by a partner. It was not until the Domestic Violence Act 1976 that women had legal rights to exclude their abusive partners from the home. This Act finally recognised domestic violence as a cause of homelessness, something which had previously prevented women from the right to housing.

The Home Office has also brought in stricter legal definitions of consensual sex, with its "No Means No" campaign, and has promised harsh convictions to those who are guilty of domestic violence.

New Labour's latest initiative is the Sanctuary project – a victim-centred initiative, where victims of domestic violence can (after assessment) have a special high security room installed in their homes. The room, known as a "panic room", is fitted with security devices, such as solid metal doors with a spy glass. If abusers break into the house, the woman or child can run to safety in the "sanctuary".

Councils such as Harrow and Bar-

net in London have been among the first in the country to participate in the scheme, with 91 families now having had the sanctuary room fitted since 2004. The motto for the scheme is "Keeping families safe from domestic violence and preventing homelessness. Making it possible for you to remain in your home and feel safe."

The claims are that it will reduce the number of homeless women and children. The Home office estimates that domestic violence costs £23 billion every year, largely because of the need to find safe houses for the victims. With the help of this sanctuary scheme, domestic violence victims will be encouraged to stay put in their own homes. But it does not help them keep safe once outside of the house.

New Labour's victim-centred approach enlists social and support workers to work with the police. This is not in the best interests of the victim; rather an attempt by the state to control women.

We can see this clearly with the Children and Adoption Bill 2005, which ensures fathers gain contact with their children through support services: counselling, classes, family activities and so on. If the mother feels the contact arrangement is unsafe and refuses a contact order, she can be arrested and her children removed.

Despite protests about contact safety, the Private Law Programme – a set of guidelines to this Bill – does not

## Women's oppression and the family

**The sexual oppression of women is rooted in the family, where, under capitalism, women carry out the tasks of rearing children and household work. This has excluded them from full participation in social life and work. It gives the man – the wage-earner – rights over property, money and children. As Freidrich Engels wrote: "Within the family the man is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat."**

**So within the home, the man dominates and is left alone to deal with "his" wife and children as he sees fit.**

**But under capitalism, women are increasingly taking part in work, such as in sweatshops. Unlike men, though, they do so with a double burden as wage earners and home-makers. They have to struggle for equality with men at work over pay and conditions and in the home over rights to property, children – even for right not to be abused.**

**These unequal power relations in the home can be exacerbated by the legal system, bad social conditions such as poverty and cultural traditions of machismo and sexism.**

specify what actions the court should take to ensure visits are safe. On the contrary, support workers are required to work alongside courts, reporting mothers if they are not complying with a contact order.

Nor do existing laws deter violence, as two women a week are killed, mostly by their own partners or ex-partners (Women's Aid 2006). The Home Office states that domestic violence is the "leading cause of morbidity for women ages 19 – 44".

The Sanctuary scheme may be a welcome fix for many women. But, for most women, turning a home into a fortress cannot be a long term solution. Women must have the same rights to

defend themselves as any other oppressed group: self-defence is no offence.

Women must have access to decent housing and refuges to help them escape violence – on demand. Once they have escaped an abusive relationship, they – and their children – must be allowed to get on with their lives without any interference from their ex-partner.

But many women still find themselves trapped in abusive relationships, often for years. Those who do escape recount that they planned their exit route for months or years, before finally getting both the courage and the finances to make the break. This is part

of the real human cost of women's scandalously low pay rates: 17 per cent lower than male rates for full time female workers, 42 per cent lower for part time women workers.

Equal pay for work of equal value, benefits paid at the national minimum wage and good quality, free, 24-hour childcare are absolutely necessary steps to help women become independent from men in family life and in relationships.

But to root out sexism and the oppression of women, it is necessary to end the privatised family and overthrow its cause: capitalism. And for that we need a revolutionary party.

But even such a party would not succeed in drawing the mass of working class women out of the domestic home and into social activity, unless it carried out special work aimed to do so. First, men don't become paragons of virtue as soon as they join the struggle for socialism; they carry their baggage of sexism with them. Second, because of women's oppression in society at large, they may not be among the first to join the party.

For these reasons – and to ensure problems like domestic violence and women's unequal pay get tackled seriously – we advocate the building of a working class women's movement to fight for women's liberation and join in the struggle for a socialism, where men and women are equal under the law and within society.

# Workers Power conference 2006

Workers Power (Britain) held its annual conference in March, in optimistic mood after another year of growth and successful initiatives. These included the conferences on political representation, called by the RMT and that against the Section 9 of the Asylum act 2004 – both of which Workers Power members can claim some credit for getting off the ground.

Revolution, the independent youth movement in political solidarity with Workers Power, has also experienced recent successes with its campaign against Asbos and dispersal orders.

Conference debated the outlook for the class struggle in Britain, and planned our work for the year ahead. We also passed a resolution on the call on the unions to found a new workers party. This question has dominated working class politics for several years, and is likely to do so in the year ahead.

Our conference resolution said: "It would be a crime for revolutionaries to stand aside" when tens of thousands were looking for an alternative to Labour. "It would be to refuse to complete the tactic of 'putting Labour to the test of office'", which we had deployed in 1997 and 2001.

"In raising the call for the creation of a new workers party, we are calling for a united front with all those who seek to build a left alternative to Labour – i.e. with leftward moving, even if still reformist, workers. Such a united front (like all united fronts) cannot set as a precondition that they leave their leaders outside. If workers were willing to leave left reformist or centrist leaders like Bob Crow, Mark Serwotka or Matt



Workers Power supporters have been active in anti-racist and asylum campaigns

Wrack aside all at once then there would be little problem in going straight to a revolutionary party in one leap."

Does this mean that Workers' Power believes that a new party must be reformist? No. Conference stated: "We reject the idea that to call on the unions to break from Labour and to form a new workers party equates to the call to build a reformist party. We place at the forefront of our campaign a revolutionary transitional action programme that such a party should be built around.

"In breaking from a given reformist party – Blair's Labour Party – which has gone far down the road of capitalist imperialist politics, workers who are still reformist may well be willing to embrace large elements of an action programme based on direct action class struggle. What is more they may be won to elements of a transitional programme."

We will be aided in this by the fact that globalisation is stacking up contradictions for the ruling class, forcing it

to attack workers across the world, and that our class is resisting.

As our perspectives resolution states: "The international background to our work in Britain over the next year or so will be the continuing neoliberal offensive by the main imperialist blocs, aimed at inflicting major defeats on the working class in Europe, North America and Japan over the issues of wages, jobs, pensions and welfare provision, social gains and democratic rights. This has created a strong wave of resistance in many countries within these blocs."

In Britain, this resistance has been uneven, largely because of the terrible misleadership of the pro-Labour trade union bureaucracy. Even the "awkward squad" of supposedly militant leaders and the left wing caucuses in the unions have failed to lead a struggle against Labour (most notably in last year's pensions dispute) or to confront the anti-union laws (for example at Gate Gourmet).

The conference resolution went on to say "Therefore, while revolutionaries must continue to work within these left caucuses and use Bob Crow's call for a new national shop stewards' movement to pressure the left leaders and caucuses in the unions to launch a rank and file movement, such a movement is likely to emerge not from these forces, but from a new layer of militants in struggle. In any serious new outbreak of militancy, we will go straight to the unions, branches and workplaces in the forefront of battle, and call on them to organise conferences and meetings to hammer out a strategy to win and set up permanent rank and file organisations."

While we recognised that the Socialist Workers Party and the left had – first

at the London ESF and then at the anti-G8 mobilisations in Gleneagles – sabotaged the building of an organised anti-capitalist movement in Britain, the radicalisation of the youth – over the war in Iraq, racism against Muslims and asylum seekers, poverty and inequality both at home and globally, privatisation and cuts, police harassment, etc. – is continuing.

The SWP is now paying the price for allowing George Galloway freedom from rank and file control. Now their Muslim clerical and middle class allies are deserting Respect too.

The SP, unlike the SWP, is growing and has initiated the Campaign for a New Workers Party. Their youth initiative, International Socialist Resistance, is also lively and attracting young people. However, the SP's concessions to reformism will surely be their undoing. They already have difficulty explaining their role in selling out last year's pensions dispute, and their project of rebuilding old Labour is becoming irksome to their more militant members.

We will continue orient to young people, helping Revolution with its campaigns specifically aimed at working class youth fighting back against Blair's vindictive and oppressive "respect agenda."

Over the next year, Workers Power is confident we can continue to play an important role in helping the most militant workers and youth break the unions from Labour and lay the foundations of a new, mass workers party. We expect to win many of them to our policies and our ranks in the process. The 10 per cent growth we achieved last year is a benchmark that we want to improve on.



## Bulldozers crush travellers homes

Yesterday the bulldozers were sent in yet again to crush the homes of travellers who by the UK government's own admission have nowhere legally to live. Basildon council, fulfilling its pledge to rid the district of unauthorised caravans, smashed up the homes of four families at Five Acre Farm.

I saw small children on bicycles weaving past heavy machinery, dangerously close to a giant JCB. Huts and caravans were crunched flat like card-houses, as mothers stood by helpless.

Within hours, huge earth mounds had been piled around each yard. The stench from splintered drains and broken cesspit tanks was nauseous.

The earth banks, blocking people from entering their own land, are illegal. The contractors, Constant & Co., and subcontractors HE Services and Terranova, are breaking the law and ignoring safety regulations.

One of the HE Services machines, during a previous eviction, smashed through the

fencing on a yard which is protection by a high court injunction pending the outcome of a judicial review.

Basildon council, led by Tory Malcolm Buckley, who pushed through the decision to spend up to 5 million euro ethnically-cleansing Gypsies, is undoubtedly the arch villain in this case.

He has his evil eye on nearby Dale Farm where nearly a hundred families know they are in line for the same treatment unless Buckley can be stopped. All human appeals and attempts at reasoned persuasion have so far failed.

But the UK Government itself, in particular Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, must take its share of responsibility. He has exposed the shortfall of at least 4,000 yards or pitches needed by travelling families.

Yet he has done nothing to curb the relentless ethnic-cleansing. Local council, hiding behind a smoke screen of planning regulations, are brutally hounding Gypsies from one part

of the country to another.

Moreover, they are not only behaving in an anti-social manner as Gypsy Affairs spokesperson Joe Jones points out, but are habitually breaking the law.

Millions have been spent erecting earth banks around land owned by travellers and trenching possible stopping places.

"This is wanton destruction of people's property," says Jones, who has reported increased harassment in neighbouring Kent. "Just who is being anti-social here?"

A delegation from the new UK Gypsy, Traveller and Roma Forum will be urging the ODPM to step in a stop some of these illegal practices - which clearly contravene the Human Rights Act - when they meet Government officials on 6 April in London.

• Please add your names to the petition in support of the travellers by emailing [dale.farm@ntlworld.com](mailto:dale.farm@ntlworld.com)

**Grattan Puxon**  
Roma Federation and secretary of Dale Farm housing association

## NUJ fights racism and wages war on low pay

The National Union of Journalists took a huge step at its national conference by voting to abolish all immigration controls. It joins the lecturers' union Natfhe in having this position and shows that union activists can fight for a principled position against racism and in defence of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers.

The NUJ has developed a "Conscience Clause" that will give individual journalists the right not to publish or put out on the air racist or other material that the journalist finds offensive. In some ways, this is a step back from a collective boycott and relies on individual members taking action. Many delegates were arguing a "No platform" position for the union to adopt.

Tim Lezard, president, opened the conference in Liverpool by paraphrasing Dickens: "it was the best of years, it was the worst of years. It was the worst of years because of the unprecedented attacks from huge media corporations. Yet it was the best of years because union members put a brake on these companies attempts to reduce quality and service by cutting staff."

The union has taken on the BBC, ITV, Northcliffe and Trinity Mirror with some success and is now launching a campaign, Journalism Matters, to put investment in editorial at the heart of the media industry.

General secretary Jeremy Dear said that the union had grown in membership for the sixth consecutive year. He attributed the year's successes to

the fact that the union was willing to fight for its members' rights and decent working conditions and also against low pay.

Yet the NEC refused to back a motion for the union to campaign for a minimum wage of £25,000 for journalists (and £20,000 for trainees) and set freelance rates and rights over copyright. Failure to campaign for a national minimum wage is a concession to sectional differences in the media industry. Most of the rank and file members of the union voted in favour of the motion.

There was a number of speakers to conference, including Hernando Hernandez, Colombian journalist; and Arnold Amber, the president of the CBC branch of the Canadian Media Guild who led the successful struggle against the lockout of 5,500 media workers in

Canada in the late summer.

The NUJ has been active over the past year working with the International Federation of Journalists to defend journalists in countries such as Iraq, Philippines, Ukraine and Colombia, and also reported on its visit to China.

Conference committed the union to take on many different struggles. But as one NEC member said it is one thing to pass these motions but another thing to bring them into being. For that, activists need to organise a rank and file movement of militants that can fight the bosses squeezing their profits out of our wages and challenge the leadership.

As Arnold Amber said: "Trade unions are about power." Let's take the power.  
**Joy MacReady**  
Liverpool

## Sack the racist lecturer Frank Ellis

Thursday 16 March saw a 300 strong demonstration of students and staff at Leeds University. The mobilisation, built by the university UAF group, was part of campaign to sack extreme right-wing lecturer Frank Ellis.

In an interview in the Leeds University student newspaper he called for immigrants to be "hunted down and rounded up", and claimed that black people were genetically less intelligent than white people.

He has spoken at rallies of the Klu Klux Klan, and written for the far-right

journals *American Renaissance* and *Right Now*. Ellis declared the BNP "too socialist" for his liking but the only political party presently worth supporting in the UK.

Students, with the support of the lecturers union the AUT, have been campaigning to have him sacked and have been boycotting his lectures.

The University has suspended him on full pay pending a disciplinary hearing.

**Mark,**  
Leeds University student

## 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!

## Activists' diary

**DEFEND HACKNEY SCHOOLS**  
Demonstration called by Anti Academies campaign  
30 March  
Hackney Town Hall  
Mare Street, London  
5pm to 7pm

**BIG BUSINESS HANDS OF OUR SCHOOLS**  
Public meeting 30 March  
Lecture theatre 137a Main building  
Goldsmiths University  
Lewisham Way  
New Cross, London

**LEEDS WORKERS POWER**  
Struggles break out across Europe:  
Can European workers defeat neo-liberalism?

**Adelphi Pub**  
Hunslet Lane Leeds  
April 20th 7pm

**CARDIFF WORKERS POWER**  
The Great Pensions Swindle  
Tues 4 April 7.30pm  
Cathays Community Centre

**SOUTH LONDON CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW WORKERS PARTY**  
7:00pm Wednesday 5 April  
336 Brixton Road  
London SW9

**LONDON WORKERS POWER**  
7:30pm Thursday 6 April  
France in crisis: Eyewitness report from Paris of the revolt against the exploitation of young workers

**University of London Union**  
Malet St, London WC1  
Nearest tubes: Goodle St, Russell Sq, Euston Sq

**LONDON REVO**  
Solidarity with the French youth:  
Eyewitness report from the streets of Paris  
Meeting 3:00pm Sun 2nd April  
Back room of the Dublin Castle Pub, 94 Parkway, Camden NW1

**BIRMINGHAM WORKERS POWER**  
25 Years since the Hunger Strikes:  
Has Peace brought Justice in Ireland?  
Wednesday 10 May 7.30pm  
Bennetts  
Bennetts Hill  
Birmingham City Centre



# Stop the BNP

At 4:29pm on Thursday 2 March, Lee Phipps was found, stabbed through the heart, on a housing estate in South Shields, Tyneside.

This is the reality of British fascism.

Lee had been a thorn in the Nazis' side since 2003. The racists had persecuted Lee's mother, who is Somalian, and sister on a daily basis. When they marched past Lee's family house, giving the Nazi salute, Lee rushed out and took photos.

These normally publicity-seeking thugs promptly kicked Lee to the floor. When Lee and his mum, Barbra Yusuf-Porter, took their tale to some documentary makers, the fascists came back to finish the job. Now Lee is dead.

In the next few weeks, dozens of neighbourhoods will feel the strain of similar gangs of fascist hoodlums. They may be canvassing for votes, but behind the scenes they will be inciting racist hatred, and organising violence.

The best way to avenge Lee's murder is to ensure that the fascists are driven off the streets, wherever they attempt to stand.

## BNP

The British National Party is looking to make gains in May's local elections. In Bradford, a full list of BNP candidates has been put forward for the council, and in neighbouring Leeds the party intends to stand in almost every ward.

Since the bombings in London on 7 July last year, the BNP has been doing all it can to capitalise on the growing climate of racism and Islamophobia. In the wake the bombings, the BNP immediately released literature with a picture of the wreckage of the bus blown up by the terrorists, with the caption: "We Warned You About Islam".

In recent weeks, BNP members have distributed leaflets with the cartoon of Mohammed wearing a bomb as a turban, in an attempt to turn the issue of a racist cartoon into an issue of free speech.

Nick Griffin and party lackey Mark Collett were charged with "incitement to racial hatred" last year. BNP sup-

porters held several marches in support of their accused members, the first time they've marched in Leeds for more than 10 years.

Griffin and Collett were not found guilty in that trial, despite overwhelming evidence of their attempts to whip up a racist pogrom. Apparently calling Muslims "cockroaches" is not incitement to racial hatred!

The truth is, they got off, because the BNP is not the anti-establishment party it claims to be. In fact, the courts and the police understand that fascism provides the last line of defence against the revolutionary working class. That's why they cannot be relied upon to defeat these Nazis. We must do it ourselves.

## HOW TO SMASH THE BNP

The BNP has suffered some setbacks. At the end of March, they were defeated in a local council by-election in Bradford. Their vote fell from 1,659 in 2004 – the last time the ward was contested – to 1,216. In 2004, the BNP received 200 more votes than the Labour candidate, who finished second. This time, Labour won the ward with a 600 majority over the BNP.

But, after five years of BNP gains, the antifascist movement cannot relax. In fact we need to re-examine our strategy.

Until recently Unite Against Fascism (UAF) has focused on telling people to vote for anybody other than the BNP. It changed its strategy at its recent conference in February, from "don't vote BNP" to one that seeks to "challenge the racist lies and myths spread by the BNP". This is a step in the right direction, but only a step.

Five years of telling people not to vote BNP may have seen the number of its councillors kept down in some areas. But, nationally, support and votes for the fascists have steadily risen, especially in white working class areas that have grown disillusioned with the Labour government.

Britain remains a country of the haves and the have-nots. Inequality is deep rooted and has worsened since Labour came to power. The proportion of wealth held by Britain's richest 10 per cent has risen from 47 per cent to 54 per cent since 1997, when Labour was



OFF OUR STREETS!

first elected. In the meantime, working class estates have been left to rot, and the incomes of the poor have stagnated or even fallen.

According to a recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research, children who live in the poorest UK households have less of a chance of escaping poverty than when Labour came to power. With Labour continuing to privatise schools, hospitals, council housing and local services, the BNP is able to capitalise on workers' discontent.

This highlights the limitations of UAF and its electoral strategy and the fact that it is utterly silent about what to do to about the issues that the BNP feeds off.

To really challenge the BNP, anti-racist and anti-fascist activists need to

be able to offer a real alternative to Labour's anti-working class policies that drive many into the arms of the BNP. If the BNP is the party of despair, then it can only be beaten by the party of revolutionary hope.

As well as fighting the racist lies, workers and youth need to provide real solutions to real problems. We should:

- Agitate for strikes and occupations to stop the privatisation of our services.
- Call for a programme of public works to build more council homes and leisure facilities, and put the unemployed to work on trade union rates and conditions.
- Demand a steeply progressive tax on

the mega-corporations and the rich to pay for this. The hated and unfair council tax should be scrapped.

This is something that UAF will not do. The union leaders, who fund and control UAF, refuse to rock Labour's boat, in the vain hope that Tony Blair will eventually be replaced by someone more pro-working class. He won't. Gordon Brown will be just as bad.

That's why the fight to stop the unions funding the Labour Party, and to found a new workers party – one which will campaign for the needs of the whole of the working class and link these struggles to the need to overthrow capitalism – is absolutely vital to defeating the BNP.

## NO PLATFORM FOR FASCISM

In the meantime, we need to stop the BNP encroaching on our streets.

Fascism exists to offer the ruling class a movement of the enraged middle class and poor workers, who have been abandoned by the labour movement, who can be used as a battering ram against the working class. It uses racism, homophobia, sexism – whatever it can get its hands on – to divide and weaken workers' resistance to the rule of finance capital.

In short, it is the party of civil war – against the working class. That's why we argue for a workers' united front to deny the fascists any platform. Instead of providing canvassers for Labour, the unions should be boycotting the delivery of BNP electoral material in the post, refusing to count or announce the votes, unless the BNP thugs are ejected from the halls, organising antifascist meetings on all the estates and in all the workplaces, targeted by the BNP.

Confrontation with the fascists is as necessary today as it's ever been, whether that be on their public demonstrations, at their election hustings, or when they are leafleting local areas. Whether or not the BNP are wearing Armani suits, they're still a fascist organisation. If we wait for them to get their bovine boots back on, before we seriously confront them, it will be too late.

- Smash the BNP!
- No platform for fascists!

## 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 L51, 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

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- I would like to join the Workers Power group
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