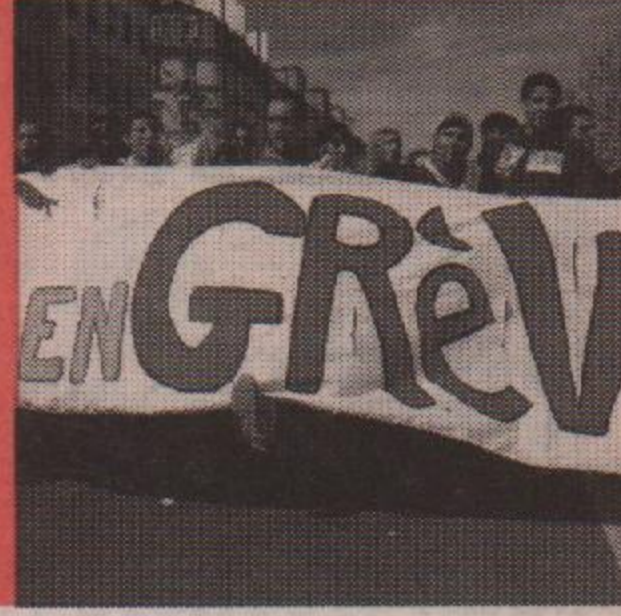


Defy and  
repeal the  
anti-union  
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Europe in  
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May 1926:  
when workers  
stopped the  
country  
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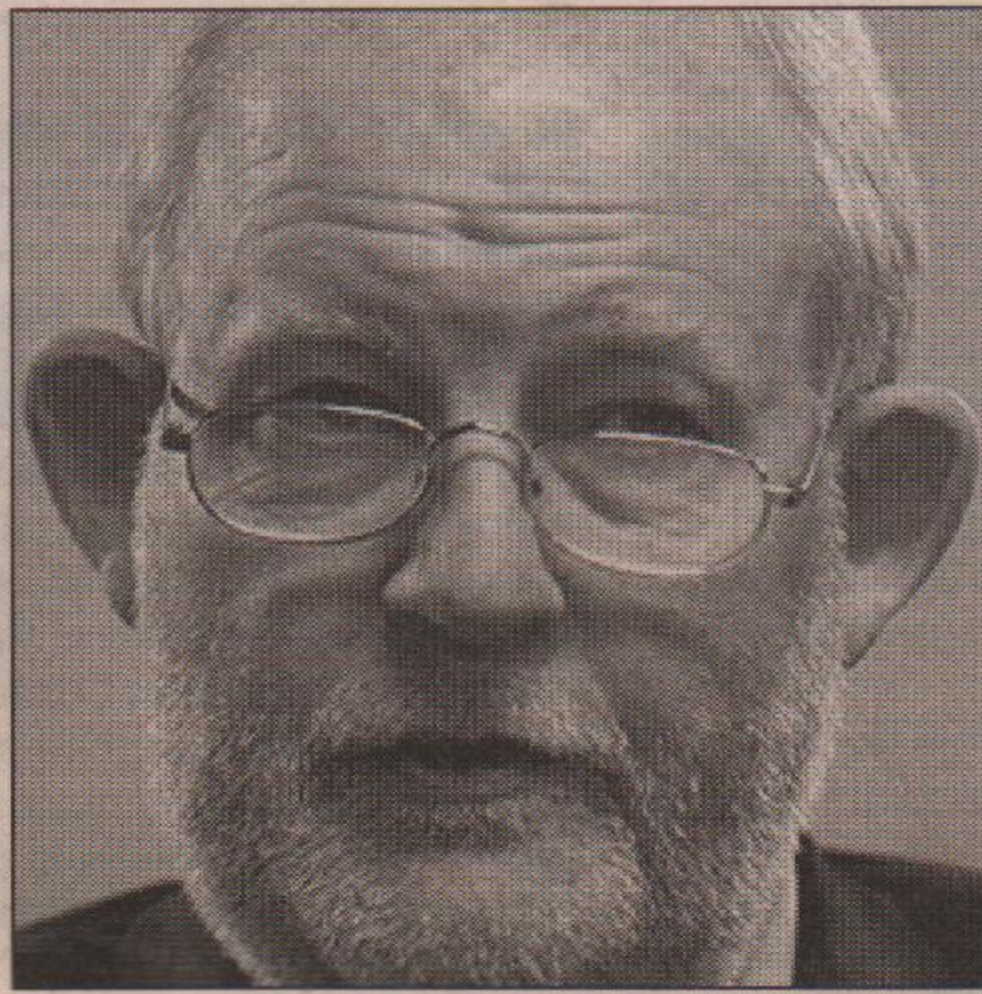
## Out with them all!



### Tony Blair

**Why he might go:** Brought Labour to 20-year low in polls, trailing the Tories, failed to tell cabinet of secret business loans

**Why he should go:** Bombed Serbia, invaded, occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, causing at least 100,000 Iraqi civilian deaths; fervent advocate of privatisation - privatised swathes of the NHS and education, air traffic control and London Underground via PFI; cheered on Asbos and dispersal orders against youth; given peerages and government contracts in bribes and corrupt deals



### Charles Clarke

**Why he might go:** Failed to deport 1,023 foreign offenders on completion of their jail sentences

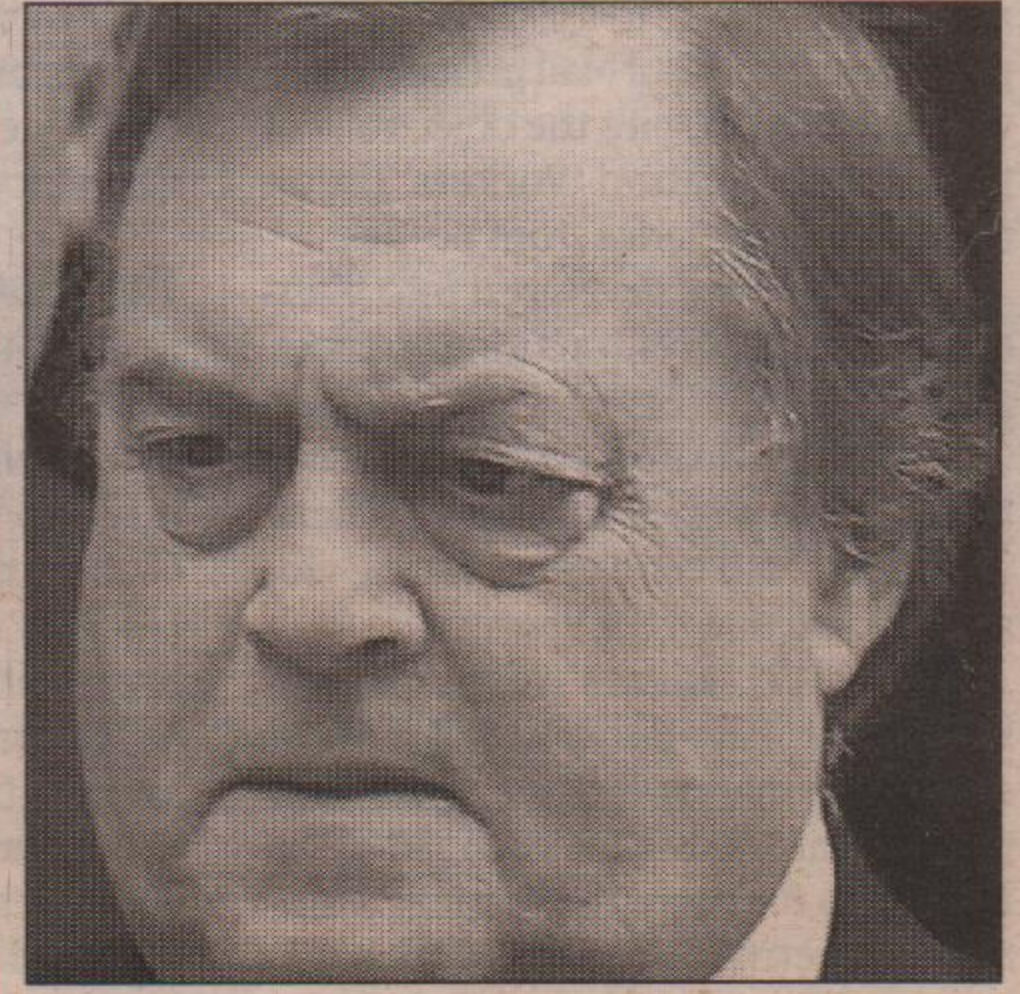
**Why he should go:** Brought in laws to evict refugee families from their homes (section nine); deported hundreds of asylum seekers to war zones; fought for right to detain terror suspects without trial indefinitely, settled for 28 days and unlimited house arrest; granted police shoot-to-kill powers, banned protests in Parliament Square, is introducing ID cards and national database



### Patricia Hewitt

**Why she might go:** Slow hand-clapped by nurses after telling them the NHS was enjoying its "best year ever"

**Why she should go:** More than 7,000 jobs cut, dozens of wards closed, waiting lists lengthening because NHS Trusts told to put financial management above patient care; guaranteed millions of profitable NHS operations to private treatment centres, first step to destroying the NHS; at the DTI refused to save jobs at Rover, while bunging nuclear power company British Energy £650 million



### John Prescott

**Why he might go:** Had two year affair with secretary and had sex in minister's office

**Why he should go:** Set out to break Fire Brigades Union in 2002-3, and cut the service; starved local authorities of cash, and forced them to privatise council housing and increase council tax; increased retirement age for new public sector workers to 65; and an internal report finds his department guilty of bullying, sexual and racist harassment, and discrimination against disabled staff

**T**ony Blair and his government are facing their biggest crisis since the invasion of Iraq in Spring 2003. On the eve of the local elections the careers of three of his most important ministers hung in the balance. These elections are bound to give Labour one hell of a thumping. Talk of a leadership challenge in the autumn is circulating the corridors of Westminster.

The right wing press also smell blood. Typically, however, they want to shoot down the prime minister from the right - for entirely bogus reasons.

John Prescott's personal life may or may not be distasteful, but it is a private matter. His real crime, which will long outlive tabloid tittle-tattle is that he is the lynchpin keeping the Brown-Blair project on course.

He has dined out on tales of the ship stewards' strike he led 40 years ago, in order to keep the unions backing this anti-working class government. Even now, Labour insiders want to save his

hide because Prescott is crucial to ensuring Gordon Brown smoothly succeeds Blair and keeps the neoliberal dynasty going.

Patricia Hewitt is accused of being arrogant and too stuck-up even for the Royal College of Nurses. She is but that's not the point. Hewitt was brought into the NHS to ensure that "competition and choice" dominate it, to open it up even further as a profit centre for private companies.

The Tories are up in arms about Charles Clarke's failure to deport foreign criminals once they have served their sentences. They happily fan the flames of racism - which will fire the electoral chances of the fascist BNP - while media pundits denounce re-offending immigrants and demand all of them are thrown out of the country.

Not one of them, or Clarke, stops to ask whether British prisoners might commit more crimes on release, or whether a refugee should be deported - possibly to face torture or death squads

- after serving time for a minor offence. Half of all prisoners in fact reoffend. Jail very rarely rehabilitates criminals, merely represses them and hardens them up. It's prison that doesn't work, not immigration.

A few police chiefs have pointed out that they have no legal right to arrest and deport ex-prisoners, who have done their time. But that's no worry to go-get-'em Clarke. He is a past master of using any setback - 7 July London bombings, Law Lords ruling against indefinite detentions at Belmarsh, etc. - to grant himself more reactionary powers and rush through emergency measures.

If anyone should be deported for serious, violent and repeated crimes in a foreign land, it is the British army from Iraq.

#### Labour: rotten to the core

The only thing that is keeping Labour's high command in office is that we have not yet prepared an alternative. If Prescott, Hewitt and Clarke went they would only be replaced by equally right-

ist figures. Even if a leadership challenge from Michael Meacher or Lynn Jones damaged Blair and hastened the arrival of Brown into Number 10, this would herald no change in policy.

Yet the longer Labour cling onto power, the stronger the Tories, Ukip and the BNP get. Indeed, that is now the Blairites only electoral card: vote for us or the right will get in.

The unions must abandon their slavish adherence to Labour now. Activists should use the union conference season to divert political funds towards the formation of a new workers party.

The RMT, which held a conference on the crisis of workers' representation in January, the FBU, which also finds itself outside Labour's ranks, and the PCS, which has called for an anti-privatisation united front against the government, should take the lead.

They should name the date and call a conference to set up a new party now. At the same time, they should call on all unions - at rank and file and

leadership level - to launch or re-launch strikes against Blair's third-term agenda. The mass lobby of parliament against privatisation, called by the PCS and a dozen other unions for 27 June should become the occasion for generalised strike action.

These initiatives, along with the Campaign for a New Workers Party and the working class components of the Respect coalition, can provide the basis for a real, mass alternative to Labour, and hasten its demise. But we should not make the same mistakes as Labour.

Instead of trimming our demands to whatever is acceptable to the bosses, instead of relying on parliament to deliver fundamental change, instead of expecting the police, the judges and the civil service tops to respect the will of the people - we should make sure any new working class party is a revolutionary socialist party.

Then we really will be able to get rid of them all - and the system that breeds corruption, poverty and war.

## WE NEED A NEW WORKERS' PARTY



## CWU: reject the Efficiency Agreement Fight for a national strike

Workers forced Royal Mail into a limited retreat on its Short Term Savings plan in February. But the bosses have returned with an Efficiency Agreement that postal workers must reject

By a CWU militant

The STS cost cutting exercise introduced at the end of last year led to longer hours for post workers, wholesale restructuring and cuts in sorting offices and job. Savings are supposed to fund investment in new machines needed to compete in the newly-opened postal market. Royal Mail pressed ahead with the plan despite the objections of the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) and resistance from posties.

The cuts have developed into plans for the wholesale restructuring of offices. Full-time delivery workers face an increased workload or could be replaced by part-timers on as little as 17.5 hour contracts. Mail centres are facing closure up and down the country.

The CWU leaders' response was inadequate. They dithered and sent out conflicting messages to members. This paralysis at the top encouraged Royal Mail to go for more throughout January. An evermore-confident management kept upping their demands for cuts - every week in some offices.

But in February the tide began to turn. Action by postal workers forced the Royal Mail bosses to retreat. A hard-

fought, courageous and illegal strike in Belfast saw 800 workers on picket lines in February. They had walked out in protest at management's bullying, and the punitive use of the disciplinary system. They stayed out for two weeks, till they won their demands. The Belfast wildcat, along with up to 60 requests for strike ballots against the cuts piling up at HQ, scared Royal Mail into backing down and meeting the CWU at the negotiating table. The outcome of these negotiations was a national Efficiency Agreement

### The Efficiency Agreement

As a result of the Efficiency Agreement it was agreed that Royal Mail had to withdraw all executive action initiated since 1 January. There is to be no pre-determined cuts figures (such as the STS-dictated 5 per cent) but a joint Efficiency Review in every office aimed at "genuine efficiency savings that are sustainable". There will be no company-wide policy to fill vacancies with part-timers or down-grade full-time positions, instead this must be locally agreed. Finally, 40 per cent of savings nationally will go back to the workforce, as part of consolidated pay, with local offices receiving bonuses if they save even more.

While this agreement has been claimed by the union leadership as a step forward it is in many ways a step backward. The efficiency review is mandatory - reps and branches must get together with management and find savings. They can't just say "no" to a proposal. All strike ballots have been withdrawn, and there is a moratorium on strike action. The new Efficiency Agreement has allowed Royal Mail, in a stroke, to cut through the deadlock in offices and areas that would not agree cuts and to throw out the threat of strikes. It leaves weaker offices to be picked off and binds the hands of the strong, those that could lead a fight.

In many areas Royal Mail has got the measure of the union leadership, and is refusing to change course. They keep coming back with the same plans as before, pre-determined cuts figures and all!

The "agreement" drops the fight for jobs and the 35-hour week without loss of pay - which is the union's position - for cuts and a crap pay deal. CWU leaders have sold the members' resistance short and imposed a dangerous policy without members having a say. The Efficiency Agreement must be put before the members to vote on nationally and be rejected.



### We need a strategy to win

Militants need to go to national conference this month and overturn the agreement. We must use the conference to hammer out an alternative strategy, including the details of the campaign, to that of the leadership's.

Any strategy should centre on the need to prepare for strike action up to and including an all-out national strike, and make this call the major debate at conference and in the coming NEC elections.

We should use conference to begin linking up branches to build committees that can lead the campaign against the agreement.

But we must also answer the question of the market - as long as capitalist competition exists, pressure for job cuts and privatisation will increase.

The answer is to abolish the Labour-

appointed, pro-market Postcomm, close the market and retract the licences for private companies.

Firms or operations that are forced to close as a result should be nationalised and merged into Royal Mail so the workers' jobs are saved, with no compensation for their owners.

We can strengthen our demands by building an alliance against privatisation with other unions, community organisations and the youthful protest movement. The recent struggles in France in defence of right for young workers shows that this is possible.

As the Belfast strike and the many ballots for action show, there is the will and the means to beat Royal Mail back, and challenge the government's whole policy of creeping post privatisation.

## Peugeot Ryton: occupy to save jobs!

By Bernie McAdam

The Peugeot bosses' decision to close Ryton was signalled last year when they sacked 900 workers at the plant. Now they are trying to increase their profits by shifting production to Eastern Europe.

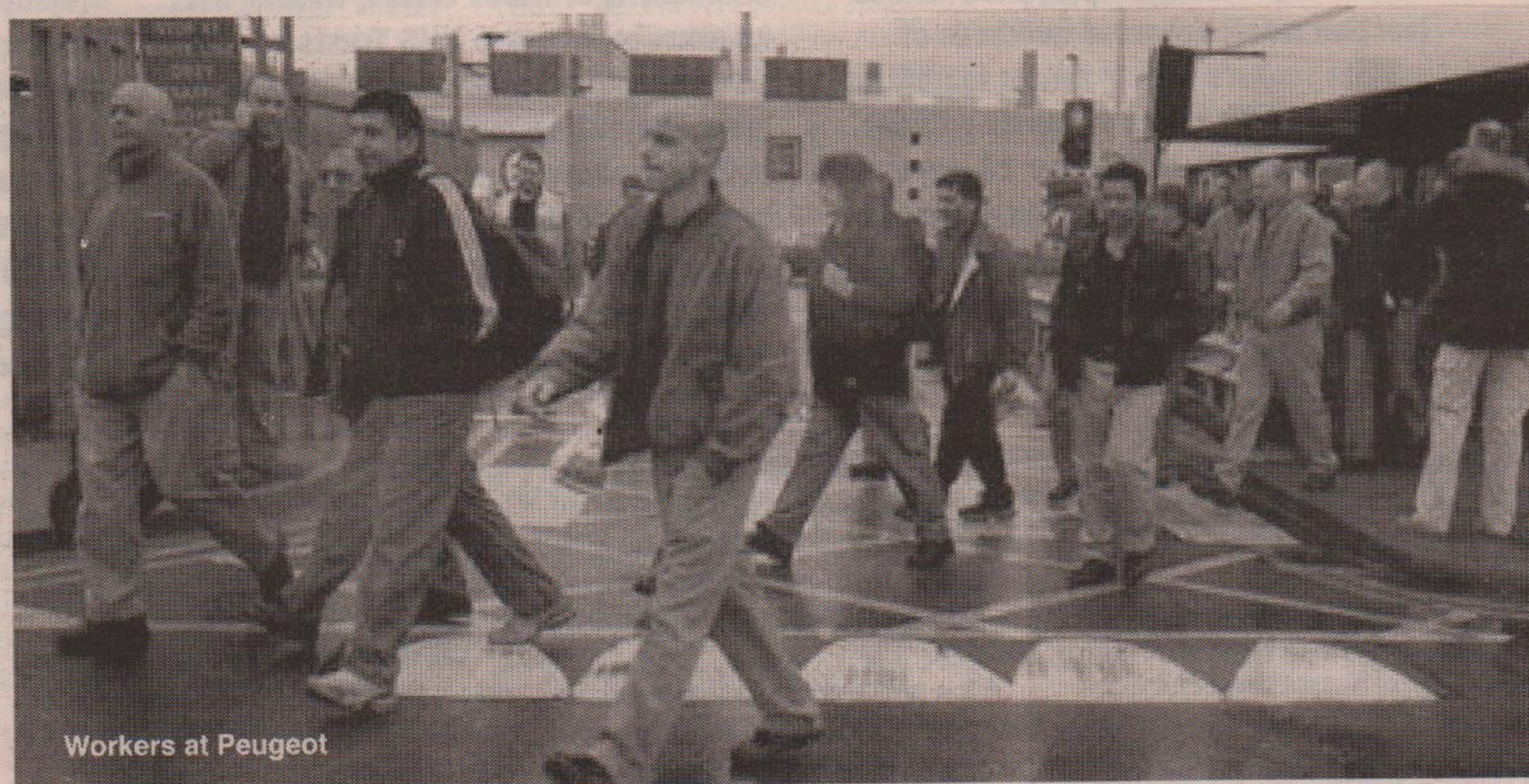
If their plans go ahead, it will mean the loss of 2,300 jobs at Ryton itself as well as many more at suppliers, over 250 firms in the UK could be affected. Rumours of redundancies remain just that - rumours. The danger is that, if Peugeot get away with their cut-and-run plan, workers at Ryton, like those at Longbridge last year, will be left high and dry.

The closure of the plant and the loss of jobs are not inevitable. But the only way to avoid this fate is to learn from the recent success of the French unions in forcing their government to take a u-turn in its attack on job security, through militant industrial action and mobilising community support. It is great that French Peugeot workers immediately offered their solidarity. Ryton workers should respond to this with a call for European wide strike action at Peugeot plants.

The global drive for ever cheaper workforces can be halted if we act together. Car workers in France and Slovakia must be turned into our allies in the fight for decent wages and secure jobs, not our competitors.

### Occupy the plant!

The only way to stop the closure, and to foil any management tricks is to occupy the factory and sit-in! Immediately, not just the bosses but Blair and his ministers, will be faced with a



new situation. No business as usual as they set about selling our jobs. We can seize the initiative and hold millions of pounds worth of machinery!

An occupation of the plant would mean Peugeot no longer controlled the production line. It would immediately provide a rallying point to all workers threatened by redundancy. An immediate strike and occupation would also act as a rallying cry to Peugeot workers in France, Madrid and internationally. It would show British workers are serious about saving their jobs and make our demand for solidarity action much easier. It could become the centre of resistance sending out delegations to Peugeot plants across Europe.

### Hammer out a plan of action

Some union leaders have been calling for industrial action to protest at the

plan to close Ryton. Des Quinn, T&G, has pledged to fight the closure "with every means necessary". In another statement he says it needs "a social and political campaign which might involve disruption to car sales or Peugeot's operations". There has been talk about asking Peugeot workers in France to take action in protest - if the closure of Ryton goes ahead, they will be next in line.

But the nettle needs to be grasped now. Left talk and promises of future action from TU leaders normally become climbdowns and sell outs after the initial shock has passed. Militant working class action in defence of jobs needs to be organised right away in order to bring the sort of pressure to bear which can force the government and the bosses to keep Ryton working.

Workers should have no illusions

that Derek Simpson of Amicus and Tony Woodley of the T&G will provide such leadership. Limiting the campaign to public demos and looking for another capitalist buyer did not save Longbridge.

Ryton workers themselves must hammer out an action plan to secure all the jobs and future production. This is the best way to win over those who doubt our ability to keep the plant open. But rank and file control of the dispute is vital to achieve this.

### For a coventry-wide council of action

We will also need to politically organise the groundswell of support in Coventry city. Today, it is the Peugeot workers at the sharp end. Thousands of jobs supplying the car industry are next. While we live under a system

that puts profit before people, all workers are under threat.

Peugeot stewards should call together workers from all over Coventry to plan a campaign of action to stop the closure. A Coventry-wide Council of Action could be crucial in delivering solidarity to the threatened workers and in starting a real fight back.

### Nationalise Peugeot

If the Peugeot bosses refuse to keep the plant open then it must be nationalised. Of course, everyone knows that, under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the Labour government has never acted to act to save jobs in this way.

But they have never faced a workforce united and determined to force them to do it.

Union leaders have swallowed Blair's lies that there is no alternative to finding other corporate buyers or grants for retraining the sacked workers.

Nationalisation should be carried out under workers' control. No compensation should be offered to Peugeot, who made a 90 million Euros profit from Ryton workers last year alone. Neither must it be allowed to become a measure simply to restore profitability by slashing the workforce and intensifying the work, as it was used in the 1970s.

Under the control of the workers all decisions over pay, conditions, hiring and firing will be made in the workers interests.

It can be the launchpad for real social ownership, not only in one factory, one industry, one country but spreading to create an economy that meets peoples' needs, not the private greed of a few billionaires - socialism.



Organise the rank and file

On May Day the TUC called its first demonstration against the anti-union laws since the 1980s. Compliance not defiance has been their slogan for 20 years or more. And in fact these laws provide an excellent excuse for not fighting back against privatisation, job cuts and closures. Their long delays and ponderous balloting procedures give the leaders a marvellous mechanism for ducking and diving when it comes to a fight.

In every dispute, workers find the union leaders ranged against them at critical moments: delaying ballots, suspending strikes, signing deals behind their backs. In some cases, these leaders even expel the most determined activists, opening them up to victimisation from the bosses.

Since Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 the unions have halved in membership. Union leaders have responded to this by a series of amalgamations. We have ended up with the big four and now two of them, Transport and General Workers' Union and Amicus, are well under way to forming a super union. But if anyone thinks this will increase the strength of the unions against the bosses or the government they had better think again.

This is because the union leaders have a different standpoint from the members they are supposed to represent. They have made their peace with capitalism. They enjoy six figure salaries and act as go-betweens with the workers and the bosses. Most would love to follow Alan Johnson (ex-CWU) and Bill Murray (ex-T&G) and become Labour ministers or peers.

The rest of us, however, have no such career path. Our interests can only be met down the road of class struggle. And since this opens up these leaders to working class scrutiny and threatens the material basis for their privileges, they tend to stifle struggles or settle for partial success instead of pressing for more decisive victories.

Even left wing leaders end up acting like this, unless they are held to account and controlled from below. Bob Crow and Billy Hayes say they want a new shop stewards movement, but neither called for action to stop the part privatisation of London Underground or market reforms at Royal Mail. Mark Serwotka and Matt Wrack actually come from grassroots organisations, but in office both have gone along with pensions deals no better than the ones signed by the other leaders.

But this club of leaders is not an alien imposition on the workers, it rests upon the labour aristocracy. These workers are often better paid and with more secure work contracts. They can be militant but can also be sectional and have a craftist outlook. Both bureaucracy and labour aristocracy are unwilling to recruit and organise the poor, insecure and migrant workers and so limit trade unions in terms of membership and radicalism.

The strategy of relying on the election of left wing leaders is flawed because it fails to recognise that the union leaders – left and right – act as a club. There is an unwritten code that they never criticise each other, never call on members of other unions to go out on strike, and never hand over control of disputes to the rank and file. Above all, they never demand that every union official is regularly elected and recallable by the members, or is paid the average wage of those they are meant to serve.

Workers Power argues that rank and file militants should build a movement in every union and across the unions to organise militant action against the employers – with “left” union leaders where possible, against them where necessary.

We fight for democratic reforms to reclaim the unions for their members. We call for mass meetings and elected strike committees to control every dispute. Our aim should be nothing less than the dissolution of the trade union bureaucracy as a caste that rules our unions.

But, above all, a rank and file movement must aim to bring wider and wider layers of the working class into the movement through unionisation drives among the poorest paid, those with insecure jobs, those whose employers treat them with no respect. It must develop an action programme to fight against closures like that at Peugeot and not be afraid to demand expropriation of the multinational exploiters, socialisation of the means of production, with worker's control in every workplaces, and linking this struggle to the fight for socialism.

# How to stop the rise of the BNP

Recent press stories have been full of warnings about the growth of support for the BNP. Jo Cassidy looks at the reasons behind this, and what can be done to stop them

The conditions in Britain in 2006 are ideal for the growth of the BNP: Labour supporters are feeling deserted by their traditional party, there are never-ending scares stories about Muslims and foreign extremists, and the media and Labour politicians have combined to give the BNP a massive publicity coup.

Barking's Labour MP Margaret Hodge has warned that eight out of 10 white voters she spoke to were considering a switch to the BNP. A *Sunday Mirror* poll suggested 45.5 per cent of those certain to vote in Barking and Dagenham said they would vote BNP, and 7 per cent of those planning to vote in Bradford would do so.

Senior BNP figures are expecting to increase the party's number of councillors by a third in the May local government elections. Antiracist groups believe that even this is under-estimation and that the BNP's current 20 councillors could rise to 70.

Whatever truth there may be in Margaret Hodge's claims, all reports and surveys indicate that the BNP is picking up support from ex-Labour voters in the some of the poorest areas of Britain, who feel betrayed and disillusioned by Labour's anti-working class policies.

While Gordon Brown likes to remind everyone that there has been a record 10 years of successive growth under Labour, the policies of the government have failed utterly to reverse the decimation of living conditions inflicted by Margaret Thatcher and the 18 years of Tory rule.

Elsewhere in this paper (see page 6) we show that large parts of the working class still live in poverty. Many have lost permanent, unionised jobs, for example in manufacturing, and survive in temporary, low-paid and non-unionised positions. Abandoned by the official workers movement, and experiencing fierce competition for scarce resources, these workers can fall for the false solutions of the BNP.

Since none of the three main parties even recognise the true extent of deprivation on the housing estates, the BNP appears radical. This explains why even Asian workers have been quoted as considering a switch to the fascists.

## Labour's rotten record

Labour has done nothing to reverse the selling off of social housing; in fact it has encouraged further privatisations of council housing stock, which compounds the housing shortage. As a result, house prices, especially in the south east, are beyond the reach of ordinary working class people. In London's poorest borough, Tower Hamlets, where 73.5 per cent of children live in poverty, the average family house price is £265,000!

While the government can talk about the billions it has pumped into the education and health, most of this money has been used to introduce the market and privatise services. Despite £12 billion spent on the NHS, waiting times for access to local GPs remain long, and now thousands of health staff are facing layoff because the government is refusing to bail out hospital trusts.

The BNP is trying to capitalise on Labour's failure to substantially improve the standard of living for the working class – its core voters. It is appealing to the sense of betrayal by Labour in its election material: “Labour betray the working man and woman,” says one leaflet. “All the Labour party have to offer the workers now are low-paid, non-skilled jobs in warehouses and flipping burgers in fast-food restaurants,” in another.

While there is a great deal of truth in these statements, unsurprisingly the BNP's actual policies show no concrete way to improve health, housing, education, the erosion of civil liberties or union rights. They blame immigrants and Islam for all the problems in British society and the government's failure to implement racist policies.

There polices would actually dividing us along lines of race, gender and sexuality and weaken our struggles.

Labour has been cynically trying to scare its traditional supports to turn out and vote for it to keep the BNP out. But voting Labour will not halt the rise of the BNP because, once safely back in the Town Halls, it will continue to cut services, transfer council houses and ignore the needs of the poor.

## Tories prepare for right turn

But the clamour in the press is designed for another reason – to send a warning to Tory leader David Cameron about his shift to the centre ground.

The millionaire owners of *The Express*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* are trying to send out the message that the way the Tories can gain at Labour's expense is to be vocal about its racist policies on immigration and asylum.

Shadow home secretary David Davis, echoing the tabloids, said on ITV that we needed to “control immigration in order to get good race relations within the country.” Racism is apparently the fault of immigrants for Davis.

Philip Davies, the Conservative MP for Shipley in West Yorkshire, blamed mainstream parties for the apparent rising popularity of the BNP, accusing them of “failing to reflect people's concerns over immigration and race relations.” Or to put it another way, the Tories can capitalise on the climate of fear around Islamophobia and immigration if they play the race card.

Of course, having leading politicians back up the racists and the tabloids spread their filth strengthens the divide and rule strategy of the ruling class, pitting black and white, immigrants and settled workers against each other.

This is exactly what happened in the late 1970s and the early 1980s when the National Front were growing and organising marches of thousands, up and down the country. The Tories, to the dismay of the NF, simply stole their racist policies and all their votes.

## Unite and fight

As we go to press, the BNP looks like it will do well in these elections. Warnings about the threat they pose will fill the columns of all the press from the far left, right through to the broad-sheets.

Unite Against Fascism, backed by all the main unions, has ducked the hard

arguments against the BNP in favour of retaining a broad, cross-class popular front. It focuses on “exposing” the BNP as Nazis and criminals, avoiding arguments around the issues that allow the fascists to grow. This will not stop them.

Telling the potential BNP voters to “use their vote against the BNP” is futile and barely worth the glossy leaflet it is written on. People who vote BNP are using their vote; they're using it as a protest vote against Labour.

The unions could do far more to halt the march of the BNP by organising campaigns and strikes to force the bosses – and local councils – to level up wages, conditions and services for all. A good example to follow was provided by 50 GMB members at Cottam power station in Nottinghamshire, who took unofficial strike action against the exploitation of migrant workers in early March this year.

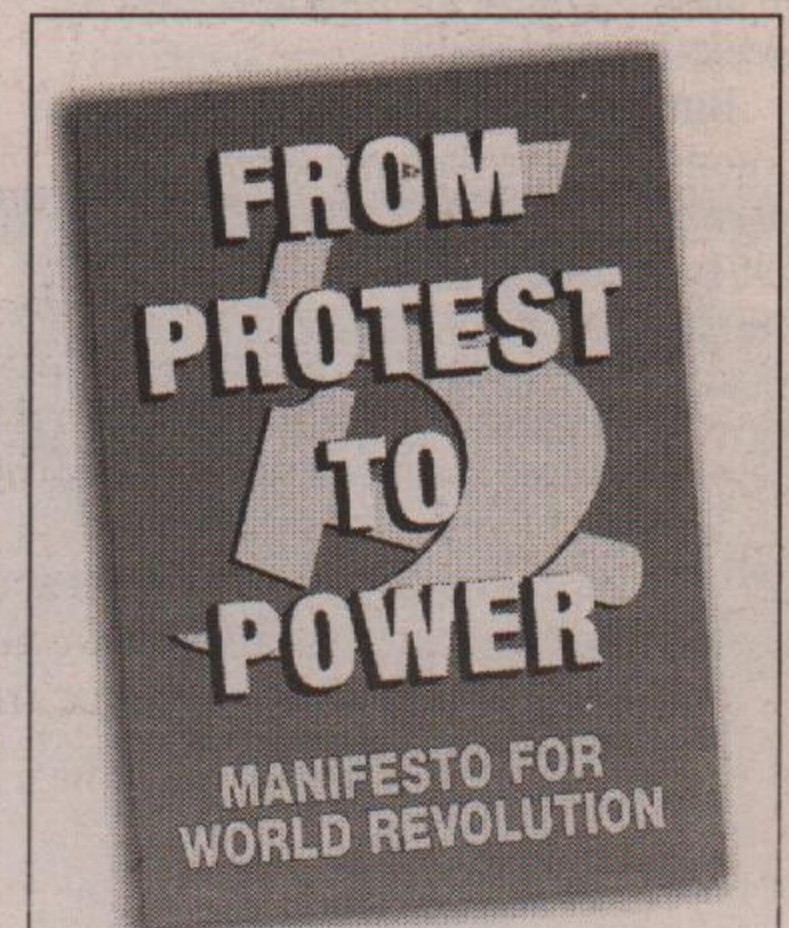
The building workers walked out after they discovered that subcontractor SFL was employing Hungarian and Romanian workers on worse pay than British workers. Nineteen strikers were then sacked, but others stayed out in solidarity. This is exactly the way to stop bosses exploiting cheap labour to force everyone's wages down – not racist scapegoating of immigrants.

The way to stop the BNP on the streets is to challenge them wherever they try to organise. More importantly we need a new mass party that can really fight for a radical working class solution, a party that can offer real hope to those left behind and ignored by Labour.

As neoliberalism continues to destroy established working class communities and use the global economy to drive down wages and conditions to the lowest level, people will be drawn towards radical solutions.

The BNP, like other fascist parties across Europe, will hope to win isolated workers and the impoverished middle classes to a fascist solution. The UAF's strategy of playing for the moderate middle ground and discouraging militant antifascism is useless. Only a revolutionary party, which can win millions to fight for a radical, socialist and internationalist solution can end the threat of fascism once and for all.

For a report of Workers Power's anti-BNP activity in Leeds – see page 15



Programme of the League for the Fifth International £1.50



## Defy and repeal the anti-union laws

Tony Blair says that British bosses enjoy "the most lightly regulated labour market of any leading economy". Looking at the anti-union laws, *George Binette* and *Jeremy Dewar* are forced to agree with him

"There will be no going back. The days of strikes without ballots, mass picketing, closed shops and secondary action are over."

Although many people might assume that this fierce anti-worker comment came from the likes of Margaret Thatcher, this is what Tony Blair said one year into his first term in office. Tony Blair - like his co-conspirator, Gordon Brown - is wedded to Britain's anti-union laws brought in by Thatcher in the early 80s.

Thatcher arrived at 10 Downing Street with a clear determination to curb effective trade unionism as the central element of a strategy for reversing the slumping fortunes of British capitalism. Over the course of the next 15 years, the Thatcher and Major governments assembled an arsenal of draconian legislation that contributed to the sharp falls in union density, strikes and the social weight of the trade unions (see box).

### The anti-union laws

- give employers a minimum of 14 days, usually a month's notice before strikes
- give judges the right to grant injunctions against pickets, and outlaw strikes on technicalities
- allow bosses to sack striking workers and replace them with scabs
- outlaw solidarity strike action, even in the same industry or company
- outlaw political strikes or any action that a judge deems not part of a trade dispute
- make unions and individual strikers liable for damages caused by any strikes deemed to be illegal - such strikers can also be sacked.

Just imagine if these laws had been in place and obeyed in France last month. The working class would have taken an almighty battering. Instead, workers successfully defended the rights of young people to full job protection. Conversely, imagine if the British Airways baggage handlers had not been forced back to work at Heathrow last summer, and their shop stewards had not later been sacked. The Gate Gourmet workers would have won and maybe inspired many more victories in other industries.

Blair made the boast that he would "leave British law the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world" even as millions in union contributions poured into Labour's coffers. There has been some undeniable tinkering around the edges that has created a national minimum wage, bestowed some new individual rights at work, enhanced the prospects for union recognition and made it marginally tougher for bosses to sack strikers en masse before 12 weeks have passed.

But the legislative restrictions on unions today remain more severe than after the notorious Taff Vale ruling in 1901 and the terrible aftermath of the miners' defeat in 1926. The laws still intrude into almost every aspect of union activity, ranging from the definition of a trade dispute through to the detailed content of notices that must go to employers declaring an intention to ballot for and actually take industrial action.

These laws have enormously strengthened the position of full-time union officials and legal advisors, as opposed to rank and file activists, giving the union bureaucracy as a whole a big stick with which to keep members in line.

What is crystal clear is that in every dispute, the Labour government has



Gate Gourmet workers: victims of the anti-trade union laws and the union leaders

supported the bosses using the anti-union laws. Now the TUC pins all hopes on the same Labour government abolishing these laws. The TUC calls this a strategy!

May Day was the first TUC demonstration for union rights at work since 1983. Yet, even now, the Trade Union Freedom Bill is only proposing the most minimal changes to the law

- workers should not be sacked during or after lawful industrial action
- unions should give "only" seven days notice of industrial action and the technical rules should be loosened
- injunctions should only be granted if the employer is likely to win in court
- workers should be able to strike against future employers imposing a change in conditions (i.e. in cases of privatisation or take-over), to boycott work transferred from a workplace in dispute, or to stop their employer manipulating a dispute in a supplier company.

This proposal has gained the backing of more than 100 largely Labour MPs, who have signed Early Day Motion 1170, proposed by a former Labour minister, Tony Lloyd. The TUC-backed proposals, if implemented, would bring Britain closer to conformity with International Labour Organisation standards, but would still fall far short of purging the legislative legacy of Thatcher and Major.

In reality, British workers, in contrast to their sisters and brothers in several European Union countries, have never had the right to strike. To win that will take something more than post-cards, polite lobbying of MPs and a bank holiday stroll through central London.

### Defiance not compliance

All this is just tinkering with the system of legal immunities. Where is the right to take solidarity action with all workers who need it? What about the right to strike against privatisation, the destruction of the NHS, another war? What about the right to strike as soon as the employer announces job cuts, factory closure, or changes in conditions?

Our starting point should be that every worker has the right to strike. And we should defy the anti-union laws, if need be, to exercise that right.

We cannot wait for a government to repeal the laws. The next time a workforce feels the full weight of these laws, we should agitate for solidarity action. If those taking secondary action are threatened, then we should hit back with a third and fourth wave of strikes.

Similarly, if workers - like those at Peugeot - find decisions regarding their jobs or conditions have been made behind their backs, they should walk

out and stay out. Or, even better, they should occupy their workplace.

But the anti-union laws will not be smashed by such guerrilla action alone. We can take the bosses and the government by surprise and score some victories, but they will come back for revenge. Only very well organised workplaces will be able to take such actions, leaving weaker sections at the mercy of the courts.

The truth is that the bosses act as a class. Their attacks on workers are not simply related to specific trades. They are planned in advance, co-ordinated across different companies, industries and even countries.

Forcing workers' unions to respond as if it was a private matter between

an individual employer and her/his employees constrains and distorts our resistance. We want to smash the anti-union laws so our unions can become more than simply trade unions and develop into class struggle organisations. And the class struggle is essentially a political struggle.

That's why we need a political campaign - including political strike action, but not only that - to smash the laws. And to wage this campaign, we need a new, mass working class party that will fight for the total repeal of these laws - in parliament, on the streets and in the workplaces.

### For a new workers party

We should demand at every conference this year that the unions stop funding Labour. No more money from union members' subs should go to funding the party that supports the bosses' right to sequester (i.e. steal) our funds because we dare to take strike action!

Labour's support for the anti-union laws is far from being an exception. Labour has consistently ruled on behalf of big business and the super-rich. It is responsible for the bloody war in Iraq, creeping privatisation of health, education and public services, and racist asylum and immigration policies. It is a pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist party.

Two unions - the RMT and the FBU - find themselves outside of Labour's ranks because they stood up against this agenda. Yet Unison, Amicus, T&G and GMB have called off strikes and filled Labour's election cof-

fers in return for promises (e.g. the Warwick agreement) that are later broken, or framework deals (e.g. on public sector pensions) that dump the rights of new workers.

Already millions of workers have abandoned Labour. A recent opinion poll puts its support at a 19-year low. The party's membership has halved since 1998.

Labour MPs have even bigged up the BNP to win back voters. But the growth of the fascists is a result of Labour's refusal to build new council houses, provide decent hospitals and schools for all, set the minimum wage and benefits at rates people can live on.

The BNP and Tory threats are real enough. But returning, albeit reluctantly, to the Labour fold in fear of the right, will only lead to another round of betrayal, disillusionment and support for the false solutions of the right.

We call on every striker, every worker, every general secretary to fight for the unions to use their political funds to build a new workers' party: one that can serve the interests of the working class and challenge the bosses' monopoly of wealth and power.

That means challenging not just the anti-union laws, but the whole capitalist system that drives the bosses to constantly attack our living standards, to constantly divide us and hold us down. By fighting for the millions to seize power from the millionaires, to take the property of the big corporations and the rich into public hands and plan society democratically, a new workers' party could open the road to real socialism, a classless society, and a real future.

Anti-union laws	Main features	Union responses
<b>Employment Act 1980</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictions on picketing and "secondary" action</li> <li>• Ballots for new closed shop</li> <li>• Abolition of previous basis for recognition rights</li> </ul>	Half-hearted attempt at a "day of action", along with an educational programme for full-time officials and some shop stewards
<b>Employment Act 1982</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All closed shops subject to ballots</li> <li>• Tighter definition of a trade dispute placing further limits to industrial action</li> <li>• Unions faced new liabilities for "unlawful" acts</li> <li>• Removal of "union-only" clauses from commercial contracts</li> </ul>	Special conference, spring 1982: agreed that TUC affiliates would boycott ballots on closed shop arrangements and refuse state funding for internal ballots. Agreement to consider co-ordinated industrial action to back any individual union faced with legal action. Eventually, the TUC General Council voted against solidarity action in response to the attack on the NGA and abandoned the union to its fate
<b>Trade Union Act 1984</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mandatory elections by secret ballot for senior official posts in national unions every five years</li> <li>• Ballots required for industrial action to retain immunity</li> <li>• Political fund ballots once a decade</li> </ul>	Unions eventually complied with all aspects of the Act. Split developed within the TUC as the right wing around the then engineering union broke ranks to take state funding to pay for internal ballots. All these features of the law remain under New Labour
<b>Employment Act 1989 &amp; 1990</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unions liable for unofficial industrial action in the absence of a written repudiation</li> <li>• Selective sacking allowed of those on unofficial strike</li> <li>• Absolute bar on "secondary" action</li> </ul>	No official resistance after passage of legislation, though numerous wild-cat strikes have openly defied the law in this regard
<b>Employment Act 1993</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strike ballots become strictly postal</li> <li>• Minimum of seven days notice required prior to strike action</li> <li>• Abolition of the industrial Wages Councils</li> </ul>	No official opposition from the TUC beyond parliamentary lobbying



# The erosion of our civil liberties

Marcus Chamoun recounts an unpleasant afternoon in the company of Her Majesty's finest and takes it personally. Below he outlines the ongoing attacks on our rights

Recently, at a demonstration outside Harmondsworth detention centre in solidarity with asylum seekers, I was hemmed in with 50 other protestors when the police used powers under section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 to impose a blanket Asbo on anyone who tried to get near the buildings.

They then used powers under section 50 of the Police Reform Act 2002, which makes it an offence to refuse to give your name and address to a police officer who "reasonably suspects" that you have engaged in "anti-social behaviour". A few people who refused were arrested.

This was no violent protest, and there was no threat to public order or anyone's personal safety. But the demonstration gave the police an opportunity to use the laws to collect intelligence on "troublemakers", without having to show that they had actually made any trouble.

This shows what is at the heart of Labour's attacks on civil liberties. Under the guise of tackling poor behaviour, young "yobs" and criminal masterminds, laws are being brought in that curtail our rights to protest, organise and fight back against the state and the bosses.

The latest plan is for "super-Asbos", which would allow the state to impose restrictions on people suspected, but not convicted of an offence from meeting certain people or going to certain places, with the penalty of a spell in prison if broken.

The government says they are justified to combat complex criminal networks involved in drug smuggling and people trafficking. But anyone familiar with the way previous legislation on organised crime, terrorism and antisocial behaviour has been used to suppress dissent should be under no illusion that the state will rest content with the "official" purpose of this proposed law.



Indeed, the government has an impressive record of eroding the very civil liberties, which are supposed to define our "democratic system". It has introduced 15 crime and public order bills since coming to office, each supposedly to deal with an exceptional situation or a matter of public concern, and each setting a precedent for the next wave of attacks.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders (Asbos) give magistrates the power to put people in jail for breaching one. Asbo legislation blurs the distinction between the criminal and civil code with a lower burden of proof in the latter case. Courts can now punish individuals even though a law has not been broken.

The presumption of innocence is under attack on two fronts: one being the admissibility of hearsay evidence to

obtain an Asbo for "offensive" or "intimidating" behaviour; the other being the increased ability of the courts to draw adverse inferences from a suspect's use of the right to remain silent.

Since last year, demonstrations and protests within a mile of Parliament must be notified and approved by the police, under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act. The same law blurs the distinction between arrestable and non-arrestable offences, with civil rights campaigners pointing out that it is now possible to arrest people for dropping litter.

The right to privacy has been attacked with laws allowing the police to retain on a national database DNA samples from people arrested but acquitted of or not prosecuted for an offence. The database will be strengthened

with legislation for ID cards containing biometric data.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 allows the state to place people under virtual house arrest without trial, while the same freedom of movement is threatened by the Civil Contingencies Act 1994. This gives ministers the power to place whole areas of the country under quarantine, and to place essential services and industries under the control of the army.

There are more laws to come, with home secretary Charles Clarke's most likely to extend into English criminal law the Scottish verdict of "not proven", just as Scottish lawyers are arguing for it to be abolished!

Some activists attribute this assault on civil liberties to Tony Blair's evangelism, or Labour's need to look tough

before the local elections, or Charles Clarke's visceral hatred of "get-rich" lawyers and "political correctness".

Ideology and personal dispositions certainly play a part, but there is a real-world context to all this. Driving the assault is the fact that the ruling class increasingly recognises that its global and national attacks on living standards, working conditions and welfare, its drive to war and the scramble for control of the world's resources are provoking people into resistance. The bosses need to strengthen the state and powers of coercion to clampdown on the workers' movement and its allies.

Globally, the "war on terrorism" is part of this. Calling activists and parties terrorists, supporting governments that repress their own people, and carrying out surveillance on people are common practices among pro-neoliberal governments.

And while some Tories may posture as critics of the attacks on civil liberties, there is no contradiction between neoliberals' belief in the freedom of the rich to exploit the poor and support for a strong state. When their system comes under threat, the bourgeois critics of Blair and Clarke will line up with them in attacking the protests of the workers.

That is why it is essential that campaigns set up to fight these assaults on civil liberties must not rely on the Tories or Liberals. They must root themselves in the working class communities that are under attack and link up with young people and the workers' movement. They must link up with campaigns to repeal the anti-union laws and other restrictions on working class collective rights and organisations.

Democratic rights are not abstract truisms - they exist because people have fought for them over the years. And the best way to maintain and extend democratic rights is to challenge the capitalist system and governments that set out to erode them and to fight for a revolution that bring about economic and political equality - a socialist society.

# Racism in the youth justice system

By Joy MacReady

"In the other cell there is an Asian person who got one and half years for car theft and there was a white person in there for exactly the same offence who got six months. The world is racist..."

"[Police] just stop you all the time - sometimes two or three times a day. They just make up a reason, usually it's drugs, sometimes stealing."

"It is tough being black, young and Muslim... As a black person, you suffer racism. As a Muslim, [police] see you as a terrorist. As a young person, they think you are up to no good."

These are three quotes from a recent study of more than 200 young black people's experience of the youth justice system that exposes widespread racism.

The youth participating in the Just Justice project reported racist treatment at the hands of the police, the judges and the prison guards. "The belief that police officers routinely discriminate against people on the basis of racial stereotypes or prejudice is based, in part, on shared understandings transmitted from within the community but is also reinforced by the experiences of the young people themselves," said the report.

Once inside prison, the racist behaviour of wardens is more overt. Many interviewees observed that prison officers could say "racist things" that they would never hear on the streets. The following quote gives a flavour:

"I've been called a 'chimp' before. I was also called a 'golliwog' by one of these officers. I ended up getting into trouble for that, and I was put on adjudication."

The research also suggests an emerging triple burden of being young, black and Muslim in a post-11 September and 7 July world. Although some respondents simply experienced the standard - and disgusting - abuse meted out to Asians, others reported being Muslim as compounding this in terms of the looks, name-calling and treatment.

The disproportionate representation of black young people within the criminal justice system in the UK is well documented. A recent government report by the Criminal Justice System Race Unit noted that black people are six times more likely to be stopped and searched, and three times more likely to be arrested than white people.

Stop and search rules under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (Pace) are applied in a consistently racist man-

ner. Home Office figures indicate that, between 1998 and 2002, 48 per cent of all Pace section 60 searches under were conducted on black or Asian people, yet they represent only 7.9 per cent of the population in the UK.

The Audit Commission (2004) recorded that young black people are more likely to receive stiffer sentences, and less likely to receive reprimands or final warnings; a disproportionate number of black and mixed race young people are refused bail; and one in 12 black young offenders (one in 10 mixed race) are sentenced to custody compared to one in 40 white young offenders.

But despite these findings, none of these reports can offer a coherent explanation of why the criminal justice system is racist.

The real task of the police is to defend the existing social order - and the system of private property - and this means repressing resistance to capitalism and its effects.

Black and Asian people feel the full brunt of this racist force because they are traditionally the most marginalised, with the lowest pay and the worse social conditions. They can also be the most militant, fighting back against racists and the police in the 1950s, 1980s and late 1990s.

Moreover, to prevent this contagion of radicalism seeping into the white working class, the police and state often repress these communities to create divisions, running scare stories about "black muggers", asylum seekers' scroungers or condoning racist gangs.

The state and its police cannot therefore be relied upon to defend black people from racism or treat them with equality. To fight back against racist attacks, we need our own street patrols under the control of committees of local

workers and the community. As well as preventing harassment by police and racist gangs, these patrols could deal more effectively with antisocial crime than the police ever could.

And while the criminal justice system may take measures to prove its antiracist credentials, such as the MacPherson report or community policing, the core racism of the police, prison and court system cannot be reformed away. It must be pulled up root and branch.

## 'Acting strangely' in a white world

"I was walking coming out of the swimming pool when the police were passing because someone had phoned them saying there was a black person in the swimming pool acting strangely. I was the only black person in there. So, the police saw me, and my description matched the person they say was acting strangely in the pool. So the police asked me questions and I told them, 'I don't know what you are talking about'."

The police say that they don't understand me. I was speaking

to them and they say they got to take me to the police station and arrest me. I told them I am not going to speak any more and they were asking me questions and they were arresting me and I ask them 'why you are arresting me, what are you arresting me for' and I started to struggle and won't enter the police car and I left a mark on the police car and they arrested me for criminal damage."

Asylum seeker who had been in UK 2 years



# Stop the pensions sell-out: restore the strikes

Unison and 10 other unions have suspended strikes to defend public sector workers' pensions. *George Binette* of Camden Unison argues our leaders have wasted the efforts of union members

At first, many union members believed that a deal had been struck. Some thought that the million strong strike on 28 March had scored a victory. But any sense of elation dissolved when they read the statement brokered by the TUC.

Only a "framework for negotiations" had been offered. Unison's local government executive voted by 17-6 to suspend all action on 12 April, with United Left and Socialist Party members opposing the move.

The framework does not even guarantee that existing LGPS members will receive the same protection offered to the rest of the public sector, still less protect future scheme members. Unison general secretary Dave Prentis had insisted that this was the absolute bottom line on pensions. But action has been suspended without securing it.

John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, introduced legislation into parliament the day after the strike, tearing up rule 85. So Unison members who had never agreed to abandon the fight for rule 85, which offered at least the possibility of retirement at 60, have been left high and dry by their union leadership after just a day of strike action.

Union members and activists must reverse this move. Their leaders are getting ready to sign away their rights without so much as consulting members. Talks are almost certain to drag on until June. Meanwhile, the danger is that members will become confused and demobilised.

In the coming days it is vital to convene emergency shop and branch committee meetings, where militants must argue that the fight is far from over and for members to:

- Pass (and email to union HQs)

motions condemning the suspension of the strikes, and calling for their immediate resumption: we can walk and talk at the same time!

- Demand regular reports on negotiations, rank and file meetings to decide on the next step, and that any offer goes to a full ballot of members

- Call on Unison to continue withholding funds from Labour, and for the other unions to follow suit: no money for the party that attacks workers' pensions!

- Convene, maintain and extend local strike and action committees to keep up the pressure and hold their leaders to account.

The suspension of Unison money to Labour during the dispute opens up the possibility to break the unions from Labour and to call on them to form a new, mass working class party. For too long Unison, and other unions have

been handing over money to Labour, while the party has been attacking the working class.

The link with Labour is not just a financial link, it is a political one. Historically it has been argued that union members can influence Labour Party policy through the link, though in practice it was always the pro-capitalist Labour leaders who influenced union policy!

But even this illusion has been shattered.

In addition to the 11 local government unions, the three rail workers are in dispute with their employers over pensions and the NUJ and Bectu are balloting over BBC attacks on staff pensions.

The time is ripe – in danger of becoming over-ripe – for workers and their unions to fund and support a new party that can fight for the interests of the working class and become actively involved in its creation.



# Poverty under Labour: facts speak louder than spin

Under Labour, 700,000 children have been lifted up from the bottom rung of society. Yet 3.5 million children remain marooned there. *Daniel Johnson* asks if the government is really reducing poverty

Most studies define poverty on the basis of an individual or household living on less than 60 per cent of average income – with housing costs extracted to even out gross disparities. By this measure, there are now 11.4 million people living in poverty, down from 13.8 million in 1996/7.

But this has been achieved during an economic upturn and after nearly 20 years of Tory attacks; the figures were far lower in the early 1980s. Any slowdown in the economy is bound to hit the poorest first and hardest, as unemployment, which has already started to rise, kicks in.

Thirty per cent of disabled adults live below the poverty line, more than a decade ago. And this is before the current attack on incapacity benefit.

Child poverty is also only at the level

it was in the late 1980s. The proportion of children living below the breadline in 1979 was one in 10; today, it is one in three.

However, this disguises real poverty traps. In parts of Merseyside, the rate is as high as 70 per cent, and areas in Dundee an incredible 96.1 per cent of children living in poverty. For London as a whole the figure is 41 per cent: so much for the prosperous south.

The percentage of children in jobless households remain stubbornly high at 15.3 per cent, despite an overall fall in unemployment.

## Pensioner poverty

Labour said this was also a priority and once again, progress has been slow, achievements fragile. One in five pensioners still live on less than £5,000 a year. Only 4 per cent top £25,000 in income.

These statistics translate into real misery. One and a half million pensioners are malnourished. In 2004, 22,000 elderly people died of hypothermia. Gordon Brown stopped the £200 heating allowance for pensioners this winter, so expect this figure to rise again. Despite the famous bus passes, 7.2 million pensioners have no access to public transport.

Pensioner poverty is expected to bounce back after the recent round of employers cutting benefits for today's workers.

But Labour politicians quote figures on absolute poverty in order to distract attention away from rising inequality, or relative poverty. Here, their record is much worse.

A study in the *British Medical Journal* showed that health inequalities across the UK are at their widest since Victorian times. A team of academics

from Sheffield and Bristol found a 10-year difference in life expectancy between rich and poor areas.

Inequalities in income and wealth have also widened since the 1980s – the poorest 10 per cent in society now receives only 2.8 per cent of the nation's total income, whereas the richest tenth gets more than a quarter.

The government's own statistics on Households Below Average Income show that the poorest 10 per cent in Britain are actually £3 a week worse off than in 2001. After housing costs, they have just £88 a week to live on.

## The bosses' priorities and ours

Labour's record on poverty is a disgrace. The poorest section of the working class is actually worse off than four years ago and millions of people still live in destitution. Inequality is worse than ever and the

benefits of economic growth have overwhelmingly gone to lining the pockets of the rich.

This reflects their capitalist outlook. The elderly, the poor and the disabled can't produce surplus value – or not much – so let's not waste time and money on them.

The unions, pensioners and disabled action groups should unite to fight for a working class solution. This should include as a minimum:

- Minimum wage of £9 an hour for all
- Work or full pay – all benefits and state pensions to be set at the minimum wage
- Reverse privatisation of housing, utilities and services – allocate on the basis of need, not profit
- Tax the rich, make them pay – abolish taxes on the poor, including council tax and VAT

# Respect goes for broke in the East End

By GR McColl

With the prospect of electoral disaster for Labour on 4 May, the Socialist Workers Party-dominated leadership of Respect certainly expected to benefit from Labour's plummeting support.

But Respect has fielded fewer than 200 candidates to contest council seats across the whole of England. A significant number are in two East London boroughs: Tower Hamlets where George Galloway defeated incumbent Blairite, Oona King, and Newham where Respect came second in two seats on the basis of a strong anti-war vote in the 2005 general election.

In Newham and Tower Hamlets, Respect has sought to stand in every seat. The Respect leadership has prioritised a strong showing in Tower Hamlets above any other objective in the 4 May election and while talk of capturing the council is now acknowledged as a pipe dream, the SWP still entertains the possibility of Respect being the single largest "party" on a hung council.

As in the 2005, the electoral battle in Tower Hamlets has been one of the most bitter and hard-fought in the country. The local Labour leader, Michael Keith, claims: "Respect are appealing to divisions between the com-

munities and are threatening community cohesion by the nature of their campaign". Respect accuses him of comparing their organisation to the BNP and has offered evidence against the Liberal Democrats and Labour of

electoral fraud in connection with postal votes.

The antics of George Galloway MP in the Celebrity Big Brother house have certainly caused Respect some damage, not least among Bangladeshi voters, who are regarded as a core constituency, but Galloway has partly redeemed himself with his skills as a campaigner and invocations of the memory of Poplar Labour leader George Lansbury striking a chord with older voters.

More significantly, Respect has made some inroads with white working class tenants on council estates because of its supporters' determined efforts in opposing the transfer of estates to housing associations. Proposals for stock transfer crashed to defeat in five ballots late last year.

This is a crucial issue in a borough where there is still a very large council housing sector – 27 per cent of all accommodation – and owner occupation is out of the question for virtually all of the council's 24,000 tenants.

Whether anger over stock transfers, combined with bitterness about the Iraq

war and the generalised discontent with Labour will translate into a Respect breakthrough remains to be seen in circumstances where the most of the electorate will simply abstain.

Being the largest opposition bloc in the council would probably be the most attractive option for Respect in Tower Hamlets and Newham since it could then evade responsibility for the implementation of the pretty vague and minimal promises outlined in its "East End Charter" (see box).

In the unlikely event of its winning control of a council Respect would face a hostile government that would soon expose not only its organisational weaknesses, but the absence of a programme for developing and implementing a needs-based budget that would entail cancelling debt repayments to City financial institutions, scrapping the precept for the Metropolitan Police and replacing the iniquitous Council Tax with a genuine wealth tax. In short, the test of office would swiftly reveal that Respect is not the answer to Labour, old or new.

## Respect's 10-point 'East End Charter' of immediate pledges

- End all council house privatisation
- Spend the £45 million the council has in reserve on housing repairs and refurbishment
- Sack all the private consultants and save the £6 million they are paid in fees
- Oppose privatised City Academy schools and campaign for more teachers in the classroom
- Reverse the council policy of privatising youth services. Open more youth centres and recruit more youth workers
- Open more pensioners' clubs and improve care for vulnerable and disabled people
- Give a fair deal to leaseholders
- Protect our green spaces from private development. We will make Tower Hamlets the most environmentally friendly borough in Britain.
- Stop Crossrail. Crossrail is to link the City to Canary Wharf. We need an integrated transport policy to meet the needs of ordinary residents
- Stop the War. Don't attack Iran. Make Tower Hamlets the first anti-war council in Britain.



# Women fight back!

By Helen Watson

**R**esistance to the negative effects of globalisation, particularly through the conscious anti-capitalist movement, has shown that we can unify against a common enemy. While much of the process of globalisation has been to unify the process of exploitation around the globe, there is no doubt that some sections of society are more acutely affected than others. In particular, the rural and urban poor of the least developed countries, the migrants and refugees from poverty and war, and the masses of newly unemployed in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Across all the areas, and in the rich countries, it is women whose lives have changed the most, who suffer the greatest hardship, and who are absolutely key to resisting global capitalism.

Women have been drawn more and more into workplaces by globalisation. This is positive insofar as it gives women more economic independence, reduces their isolation in the home and draws new fighters for freedom into the struggle. But, as always, capitalism does not do this for the benefit of women workers. It does it because it believes women will work for less and will continue to look after children and the home for free. As in the 19th century in Europe, it is also only too willing to use child labour to make its super-profits.

The increase of women's work largely in part-time and casual jobs goes hand in hand with a neoliberal attack on the service sector. This forces women to look for work that fits around their domestic commitments, while the availability of secure full time jobs has reduced. Overall globalisation has changed the form but maintained the essence of women's oppression: their continued responsibility for household and family.

All across the world, women are involved in historic struggles against the capitalist system: in Colombia, women have blocked highways to a protest against neo-liberal globalisation and to demand that the Free Trade Area of the Americas be rejected; in Cuba, they demand reform of monetary policies which create poverty and inequality; in Ghana, they are fighting for the right to property and secure family life; in Palestine and Iraq, they are fighting against the brutal force of occupation.

Other important issues raised through struggle by women are around immigration and the accompanying violence in El Salvador, as well as trafficking and the rights of migrants by women in Greece. The struggle in Indonesia against the brutality of sweatshop labour, with young women organising in unions to challenge the right of the bosses to work them to death has inspired other struggles from Mexico to China.

Developing an international network of women facing oppression on many different fronts - to coordinate our struggles and come up with a concrete plan of action - is absolutely necessary in order to challenge our oppression. Women have shown that they are willing to fight for a world free of oppression, exclusion, discrimination, intolerance and violence. We, as revolutionaries, are willing to fight for such a world - and have a strategy to do so. We don't believe that the world's wealthy are going to just hand over their profits and renounce their old ways to make a better world. We are not dreaming of a utopia, but are waging a political struggle against the problems today and building a strategy of how we will win the struggles of tomorrow.

Sexism, like racism, homophobia and other forms of oppression, is a tool used by the capitalist system. The capitalist rulers maintain the level of exploitation by playing one section of society against the other. For example, in the family the sexist division of labour means women are expected to carry out a host of domestic duties and childcare. Men clearly benefit from this, which is why many men continue to defend their privi-

leged role in the family, and some will use violence and abuse to retain their power over their wives and daughters. But the real beneficiaries are the capitalists who effectively use this system to get women to carry out the reproduction of labour by raising the next generation of workers for nothing. That is why bourgeois society does everything to maintain the patriarchal family. While men also dominate many spheres of power and influence in society, such as the workplace and political and judicial structures, it is class relations in society that explains how exploitation works, not gender. It is the capitalist class that exploits working class men and women and this class is made up of women as well as men.

All women do not suffer the same level of oppression under capitalism - this idea blurs the class divide and the socio-economic structures underpinning capitalism. Although even bourgeois women suffer sexism and often legal and economic oppression relative to men of their class, they remain representatives of the ruling class and will generally act in the interests of that class. A young women worker in a sweatshop factory in a Mexican maquiladora has more in common with a fellow male worker than she does with Hilary Clinton or with the 'first lady' of any country.

## Fight for a working class women's movement

This has consequences for how you build a movement against women's oppression. The struggle for women's liberation is widely identified with feminism, since workers' organisations have failed consistently to take up the issues. But can feminism lead to women's liberation? Since feminism locates women's oppression solely in the relationship between men and women, separate from class society, it promotes the strategy of women of all classes joining together to fight their oppression. This is a dead end, because ruling class women do not share our interest in fighting the low pay, poor housing and lack of access to healthcare that cause millions of women to suffer every day. The founders of the Suffragette movement in Britain suspended their demand for the vote for women after the outbreak of the First World War. They put their allegiance to their class above their solidarity with their sisters.

Rather than a cross-class feminist movement led by Hilary Clinton, women need to build a movement based on working class and poor women who share a common enemy, global capitalism.

Such a movement needs to fight for:

- Equal rights for women: rights to vote, rights to work, rights to education, unrestricted rights to participate in all public and social activity.
- Equal pay for equal work. This is still beyond the reach of millions of women because work tasks have been redefined to avoid it. We fight for its implementation.
- Permanent contracts for part-time workers with full protection from early dismissal and entitlement to sick and holiday pay and to decent pensions.
- Free high quality childcare, available every day and whenever parents need it and funded by taxing the rich. With the deregulation of working hours, the provision of flexible 24-hour childcare has become an even more urgent need so that women can work, and participate in social and political activity.
- Free contraception and abortion, on demand, regardless of age. In many countries there is a moral backlash against women's rights, led by the evangelical Christians that run the White House - abortion clinics are under attack; services are cut while "family values" are promoted to put the burden of care back on the shoulders of women. Contraception and abortion must be defended against attacks by right

wing forces and access to these must be free, on demand and regardless of age.

- No to discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. We should fight for anti-discrimination laws, campaigns against homophobia and the right of lesbians and gay men to self-defence.
- End the criminalisation and harassment of sex workers, full access to healthcare, a living wage and retraining for free. Sex workers' unions must be recognised and integrated into national union federations. They must have safe working conditions free from the control of organised crime and the dangers of life on the streets. The working class movement must demand the legalisation of prostitution under the control of the sex workers.
- Stop sexual harassment at work and domestic violence. The harassment of and violence against women must be exposed, confronted and outlawed. Fully-funded refuges must be provided to allow women to escape violence at home.
- The right to an immediate divorce on request. An equal right for all co-habiting women (married or not) to share in the household assets upon separation or divorce.

The majority of women will only be liberated and free from discrimination when the economic foundations of class rule and male supremacy are overthrown. Whilst the deep roots of this oppression lie in ancient class society, they are reinforced by global capitalism. Only a socialist society, run for human need rather than private profit, will be able to get the whole of society to take on the domestic duties, which today are mainly performed by women in the home. Only then will women be able to realise their full potential.

## Socialism and women's liberation

A socialist society would promote collective childcare, cooking and cleaning and an equal distribution of housework and childcare between men and women in society as a whole. Women will no longer be forced to perform these basic tasks separately in isolated family units. The social provision of these services - well funded and democratically run - could be a million times better than the provisions made in the family today. In this way, real choice, a high standard of living and real sexual equality can replace the poverty, isolation and oppression facing working class women today.

This is why Workers Power and the League for the Fifth International supports the struggles of working class women across the globe, at the grassroots level, at the factory level, national and international levels. These struggles lay the basis for forging a movement led by working class women that can fight against sex discrimination, the oppression of women and the super-exploitation that grows out of it. A working class women's movement needs to be open and democratic - and refuse to recognise national borders by linking up with struggles in other countries. It needs to involve local activists, women's groups and federations, but also pull in the trade unions that together can strike a blow against the capitalists and bring the system to a grinding halt through strikes and occupations.

The need for such a movement lies not only in the scale of the attacks faced by women across the globe, but also in the fact that the traditional organisations of the working class fail to meet the needs of women workers and women at home. To counter this, women need to join unions and campaigns and fight for the full participation of women and for leadership positions at all levels. In these organisations women must have the right to caucus to resist sexism and the institutional obstacles to women's participation.

Within a working class women's move-

ment there will be arguments about how to take the struggle forward. We think that the only road to full women's liberation is through the overthrow of the global capitalist system, and that means building an international working class party - the Fifth International. Join us!





## A programme of action for the ESF

**Dave Stockton** looks back on a year of struggle and outlines the dangers and tasks facing the workers movement at the Athens European Social Forum

In the face of low growth rates, estimated to be 1.1 per cent between this year and 2010, the ruling classes of Europe have gone on the offensive against the working class.

But the workers have resisted. The current wave since the "No" vote to the EU constitution has included:

- In Belgium two one day general strikes
- Dock workers attacking the European parliament and forcing the repeal of the dock work directive, withdrawal of the worst parts of the Bolkestein directive.
- In Italy, Germany and Greece strikes against right wing governments
- In France the defeat of the constitution at the ballot box has been added to by the defeat of the CPE.

"Laws are made in parliament," said premier Dominique de Villepin, "not on the streets". How wrong he was.

The wave of struggles has begun to affect elections, toppling one of the worst neoliberals and pro-war governments, that of billionaire Silvio Berlusconi. Yet the entry of Rifondazione Comunista (RC) and the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) into a government led by the neoliberal Roman Prodi is an enormous danger.

The Linkspartei has been formed from the Wahlalternativ (WASG), a

split from the SPD, and the PDS. But the latter shares power in two German regions with the SPD and is loyally fulfilling the neoliberal "reforms". How can this be?

Both RC and the Linkspartei are part of the European Social Forum and the European Left Party (the reformed Communist parties), where they insist they are staunch anti-neoliberals.

The same fate is beckoning another ESF stalwart and ELP member, the French Communist Party (PCF) in 2007. Electoral "realism" will push it towards a bloc with the Socialist Party and its "social liberal" programme.

How will these parties lead struggles against neoliberalism when they sit in governments that are carrying out the attacks?

A militant struggle has to continue across Europe to prevent these attacks.

Key measures for uniting the resistance that the League for the Fifth International is fighting for in Athens at the fourth European Social Forum. We will also be fighting to expose the European Left Party's fatal policy of class collaboration and supporting the left wing militants in these parties who are fighting to stop this treason to the working class and the anticapitalist struggle.



Successful struggles of workers in Belgium (Left) and students in Austria have been features of the past year



### Extract from the League for a Fifth International's draft declaration to the Athens European Social Forum

**O**ur movement needs a programme of action to counter the Lisbon Agenda and the plans to build a European imperialist superstate. This cannot be a charter of democratic and social aspirations, which fears to name capitalism or imperialism as the enemy, and the working class as the leading force for another world and the socialist goal we must set ourselves.

**Our programme must include calls to action.**

Declare war on imperialist invasions and occupations in the name of a so-called War on Terror, on the genocidal Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people. Demand the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and the Middle East. Encourage and solidarise with the resistance to the occupiers.

Condemn the campaign currently being waged by the Anglo-American alliance, supported by the main EU states, to prepare the way for an attack on Iran. Lift the blockade on Cuba and halt the threats against Venezuela.

Mobilise a massive movement against any more economic sanctions and military attacks: this time we must go beyond demonstrations to direct action and mass strikes to halt the warmongers and drive them from power. Defend our democratic rights

against the so-called anti-terrorist measures. End "extraordinary rendition". Release all those held without trial at Guantanamo Bay or in Iraq. Bring their torturers to justice.

Mobilise continent wide resistance to privatisation and the coordinated attack on our social and public services, pensions and jobs – mobilising international solidarity action with all those directly under attack from plans like Agenda 2010 or the new Italian pension laws.

Aim at common action across Europe to enforce the renationalisation without compensation of what has already been privatised, and demands that the corporate exploiters and the rich be taxed to pay for the restoration and maintenance of social services.

Make the corporations and the rich pay for putting all the unemployed back to work and for affording all the poorly paid and insecurely employed a raise in their wages to levels decided by the unions, along with decent working and living conditions.

Tear down the prison walls of fortress Europe and give asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants seeking work the right to enter and enjoy full civil rights within the EU.

Give people of all faiths the right to practice their religion in

peace, which does not scapegoat Muslims or demand they abandon symbols of their faith (such as the headscarf), but equally which removes all compulsory religious observance from the schools and the courts, that grants a women's right to choose. In short, establish a secular system of justice, education and healthcare.

Give all the stateless peoples of Europe the right to self-determination, including the right to secede and form their own states, should they so wish, and the right to use their own languages. We do not necessarily advocate the splintering of the existing states, but we do insist that oppressed nationalities be absolutely free to determine their future. Only thus, and by social and economic development based on equality, can national antagonisms be laid to rest and the genocidal horrors of the twentieth century be abolished forever.

Liberate women from the burden of childcare and housework, unequal wages and domestic violence. Recognise their right to abortion and contraception. Liberate lesbian and gay people from all legal and job discrimination, abuse or harassment.

Give full political and social rights to young people and assure them a free, universal, publicly

owned education system, and the right to work for equal wages. Abolish measures which allow police to inflict summary punishment on young people unconvicted of any crime. Repeal all laws, like the attempted CPE in France and the Biagi law in Italy, which allow employers to hire and fire young workers at will.

As long as capitalism exists – we demand the fullest and freest democratic rights and call for the election of a sovereign European constituent assembly, within which we will fight for a Socialist United States of Europe.

Transfer ownership and control of the factories, the offices, the shops, the mass media, the banks and finance houses from the millionaires and the corporations into the hands of those who work in them and who use their goods and services.

Fight to break for good the power of the warmongers, to dissolve their police and security forces and replace them with the power of the working people, organised in assemblies of their delegates and their own mass defence associations.

Treat the struggle in Europe as an integral part of a worldwide revolution to dispossess the capitalists and create a socialist world, free of poverty, inequality and war.

## Italy: Rifondazione Comunista put to the test

By Luke Cooper

**R**omano Prodi is Italy's new prime minister. In a closely contested election Prodi's l'Unione Coalition won 49.8% of the vote in elections to the lower house – just 0.7% more than the Berlusconi led the House of Liberties; but due to the system for handing out seats Prodi has a comfortable majority of 63 seats. In the Senate however, they have 158 seats while Berlusconi's coalition has 156.

Prodi's victory is indicative of the tremendous hatred of Berlusconi felt by a working class that has had major confrontations with him in the last five years.

Beginning with the massive confrontation between the Italian state at the G8 protest in the summer of 2001, Berlusconi has faced a militant and radical

working class movement.

In particular, between 2002 and 2003 the huge militant mobilisations beginning with the 13 million strong general strike against laws that took away protection against dismissal, continuing through the millions fighting the war in Iraq and further general strikes against pension reform, a tremendous opportunity existed on the streets to drive Berlusconi from office.

An opportunity that was squandered by the demobilising of the movement by the left reformist Rifondazione Comunista, the Democratici di Sinistra (Democrats of the Left), and the CGIL and other union leaderships, scared of forcing a confrontation with the government that could destabilise the state.

Italy's bosses will be looking to Prodi to pep up ailing capital-

ism. The Italian economy sunk deeper and deeper towards stagnation, growing at on average just 0.7% GDP a year over the last five years. Its dominant sector is manufacturing, which is increasingly struggling to compete against cheaper imports. It has a large public sector that has meant incurred a state debt that is staggering 106% of GDP. It has too few big multinational firms really capable of competing in the global economy.

The neoliberal medicine of cuts in state spending (i.e. welfare), privatisation, slashing of state regulation and attacks on social security are the remedies of choice for the bulk of the Italian ruling class.

Berlusconi, however, is not a natural free-marketier having established his business empire through monopolistic business

practice and corruption, and has only "delivered" for the ruling class two major defeats on the workers' movement – his pensions and labour market reforms having left the state sector relatively untouched.

Will the Prodi government deliver for them? He will certainly try. Prodi is the architect of the Lisbon Agenda, passed in 2000, with the stated aim of making Europe the world's most competitive economy by 2010.

The worry for the bosses, though, is not whether Prodi wants to deliver for them but whether his coalition partners will be so willing to dance to the neoliberal tune.

Prodi's coalition rests on the support of Rifondazione Comunista and the Democratici di Sinistra (DS), who have both been at the head of the huge mass con-

frontations against Berlusconi over the last five years.

Despite Rifondazione leader Bertinotti promising at the 2002 Florence European Social Forum that the party would "never again" support a government like Prodi's Ulivo coalition (1996-1998) he now finds himself speaker of the lower house and leader of a bloc of 47 deputies in the same coalition.

The common manifesto of the l'Unione coalition promises more neoliberal reform, including an economic policy based on the "principles of the strategy of Lisbon launched in 2000 by the governments of the European Union" and a "plan of reform with three aims: a more favourable investment climate and increased competitiveness, improvement of the quality of services, and reduction in the costs of state administration".

The only little sop it offers to the working class is to partially repeal the Biagi law, making it less attractive to employ workers on temporary contracts.

Rifondazione must bloc all attempts to "liberalise" the labour market, dismantle the welfare system. Prodi will insist that if Rifondazione does not back his measures his government will fall and Berlusconi will get back in. In fact the biggest danger is that RC and DS will use their ties with the unions to push through measures that Berlusconi could not get away with.

The plight of Italian capitalism will not for long allow RC to avoid hard choices. So that the working class is not disarmed as it was 10 years ago, it is urgent that a revolutionary party is built in Italy, armed with an action programme for working class power.



# France: students defeat the CPE, but more is possible

By Marc Lassalle

The French student movement has scored a tremendous victory over the right wing government, forcing president Jacques Chirac to repeal the Contrat Premier Embauche (CPE), just 10 days after it had become law on 1 April. The massive and escalating actions in the first week of April were the reason for Chirac's capitulation.

More than 3 million people demonstrated in France on 4 April, in the fifth of a series of joint days of action by youth and workers, which threw France into the biggest political crisis since 1995.

On 5 and 6 April anti-CPE demonstrators targeted key communications and workplaces across the country: preventing the movement of an Airbus A380 convoy, blocking the main Paris stations, and picketing out workers.

It was not "seeing reason" that changed Villepin's mind but the power of this opposition. His and Chirac's climbdown represents a stunning victory over the plan to reform the labour code.

The danger now is that the activists set their sights on the Presidential elections next year in the false belief that a Socialist Party candidate will protect the labour code and "social Europe".

In the meantime, the "equal opportunities law" remains in place, which allows apprentices to work at the age of 14, and for night work from the age of 15. It also includes compulsory military service for young "repeat delinquents".

The small business version of the CPE, the CNE, which also allows employers to sack workers without reason, is untouched.

## Fighting unemployment

Villepin claims that the CPE was designed to "do something about youth unemployment". Now let the trade unions and the coordinations of the youth "do something". Let them decide how many new housing units, what repairs to the existing projects, how many schools, hospitals, youth clubs and leisure centres, parks and bus and rail links are needed. Then they can develop a local and national plan – an

action programme – to put the unemployed to work, solving the social problems.

How to pay for it? Make the rich, the corporations, the banks, pay! Make the reformist leaders – François Hollande of the SP and Marie-George Buffet of the PCF – say what they would do in power.

The coordinations should approach the unions, locally and nationally, to launch a campaign of mass meetings, demonstrations and direct action (strikes, occupations, blockades) to demand this "solution" to structural unemployment, précarité and social decay.

The movement also needs to fight racism. Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, has proposed "Ceseda" laws, which would prevent many immigrant families from gaining residency in France. It also promotes "throwaway immigration" based on annual work and residency permits.

Unions and immigrant rights activists demonstrated against the bill on 29 April. They must press for full citizenship rights for all: no immigration controls, no deportations. Representatives of the racial-



ly oppressed, along with the trade unions, should monitor employers, who discriminate against Arab and black job applicants, and demand draconian punishments. Whenever Sarkozy's stormtroopers, the CRS, invade the banlieues, they must be met with demonstrations, strikes and organised defence.

Last, and most importantly, we have to agitate for a new revolutionary party. The LCR, Lutte Ouvrière and the PCF must involve the broader strata of the vanguard in a debate about what kind of party and programme we need: not only to fight neoliberalism, but also to overthrow capitalism; not just to win elections, but to achieve working class power as well.

The main obstacle to further successes remains the trade union bureaucracy. The unions did not take the fantastic opportunity in April to raise and re-raise the many issues facing workers – from the privatisation of Gaz de France to mass unemployment. These are the issues that affect many millions and can draw them into a mass strike wave.

That is why it is vital to encour-

age the formation of workers coordinations, councils of action, united with those of the students. That is why it is vital for youth, unionists, and militants of the far left to agitate in the workplaces for the formation of such coordinations in every town, city, district of Paris and the suburbs.

## Relaunch the offensive!

The CGT trade union leader, Bernard Thibault has fixed the traditional May Day demonstrations as the first major protest against the CNE, following on from the successful action on 18 April when 40,000 university and high school students across France took part in a day of action against the CNE.

The "no committees" that ran last year's successful campaign against the EU constitution are holding their national conference on 13 May to discuss the way forward for the left. It is essential they and the student co-ordinations and unions turn this into a council of war against the government.

Our aim must be to force the unions to call an all out general

strike. In the end, it was only the absence of a general strike that left Chirac, Villepin and Sarkozy in office and the CNE and "Ceseda" laws in contention. Next time, activists must demand the union leaders call such a strike – and prepare for one from the beginning.

In every union and workplace, militants should fight for all out action now: bring forward wage claims from every section of workers; re-raise the demands over pensions and working conditions; occupy workplaces to prevent scabbing and provide places for mass meetings of the strikers.

The coordinations must recognise too that a general strike poses the question of who will be master in the country: the capitalist class or the workers? It raises the prospect not only of kicking out Chirac, Sarkozy and Villepin, but the need for workers' power, for a workers' government based on councils of action and a workers' militia.

It opens the road to another world: a world without inequality, insecurity and exploitation, a socialist world.

# Germany: whose new Left Party?

Martin Suchanek reports on the the latest unsteady moves towards a united Left Party in Germany

The German Christian Democrat/Social Democrat coalition government of Angela Merkel has been pushing through major attacks on the working class. It has inflicted a partial defeat on the striking public sector workers union ver.di, raised VAT from 16 to 19 percent, increased age of retirement to 67 and has cut unemployment benefit for young people.

The conventions of these two left groupings focused on their fusion process, rather than on how to stop the government and the bosses attacks.

Since their success in last general elections, the new 54 strong parliamentary fraction headed by Oscar Lafontaine of the WASG and Gregor Gysi of the LP.PDS has put on a dull show. One of the WASG MPs summed up why – now it is time, he said, for "real work" and an end to "running around in social movements."

The WASG-LP.PDS parliamentary fraction plainly agrees with this parliamentary cretinism. It refused to call for a national demonstration against the government attacks in winter and early spring, when the

grand coalition was only feeling its way. It refused to criticise the sell out by the ver.di leaders in the public sector strike – since it regards the trade union bureaucracy as its partner. And finally, the PDS has pressed on with its disastrous policy of coalition with the SPD in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. These regional governments are cheerfully implementing neo-liberal attacks.

And in Dresden, the PDS fraction in the CDU/Free Democrat-led city council supported selling all the council housing, flats for tens of thousands of workers, to a US pension fund!

## The Berlin question

The really vexed issue facing the conventions was the decision of the WASG in Berlin to stand on its own in the elections for the Berlin state in September. This was because the PDS has pushed through attacks on the workers and wants to continue with its "successful coalition."

While the Berlin WASG is under the leadership of the left, the Sozialistische Alternative (SAV) sister organisation of the Socialist Party in the UK for example plays a leading role, it is made up



Gysi and Lafontaine: All smiles for the posters

of more than just the left groups.

It is party of those who have suffered from neo-liberal attacks and the Berlin government's policies. Nearly half of its 900 members are unemployed, many became politically active during the mass Monday demonstrations of the unemployed in 2004; many others are shop stewards or Betriebsräte.

The WASG Berlin is a genuine political expression of those workers who want to fight and has

roots in the social and political struggles in the city – struggles that are often against the SPD/PDS government. Therefore it demanded, correctly, that to join in a common election platform with the PDS, the PDS had to break with implementing social cuts, privatisation, etc.

This "ultimatum" was sharply rejected not only by the PDS and the national parliamentary fraction but by the right wing of the WASG Berlin led by former PDS-

members and by Linksruck, the German sister organisation of the British SWP. The latter formed a kind of faction in the WASG, called "Rixdorfer Initiative" running a petition "for a common slate in the election – irrespective of all differences".

## The path to fusion

The Berlin dispute has a national importance – since it also poses the question of what kind of party should be built: a fighting party of the working class or party of the PDS apparatus in the East and the left trade union bureaucracy in the West. Already, the PDS and the WASG have set up a common programme commission whose work will be pushed through without any possibility to put forward alternative drafts.

Christina Buchholz of Linksruck, wanted go for a split. The majority of the WASG leadership refused this, since they knew that the Berlin WASG has a base in the city, with recent polls showing that up to 12 percent are actively considering voting it.

Whilst the PDS convention was the normal bureaucratic affair where leadership policies

were rubber stamped, the WASG convention was much more contentious. A WASG leadership majority resolution, which endorsed the path to fusion, was adopted by 186 to 107. Another resolution, which condemned the Berlin section for standing separately and empowered the national leadership to do whatever it sees as necessary to prevent an independent candidacy in Berlin, was adopted by 160 to 130 votes. However this resolution also stated that "expulsions shall be avoided."

On Saturday evening, Gysi, and Lafontaine posed in triumph for the bourgeois press. But this triumph may not last. Over the last months an opposition has developed in the WASG nationally which may represent anything from a quarter to a third of the membership. Arbeiter Macht, the German section of the LFI is part of this opposition.

It aim must be to defeat the attempt to tie the new party to the class collaborationist policies of the PDS and the national parliamentary leadership and instead build an organisation that offers revolutionary solutions to the current crisis in Germany.



# USA: No Shopping, No School, No Work

On May Day, millions of workers took part in the Great American Boycott of 2006, an unofficial general strike in support of illegal immigrants' rights. *Jeremy Dewar* reports on the huge US movement

A new movement of migrant Latino workers hit the headlines in March and April under the slogan, "We are workers, not criminals". It has organised millions of illegal immigrant workers across the US. It has also made links to the unions, the antiwar movement and the African American community.

On May Day – not a public holiday in the USA – the movement reached a new high when millions of workers walked off the job to attend huge demos and rallies. Their action was all-embracing and summed up by the official slogan: No Shopping, No School, No Work. Where has this movement come from?

## Si, se puerde!

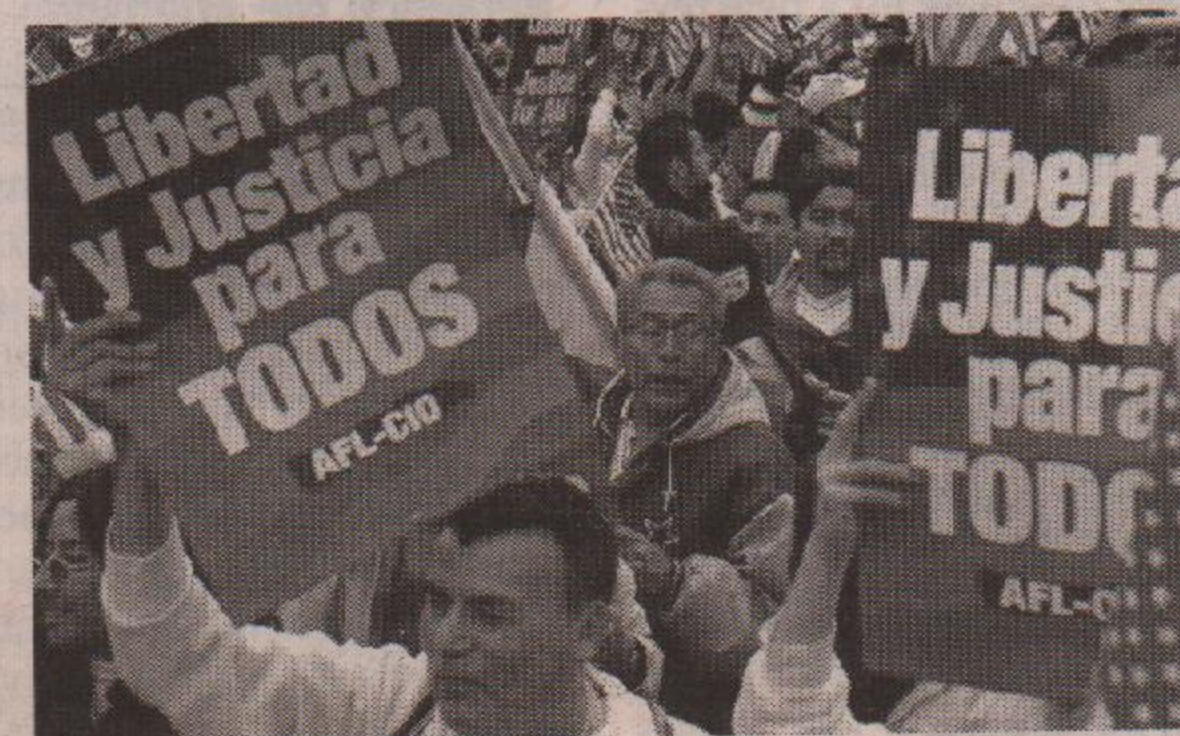
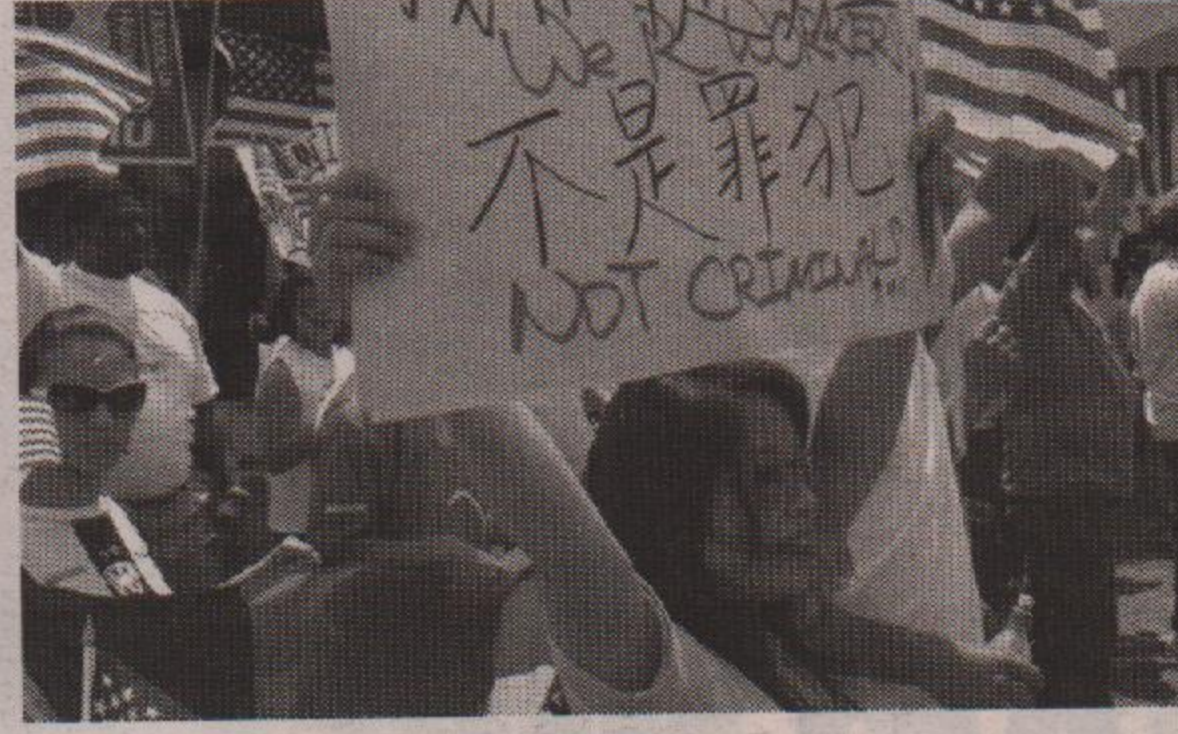
On 7 March 5,000 immigrant workers attended a rally in Washington to protest against a new bill before Congress, HR4437, which threatens to make it a criminal offence to associate with or assist illegal immigrants. Its appearance coincided with George Bush's decision to push ahead with the construction of a wall along the Mexican border.

From this small beginning, the call went out for "A day without Latinos" on 10 March. Based on a popular film from the 1970s called "A day without Mexicans", it was a huge success. Half a million responded, including Koreans, Poles, Irish.

The movement went on to mount the biggest demonstration in the history of Los Angeles (one million marched on 25 March), and to bring two million onto the streets in a political strike across the US on 10th April and to call the "Great American Boycott" on May Day.

According to *Business Week*, "Latinos alone account for more than 40 million people in the US – including an estimated 12 million undocumented. With 17 million of them working, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, a Washington DC based research group, they represent 13 per cent of the US labor force. The nation's 7.2 million undocumented immigrant workers make up 24 per cent of all farm workers, 17 per cent of maintenance workers, and 9 per cent of employees in production occupations."

The simple idea behind the immigrant workers' movement is to combat



the racist laws designed to criminalise them by withdrawing their labour. These workers are barely noticed by mainstream America. They are the "invisible" people who clean hospitals, fix plumbing, pick fruit. With few or no rights, they are subject to systematic repression and super-exploitation: an immigrant construction worker is killed every day in the US. Their contribution to the economy is considerable.

Could these workers stand up and be counted? As word got round, and the demos and rallies got bigger and bigger, the reply, "Si, se puerde – Yes we can" became the roar of a mass movement.

This movement is based in working class communities, using working class methods of struggle and making work-

ing class demands.

Yes, the Catholic Church is heavily involved – just as the Southern black Protestant churches were in the Civil Rights Movement. Democrats like Senator Ted Kennedy have jumped on the bandwagon, hoping to mount a voter-registration operation on the back of it.

Shopkeepers and small farmers have lent their support. Significantly, it is the racially oppressed and poor petit bourgeoisie who live and work alongside migrant workers who have recognised that their livelihoods and social status are bound up with these workers.

The movement also has massive support from the youth. On 27 March, 40,000 high school students walked out in solidarity with their parents and

friends in Los Angeles, the cops greeted them with nightsticks and tear gas only firing their determination. When the Mayor of Los Angeles called on them to go back to school, they responded with the old anti-Vietnam war chant, "Hell no, we won't go!"

The state has responded with fierce repression, raiding workplaces and detaining immigrant workers in their thousands. Bosses have tried to fire workers or threatened to bring in the immigration officials.

## Where next?

This movement not only has the potential to dynamise the US working class movement, it has already begun to do so. The unions involved (primari-

ly those like the SEIU and Unite Here of the Change to Win coalition) have recruited hand over fist among the most exploited and oppressed sections of workers. The Million Man March and the Troops Out Now Coalition support the May Day call and are involved in the New York co-ordination.

One danger is that the movement could splinter over George Bush's call for a "guest worker" scheme, which would allow Mexicans to work for a specific time, in a specific job, before being deported. Even Andy Stern, general secretary of the SEIU, who joined janitors on protest hunger strike and has some respect among the workers, supports this disgraceful position.

On the other hand, the movement is clearly inspiring others to join in. On May Day, workers across Mexico, who have suffered since the North America Free Trade Agreement gave US multinationals free rein to distort their economy, also boycotted US companies.

The vicious anti-worker character of American democracy can also be seen in the treatment meted out to the New York transport workers. TWU 100 Local (New York subway) has been fined \$2.5 million for a three-day strike in December 2005. Its leader Roger Toussaint has been fined \$1,000 and handed a 10 day prison sentence for leading the strike (all public sector strikes are illegal in New York). Meanwhile a big battle is shaping up in the auto industry as Delphi, a major parts manufacturer is using bankruptcy proceedings to slash wages by up to 65 per cent.

Does this mass movement, with its potential dynamising impact on the trade unions and working class of the US, herald a radical change in US politics? Only if the US workers break the right wing duopoly of the Democrats and Republicans, and found their own party – not a reformist party, but a mass working class party based in the unions, the working class and in the immigrant and racially oppressed communities.

Such a new party needs to democratically debate and decide its perspective and programme, and in this process socialists should do all in their power to win it to a revolutionary position and to reach out towards the international working class. Any major step towards real class independence and internationalism by the US workers will be a giant step for workers across the world.

# Support self-determination for the Kurds

By Sean Murray

Violence has been escalating in the Kurdish areas of south-eastern Turkey (northern Kurdistan) over the past few months. So far dozens of militants of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and 14 members of the Turkish armed forces have been killed and hundreds of civilians injured.

The violence has flared since 11 November last year when a member of Jitem, the secret service of the Turkish army, walked into bookshop in Semdinli, a remote town in the Kurdish area of south-eastern Turkey (northern Kurdistan) and planted a bomb. One man was killed and another was shot in the rioting that followed.

Such actions are routine for the security services, what was unusual about this act was that the security officer was caught along with two accomplices. Weapons and documents, including a map of the bookstore and a list of names including that of the owner, were

found in the car the three tried to use to escape. Ignoring the evidence and eyewitness reports, the security officers were freed and the public prosecutor is now being investigated for bringing the case to court in the first place.

These are just the latest incidents in the war waged by Turkish security forces against the Kurdish people since 1984, when the PKK took up arms for Kurdish self-rule in the southeast. Over 30,000 Kurds have been killed and more than 3,000 Kurdish villages evacuated and destroyed, turning between 3 and 4 million Kurdish civilians into internally displaced people. Between 23,000 and 30,000 Kurds were imprisoned in the period between July 1987 and May 2001.

The European Union (EU) is using Turkey's wish to join as an opportunity to put pressure on Ankara over the suppression of Kurdish civil rights. In response to this, in a landmark speech in August 2005, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan promised that

the Kurdish conflict would be resolved with "more democracy". The Turkish army clearly has other ideas.

But the Kurdish people certainly cannot rely on the support of the imperialist countries. Following Erdogan's speech the government failed to introduce any concrete measures. When it was pressured into lifting ban on the Kurdish language in 2002, State Prosecutors were briefed by the Ministry of the Interior on how to bring charges of 'membership of a terrorist organisation' against any students or parents who lodged petitions demanding optional Kurdish lessons!

The US has shown a number of times that it is willing to manipulate Kurdish aspirations for independence to further its own aims in the region. The development of a semi autonomous Iraqi Kurdish area in its struggle against Saddam Hussain and its military support for Iranian Kurdish rebels in its campaign to destabilise the Iranian government are more high profile examples.

But the US, and the EU, will never support a unified Kurdish state as that would weaken Turkey which has been a loyal Nato member and US supporter in the Middle East. The imperialists are only interested, as always, in divide and rule. In the past they encouraged the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in northern Iraq to attack PKK bases there.

However since the overthrow of Saddam and growing Kurdish autonomy in Iraq the Turkish military have become worried that this will spill over into eastern Turkey and revive the flagging fortunes of the PKK. As a result Turkey, with the tacit support of the US and EU, has used the occupation of Iraq to relaunch its war on the PKK and Kurdish nationalists. This is what lies behind the escalation of violence and has forced the PKK to restart the guerrilla war put on hold since its leader was imprisoned.

The war on Kurdish rights also provides a cover to wage a war on the rights

of the working class and other oppressed sections of Turkish society. The Turkish state has a long history of interfering in the affairs of trade unions in Turkey and has outlawed many workers organisations under the guise of protecting the interests of the state.

The government, under the direction of the IMF and as part of its negotiations for EU entry, is currently implementing a neoliberal programme of cuts. On 14 April, the government passed a wide ranging IMF sponsored Social Security bill that increases the retirement age as well as reducing state pensions, attacks health and safety laws and is introducing wide scale privatisation of public services and utilities.

In this situation Turkish workers have nothing to gain from supporting the government's repression of the Kurds. Turkish workers should support the rights of Kurdish people to self-determination, up to and including separation if they so wish, and launch a common fight against the government.



# Bolivia: Morales sends in the army to break airline strike

Workers at the Bolivian national airline had a rude awakening about the new government of President Evo Morales last month – he sent in the army to break their strike. *Keith Sellick and Stuart King report*

At the end of March, police and army broke a strike of workers employed by Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (LAB) at La Paz airport and a blockade at Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and Tarija airports.

Workers at LAB had been on strike to force out the company president Ernesto Asbun and nationalise his 50 per cent share of the company. The shady millionaire Asbun had taken it over in 2001. Back wages were owed and pension contributions had not been paid; Asbun was clearly milking the company.

When the government arrested Asbun for corruption his friends in the Supreme Court had him released. LAB workers immediately blockaded the airports and demanded the state takeover of the company – Morales refused saying he was not going to “nationalise corruption” and reward Asbun.

In Cochabamba, the army broke up the blockade by using tear gas and arresting protestors. One of those arrested, Oscar Olivera, is a key leader of social struggles and worked alongside Morales in the victorious battle to stop water privatisation. The La Paz radio station, Gigavision, broadcast Olivera live from the airport, calling on Morales and his vice president Alvaro Garcia to “stop caring only about numbers and start caring about people”.

While later Morales offered enough concessions to get the strike lifted, his resistance to the demand for nationalisation is significant. LAB was one of a mass of state assets part privatised – known euphemistically as capitalisation – over the past 20 years. Water, mines, telecommunications, oil and gas were just some of the industries handed over to capitalists.

One of the key demands of the mass movement that put Morales in power is to take back all that has been sold off. Olivera, in his live radio broadcast from Cochabamba airport, said: “What Evo Morales has to do is to banish capitalisation once and for all, and return to the Bolivian people what is rightfully theirs.”

But Morales has a different strategy: reform of the state and the econo-



## A government of the popular masses?

There are no shortage of international fans of Evo Morales and his government.

Commenting on Morales' government in February's *International Viewpoint* (IV: Fourth International), Herve Do Alto declared that here was “finally a government equal to the hopes of the popular movement”. IV refers to the “massive presence of the social movements” in the government and how this was welcomed by the left.

But the opposite is the case. Salvador Ric Riera, a conservative Santa Cruz businessman and Minister of Public Works has been denounced by regional trade unionists for corruption and money laundering. Minister of Mines Walter Villorroel is a member of the rightist UCS party and helped privatise the state mines. The Minister of Defence is a former lawyer for LAB, involved in covering up the rip off of state assets during privatisation. And Luis Alberto Arce,

Finance Minister and member of the rightist MNR, has long been associated with the IMF and World Bank.

Indeed the “leftist” Ministers were confined to the “social ministries”, while the economic and security ministries were left firmly in the hands of the conservatives.

Yet this spokesperson for the Fourth International ends his article by declaring that there is no doubt that the Government's “first tentative steps are going in the direction of satisfying the popular demands of the famous October agenda”.

Precisely at the moment when revolutionaries should be pointing out to the masses the dangers of the Morales government backtracking on the “October Agenda”, and mobilising the workers and popular movements to stop it, the Fourth International is peddling illusions in the leftism of the government, which can only lead the masses to defeat.

my, making compromises with the capitalists, while talking left to the mass movement. He needs to keep them on side, even threaten the capitalists with them, but above all demand patience and discipline from them.

Recently he told BBC's *Newsnight* that he felt a “prisoner of the neoliberals' laws” and was waiting on the Constitutional Assembly (CA) to enable him to pass laws that favour the poor. “In last year's election we only captured government – with the Constituent Assembly we want to capture political power.” In fact, Morales is a willing prisoner of the capitalist state, yet he sighs and groans about what he would love to do for the poor.

While a Constitutional Assembly can be a powerful tool in sweeping away privileges, corruption, an undemocratic constitution and so on. The issue is: who will convene it, who will control it, who will frame its laws, who will enforce its decisions? If the answer to all these questions is the organisations of the working class and the fighting poor – the COB trade unions, the Fejuve, and the youth organisations – then the CA can play a revolutionary role.

But if the masses are demobilised, then the CA will be held under the auspices of the Supreme Court, the police and the army: the bourgeois state.

Morales' government has no intention of sanctioning a revolutionary CA. Already he has said the old parliament, elected on corrupt and fiddled electoral lists, will continue in power while the CA is in session.

Elections to the CA are planned for 2 July. In a major concession to the big capitalists of Santa Cruz, Morales has agreed to simultaneous referendums on departmental autonomy, referendums that will be binding on the CA. The departments of Santa Cruz and Tarija control 87 per cent of the country's gas and oil resources and their business leaders have been threatening to break away if their riches have to be shared with the workers and peasants of Bolivia.

The Bolivian workers organisation – the COB – has denounced this agreement, accusing Morales of reneging on

the “October Agenda”, a reference to the uprising of October 2003 which demanded the nationalisation of the hydrocarbons (oil and gas) and a CA with full powers.

Morales has made it clear where he stands. Speaking in February before business leaders of Santa Cruz, he declared: “This government guarantees the right to private investment... we only ask that these profits benefit the entrepreneurs and the Bolivian state.”

He has also defended large estates that are efficient and profitable. In his inaugural speech he declared: “I want to tell you that productive land, whether it is producing or lends itself to a social economic use, will be respected, whether it is 1,000 hectares, 2,000 hectares, 3,000 or 5,000 hectares. But those lands which are used for speculative purposes will revert to the state in order to redistribute the land to the people without land.”

However, while Morales continues to enjoy popular support – up to 80 per cent in opinion polls – and many of those who have led the heroic struggles against privatisation and austerity continue to have illusions in him, revolutionaries must continue to place demands on him.

As a first step, he can throw the bourgeois ministers out of the cabinet, he can nationalise the oil and gas resources, he can distribute the land of the huge estates to the peasants, he can arm the masses. If he did any of this, the mobilised workers and peasants would enthusiastically support him.

The Bolivian workers and peasants should follow the example of the LAB strikers and step up their struggles. Morales and his party, the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism, an alliance of different classes in society including sections of the bosses) will no doubt resist such a renewed revolutionary offensive, and in that struggle the Bolivian masses will need to form their own party.

Such a party would have to fight Morales' government and the bosses. It would have to fight to overthrow the army, the police and the capitalist state and bring in a state based on councils of workers and peasants.

# Venezuelan revolution must go further

President Chávez comes to London this month. He will see some trade union tops, hold a press conference and meet London Mayor Ken Livingstone. But he will not be seeing Tony Blair, write Keith Harvey.

A man George Bush calls “a negative force in the region” will find no welcome at Number 10. But Chávez has supporters elsewhere, lots of them, in Britain and among all those in the world who are fighting against neoliberalism and corporate globalisation.

Underlying Chávez's popularity has been his ability to benefit millions of people with health, literacy and infrastructure programmes without stripping the major capitalists and imperialists of their assets. He can do this because he has enjoyed amazing economic good luck: rising state revenues

from oil exports.

But this cannot last. A significant fall in oil revenues, a world recession, a flight of foreign investment from Venezuela would all narrow or eliminate Chávez's room for manoeuvre.

Chávez's policies have been limited to reforming capitalism – with land reforms, fairly minor restrictions on the movement of capital, and only nationalising (buying out) capitalist companies that have gone bankrupt. He has talked about workers' control of the factories, which has led to some enterprises being taken over by the employees. This is a first step but must go further. But no attempts have been made to expropriate foreign capital or nationalise the banks.

When Chávez is under attack from imperialism, especially the US, and

from internal counter-revolutionaries, Marxists certainly should fight alongside the Bolivarian Movement against every anti-democratic and sabotaging action. But this backing cannot extend to giving political support to his government, failing to criticise its weaknesses or, worse, sowing illusions in the steadfastness of Chávez.

Chávez should immediately expropriate the land, banks, insurance companies and big industries without compensation and place them under full workers' control. Chávez must go further than sanctioning the take over of unused land in the largest estates and confiscate all large estates for distribution to the landless.

The working class needs to form its own delegate-based workers' democracy in the factories and the barrios, with

real accountability and power; the missions and circles that oversee the social programmes are purely auxiliary support mechanisms for Chávez or self-help projects. They must aspire to organise and govern the lives of those who are drawn into them. For this they need power, rooted locally but reaching up to regional and national level – a workers' and peasants' government.

This power needs defending from the counter-revolution arms in hand. It needs armed militia to defend its demonstrations from opposition provocations and reactionary police attacks. And it needs them for the day that Chávez's army ceases to be a “friend of the people” and imposes instead the “rule of law” upon an insurgent population. Chávez has said he wants to train the masses to wield weapons and has

ordered a million guns. Good, the workers and peasants must take them and demand that Chávez buys more.

The most urgent task of the working class is to form a revolutionary socialist workers' party out of the cadres of the unions, out of the Bolivarian circles, out of the rank and file soldiers. It must be committed to the root and branch overthrow of the capitalist system that he presides over.

Venezuelan reactionaries are presently divided and weak; they are resigned to another Chávez victory in the Presidential elections in December. But the counter-revolutionary forces are biding their time – waiting for another opportunity to overthrow him.

The future of the Venezuelan revolution depends on revolutionary measures being taken.



In the final part of his review of *Cuba: a New History* by Richard Gott, *Stuart King* explains how Fidel Castro's July 26 Movement brought about a social revolution, but one where the working class was deprived of power

The 1959 government that followed the overthrow of Batista was not a socialist one. Castro had made an alliance with leading figures in the bourgeois Ortodoxo Party in July 1957 – the "Pact of the Sierra". He followed this agreement to the letter. The government was dominated by irreproachable bourgeois figures. The presidency went to a respected judge Urrutia, the premiership to Cordona, Dean of the college of lawyers, the Foreign Ministry to Rufo Lopez, a manager of the Development Bank under former President Prío Socarras. The J26M took half of the ministries but leading figures like Castro held no positions in the government.

Yet this was no ordinary regime. Batista's army and repressive state apparatus had been overthrown by the guerrilla army and the process of purges continued after the victory. Special tribunals dealt out summary justice to officers involved in the repressive dictatorship – several hundred were shot, thousands imprisoned and others summarily dismissed. Only the airforce escaped largely unscathed.

Real power lay with the guerrilla army and its commanders and everyone knew it. There was a "dual power" in Cuba, running through the government itself and through the J26M. The J26M was a loose coalition, stretching from Ché Guevara and Raul Castro on the left, to nationalists and anti-communists on the right. It had no democratic structures and only ever met once – in 1959.

The labour movement was also an arena of struggle. It was purged of its Batista leaders but the attempt of the Cuban Communist Party (PSP) to smoothly retake control was challenged by the more anti-communist elements of the J26M. The PSP were defeated in the new union leadership elections.

Indeed relations between the J26M and the PSP were extremely bad in the first half of 1959. In this period Castro was giving speeches, much of them directed to a US audience, making clear he was no communist, that the Cuban revolution was not red but "olive green".

But it was not long before the government coalition itself started to unravel. The first to go was Cordona who discovered that despite being premier he had no power; he resigned to be replaced by Castro. But it was the proposed agrarian reform, or rather the US opposition to it, that was to blow apart the coalition in the summer of 1959.

The bulk of the guerrilla army had been drawn from the peasantry and landless labourers. Massive land inequality existed in Cuba. Huge estates lay underused while peasants scratched a living on inadequate plots. Land hunger sparked a wave of land occupations after the revolution and the government needed to respond.

As Richard Gott notes (page 171) the land reform proposed in May 1959 was a moderate one. Landowners were allowed to keep estates up to 1,000 acres, and "efficient" ones – cattle, sugar and rice plantations – were exempted. Landowners were to be compensated (apart from those with connections to the dictatorship) and the land distributed to the landless and small peasants in 67-acre plots. But it was not the content of the land reform that alarmed the US, but the context in which it was taking place; in the middle of a revolution it ran the risk of getting out of control.

The US responded ambiguously at first to the new Cuban government and to Castro. Sections of the government in Washington (and the CIA) thought he was a radical nationalist who could be tamed and used against the Communists. Others saw him as a dangerous revolutionary at the head of a communist infiltrated movement that threatened US interests.

## Cuba: island of revolution



By the summer of 1959 the US had decided to use the big stick. Gott quotes a National Security Council summary written in 1960 saying "In June (1959) we had reached the decision that it was not possible to reach our objectives with Castro in power... In July and August we had been busy drawing up a plan to replace Castro" (p180).

As a result the land reform, which included a clause stating land could only be owned in the future by Cubans – a clear threat to companies like United Fruit and Cuban American Sugar which owned huge estates in Cuba, was declared "unacceptable".

Early summer saw a huge campaign against the reform in the US and Cuban press. The large cattle ranchers' association led the campaign, donating \$500,000 to bribe the press! The head of the airforce denounced the "indoctrination classes" being held in the army and then fled to Miami. Various ministers joined the attack with President Urrutia giving interviews about the communist threat to Cuba.

Days after a US diplomatic note opposing the reform and demanding prompt and effective compensation, Castro moved against the right in the government, which was now unreliable.

In June, several leading ministers were forced to resign and their posts filled by trusted J26M veterans (Raul Castro, for example was placed at the interior ministry). In July, Urrutia was forced to resign.

### Purging the state

Castro's refusal to bow to Washington's demands set off a train of events not dissimilar to the attempts to remove Hugo Chavez from power in Venezuela in 2002-3. From the summer 1959 through 1960, plots were launched to overthrow Castro. Bombs were set off in the cities, economic sabotage ravaged the country and sections of the right wing of the J26M took to the hills to try and launch a guerrilla struggle, this time backed by the USA.

Castro immediately moved to consolidate his position. The armed forces, especially the airforce was purged again – some figures claim as much as 50 per cent of the personnel were sacked. Raul Castro was made Defence Minister, the army was renamed the Revolutionary Armed Forces and a large militia organised alongside it, initially comprising 100,000.

Gott documents the growing rift with the USA during this period, which had dire economic consequences for Cuba. Under a sugar quota agreement the USA took almost the entire Cuban sugar crop, the mainstay of the country's economy. Much of the industrial infrastructure, the sugar mills for example, depended on US spare parts.

As relations with Washington deteriorated, the J26M government looked around to diversify its exports of sugar and for alternative imports – especially of oil. The Soviet Union was only too keen to step in, seeing in Castro not

only a potential ally and link to Latin America, but also as a military outpost a mere 90 miles from the US coastline.

A wave of nationalisation of US assets took place in the summer of 1960. They were sparked off by the US pressurising oil refineries in Cuba – Standard Oil, Texaco, Shell – to refuse to accept Russian oil, which had arrived in exchange for sugar. The US replied by ending the sugar quota completely. The USSR agreed to buy the unsold 700,000 tons of the sugar harvest that year. By November 1960 the USA had imposed a crippling and complete trade embargo on Cuba – an embargo that exists to this day.

The turn to the left necessitated Castro to seek a renewed alliance and indeed fusion with the PSP, which probably had 18,000 members by this time. The right-wing J26M leaders of the trade unions were purged and replaced by reliable PSP apparatchiks. Moves were set in place to merge the J26M and the PSP into a single party. The Integrated Revolutionary Organisation was formed in July 1961, only becoming the Cuban Communist Party in 1965.

By the end of 1960, a Czech planning team had arrived to start re-organising the economy, and in 1961 a series of "organic laws" were introduced re-organising the government economic ministries. In the words of Edward Boorstein an American socialist working in the Cuban planning agency in 1960-63, "The purpose of this re-organ-

isation was to complete the task of rebuilding the state apparatus, to give it the structure required to operate a socialist planned economy".

### What sort of revolution?

Richard Gott does not concern himself with how a guerrilla movement, led by a revolutionary nationalist, hostile to communism, ended up constructing a "socialist state" under the tutelage of the USSR. Yet for Marxists at the time (and since) this was a conundrum.

It was one thing to explain how Stalinist parties in Eastern Europe and China replicated, with the support and encouragement of the USSR, the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism, while sidelining the working class. It was quite another to explain how a small group of revolutionary intellectuals with few links to Stalinism had led a predominately rural based guerrilla movement to destroy capitalism in Cuba.

For Tony Cliff of the British Socialist Workers Party, capitalism had not been overthrown just replaced by "state capitalism" and Cuba had become yet another small country dominated by "Soviet Imperialism".

For most of the Fourth International it was taken as proof that even a "blunt instrument", like a petit-bourgeois guerrilla movement, could be used to deliver socialism. Criticism of the Cuban revolution was reduced to "advice" to a revolutionary ally. The absence of workers' democracy, of workers' councils, political and press freedom were minor "bureaucratic deformations".

Yet what came out of the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism in Cuba was a Stalinist dictatorship – certainly one with more popular, anti imperialist roots than the Soviet Union and "Peoples Democracies" of Eastern Europe, and therefore not politically identical to them – but a dictatorship over the workers nevertheless. The Castroite movement transformed itself into a Stalinist party taking some of the worst features from that political current – its bureaucratism, fear of workers' democracy, top down control, command economy etc.

The task of establishing a real socialist Cuba, where the workers direct the economy and state through their own democratic, workers' councils, has still to be won. It will only be achieved through a new political revolution, one that will smash the Cuba's Stalinist repressive apparatus and state.

The Castro regime was able to overthrow capitalism because it had already destroyed the bourgeoisie's most important means of defence, its repressive apparatus, the army and police, in the 1959 revolution. As a result it was able to transform the state to run the post-capitalist property relations through a process of purgation and restructuring in the early 1960s.

Richard Gott's book obviously covers more than the period covered by this review. It deals with the Cuban state's foreign policy zigzags in Latin America and Africa pre and post Guevara's death. It deals with the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on the Cuban economy and the ongoing struggle against the US blockade – a struggle in which all socialists should stand fore square with the Cuban people and its government.

It also examines today's Cuba, where the capitalist sectors of the economy are growing under the benign gaze of the longest serving dictator in the world – Fidel Castro – leader of the revolution and now perhaps its gravedigger. It is a book worth reading – critically – in order to understand the history of a remarkable revolutionary island.

• For more on the Cuban Revolution and the social overturn go to:  
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFfiles/DRcontents.html>



# May 1926: when workers stopped the country

The May 1926 General Strike could have changed the course of British history but, as *Andy Yorke* and *Mark Hoskisson* explain, the trade union leaders demobilised the workers and handed victory to the bosses

“I suppose my usual critics will say I was groveling, and it is true. In all my long experience I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today.” These were the words of Jimmy Thomas, a leading member of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), on May Day 1926.

Thomas had spent the day with Tory ministers in Downing Street, desperately trying to find a way to call off the imminent general strike. Meanwhile more than 100,000 workers, determined to stop an ongoing bosses’ offensive, gathered in Hyde Park for the biggest May Day demonstration in living memory.

But Stanley Baldwin’s Tory government gave Thomas no way out. They had prepared for battle. On Monday 3 May 1926, the TUC called the majority of organised workers out on strike. The British general strike had begun.

## Preparations

The Tories were driven by an intensifying economic crisis on the one hand and by the need to counter the wave of militancy that had swept the globe since the Russian Revolution of 1917 on the other. Baldwin’s Tory government came to power in December 1924 determined to smash the unions.

On 30 June 1925, the owners of Britain’s coal industry terminated all existing wage agreements and slashed pay. All sides saw the attack on the miners as a test case. The TUC called solidarity strike action and the government retreated. It announced a nine month wage subsidy for miners and a Royal Commission on the industry.

This retreat was hailed as “Red Friday” by the workers’ movement. It demonstrated the power of workers’ solidarity. But instead of using it to prepare for a red future the union leaders sat back and congratulated each other. Yet it was clear that the Tories had no intention of giving up. Faced with Red Friday Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, explained: “We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or if not of averting it, of coping effectively with it when the time comes”.

The government and employers began preparations. The country was divided into 10 districts, each under a “Special Commissioner” in charge of strikebreaking. The Tories strengthened the army and police, creating a Civil Constabulary reserve made up of ex-soldiers. They set up the Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) – a semi-official strike breaking organisation that was set up to run the rail and road supply system.

In contrast the TUC, the “general staff” of the workers, made no preparations.

This passivity was all the more unpardonable given that there was a sizeable left-wing faction on the TUC leadership – the General Council. The miners’ leader, A J Cook, together with TUC president George Hicks and builders’ leader A.A. Purcell, enjoyed the support of many workers as they argued a militant line. But most of these lefts were, as Trotsky commented, radical in words rather than deeds.

It was left to the rank and file, organised in the Communist-led Minority Movement, to prepare from below. On the eve of the General Strike the Minority Movement was able to hold a conference of delegates from 547 union bodies, representing 957,000 workers.

At this conference and throughout the general strike, the Communist Party correctly called for the setting up of local councils of action to organise and politically lead the strike. It also fought for workers’ defence of



picket lines and strikers against the expected violence from scabs and the state.

But while these policies were correct and the growth of the Minority Movement showed the growing influence of the CP (it had only 5,000 members in 1926), the policy of the party towards the “left” leadership was a fatal weakness.

To pursue the policy of “socialism in one country” inside the USSR, Stalin sought allies in the imperialist countries to ward off any attack on Soviet Russia. The “Anglo Russian Committee” (ARC) – an alliance struck between the Russian and British trade union leaders – was used by Stalin to promote sympathy for Russia and prevent, he hoped, imperialist attack. But this policy had a price. The CP had to promote the left reformist trade union leaders who were vital to this policy and mute its criticism of them in order to preserve the ARC.

These left leaders proved incapable of fighting the sell-out policies of the right wing and the CP never prepared its members, or the hundreds of thousands in the Minority Movement, to fight independently of the TUC leadership. Before and during the strike the CP’s main slogan – “All Power to the General Council” – disarmed and confused the militants – it was this very General Council, which organised the sell out.

Trotsky had outlined an alternative to this disastrous policy and warned in advance that the left leaders would vacillate and betray. But with Stalin’s campaign against “Trotskyism” in full swing his warnings were either suppressed or construed as “sabotage” because they undermined the ARC.

This all meant that the CP found itself tied to the left wing of the bureaucracy precisely at the moment when it needed to break with them and lead the Minority Movement in offering a fighting policy that could win the strike.

## Employers’ offensive

In March 1926 the Tories went onto the offensive. The Royal Commission proposed scrapping subsidies to the coal industry, a measure that would immediately result in massive wage cuts and job losses. If it went ahead it would pave the way for similar policies in every industry.

Cook and the miner’s leadership rejected the proposals and declared the miners’ union ready to strike. The TUC was pledged to support the miners.

The right-wingers on the General Council, like Jimmy Thomas and Ernest Bevin, had a powerful influence that the lefts had done little to challenge. In an attempt to avert the crisis the lefts effectively ceded leadership to these two, dispatching Thomas on his famous trip to Downing Street to “beg and plead” for a compromise. They all feared that a general strike could lead to revolution – the last thing these reformists wanted.

But the miners were already locked out and a printers’ strike had started at the Daily Mail in protest at its anti-strike editorial. The Tories broke off negotiations and forced the TUC to call the strike.

The response from the ranks was immediate, solid and overwhelming. Once the working class had shut everything down it was immediately faced with the problem of who runs society. As councils of action and local strike bulletins mushroomed, millions of workers began to realise they could run society themselves.

The initial impetus for local councils of action came from the TUC, who envisaged them as mere strike co-ordinating committees. But once the fight was on, these councils gathered delegates from every type of workers’ organisation. Some of them became real centres of embryonic working class power, like the “soviets” which had taken power in Russia in 1917.

The most effective councils of action organised themselves into separate “Commissariats”. They distributed food and organised workers transport. They organised workers’ defence units to protect supplies and to stop police attacking pickets. They produced trade union bulletins and papers to counter the propaganda of Churchill’s anti-strike paper *The British Gazette*. The TUC’s daily paper, *The British Worker*, reached a circulation of one million by the end of the strike.

Mass pickets were organised to stop strike breaking at strategic workplaces, where, under police and army protection, the OMS had taken over.

In the Fife coalfield, in Scotland, the trades council formed a workers’ defence corps. A

Tyldesley miners outside the Miners Hall during the 1926 General Strike

member of the Fife council of action wrote: “The organisation worked like clockwork. Everything was stopped – even the railway lines were picketed... After police charges on mass pickets, the defence corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. Numbers rose to 700, of whom 400 marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again.”

Throughout the country the strike was gaining strength. In contrast the union leaders were desperate to find a way out. General and Municipal Union leader, Charles Dukes expressed their fears: “Every day the strike proceeded, the control and the authority was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control.” A revolutionary situation was developing. The strike did not just call into question the survival of the government, it called into question the survival of the system.

## Betrayal

What was urgently needed was a communist party that actively pushed this development towards its natural conclusion – the formation of a revolutionary workers’ government. This would have entailed preparing the workers for seizing power and smashing the obstacles that stood in their way – the police, the OMS and the army.

But the Communist Party failed to challenge the hold Hicks and Purcell had over the most advanced workers. And as the strike continued these lefts ran for cover behind the coats of Bevin and Thomas. On 12 May, only nine days into the strike, the right wing delivered their unconditional surrender to the Cabinet. Bevin remarked: “We have taken a great risk in calling the strike off. I want to argue it must not be regarded as an act of weakness, but rather one of strength...it took a little courage to take the line we have done.”

The TUC lefts stayed silent. Even A. J. Cook, general secretary of the miners, refused to go over the heads of the TUC and call for continuation of the action from below. Yet the workers themselves showed no signs of wanting to retreat, on the day after it was called off 100,000 more workers came out on strike. But in the end the miners were left to fight alone, for seven more months. Starvation and isolation led to a terrible defeat.

The Communist Party failed to learn from the defeat indeed Stalin’s faction had to cover it up. They certainly attacked the right wing of the labour movement and their “left-wing satellites” but at the same time maintained their alliance with them in the ARC. They attacked Trotsky for his criticisms of the Anglo-Russian Committee and for his demands that the Russian trade unions should have publicly broken with the traitors in front of the working class.

The defeat of the general strike and the miners was a massive set back for the British workers. Thousands were victimised and wages slashed. General strikes were outlawed. The unions lost millions of members as the whole movement retreated after this strategic defeat of the working class.

The general strike was defeated not because the forces of the state were stronger than the working class, nor because the rank and file gave in, but because the union leaders were faced with a choice: the survival of capitalism or the fight for workers’ power. They preferred defeat to the threat of revolution and the revolutionaries were not armed with the right policies to be able to win the leadership from the bureaucratic traitors.



# Nepal: out with the King!

The masses forced the king to recall parliament. But the revolution must go further, argues *Richard Brenner*

**M**ass demonstrations of workers and peasants defying tear gas, plastic bullets, baton charges and live rounds have ended the dictatorial rule of the Nepalese King Gyanendra.

Hundred of thousands of workers and peasants went on general strike for 19 days, marched to the towns and cities, and broke through army and police cordons. Six people died and more than 200 were seriously wounded, a third with rubber bullet wounds to the head. Young people, women and children were drawn into striking and demonstrating in increasing numbers. Hundreds of thousands carried the red flags of the Communist Party and chanted slogans for an end to the monarchy, for a republic and an elected Constituent Assembly.

The three main trade union federations, which organise more than 500,000 urban workers in industries as varied as chemicals, iron, tourism, tea plantations, carpet and textile making and even barbers, brought the country to a halt. After heeding the call of the bourgeois parties for a four-day general strike, they stayed out for 19 days!

In the face of a mass uprising the regime of the king was paralysed. The forces of repression were falling back - in the end only being able to control a small area around the royal palace in Kathmandu. One protester told the BBC: "I am not afraid, I do not fear the government. Every Nepalese person here is willing to give up their lives in exchange for freedom."

The first offer from the King to appoint a prime minister was rejected by the masses, who showed their contempt by going onto the streets in even greater numbers.

Gyanendra had to make further concessions. Now the masses are celebrating a victory after forcing the King to recall parliament.

The two-week long general strike confirmed Lenin and Trotsky's analysis that a general strike poses the question of power and demands an unambiguous answer to the question: "Who will be master in the house?" It is this question that the Seven Parties Alliance (SPA) has utterly failed to answer. The recall of parliament, which met at the end of April, satisfied the SPA, consisting of bourgeois parties, including the Nepalese Congress Party, and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist). Congress leader GP Koirala, 84, has become prime minister. He is well known for his iron grip on the party and putting his own family in positions of power.

Since its formation in 2005, after

Gyanendra dissolved parliament and established autocratic rule, the SPA has demanded three things: the restoration of parliament; an interim government to supervise elections to a Constituent Assembly; and for the Constituent Assembly to determine the fate of the monarchy.

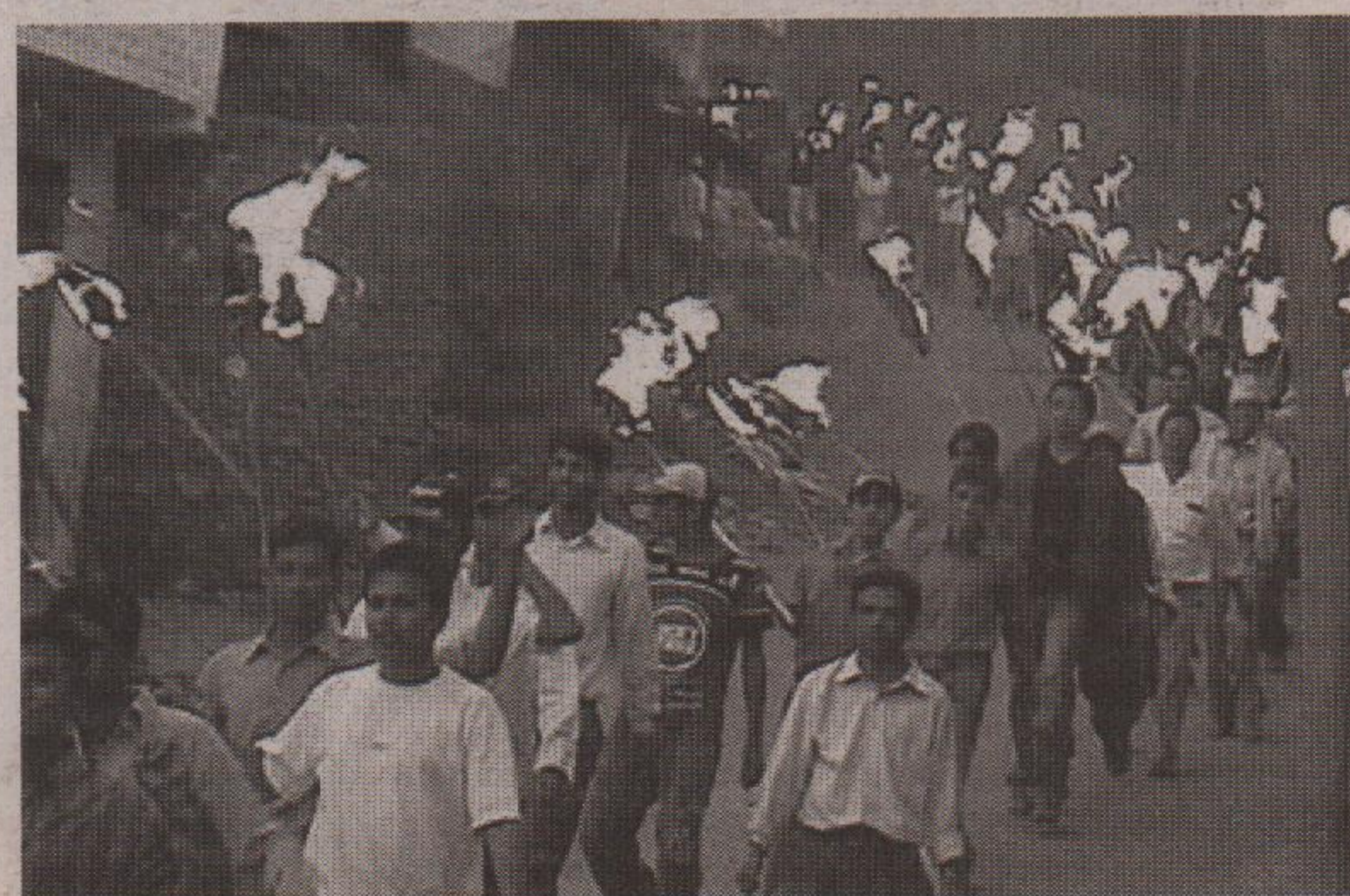
This programme perfectly expresses the aims of the SPA's component parties. The bourgeois and liberal nationalist parties want to reopen space for their own participation in the political process and government, not to allow the masses to rule themselves. They want a government of professional parliamentarians that can control the election of a Constituent Assembly itself, without allowing the masses to influence the process; hence they refuse to declare in advance that the monarchy must be abolished and replaced by a republic.

Most shameful of all, the CPN (UML) - the main party of the urban workers - participates in this bourgeois bloc and limits its own demands to a capitalist democracy. Its crowning slogan is not a workers' and peasants' government, but a "Multi-Party People's Democracy". In the crucible of struggle it has offered neither guidance nor a revolutionary programme for the overthrow of Gyanendra's regime.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and its 15,000 strong militia control 80 per cent of the countryside along with Nepal's main student union. At the end of March, their leaders were calling for a Nepalese "February 1917" - a revolution against the autocracy, but not a workers' one like October 1917. They have been critical of the agreement and have continued their attacks on government forces. But they are waiting on parliament to call a constituent assembly and offer no lead to the masses.

But the masses are already bursting through the limits of the SPA's cowardly three-point programme by calling for an end to the monarchy. The BBC reports one teacher saying that Gyanendra "is only offering us what he had snatched from us in 2005" when he abolished parliament and assumed absolute power. A housewife added, "Nobody is happy with what the king said. We want democracy and freedom. So many people have died. What for? So that the king can continue to live in his palace and appoint and dismiss prime ministers at will?" Demonstrators burned effigies of Gyanendra and shouted, "Burn the crown" and "Hang the king".

The general strike in April posed the question of the insurrection point blank. The Maoists should have gone to Kath-



Scenes from a revolution. Demonstrators and protests throughout Nepal

mandu, handed their weapons to the masses and confronted the King's army. If the SPA returns to power, tolerates the king and the army's "constitutional" role and thwarts the aspirations of the masses, the Nepalese workers and

peasants will need to return to the general strike and mass demonstrations. But this time they must be prepared to defend themselves if imperialism and the Nepalese bourgeoisie take the path of civil war or even back foreign

intervention, such as by India.

But here there is a problem: China. It backs the King and social stability, but is most unlikely to welcome Indian intervention on its borders. The fall out from the Nepalese Revolution could not only be to enlighten and embolden the masses of south Asia, but to heighten tensions between the new USA/India alliance and China.

The workers and peasants must prepare for the sell-out of the SPA and begin organising now. Democratic councils of workers and peasants must be built to organise the arming of the masses and not rely upon the Maoists in the countryside. These councils must:

- Elect workers' and peasants' delegates to supervise elections to a Constituent Assembly and struggle to transform it from a bourgeois talking shop into an instrument of the oppressed.
- Establish a provisional revolutionary government of workers and poor peasants, get rid of the king, nationalise the key levers of the economy under workers' control and create a democratic plan of production;
- Spread the revolution across south Asia - for a socialist federation of south Asian states.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia. Eighty per cent of its 24 million people live in the countryside. Half of the population live on less than a dollar a day while the richest fifth have 45 per cent of the country's income. Four out of five people have no health care or sanitation. This grinding poverty and inequality make Nepal ripe for social revolution.

The revolution in Nepal can continue to provide a significant impetus to mass peasant and working class movements in the region. Before the revolutionary crisis of 2006, the Nepalese Maoists had encouraged the Indian Maoists to unite and launch a renewed war in the countryside. But the uprising in Kathmandu of April 2006 provides dramatic confirmation of the fact that even in countries with a small proletariat, urban classes come to the fore in the revolution, and that the cowardly bourgeoisie will never see through the struggle against absolutism. The Nepalese events can thus popularise the fundamental strategic and tactical lessons of Leninism and Trotskyism among the vanguard of the South Asian working class.

The masses of Nepal are fighting out this great drama in the full view of the world. The outcome of their struggle will have a direct impact also in India, where a billion people are watching.

**Victory to the Nepalese workers and peasants!**

## Shooting Dogs (directed Michael Caton-Jones, 2006), reviewed by Joy MacReady

**Shooting Dogs depicts the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when Hutu extremists murdered more than 800,000 Rwandans. The events are seen through the eyes of a young white British man in a Catholic missionary school.**

Focusing on l'Ecole Technique Officielle, a school in Kigali where many people fled to escape the genocide, the film exposes the treachery of the UN and the ineffectiveness of the Church in stopping the massacres.

Belgian peacekeeping troops were occupying the school grounds when the massacres began in April. As the refugees started flooding into the compound, the UN commander was clear that "this is a military base, not a refugee camp". The UN decided to pull out of Rwanda because their troops

were in danger - and evacuated the white foreigners with them - leaving the Tutsis behind to be slaughtered.

The Church could only offer a few masses and communion before its followers were killed. The Tutsis themselves tried to organise, subdividing into food, security and medical groups. But they still looked to the army and the church to save them. More than 2,500 people were killed at the school when the UN pulled out.

The title of the film is derived from the fact that the UN troops were willing to shoot the dogs that were eating the flesh off the rotting bodies in the streets because they were pests, but were unwilling to raise a weapon to stop the genocide.

The film has some poignant

moments, such as when the BBC journalist articulates her own racism: "In Bosnia, I cried because, when I saw older Bosnian women laying murdered in the road, I saw in their faces my own mother. In Rwanda, I have never cried because they are just Africans."

The weakness of this film - and of Hotel Rwanda in 2004 - is the lack of a political context. No amount of horror should blind us to the history of colonial rule in Rwanda and continued imperialist exploitation, which were the real causes for the genocide.

The primary division in Rwanda was social: Hutu, 85 per cent of the population, means "servant", while Tutsi means "cattle owner". While the imperialists maintained the Tutsi king during colonialism, divisions among the

people were dying out. It was only in the dying days of Belgian rule in 1959 that the colonists whipped up divisions.

In 1994, the four year Rwandan civil war between the Hutu-chauvinist government of General Juvenal Habyarimana, backed by the French, and the predominantly Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front, made up of exiles and backed by the US and Uganda, had brought about a settlement based on the power-sharing Arusha accords.

But President Habyarimana was shot down in a plane before the agreement could be implemented and the genocide was unleashed. The chauvinists and pogromists in the army and the government whipped up fear against the Tutsis and moderate Hutus. As Francois, a Hutu worker at the missionary, said:

"Hutus must protect themselves or die. They want to make us slaves again."

Having created the ethnic power struggle in Rwanda, having armed the government to the teeth, having sucked the African continent dry, the imperialist powers, including the UN, could not bring any progressive solution to the conflict.

And we should remember that today 60 per cent of Rwandans live below the poverty line and over 250,000 are living with Aids. Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa, yet about 90 per cent of the population is engaged in (mainly subsistence) agriculture while the country services an external debt of \$1.4 billion to the West.

• For more on Rwanda go to [www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=16,38,0,0,1,0](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=16,38,0,0,1,0)



## Fighting fascism in West Yorkshire

Dear comrades

We have been fighting in Unite Against Fascism (UAF) for the past year for it to adopt a working class united front against fascism and a policy of no platform. The problem for UAF is that their campaign might be broad, but it is also failing.

On Wednesday 19 April, Workers Power and Revolution members and supporters began leafleting around the council estates in East End park, in Leeds. We handed out more than 3,000 leaflets. Our leaflets dealt with the issues that UAF won't touch.

One side had arguments against the supposed "working class nature" of the BNP, that they won't tax the rich, they supported the government against the FBU in 2002, and their leaders are fascists. We even had a box on Mark Collett, one of the local BNP leaders, with some of his quotes from the TV! On the reverse we challenged the racist lies of the BNP and pointed out the need for a mass new workers party and how it could be built.

We had some hassle from local fascists but just ignored them.

On our second leafleting session on Sunday 23, we managed to get 25 people out - Workers Powers members and other antifascists, including three postal workers from the local delivery office, helped to hand out another 2,000 leaflets around Harehills Lane. UAF could only attract six to hand out their "don't vote BNP" material on the same day.

During the leafleting one of our leafleting teams was confronted by Mark Collett who threatened to call his "security team". Needless to say we were not going to let this jumped up little Nazi put us off. Six of them turned up but they were no match for us.

The turn out was great and we followed this up with a successful public meeting in Leeds on how to stop the rise of the fascists. The fact that we can go right into Collett's "home turf" and he can only mobilise six people, shows that they might be getting the vote out, but when it comes to making areas of Leeds no go areas for the left they have some way to go yet.

Simon Hardy  
Leeds Workers Power

## NUT conference exposes the left

Dear Comrades

Over the Easter weekend more than 1,000 teachers descended on Torquay, in Devon, to discuss and debate the policy of the National Union of Teachers over the coming year.

One of the main debates was on the Education and Inspections Bill.

The Bill opens the door to the fragmentation and privatisation of education and must be defeated.

So how does the leadership suggest we focus our energies in the coming months? A postcard campaign and a lobby of MPs.

Conference has only mandated the executive to consider the need for strike action. What is more worrying is that the left played a role in this compromise in order to present unanimity. Both the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union (CDFU) held back on putting the call for a national campaign of strike action directly to conference.

Yet again we are left without a national strategy.

The most lively debate at conference was on a motion from Brent calling for the end to all faith schools. Teachers on the left have generally believed that faith schools are divisive and that, while religious beliefs should be respected, religion should have no privileged role in the running of a school.

But the left is now divided on the question. An amendment from West-

minster, but supported by the STA and the SWP, called on the union to support the rights of Muslims to establish schools with the argument that if other faiths had the right, then so should Muslims. Workers Power delegates along with those in the Alliance for Workers Liberty and the Socialist Party rejected this argument. The way to tackle the current privileges that catholic, protestant and Jewish faiths have in the running of schools is not to extend the privilege, but to abolish it! In the end an amendment from the executive calling for a working party on this was passed and so the issue is likely to be debated in the future.

Debates on conference floor revealed that the left's current broad leftist strategy of doing backroom conference deals in order to secure minor shifts on policy is getting us nowhere. The STA and CDFU's attempts to win positions on the Executive have long been given political priority over the building of a strong rank and file organisation. The result has been sell-outs such as pensions in which some on the left like the Socialist Party went along with.

Our immediate tasks over the next few months must be the building of campaign in the union that can get action against the Education Bill off the ground. An all London reps meeting called by STA for Thursday 18 May at Hamilton House (5.30-7.30) could be the beginning for such initiatives. Other regions should call similar mass reps meetings to discuss action against the Bill.

Workers Power members of the NUT through their associations will be arguing for indicative ballots on strike action against the Bill along side a mass campaign in our communities among parents.

Kirstie Paton,  
Greenwich NUT

## France in struggle

Dear comrades

Workers Power sent delegations to France at the height of the anti-CPE struggle. A team of 3 travelled out for the strike on the 28 March, and another group of 8 went out the following Saturday to Wednesday.

We arrived in Lille and met students who were on guard at the university. We had to explain who we were and the fact that we had travelled from the UK to see them, much to their amazement.

Inside the occupied university there were banners everywhere with slogans against the CPE.

The student meetings had nearly 400 delegates from all over France. During the meetings, the sessions had to be stopped every so often because the entire hall was shouting "tous ensemble, tous ensemble, greve general" (altogether, general strike) with their fists in the air.

We gave a message of solidarity to the French students and their struggle. This was well received with huge applause and even chants of "the internationale", and afterwards many students came to speak to us and take our literature. We were even reported on in the local paper the next day, with mention of the Fifth International and parts of our message, attributed to the "students from the banlieues of London."

On Sunday we made our way to Paris, and went to the occupied Immigration Department Office where students and sans papiers ("illegal" immigrants i.e. those without documents) were staying and organising for the general strike. Luckily they let us stay there for the next two nights in Paris.

We spoke to the students and sans papiers, who told us some of them had spent years in France, working in awful jobs with terrible pay and conditions and no job security, waiting for documents from the French government that never came.

It's really encouraging that students have taken up their case, and that the two groups have been brought together by the anti-CPE movement. Early on Tuesday afternoon we all assembled outside

the building as a contingent for the demo. We marched down the street chanting "etudiants, sans papiers, solidarite" and stormed the metro to get to the Place d'Italie, holding open the gates so everyone could get through for free.

The most striking thing about the demo was just how many young people were on it - you had the feel that every young person in Paris was there. It was very racially mixed as well; there wasn't much segregation between white youth and the African and Arabs from the banlieues.

The march was militant but calm, with the police mainly hiding down the side streets and the way to Place de la Republique passing without much incident. We arrived there about 4.30 but the size of the demo was such that people were still streaming in until about 8pm! It was a huge and youthful demo, and we heard that there were three million protesting across France.

Our visit to France was a great experience which has given us inspiration for the struggles we face in Britain and made us some good French contacts which we hope to develop into a strong network in the future.

Natalie Sedley  
London

## Condi and Jack's love-in turns sour

Dear comrades

Liverpool, 31 March. John Lennon anthems, including "Imagine" and "Give Peace a Chance", rang out from hastily improvised sound systems. Hundreds of red balloons floated across the famous skyline. And on the steps of the Catholic cathedral, crowds, appropriately, began to mass.

More than 2,000 demonstrators turned out to tell Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, exactly what they thought of her. "Murderer", "terrorist" and "imperialist butcher" were just some of the phrases used by the crowd.

The demonstration was the high point of three days of protest, organised by the Stop the War Coalition and local trade unionists, to coincide with Rice's tour of Liverpool and Blackburn.

In Blackburn, a scheduled visit to a Mosque was cancelled after members of the local community insisted that inviting her to an Islamic place of worship would be considered offensive in the light of the huge number of Muslims her government has slaughtered in Iraq.

In Liverpool demonstrators picketed the hotel she was staying in, the London Carriage Works. Her secret arrival at the poshest hotel in town was made public by numerous hotel staff angry that they would be forced to wait on a warmonger.

Rice's visits to museums and to Paul McCartney's performing arts institute were also shadowed by protesters, many of them donning the orange jump suits of Guantanamo's many prisoners and victims of torture. Others wore T-shirts which read "No Scouse for Rice" - leading to baffled looks on the faces of US journalists. One of them eventually plucked up the courage to ask: "what's scouse?"

The only place they could visit was an empty Blackburn Rovers football ground - no change there then!

Rice's visit to the North West had been given massive coverage in the press and on local radio in the days leading up to her arrival. But it was a publicity stunt by Jack Straw, the UK Foreign Secretary, designed to show both himself and his US opposite number in a new light. They weren't warmongers; they were just honest lovers of culture.

Thankfully it turned into a PR disaster. It re-raised the issue of the unjust and illegal war in Iraq in the minds of thousands of people in the North West. All the media coverage gave anti-war activists the opportunity to talk about the brutal occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan by the US and the British government

Jack Tully  
Liverpool

## 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 reason 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!



## Israel prepares massive new land grab

Israel has a new government. Last month Ehad Olmert of Kadima and Amir Peretz of the Labour Party agreed to form a coalition with other smaller parties, giving them a slim majority in the Knesset. However unstable the majority may prove to be, it does have a clear programme based on annexing large parts of the West Bank.

The Kadima-led government aims to consolidate an expanded Israel behind its planned 420 mile "apartheid wall", a barrier it has spent hundreds of millions of dollars building. It aims to expand Israel deep into the West Bank and east of Jerusalem, bringing within its borders most of the main settlements built in the past decades – involving 240,000 settlers.

It will divide and destroy many Palestinian communities and trap tens of thousands of Palestinians inside Israel. No doubt their life and status will be made as difficult as possible, "encouraging" them to leave. The land that is seized will take in some of the best agricultural land and most of the water supplies in the areas, leaving the Palestinians to exist in a series of disconnected territories in a largely barren wilderness.

Olmert has declared that all this will happen unilaterally, by 2010 – he does not care whether he has a Palestinian side with whom to negotiate; the crucial factor is gaining US agreement and George Bush has already given the green light in principle.

To carry out this land grab Olmert needs to consolidate the settlements – removing 60,000 settlers who currently live in far-flung outposts.

### Expansionist state

Expansion by military occupation is nothing new for the state of Israel. Its 1948 war of foundation took in areas

not given to it by the United Nations and its 1967 war conquered enormous areas belonging to Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Jerusalem and the Golan Heights which belonged to Syria were annexed; while the Sinai was returned to Egypt only after the Yom Kippur war of 1973 showed the area was difficult to defend.

The debate about the occupied territories continued in Israel right up to this year's election. Many militant Zionists want a greater Israel stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River and beyond. The settlements encouraged by Sharon when he was leader of Likud, were part of a strategy of "creating facts" towards such a goal. But demographics (a growing Palestinian population which would have threatened the Jewish majority within such a state) and international opposition, made this plan untenable.

Kadima's manifesto tackled this dilemma openly. While referring to the "national and historic right to the land of Israel in its entirety" i.e. a greater Israel, it went on to argue that "The balance between allowing Jews to fulfil their historic right... and maintaining the continued existence of Israel as the national Jewish home necessitates territorial compromise". The "compromise" is the current massive land grab and the relocation of a few ten thousand settlers.

The major opposition to this in the election came from the right. Parties like Yisrael Beiteinu, which now nearly equals Likud with 11 seats in the Knesset, and the National Union, want to solve this problem by expelling Palestinians. Yisrael Beiteinu, which gains much of its support from recent Russian immigrants, suggested redrawing borders to push 500,000 Arab Israelis into a Palestinian state – ethnic cleansing on a Balkan wars scale.

### Palestinians under siege

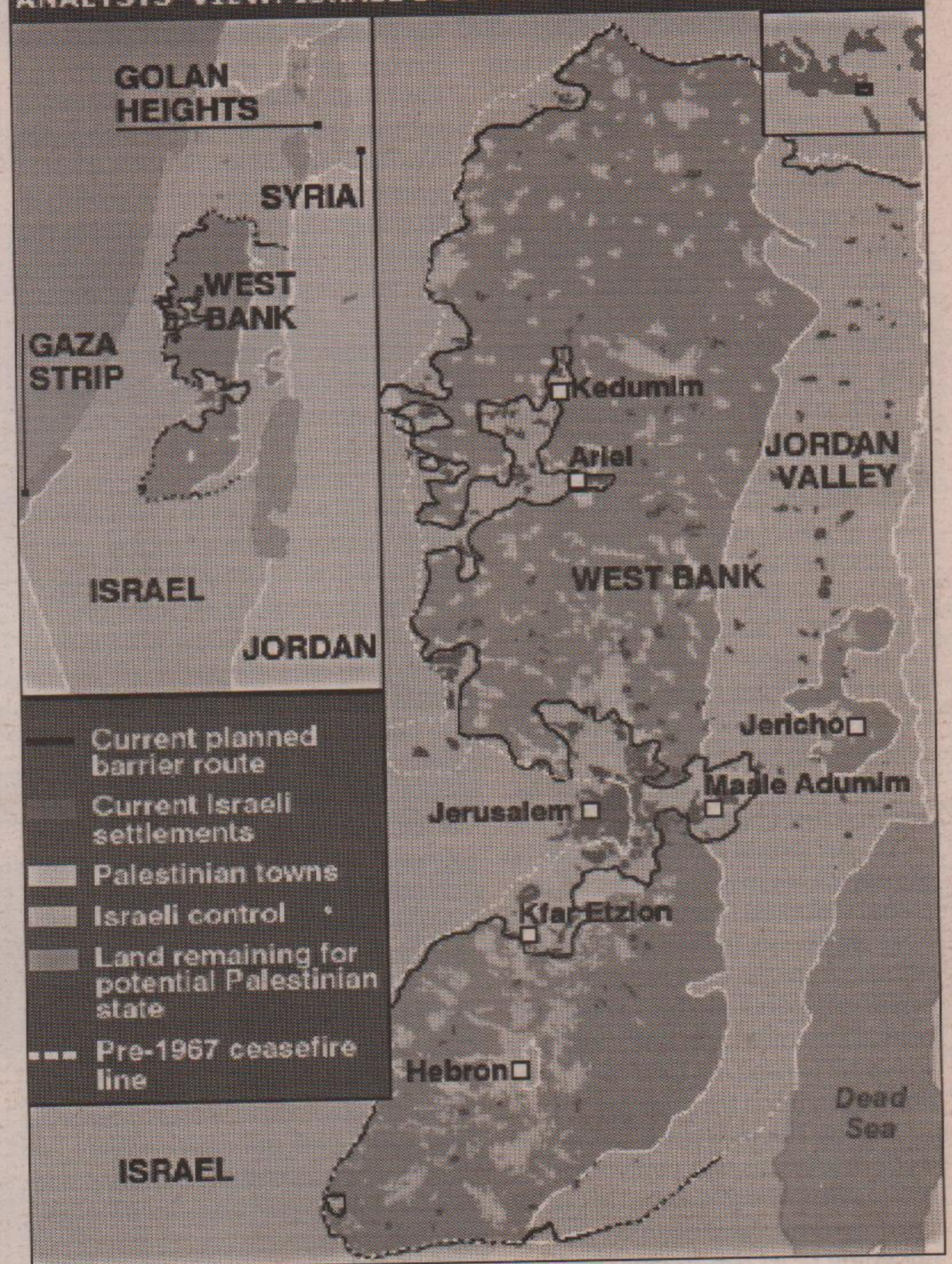
Kadima's plans have been aided by the blockade of the new Hamas government in the Palestinian Authority (PA). Since coming to power in January the government has been subjected to every kind of economic and political pressure to destroy it or make it bend the knee to the demands of imperialism.

The US, EU and UN demand that the Hamas government renounce "terrorism", in reality its right to militarily defend itself against an occupying power. Not only this, it must recognise Israel's right to exist – as an explicitly Jewish state, one which sits on Palestinian land and bars the Palestinians, who were driven from the country in various wars of expansion, the right to return to the farms and homes they were deprived of. Finally they must accept the international agreements previous PA governments entered into – the so-called Road Map to peace.

The cutting of aid to the PA has plunged the Authority into deep crisis. The EU has cut off \$600m a year to the government, the US \$400m and Israel is blocking another \$50m a month in customs revenues. More than 100,000 government employees – teachers, hospital staff, civil servants, police and security services – are owed back wages; the UN estimates that a quarter of the population is dependent on these incomes. Before the crisis 43 per cent of the Palestinian population lived on less than \$2 a day – now hunger and poverty is even more widespread.

Imperialism and Israel are teaching the Palestinian people a lesson for voting the wrong way – they have decided they won't tolerate a Hamas government that refuses to bend to their demands. They are ensuring that governmental functions are taken away

### ANALYSTS' VIEW: ISRAEL'S BOUNDARIES IN 2010?



from the authority, that UN bodies or NGOs are financed to do the job.

They have raised the Presidency of Mahmoud Abbas above the government and want to give him sole rights to negotiate with Israel. The fact that Iran is offering financial support and aid to the Hamas government is just one more reason why the US and Israel are threatening military action against it.

### Two states?

The recent events show just how bankrupt the policy of a "two state solution" is. Adopted by Arafat and the PLO under the pressure of imperialism, it has dominated Palestinian politics since the Oslo Accords of 1993. It has delivered nothing to the Palestinian people but it has become ever clearer what sort of "state" is on offer to the Palestinians.

Israel and the US have decided that it will be a series of disconnected "cantons" on the West Bank, isolated from a Gaza under Israel's permanent military and economic domination. It indeed resembles the Apartheid plans in the 1960s and 70s for a series of "independent" black Bantustans within South Africa. As with South Africa in the 1980s,

the masses of the Middle East can blow up these reactionary plans of Kadima and imperialism – but only through mass struggle, through general strikes and mass protests and blockades. Mass struggle, including military offensives, is the way to destroy the Zionists and imperialists' plans, not desperate suicide bombs against civilians and isolated guerrilla actions.

The aim must be a revolutionary socialist Palestine where Jews and Arabs live within a single state, one where the ideologies of reactionary Zionism and fundamentalist Islam are swept aside. Only a mass revolutionary party, which makes this its aim, and takes its struggle throughout the Middle East, can offer a real alternative to the growing militarism and poverty, which threatens the region.

- Down with Kadima and its reactionary land grab! Down with the Apartheid Wall, dismantle all the settlements!
- Break the US/Zionist siege of the Palestinian Authority!
- Forward to a workers' republic of Palestine and a socialist united states of the Middle East!

## Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

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

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

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

Socialist Revolution - the Fifth International.

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

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020-7407 2907 or email us at workerspower@btopenworld.com

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