

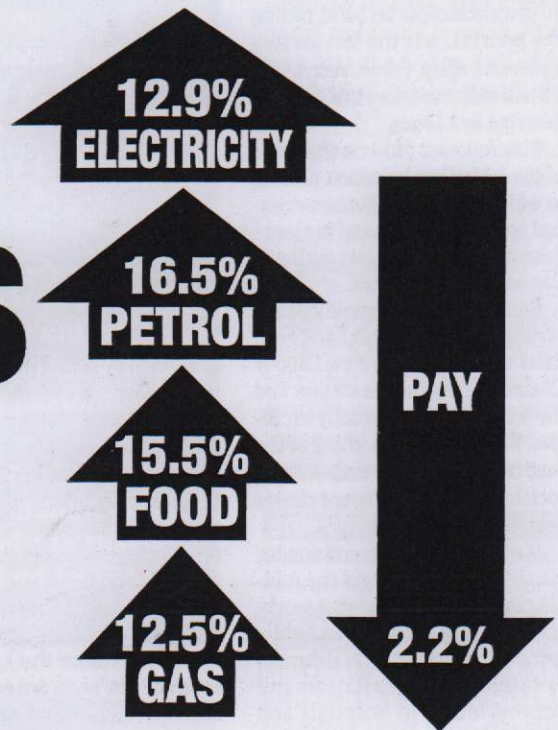
# workers power

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As inflation hits the High Street

# BOSSES MUST PAY FOR THE CRISIS – NOT WORKERS



## Inside:

- Fighting inflation
- Brown's crisis - time for new party
- Breaking the 2% pay limit
- Defend post offices
- Fight the BNP
- What stance on war?



League for the  
Fifth International



## EDITORIAL

# As union leaders cling to dying Brown regime: Time to break our unions from Labour

**E**lection disasters at the polls and a projected 300 seat majority for the Tories at the next general election have spread panic in Labour's ranks.

The Crewe and Nantwich by-election on 22 May showed they had lost a huge chunk of the Old Labour working class heartland. Many such voters said Brown's abolition of the 10 percent income tax band, hitting the poorest, was the last straw - again and again Crewe voters told TV and radio reporters that they felt deserted by Labour.

This followed hard on the heels of the 1 May local election results, in which middle class voters - central to the 'New Labour' project - deserted Labour en masse for David Cameron's 'New' Tories.

Brown faces the dilemma that any serious attempt to win back both parts of the so-called New Labour Coalition - the middle classes and the workers - are mutually exclusive. Far from being a 'thing of the past' or a 'dead issue', class is a real social relation, and different classes have different interests.

At a time of looming recession big tax cuts for the rich and the middle classes clash with what workers want: big increases in public spending, including wage increases to catch up with inflation and improvements in hospitals and schools. Half-measures will fail to please either. Instead of straddling the classes, Brown could end up doing the splits, pulled apart by the economic crisis. Still this appears to be his only strategy.

He's begun floating a series of reactionary measures - a cap on immigration, scrapping the rise in fuel tax and dumping "green tax" initiatives, forcing unemployed youth and those on incapacity benefit to take lousy jobs, punitive measures aimed at young people - but these are unlikely to win back the alienated middle classes. After all the Tories will do all this and more. Since the former iron chancellor's reputation for economic efficiency went up in smoke with Northern Rock and the collapse in house prices, Brown's attempt to take the credit for years of rising incomes for smart home owners has blown up in his face.

On the other hand, Brown could only afford to protect workers from the worst effects of the economic



**Tony Woodley claims Labour's leadership is "reconnecting with Labour's social conscience"**

slowdown by taking wealth from the rich in increased taxes. And this he will not do. So what he and Alistair Darling offer instead is paltry: £200m to buy unsold new homes and rent them out, £100m for shared equity schemes to help first-time buyers purchase new-build homes. This is a drop in the ocean, and does nothing to reduce the four million waiting list for rented social housing. Even their promise that agency workers should be accorded employment rights after 12 weeks is accompanied by allowing agency parasites to continue to cream off their wages, and receive compensation for converting to a permanent contract.

Gordon Brown's collapse - symbolised by the conversion of last summer's 11 percentage points lead over the Tories into trailing 18-points behind now - has seen former millionaire backers flood away from Labour. These donations and loans allowed Brown and Blair to put two fingers up to the labour movement, dumping its disused heirlooms like Clause IV ("common ownership of the means of production") as well as annual conference's right to make policy (which Labour governments had always been free to ignore). It enabled Labour to short change the unions on the Warwick Agreement of July 2004, which in the Guardian's words "averted the threat of mass disaffiliation from the party by the unions and helped to secure union support for Labour in the 2005 election."

Once again the party is facing

bankruptcy. It is upwards of £24m in debt and must pay creditors £13.65m this year - ironically to repay banks and wealthy creditors recruited by Blair's fund raiser Lord Levy. Once again the unions are Labour's main funders and they now have to pay the bills for the New Labour binge. More than 90 per cent of the £3.1m given to Labour in the first three months of 2008 came from the unions.

In this situation the trade union leaders should be calling the tune. But the piper is still playing the neoliberal tune of market reforms in the public services, the break-up of Royal Mail and other measures opposed by the unions who fund Labour.

So what are the union leaders doing with their restored financial muscle? The short answer is next to nothing. Even worse they are falling over themselves to convince their members that it is all change under Gordon who, it appears, has heard their members' pain.

Without obtaining a single solid promise, Unite general secretary Tony Woodley claimed the mini-budget showed the leadership was "reconnecting with Labour's social conscience". GMB leader Paul Kenny congratulated Labour's front bench for "listening to the public and changing tack."

So why - given they have the whip hand over Gordon - are the union leaders not dictating their terms?

Their standard reply is that to extract concessions from Brown when he's down will boost the

chances of Cameron and the Tories getting in. Supporting Gordon is, they claim, a lesser evil.

Let them explain to us how swallowing Brown's anti-working class policies, with feeble protests but without a determined fight to stop him, is a lesser evil than actually fighting the same policies from the Tories. In fact a determined fight would expose the Tories' bogus opposition. Do the Tories want to restore the 10 percent tax band? No. Bust the 2 percent pay limit? No. Restore trade union rights? Never. Scrap privatisation schemes in the NHS? Not for a minute.

But instead of using their position to force Brown to deliver changes in the workers' interests, the union leaders are pursuing a policy that is criminally harmful to their members.

First they are delaying, dividing and demobilising our struggles - like on public sector pay - at best calling isolated and infrequent days of action. We must turn all our efforts to putting an end to this sabotage and unite our struggles in a common all out offensive based on strike action to force an end to Brown's attacks.

Second they are spending millions of pounds of their members money on a party that attacks them on behalf of the capitalists, when they could use these tremendous resources to build a party of our own which fights to defend workers jobs, wages, social services, to build social housing, to pull the troops out Iraq and Afghanistan, to provide housing for all.

We must fight to get the unions to break from Labour and set up a new workers' party. Over a hundred years after Labour was founded by the unions, the death of New Labour opens the possibility of winning hundreds of thousands of workers to the project of creating our own political representation once again. A new workers' party would of course face the question of whether the party adopts a reformist strategy (which is the path Labour took in the past and which ended up with Blairism and Brown) or a strategy of socialism and revolution (overthrowing capitalism and taking the property of the billionaires into social ownership). We will fight for the path of revolution, to get rid of the system that causes inflation, inequality, poverty and war.



# Fight inflation

The economic crisis hit the High Street with a vengeance this month. With the price of rice surging up by over 60% in a year, and global shortages causing riots around the world, Netto and other supermarkets imposed effective rationing of rice in Leicester.

Newspapers tracking food price rises in the UK recorded a 20% rise in the price of a loaf of white bread, a 62% rise in butter, a 40% rise in chicken, a 67% rise in the price of tea and a staggering 100% rise in the price of cooking oil.

Meanwhile Gordon Brown is holding public sector pay down to just a 2 percent rise, and has scrapped the 10% tax rate for people earning less than £18,000 a year - and his forced 'compensation' still leaves millions out of pocket.

Fuel prices meanwhile have gone through the roof, provoking protests all over Europe. Last year the markets gasped as oil hit \$100 a barrel. Last week it passed \$135.

Pro-market commentators are at a loss to explain this away. Is it caused by growth in the world's population? If so, then why didn't surging population growth between 1990 and 2004 also cause inflation? In fact those years saw a huge fall in inflation. So that can't be the answer.

The fact is that it is the chaotic nature of capitalist economic growth itself that leads to these crises - inflation is being driven by growth in the East at just the point in which recession is starting in the US and Britain. Only a global recession will squeeze inflation out of the system.

The US and British central banks have been cutting interest rates to head off recession, but this has made inflation even worse at home. Now the US Federal reserve and Bank of England are being tipped by the financial markets to be preparing to raise interest rates again to counter price rises. This will push us into recession harder and faster.

This combination of inflation and recession - known

as stagflation - has not been seen since the 1970s. It means hard class struggle as the capitalists try to make the workers pay for the crisis of the system, by cutting the value of our wages (inflation), and by scaling down production, cutting jobs and throwing people onto the dole. The continuing credit crunch will make this even worse: as banks tighten loans, companies will find it much harder to refinance themselves, and many will go bust in the years ahead. The bosses fully expect this to happen: that's why the cost of insuring against corporate loan defaults has risen so sharply again over the last month.

## The socialist answer is clear:

- A sliding scale of wages to meet the real cost of living
- A workers cost of living index to track the true level of rising prices
- For the state to cancel mortgage interest payments and block all home repossessions
- For a united strike across the public sector to bust the 2% pay limit, in reality a pay cut
- For nationalisation under workers control of all firms declaring redundancies
- For a new workers party, funded by the unions who should break from Labour, to lead the resistance to the crisis and to capitalism.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### VICIOUS FASCIST ATTACK

A student activist from the Education Not for Sale campaign in Huddersfield was attacked by the far right on Friday morning on her way to work. Three men pulled her to the ground, kicked her in the ribs, and slashed at her head with a knife. She suffered a fractured rib.

The student has been campaigning to deny the BNP a platform at her campus and has been obviously targeted. They knew her name and route to work. As she was attacked they called her a 'Dirty Red', 'Lesbo', and 'Britain hater'.

The working class movement needs to make it clear to the far right that this student is not isolated. They cannot get away with targeting people who stand up to them.

This attack is another sign that the BNP is no ordinary right wing party, but a vicious menace that must be confronted with direct action and spoken to in the only language its thugs understand.

### STOP WITCH HUNTS

While thousands of union members across the public sector are being balloted on industrial action against the two per cent pay limit, what are the union officials doing? Well Unison's bureaucrats are spending their time attacking their own members!

The trade union certification officer has ruled that Unison broke its own rules in expelling Tony Staunton, Plymouth Unison, and suspending Yunus Baksh, North of Tyne health branch. In the case of Tony, it accused the union of acting illegally. The certification officer said that the union moves denied its members from exercising their democratic rights.

It's the right wing that should be disciplined for breaking union rules and spending thousands of members' money in attacking trade union militants.

All the more reason for a rank and file movement, to bypass the official leaders when they hold back our struggles - and to replace the bosses' marks with militants who stand up for the workers.

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## PUBLIC SECTOR PAY

# A united strike can smash the 2%

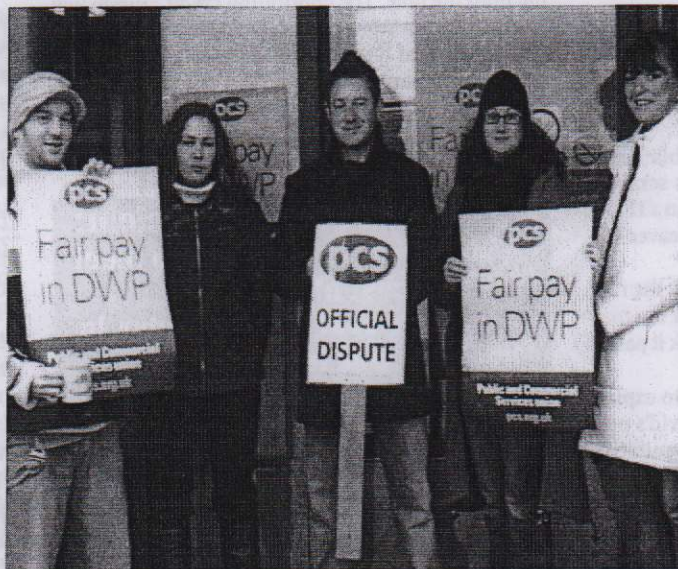
Workers are furious at the government's 2 per cent pay limit. Across the public sector, workers are voting for action. How can we force Brown to back down? *Keith Spencer* looks at the possibilities

There is a mounting roll call of union members voting for industrial action on pay.

- Two-thirds of civil servants and more than a million local government workers are balloting for industrial action against the government's two per cent pay limit.
- Already more than 95 per cent of the GMB union's 30,000 members in the NHS have rejected the deal. The Royal College of Midwives' consultative ballot also led to rejection.
- Hospital porters, cleaners and caterers in the Unite union have also thrown out the deal.
- Unison's members in health (400,000) and local government (900,000) are balloting for industrial action.
- The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) decided at its conference to ballot all its 280,000 members on disruptive action.
- The professional engineers' union Prospect is voting for action in the civil service (40,000 members).
- Unite members in local government have thrown out the employers' 2.45 per cent offer by a three to one majority - the union is balloting its 70,000 members.
- The firefighters' FBU is considering action after being told that the government might not honour its July pay deal.
- The GMB in local government is consulting its 300,000 members on action, and despite its worse-than-useless national secretary for public services Brian Strutton informing the bosses in advance that there is supposedly "little appetite for industrial action", members have expressed "dissatisfaction" with the pay offer.

On the down side teachers' leaders in schools and further education (NUT and UCU) have postponed balloting for more action in September.

Union leaders are reflecting their members' growing fury at Gordon Brown, who is spending billions bailing out banks but is hiking tax and cutting pay for the poorest workers in the country. So the general secretary of the civil servants' union, Mark Serwotka,



told the union's conference in May that Brown was "a miserable PM who should hang his head in shame" over his measly pay deals. Even the TUC's Brendan Barber, usually a Brown loyalist, slammed the prime minister: "Labour is paying a heavy political price as six million public servants sense that the government, far from being on their side, just sees them as an easy target."

The scale of poverty pay can be gauged by the fact that 55 per cent of council workers and a quarter of civil servants earn less than £16,000 - two-thirds of the national average and the benchmark for poverty pay. And most of these are women workers. All these workers have seen their income tax double with the abolition of the 10 per cent rate. All will earn less in real terms because of the 2 per cent pay limit.

### Workers want united action

It is blindingly obvious that if we take action together we will be stronger. After the huge turnout for the one-day strike on 24 April, a national co-ordinated strike of public sector workers would rapidly bust the pay limit. The Labour government knows it and so do the leaders of the big trade unions: Unison, Unite and GMB.

But the union leaders seem more concerned with keeping Gordon Brown in his job than in winning a real pay rise for their members.

Dave Prentis, general secretary of Unison, told the Scottish TUC in the aftermath of the 10p tax

fiasco that "Gordon Brown has a good track record on taxation and measures to alleviate poverty". This is the same Brown who as Chancellor stubbornly maintained poverty pay in the public sector for the past 10 years.

Last year, September's TUC conference witnessed heady talk of a public sector alliance to break Brown's two per cent pay limit, and even called for coordinated action, but then one by one the union leaders caved in. We don't want a repeat of that this year!

Outside the Big Three, leaders of more militant unions, such as Mark Serwotka of the PCS, the NUT's Christine Blower and the Fire Brigades Union's Matt Wrack, have been much more forthright in criticising Labour. But they never criticise the leaders of the other unions for failing to organise joint action. This sets back the fight for a united strike in the public sector.

### A strategy to win

The massive one day strike on 24 April was a great starting point - it involved hundreds of thousands of people in their first taste of mass strike action; young workers in particular began to get a sense of their power. Nevertheless, one- or two-day strikes will not be enough to win better pay. The government ignored our strike on 24 April and they will tough out future limited strikes unless we escalate our action.

Even discontinuous action section by section will be insufficient.

Unison, Unite and the GMB have said that a good pay deal will require "sustained strike action". But at the same time the leaders don't explain how such "sustained" action could win; instead it can sound like nothing more than a recipe for a series of ineffective one-day strikes. The danger is that this phrase can be used to frighten members into voting to accept a rotten deal. The same phrase was used last year in Unison's health section and members voted to accept a below inflation deal.

So is 'sustained action' necessary? It is true that all out indefinite strike action will be needed to get a deal which protects us against the ravages of inflation: an all-out public sector general strike in which we all agree not to go back until we have won. But it is not true that such a struggle means a long drawn out and financially bankrupting action. Quite the reverse. The government and the employers are weak and can be beaten quickly by large-scale decisive action. More than this we need to protect our increases with a sliding scale of automatic increases for every rise in inflation (see page 3).

So how can we get past the endless delays and even outright sabotage by our officials?

In every town and city, in every London borough, we need to set up local committees of action to bring together rank and file members of all public sector unions. These committees should organise local street protests and mass public meetings to get the message about poverty pay over to all working people who use and need the services. Unity will increase our confidence and help us build for the biggest possible "yes" vote in all the coming ballots.

These committees should demand the leaders of unions call all out action, and could become centres to hammer out a strategy to win the disputes and take democratic control of the strikes. If successful they could be a launching pad for a general movement of the rank and file to democratise the unions, breaking the power of the officials to hold back and sell short our struggles, and putting all officials and all union actions under the control of the union members.

See [www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com) for more on public sector disputes



# Post office privatisation - how can we stop it?

A CWU rep outlines how we can organise the fightback

When the minister for business John Hutton announced a review of postal services in December, he claimed that "the market has brought considerable benefits for users of postal services". The government waited until the postal workers strike had been defeated before opening up round two in the attack on postal services, with a commission to explore options for furthering privatisation. However, the commission's interim report in May instead echoed what the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has been saying all along: "Liberalisation of the UK postal service has produced no significant benefit for either households or small business" and only big business has gained out of it.

But Postcomm - the pro-privatisation quango set up by Labour supposedly to "defend" the universal service obligation (the commitment to deliver mail to the whole country) - has come to the government's rescue, demanding the partial privatisation of Royal Mail and the selling off of a 49 per cent stake in Royal Mail. They want to break up Royal Mail, separating post offices and outsourcing some functions to private companies.

Since the end of last year's strike, Royal Mail and the Labour government have pressed ahead with restructuring, slashing costs. Royal Mail bosses have forced through huge cuts to pensions and raised the retirement age to 65, imposed flexibility, while closing 2500 Post Offices up and down the country in the face of bitter local opposition.

Over the next year, we also face massive job losses. The introduction of sorting machines slashes the hours of sorting mail and raises the possibility of a majority part-time, casualised workforce. The threatened closure of Oxford Mail Centre, a CWU bastion, will most likely be followed by several others. We face the threat of a jobs massacre and a broken union.

The CWU leadership's submission to the review accepts job losses



and that there will be no return to Royal Mail's monopoly. What happened to the union's policy for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay? Where's the union's commitment to a fully public postal service? Our bureaucratic leaders have already surrendered on these issues. And on the question of pensions, they don't think we can win a "Yes" vote and have so far remained paralysed. Their strategy is a media campaign and lobbying Labour MPs. Well, it hasn't worked and it won't work.

## A 180 degree turn is needed

On 28 May 37 branches - over a third of CWU branches - called a meeting in London to discuss what action the union can take to halt Post Offices closures, oppose privatisation, and how to win a "Yes" vote in a ballot for industrial action against the pension cuts, after the successful consultation saw 92 per cent of members reject Royal Mail's imposed changes. Around 250 attended plus general secretary Billy Hayes and Dave Ward (deputy general secretary-postal) who tried to defend their inaction so far, while

speakers from the floor stressed the need to act. (See [www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com) for more details.)

In a leaflet to the meeting, Workers Power argued that a 180 degree turn is needed in the union's tactics to kick start a campaign. This should campaign for the restoration of the monopoly, rescinding the contracts of "competitors" parasitically using Royal Mail's delivery service, and bringing their workforces into Royal Mail.

However, only a major campaign, based on demonstrations, protests and backed by strike action can force Labour to retreat on this question. We can start with pensions and the looming job cuts, and join with the other public sector workers, striking against the government's pay freeze in a united front, something CWU national leaders never seriously pursued in last year's strike. Millions of working class people would rally to support a union-led fight to stop another public service being sold off to the fat cats, given the implications for service levels and stamp prices.

We can win a "yes" vote for strike action with an active campaign. The full-time officers should leave their head office and address mass meetings up and down the country to show they really mean it. They should encourage members to elect workplace and local strike committees to prepare for action, campaign for solidarity from the public and build unity with other unions balloting for action, like local government Unison and civil service PCS branches, or facing real pay cuts, like the teachers and NHS staff.

To have the credibility to win the argument however, our leaders would have to come clean on their failures in the strike last year: falling for Royal Mail's trick of asking for negotiations in order to break the momentum of the strikes; arguing for wildcat strikers to go back to work without agreement; throwing in the towel the minute the courts banned a round of strikes. Without showing that they have learned these lessons, the members' trust and support for another strike will be harder to win.

In the run up to the CWU conference an emergency resolution needs to be tabled which calls for:

- A ballot for escalating industrial action, up to an all out strike, to defend jobs and pensions.
- Joint action, locally and nationally, with the other public sector unions.
- A clear no to privatisation and the restoration of the postal monopoly under workers control.
- Above all it is crucial to establish a network of rank and file of activists and branches to push forward the campaign from below.

As soon as the struggle is on we need strike committees, directly elected by the members in workplaces, so that the CWU membership can take control of the campaign and any action. Billy Hayes, Dave Ward and the majority on the postal executive have lost the confidence of the membership. Either they lead a fight for union policy and accept the rank and file's right to run the campaign - or they get out of our way!



## THE RETURN OF THE POGROM

# Italian right unleash police and gangs on Roma migrants

*Jo Cassidy* looks at how Berlusconi and his allies are showing their true colours with savage anti-immigrant attacks

The new government of Silvio Berlusconi wasted little time unleashing police repression. Its first targets were Italy's refugees and migrants, though its ulterior motive is not hard to uncover: to send a warning to the working class and the left that this is no ordinary right wing government but one determined to settle accounts with its class enemies, using the full power of the state, backed up by right wing thugs, if need be.

Immediately after Berlusconi's victory, police raids began. Foreign workers and their families were indiscriminately rounded up and, in the first weeks of the crackdown alone, 53 were deported. One high profile attack took place on the banks of the Tiber in Rome where a Roma camp was shut down. All inhabitants without official papers were deported.

Encouraged by the state's actions, gangs of right wing thugs launched vicious attacks on Roma across the country. A pogrom in Naples followed sensationalist reports that a 16-year old Roma girl had supposedly kidnapped a baby. This story ("gypsies kidnap babies") is an old smear of anti-Roma racism. As a result a baying mob gathered outside the camp in Ponticelli shouting racist abuse and hurling petrol bombs until the camp was razed to ground.

The attacks are spreading from Roma to any other dark-skinned people: in Rome, men attacked food shops owned by Indians and Bangladeshis.

The blame for the violence lies firmly at the door of the Berlusconi government which throughout its election campaign targeted the Roma community as the main source of crime and other social and economic problems.

Anti-immigrant measures agreed by the cabinet include making unauthorised entry to Italy



Pogrom against Roma camp in Naples

a crime, allowing authorities to check that EU immigrants can support themselves before granting residency, and allowing authorities to confiscate any property let to illegal immigrants.

All three of the government's main components - Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, the "extremist" Alleanza Nazionale of Gianfranco Fini,

and Umberto Bossi's Northern League - have openly played with fascist terms and symbolism since winning the election.

The new mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, is a member of the Alleanza Nazionale, who the *Daily Telegraph* casually refers to as "a firebrand neo-fascist." He was greeted outside the city hall with fascist salutes and shouts of "Duce!", the title used by Mussolini. He has promised to purge the Italian capital of 20,000 illegal immigrants and to raze 85 Roma camps.

Berlusconi himself declared, "We are the new Falange", the name of the Spanish fascist party under Franco. His closest ally, Bossi threatened, "I don't know what the left wants but we are ready. If they want conflicts, I have 300,000 men always on hand."

The terrifying wave of racist violence benefits the Italian government. It diverts attention from Italy's intensifying social and economic crisis, as well as giving the state an excuse to use more force and repressive legislation. Italy is the worst-performing economy in western Europe and the government has a clear agenda to solve the problem at the expense of the working class, whilst seeking to divide workers by racist agitation against the immigrant communities.

The Italian left, reeling after its crushing defeat at the polls (this is the first Italian parliament since the downfall of Mussolini without any Communist party deputies), clearly has a major struggle on its hands in the months and years to come. They need to start with an intransigent defence of immigrants against the police and the fascist gangs. Only militant class struggle including mass strikes and organised self-defence - will avoid the historic defeat Berlusconi and co are out to inflict.

## Pogroms on the rise as the

The spread of anti-migrant rioting in both Italy and South Africa are expressions of the same phenomenon - the failure of the working class and popular movements to take advantage of the rise of mass anticapitalist and antiglobalisation movements in the early years of this decade.

In Italy the antiglobalisation movement mushroomed across Italy in the period 2000-2003, with gigantic

demonstrations against neoliberalism and war, including the great march against the G8 in Genoa in 2001, the formation of social forums and social centres across the country after the repression in Genoa, the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 at which Communist leader Fausto Bertinotti promised never again to support a capitalist government and the mass antiwar mobilisations of 2003 including more than three million filling the streets

of Rome. Yet the party of the Italian left - Bertinotti's Rifondazione Comunista - propped up the reformist/liberal coalition of Romano Prodi and shielded it from the workers' anger, even giving support to Italian troops joining the occupation of Afghanistan. A great opportunity to build a working class movement fighting for the overthrow of the system was frittered away.

But politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum. The right wing filled the breach.



# Anti-foreigner violence sweeps South Africa

By Rebecca Anderson

Racist violence against migrants swept seven out of South Africa's nine provinces, with 25,000 people internally displaced and more than 50 dead. Zimbabweans and Somalis have been some of the worst affected, as mobs went from shack to shack in the impoverished migrant areas of towns and cities searching for 'foreigners'.

The ruling party, the ANC, has only made gestures toward dealing with the problem - they originally said that they would set up a committee to investigate the causes of the violence and, when criticised for their complacency, began to hold meetings across the country to promote 'tolerance' and quell the unrest. It was at one such meeting in Cape Town that anti-migrant violence broke out, resulting in one Somali dead and six others injured. Only then did the ANC call for communities to form street committees to control the violence, working in cooperation with the police.

The ANC took this step grudgingly, under enormous pressure from organisations that have in the past given full support to them - the trade unions, the South African Communist Party and some of the country's new social movements.

A mass demonstration against xenophobia in Johannesburg on 24 May brought thousands onto the streets calling for an end to the attacks, an end to immigration controls and blaming the ANC for the very poverty that the racist mobs have blamed on immigrants.

Socialists in South Africa should energetically take up and promote the call for community self-defence and should demand arms from the ANC to help put down pogroms. At the same time, remembering that the ANC is today the ruling party of the South African



Armed gangs rampaged through many towns and cities

capitalists, socialists should argue for the popular self-defence organisations to be independent of the government and the police, and instead should be under the democratic control of the communities and the rank and file of the trade unions.

It is also time for the trade unions and SACP to break with the ANC and stop supporting its bourgeois government. Since the ANC came to power they have unleashed a brutal neoliberal assault on the workers and poor of South Africa and so far their coalition partners have done little or nothing to stop them. The Johannesburg demonstration was right to say that

Mbeki had blood on his hands, as under rule of the ANC unemployment has risen from 12 to 50 percent. The unions and SACP must provide an alternative leadership to the working class - very different from that of the ANC or the racist mobs - and say that poverty, unemployment and inflation are the fault of the ANC, their policies and the capitalist system they represent. The struggle against xenophobia must become a struggle against the government, and for socialism, to destroy the root of the problems of racism and poverty engulfing South Africa and the rest of the world.

## “wine turns to vinegar”

Now the wine of opportunity is turning to the vinegar of disillusion and despair.

The same process took place in a different form in South Africa. Massive campaigns in the townships and unions against privatisation, casualisation, globalisation and poverty saw new organisations mushrooming. But the South African Communist Party and the unions remained wedded to the ruling bourgeois ANC party. Now, having taken responsibility for the ANC's attacks and

having shielded the government from challenge from below, the official working class organisations are struggling to prevent popular discontent assuming, as in Italy, a wild and reactionary form.

The return of the pogrom is a warning sign to the working class of the whole world. But we have no right to let it be a signal for despair. It proves that if the socialist section of the working class cannot find a path to the masses, cannot

succeed in creating a powerful political alternative to the mainstream reformist parties, and cannot direct working class struggles towards the goal of anticapitalist revolution, then the elemental rage of the masses will express itself in other, reactionary and destructive forms. As the economic crisis deepens around the world with massive rises in food and fuel prices and a surge in poverty, we do not have a mortgage on time.



## NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS NETWORK CONFERENCE 2008

# Time for a Rank and File Movement

The National Shop Stewards Network conference is meeting on 21 June at a time when public sector workers are balloting for industrial action but will face obstruction and delay from their own officials in turning votes into action. Now more than ever we need a national rank and file movement. *Joy Macready* shows how the NSSN could play a vital role in bringing this about.

**I**nstigated by militants in the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) in 2006, but founded in July 2007 with the official support not only of the RMT but a number of other more militant unions (postal workers, fire fighters, miners, civil servants, journalists, prison officers and bakers) the National Shop Stewards Network is attempting to rebuild the shop stewards movement of the 1970s. It has organised well-attended meetings with a good spread of unions represented, including both white collar and blue-collar sectors.

During the postal strike last year, NSSN activists in the CWU were able to co-ordinate a campaign against the sell-out deal. It has also played a significant role in supporting workers who are striking at the homelessness charity Shelter; distributing information and providing solidarity with other disputes; it has defended activists witch-hunted by management (Karen Reissmann of the Manchester mental health trust workers, Ricky Jones of the school caretakers in Hackney) and in some cases even by their own unions (Tony Staunton of Plymouth Unison).

All this is vital, as is the campaign to rebuild strong workplace representation and democracy, a network of shop stewards across the country. But the NSSN has built a severe self-limitation into its foundations.

Point 3 in its founding statement promises that the NSSN: "would not encroach on the established organisation and recruitment activity or interfere in the internal affairs and elections of TUC affiliated trade unions or the functions of the TUC."

Workers Power supporters opposed this at the founding conference of the NSSN, pointing out that coordinated action across the unions is impossible without "interfering in the internal affairs" of unions whose leaderships are failing to mobilise. This pledge - if it were adhered to - would mean tacitly supporting such leaders against their members, or at the very least refusing to challenge them. Indeed in cases such as Tony Staunton,

which it rightly publicises, how can the NSSN effectively support activists being attacked by their own union leaders if it refuses to "interfere in the internal affairs of TUC affiliated trade unions"?

Workers Power supporters filed an amendment to the first NSSN conference that would have committed the NSSN to organising action independently of union officials where necessary. It is no accident that this was the only amendment that the conference's organising committee - comprising members of socialist groups including the Socialist Party and the Permanent Revolution group - decided should not be debated or voted on at the conference.

Therefore, while the NSSN might allow verbal criticisms of trade union leaders, it doesn't organise action to challenge them.

While it may organise meetings in support of public sector unions that are balloting for strike action, it refuses to mount a campaign or call for the setting up of joint committees, even NSSN networks, that can unify the struggles. This too is embodied in its founding statement: "The network would support official campaigns and industrial disputes...existing workplace committees and trades councils", but no mention is made of initiating actions or organisations.

At its founding conference, the NSSN pledged to "organise at regional level conferences of work shop stewards and workplace representatives to build regional shop stewards networks, and to mobilise the local unions in support of those in struggle." Yet, while the NSSN provided a forum for CWU activists to get together during last year's dispute, it failed to organise cross union meetings or conferences to rally support for the CWU. Instead meetings were organised by individuals, small groups such as Workers Power, or local trades councils.

By calling itself a shop stewards' movement, the NSSN fails to bring in those activists who do not yet hold positions as workplace representatives or are local or national fulltime officials - in effect it prefers to base

itself on the existing stewards and officials rather than looking to new layers of workers emerging from the public sector strikes or other disputes.

The NSSN strategy is dominated by the old 1970s Communist Party's "broad left" strategy which was subordinated to electing left officials such as Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones. Except of course it is Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka who will play this role today. But where these leaders fail or allow themselves to be taken prisoner by more right wing forces on their NECs, union militants are left leaderless. They only can wait till the rank and file elect another left official.

Workers Power believes the NSSN must become a rank and file movement to effectively oppose management and to act against the official leaders when necessary. Opposition to this from centrist groups which however between reformism and revolutionary politics such as the Socialist Party and the SWP, is a sign of just how limited their 'independence' is from the trade union officialdom.

The NSSN needs to organise across the unions, challenge the misleadership of the bureaucrats and fight for rank and file control of the unions, so that they can be more effective in the class struggle.

Already accelerating inflation is driving workers to take action to defend living standards. As the world recession starts to bite, we will be forced to pay a high cost for it or mount a fight back on a scale we have not witnessed for many years. The union leadership is woefully unfit for purpose.

For this reason alone a rank and file movement cannot be indifferent to the national leadership in the unions. It should stand candidates in elections on a clear programme for union democracy, militant action and the necessity for political action - which with New Labour in freefall means a new working class party.

We will still need full time organisers, researchers and administrators to serve the members, but we do not need a privileged bureaucracy to rule over us - it must be dissolved. This can be done by:

- regular election of all union officials: instantly recallable by a simple majority of their electors;
- all officials to be paid the average wage of their members;
- all disputes, strikes and negotiations to be under the democratic control of those in dispute through mass meetings and the election of strike committees at them.

## National Shop Stewards Network 2nd conference

Saturday 28 June 2008

11.30am - 4.30pm

Registration from 10.30am

South Camden Community School  
Charrington Street, London NW1 1RG

Speakers include: Bob Crow (RMT), Mark Serwotka (PCS), Brian Caton (POA), plus shop stewards from disputes around the country

[www.shopstewards.net](http://www.shopstewards.net)



## BRITAIN'S THIRD CAMP

# On the fence in the class war

**A**long with the USA, Britain has been one of the main belligerent parties in the wars of plunder in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the main points of support for British capitalism's wars has been the refusal of the leaders of the British labour movement to take effective action in defence of the victims of imperialism and against our rulers' military adventures.

At the height of the antiwar movement of 2002-2003, when millions were appalled by the US/UK war drive and saw through Bush and Blair's "war on terror" demagoguery, huge numbers took to the streets not merely in opposition to war but in outright solidarity with the Palestinians and Iraqis. Among the peace placards and union banners, Iraqi and Palestinian flags flew. Directly anti-imperialist slogans resonated in the crowds. When George Galloway declared immediately after the US invasion of Iraq that the only people fighting legally were the Iraqi army, everyone knew what he meant.

Yet, the official union leaders sat on their hands and took no action. The antiwar movement failed to achieve its goals and the wars have dragged on effectively unchallenged by the British working class movement.

As communists have long recognised, the main social basis for these treacherous leaders is the existence of a large "aristocracy of labour" in Britain - a privileged minority of the working class whose relatively comfortable conditions of life and "respectable" social outlook have been shaped by better pay and conditions than the rest of the working class.

Small wonder then that these labour aristocratic ideas should permeate the socialist movement too. As the mass antiwar movement has declined, and as the imperialist propaganda machine has regrouped with attacks on those who dare question the "dignity" of the armed forces, more credence is being given to those small voices on the left that

question communists' traditional unconditional support for oppressed peoples fighting imperialism.

In this special supplement, we examine two trends that represent this view. The first is the Alliance for Workers Liberty, which shamefully refuses to support the call for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq. The second is the new and growing campaign Hands off the People of Iran, which expresses deep confusion about the tasks of the left with regard to threats of war against Iran and the tasks of socialists in the belligerent western nations. Finally, we look at the ideology that underlies both phenomena: the notion of the so-called Third Camp, which we regard as nothing more than a fig leaf of "working class" policy for people who are abandoning the real duty of socialist workers to fight for the defeat of their own ruling class in times of war and to promote the victory of oppressed nations in their resistance to imperialist domination.

## Alliance for Workers Liberty: apologists for imperialism

*Simon Hardy and Luke Carter* unpick the AWL's leaderships' arguments against the slogan "Troops out" of Iraq, and find that they are apologists for imperialism

**T**he Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) is divided three ways on the Iraq occupation. Two tendencies within the organisation are questioning the leadership's line. One argues for "Troops out", while the more principled tendency proposes the clear and unequivocal slogan, "Troops out now".

The leaders of the AWL argue that socialists should not fight for the withdrawal of US and British troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. They claim that, were the occupation to end immediately, reactionary Islamic forces would annihilate the Iraqi labour movement. Some comrades in the organisation are challenging this shameful position. To assuage their fears one of their leading members, Martin Thomas, published a "questions and answer" on the slogan of "Troops out", in the run up to their recent conference.

Thomas' argument has a Marxist veneer only insofar as he expresses a concern for the Iraqi working class, and suggests that this is the basis for the AWL's refusal to call for Troops out. Notwithstanding this, Martin Thomas offers little in the way of serious Marxist analysis or strategy, choosing instead to appeal to "common sense" arguments that

would not be out of place in *The Guardian*.

### From the "third camp" to the imperialist camp

Thomas' argument is hinged on the view that there are two forces engaged in fighting in Iraq: on the one hand, the imperialist occupying troops and, on the other, the "reactionary anti-imperialists" in the form of the "sectarian clerical-fascist militias". If asked to choose, Thomas is quite clear that he thinks the latter are worse. He argues:

"The US/UK occupation is bad. The immediately available alternative to it is throwing Iraq into the hands of sectarian clerical-fascist militias, who will fight it out among themselves. That is also bad, in fact worse."

Thomas continues by claiming to spurn both sides in this reactionary conflict, arguing that the AWL's role is to support the "third camp" of the working class. He writes that it is not the job of the AWL to counsel "the working class on which among the bourgeois alternatives immediately available is the lesser evil and therefore should be supported. We are for the working class creating its own alternatives - the Third Camp."

Observant readers will already spot a sleight of hand. On the one hand, Thomas does not want to take sides in the conflict between the imperialist occupiers and the Iraqi resistance. But just a few sentences earlier, it was Thomas who tacitly took sides in the conflict, arguing that the triumph of the "sectarian clerical-fascist militias" was "also bad, in fact worse" than the occupation.

What else could this mean other than that Thomas sees the occupation as providing some kind of security for the working class against the "clerical-fascist" resistance? This is not a mysterious "third camp" but grossly misplaced reliance on the occupation as defenders of the Iraqi labour movement.

His comrade Mark Osborne has recently claimed at an AWL school that Moqtada al-Sadr has a policy of "killing trade unionists". In a recent letter to *Workers Power*, Sami Ramadani summarised nicely what the AWL's attitude amounts to:

"It is despicable of the Alliance for Workers Liberty to absolve the occupation and accuse the Sadr movement of assassinating trade unionists. It is the occupation tanks, jets and police-state tactics, which are trying to



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crush the struggle of Iraq's working class and its trade unions. Like you, I don't have any illusions about Sadr, but one has to base one's analysis of Iraq on the facts and not on a pack of lies."

Thomas uses the resistance as a bogeyman. By labelling all those who resist imperialism as "clerical-fascists", he wants to absolve the AWL of the need to support the democratic rights of the Iraqis to decide their own future - something that is naturally impossible while the country remains under occupation. For any consistent democrat - let alone socialist - it is elementary that you have to support the basic democratic rights of Iraqis to organise militarily to repel the occupying army.

### "Clerical-fascist" bogeymen

The use of the term "fascist" to describe these forces is intended to rouse the emotion of AWL members - after all, how could socialists ever support the actions of fascists? In fact, Thomas uses the term without much attention to its actual meaning.

For Marxists, "fascist" is the term assigned to the shock troops of the enraged middle class, whose aim is to smash up the organised working class, in the service of the big bourgeoisie. We should not extend the term fascist to simply include any political force, which has recourse to violence or appeals to reactionary ideology. The instability of bourgeois politics in most of the world oppressed by imperialism means that even ordinary capitalist parties employ violence regularly against political opponents or journalists, who criticise them - Bangladesh springs to mind. But to label them fascists would run the risk of failing to alert the working class to a real fascist threat, when it does emerge.

However, let us assume for the sake of argument that Moqtada al-Sadr and his supporters are fascists - in the classical Marxist sense of the word. What should our attitude be to them and any other "fascist" (again, for the sake of argument) forces that are thrown into conflict with the occupation?

Trotsky confronted this question directly in the 1930s. He speculated hypothetically that the semi-fascist regime in Brazil would enter into conflict with Britain. On whose side should the working class be? Trotsky was unequivocal:

"I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain. Why? Because, in the conflict between them, it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro

and will place double chains on Brazil."

Trotsky drew this conclusion because a) he knew that a defeat for imperialism would be a victory for all those oppressed by it across the world; and b) he wanted the working class to come to the head of the anti-imperialist struggle in the event of any war.

Take the example of Iran as a closer analogy. Here you have a reactionary theocratic regime, which may be attacked by Israel or the United States. In the event of this attack, what would the message of Marxists be to the Iranian working class? We would certainly seek to use the crisis to bring down the Iranian regime. But we would not for a moment oppose the actions of the Iranian state, aimed at repelling the imperialist invader.

Our unconditional message would be "Victory to Iran!" But we would link this to the fight for workers' control in the armaments factories, democratic councils in the army, full political rights for women, and so on. In short, we would wage a political struggle against the theocracy, while also giving unconditional support to the military struggle to defeat the attack of the United States or Israel.

The occupation of Iraq is different only in the following sense. Here, you have a country under occupation by an imperialist power. The US is already in power rather than fighting for power in a war. But there is armed resistance, mainly led by reactionary forces. Like the Iranian regime, these forces are also enemies of the working class - they want to oppress the rights of women, the working class and so on. However, the question remains: how do we effectively fight their influence on the masses?

The answer is by fighting for a united front with these forces. "But hang on" the AWL leadership would say, "how can you have a united front with reactionaries?"

### United front

This response belies a misunderstanding about the united front policy in general. The united front always involves a political struggle. In Germany in the 1930s, Trotsky proposed a united front of the communists and social democrats - these were the very social democrats, who assassinated Rosa Luxemburg. But for Trotsky, this moral question was irrelevant. The point was a united front of the mass organisations - organised in councils of action from below - was the best means to expose in practice the treachery of the social democrats, defend the class from the Nazis, and prepare the way for the working class seizing power, based on the anti-fascist committees.

By placing demands on the leaders

of the resistance to have a united front with the working class, we can break their influence and expose their treachery in struggle. After all, look at the series of ceasefires Sadr has called, and how his ministers once participated in the puppet government. These facts can be used against Sadr - as can any reactionary attacks he carries through on workers or women - but they will only be effective, if the working class demands that all forces in Iraq (including Sadr's Mahdi army) unite in struggle to break the hold of the imperialist occupation.

In this case it is totally possible and permissible to organise democratic forums of resistance (similar, for example, to the popular committees of the first intifada in Palestine) to coordinate the struggle against the common enemy: in short, to fight for a united front "from above" and "below", as the Trotskyists did in Germany during the 1930s.

In this way the Iraqi masses will see that the revolutionary socialists are not afraid to fight, but, on the contrary, want to lead the resistance movement and have a more progressive programme for the movement (e.g. for the nationalisation under working class control of the oil industry) than their current reactionary leaders. When whole regions or towns (Fallujah, Mosul, Sadr City, etc.) have risen up in revolt, it is clear that this movement is not simply limited to small bands of Islamic fighters, but at key moments has involved whole layers of Iraqi society.

To return to the question of "clerical-fascism", it is clearly necessary to expose the lie that, simply because a resistance movement is led by Islamists, it is automatically "fascist". The experience of the Lebanese Communist Party militias in Lebanon, fighting alongside Hezbollah against Israel, and of the joint work between the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Hamas in Gaza both demonstrate that the AWL leadership's single-minded obsession with "Islamofascism" (one they share with such pro-war writers as Nick Cohen of *The Observer*) is totally at odds with the reality on the ground. On the contrary, under the pressure of the masses' desire for unity, workers' organisations and Islamists have taken common actions against occupying forces.

### The inevitable destruction of the labour movement?

Thomas quotes the AWL's historic leader Sean Matgamna approvingly:

"The immediate or, in Barry Finger's expression, 'precipitous' withdrawal of the occupying troops would, most likely, lead to three-way sectarian (Sunni, Shia) and national (Kurdish) civil war...



In those conditions, the nascent Iraqi labour movement - which is our central concern - would probably be destroyed."

Would it? No, not necessarily, not if the working class was armed and had drawn mass support by declaring loudly and clearly that it was a consistent defender of the Iraqi people, and that its cadres had fought against the hated occupation. Let us remember how Islamist resistance movements became so popular in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq? Because the secular (usually Stalinist led) forces capitulated, and ceased fighting the imperialists or Zionists. The Islamists filled the gap, and rallied the majority behind them.

But let us think more carefully about what it means to say that in conditions of a "precipitous withdrawal" the labour movement "would probably be destroyed". Well, the question is what exactly is the alternative to a precipitous withdrawal - a steady, phased withdrawal? Under what conditions would the Americans do this - given we are now five years into the occupation?

The answer, of course, is: once they have won, and secured a stable pro-US regime in Baghdad, or managed the break up of the country into a series of client states. How exactly would the working class - in an Iraq, which was enslaved to imperialism in this manner - be in a stronger position?

The US occupations of Italy and Japan after the World War II provide excellent examples of how imperialism treats the working class in such situations - with formal democratic rights, but alongside the most repressive extra-parliamentary repression that you care to imagine.

Confronted with a general strike in Japan in 1947, US General Douglas MacArthur had the leaders of the trade unions brought to his office at gunpoint, and demanded they call off the strike. Or look at the creation of the secretive Gladio network in Italy, whose aim was to launch a military coup if the communists ever came close to taking power. These clear examples should dispel the illusion of any honest observer that imperialism would provide a breathing space for the working class.

### Leaders

Of course, the imperialists are not against promoting certain leaders of the workers' movement, so long as it is in their interests - for instance the Iraqi Communist Party, which joined the government at the start of the occupation. The imperialists helped them to build their "free trade unions" as a bulwark against the more independent and radical trade unions, and to tie the working class politically and organisationally to a pro-imperialist

party in a quisling government. Imperialism will only allow the creation of a workers' movement that is totally subordinated to the interests of the imperialists.

Principally, this means the economic plundering of the country, through extraction of its raw materials and the theft of industry, in the form of privatisation to foreign multinationals. Any serious strikes against this project will be met with, first, the Iraqi police, then, the Iraqi army and, finally, the imperialist troops - sent in to "keep order" and "protect democracy". The protection offered the working class by the occupation is illusory and those, who spread this illusion, are doing the work of public relations hacks for the Washington/London war machine.

Furthermore, what exactly makes the destruction of the labour movement in a precipitous withdrawal inevitable? This is a frank admission that the AWL - despite its nominally proletarian orientation - has no faith in the working class' ability to come to the head of the national liberation struggle. The force that leads the resistance will be in the best position to take power, when the troops leave. In short, to abstain from the fight to rid the country of imperialist troops is to abstain from the struggle for power.

### Communist movement

Forget the AWL's bourgeois "common sense" logic and learn from the Communist movement.

The Communist International summed up a clear analysis of what must be said in 1922:

"The Communist International, though well aware that in different historical circumstances fighters for national political independence can be very different kinds of people, gives its support to any national revolutionary movement against imperialism. However, it still remains convinced that the oppressed masses can only be led to victory by a consistent revolutionary line that is designed to draw the broadest masses into active struggle and that constitutes a complete break with all who support conciliation with imperialism in the interests of their own class rule."

The communist movement thus established critical but unconditional support for all anti-imperialist struggles as a principle. But they recognised that this is just one component of a communist programme for the liberation of the oppressed. This must include class struggle demands, like the formation of militant unions, strikes in the workplaces for economic and political demands, women's rights, and, above all, the arming of the working class - not only to defend

itself from attack by imperialists or reactionaries, but also to go on the offensive against the imperialist occupation. The point then - as it remains today - is that, when revolutionaries refuse to raise clear slogans of class independence, coupled with consistent anti-imperialist positions, they will be outflanked and eventually defeated by the bourgeois nationalists, as happened tragically in Iran 1979.

The Comintern continued:

"The refusal of Communists in the colonies to take part in the fight against imperialist tyranny, on the pretext of their supposed 'defence' of independent class interests, is the worst kind of opportunism and can only discredit the proletarian revolution in the East. No less harmful, it must also be recognised, is the attempt to remain aloof from the struggle for the immediate everyday demands of the working class in the interests of 'national unity' or 'civil peace' with the bourgeois democrats. A dual task faces the Communist and workers' parties of the colonial and semi-colonial countries: on the one hand, they are fighting for a more radical answer to the demands of the bourgeois democratic revolution, directed towards the winning of national political independence; on the other hand, they are organising the masses of workers and peasants to fight for their own class interests, making good use of all the contradictions in the nationalist bourgeois democratic camp. By putting forward social demands, Communists will stimulate and release revolutionary energy, which can find no outlet in liberal bourgeois demands. The working class of the colonies and semi-colonies must be firmly convinced that it is only the overall intensification of the struggle against Great Power imperialist oppression that can promote it to revolutionary leadership. On the other hand, it is only the political and economic organisation and the political education of the working class and the semi-proletarian layers that can increase the revolutionary scope of the anti-imperialist struggle."

AWL leaders will no doubt protest that we are no longer in the epoch where these policies applied. This is a question for another article, and another time. But when US and British forces are engaged in brutal and reactionary occupations, systematically denying the democratic and national rights of the Iraqi and Afghan people, we see no need to dump the Communist International's programme. Our message to AWL members remains the following: start a fundamental consideration of the politics and method of the AWL.



## BRITAIN'S THIRD CAMP

# Hands off the People of Iran: campaign for action or propaganda bloc?

*Andy Yorke and Luke Carter* take a closer look at Hopi and ask if it's a campaign for building action in solidarity with Iran, in the event of a US/Israel attack, or is it an organisation aimed at making propaganda for a neutral position in a military conflict between Iran and the West?

**H**ands off the People of Iran (Hopi) describes itself as a campaign against an attack on Iran by the United States and in support of the struggles of Iranian workers, youth and women against Iran's repressive theocratic regime.

It was initiated by Iranian activists, who had criticisms of the policies of the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) leadership in general and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in particular. They accused the StWC and its predominant force, the SWP, of being soft on political Islam and even acting as apologists of the Iranian regime. This theme was taken up by *Weekly Worker* of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

Hopi's current secretary Yassamine Mathew wrote in *Weekly Worker* in February 2007 that StWC/SWP had "deliberately watered down the politics of the movement - to the extent of avoiding any critique of political Islam... and taking up 'Islam-friendly' slogans and positions." She singled out for attack the slogan, "We are all Hezbollah now" used in the 2006 demonstrations against Israel's invasion of Lebanon, when Hezbollah led the resistance, and claimed that the SWP had dropped its own principles and slogans in the antiwar movement.

It is certainly true that the Campaign Iran speaker at the November 2007 Stop the War conference (and at previous StWC meetings) went out of her way to excuse the crimes of the Iranian regime, claiming it was a democracy, downplaying its anti-Semitism and so on, with the SWP uncritically supporting many of these arguments. Leading SWP members on the platform were correct to emphasise that the antiwar movement had to concentrate on defending Iran from US threats - but they should have made clear their differences with these other claims.

The 2007 conference took the ludicrous decision to deny Hopi an affiliation to the coalition - despite the campaign being unequivocal in its call for the withdrawal of US and UK troops from the Gulf, which is the central demand of the StWC. In his executioner's speech at the conference, Andrew Murray, on behalf of the officers of StWC, accused the Hopi founders of trying to build

an alternative to the Coalition.

As a result Hopi was formally launched at a December 2007 conference with a founding statement opposing both imperialist war and the Iranian regime, in contrast to StWC's central slogan of Troops out now/stop the war. So, is Murray right, is Hopi's intention to build an alternative to the StWC, and should the antiwar struggle in Britain link opposition to imperialism with opposition to the Iranian regime?

Even more importantly, if we are serious about stopping a future war on Iran, is it not the case that the Stop the War Coalition remains the best possible vehicle to do it? So why a build special campaign, such as Hopi, to focus on this? Or is Hopi a campaign, whose central point is to build solidarity with repressed opposition activists and organisations in Iran?

Of course Workers Power recognises that the issues are linked to one another, in the sense that the Iranian working class is the only force that can lead a successful struggle against US imperialism and against clerical dictatorship at home. But in the event of an imperialist attack on Iran, the working class must not only defend the country against a possible Iraq-style occupation, alongside the troops and other military forces of the regime in the first instance, but also, by its determination and militancy, come to the head of this justified and progressive struggle, thus putting itself in the best place to overthrow the theocratic regime as soon as possible.

The first tactic is the "anti-imperialist united front" - a tactic adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International before its Stalinist degeneration. The second - a question of strategy, not of episodic tactics - is the programme of permanent revolution, whereby the working class both fulfils and goes beyond democratic tasks (including national independence from imperialism).

This position is known as revolutionary defensism and is totally consistent with a parallel policy in the imperialist attacker countries - revolutionary defeatism. We in the imperialist heartlands must seek - by the widest mass mobilisations and militant direct action - to break the will of our rulers to carry on the war, i.e. we seek the defeat of our "own side"

quite simply because it is not our own side.

But to make opposition to the theocratic regime a condition for supporting Iran in a war against the US and its British ally would unnecessarily narrow the forces of opposition in Britain. In Iran it could be a pretext for standing aside from the national struggle, thus isolating and condemning to impotence any working class forces, which took up this disastrous position.

We came to the following conclusions. First among these is our concern that Hopi is nothing more than a propaganda bloc that splits the difference between third campism and revolutionary defeatism.

### What should be the objectives of the antiwar movement in the imperialist countries?

It goes without saying that Hopi's main two slogans - No to imperialist war! No to theocratic regime! - are ones that Workers Power and most democrats and socialists would generally agree with. We are opposed to any war against Iran, but we are also opposed to the Iranian regime. By extension we are against all dictatorial or religious states, and fight for secularism and democratic rights as part of the struggle for socialism.

Nor do we believe that the imperialist aggression against Iran obliges us to tone down or suppress our opposition to this regime. Indeed in our propaganda during the current two-year sabre rattling against Iran, as in the run up to the 2003 Iraq war, Workers Power has put forward demands that link the struggle in such semi-colonial states against an imperialist attack to the revolutionary struggle by the working class to overthrow the regime itself and fight for socialism.

In 2003, as the war became a certainty, we advanced the slogan "Victory to Iraq", and called for the defeat of the US and UK military forces, arguing that the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front was crucial to uniting all those in the military struggle against attack. We also called on socialists in Iraq to fight for demands that allow the working class, under the leadership of a revolutionary party, to advance to the forefront of the resistance, opening the road to a successful revolu-



tionary overthrow of the Saddam regime.

We will adopt the same approach in any attack on Iran or any other semi-colony (the Marxist term for a the great majority of “third world” countries today that are oppressed by imperialism, exploited financially and economically, and existing under the threat of the imperialism’s military might, but, unlike an outright colony, formally independent with its own government).

However we are socialists; the STWC is a mass anti-war organisation that unites many different forces that are not - trade unions, bourgeois pacifist groups, such as CND, religious groups, including Islamic groups, Labour against the War, and so on. That is why we are against linking together these two slogans - no to war, no to the regime - as the basis for mass anti-war campaigns in the imperialist countries.

In addition, such a dual slogan cannot but imply that the two forces in question - US imperialism and Iran - are equivalent to one another. In reality, of course, Iran has none of the economic, political and military power of US imperialism. It is not even an imperialist country - what other countries does it oppress and exploit? - but, rather, suffers from imperialist oppression. Raising the two slogans together carries with it the tacit assumption that, in the event of a war between the US and Iran, one would be neutral - when revolutionaries should side with Iran against the imperialists. Workers Power and, to their credit, the SWP opposed the attempts by the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) to get the antiwar movement to adopt the slogans “no to war, no to Saddam” prior to the Iraq war in 2003.

This does not mean that one should demand that the whole antiwar movement should adopt the slogan “Victory to Iran”, because this would limit the antiwar movement to its explicitly anti-imperialist elements. However, the movement should be built around the call for an immediate and unconditional end to the wars and occupations. This can potentially mobilise largest number of forces for the de facto anti-imperialist objective of blocking an attack on another country, such as Iran, or securing the immediate withdrawal of the troops in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan today.

Within such a limited basis for common action, we are in favour of revolutionaries making their own propaganda for their own positions, the need for defeatism in the UK and the USA, the need for workers to overthrow the Iranian regime, etc. We do not need the permission of Lindsey German or Murray to do this. We have done it repeat-

edly, raising such burning issues as the demand that the union leaders on StWC platforms be pressed to call out their members (as in February and March 2003). Indeed our criticism of the leadership meant that these forces ousted us from the steering committee of StWC. But since our prime purpose is unity in action against the occupation and future attacks, we will not walk out in a huff or create a tiny imitation of an antiwar campaign.

### **An alternative to Stop the War Coalition?**

We think it is worth clarifying these principled differences we have with the *Weekly Worker* on the question of communist policy and the resistance to imperialism because it is the context, in which we have to view the whole Hopi initiative. Is Andrew Murray right to claim that Hopi is seeking to build an alternative to the StWC? If so, then we agree with Murray; the slogan of the StWC - Troops out now - must be the slogan of our movement; we have no need for Hopi.

If there is a fundamental problem with the StWC it is that on several occasions - for example, as the occupation took hold in spring 2004 - it dropped the call for immediate withdrawal of troops. German even shared a platform with a pro-occupation Iraqi Communist Party member at the European Social Forum in 2004. Similarly, a further problem with StWC is its failure to build a campaign of systematic direct action - including strike action - when this was possible and necessary in 2003. But these faults are hardly solved by setting up a third campist alternative “political centre” either within it or outside it. We need to fight within the StWC for militant direct action and against any concessions to the “troops home sometime” argument of the Liberal Democrats et al.

We do not need a third campist antiwar campaign - far from it. Murray also pointed to formulations from *Weekly Worker* to make his case. For example, he used the following quote from an aggregate the CPGB held last year:

“An important goal is to establish a viable alternative political centre to the rotten politics of the Stop the War Coalition and Campaign Iran. Obviously the main purpose is to oppose any attack on Iran by imperialism, but also, and crucially, to support working class resistance to the theocracy. Whenever any country is attacked there is a tendency to tone down criticism of the regime, and we need a conscious, principled effort to avoid such a drift. We are attempting to build links with groups of workers and protesters in Iran - such support always has the material effect of boosting morale of those

struggling against autocracy.”

### **Debating perspectives**

There is more confusion that clarity here. On the one hand, formulations like the “rotten politics of the Stop the War Coalition” confirm that Hopi is indeed perceived as an “alternative political centre”. We do not conceive of StWC (or Hopi) as a “political centre”, ripe or rotten. We have no need for single-issue campaigns developing political guidance for anyone. That is the task of political organisations, groups or parties with a programme, principles, and members loyal to these. But immediate and burning tasks require united fronts for common action. Confusion of these issues is a major weakness of the British left and a key feature of centrism - forces that vacillate between reformism and revolution

Likewise, Hopi’s claim that its “main purpose is to oppose any attack on Iran by imperialism” is immediately qualified and confused by the addition: “but also and crucially, to support working class resistance to the theocracy”. *Weekly Worker*’s third campism is plainly on view when it states: “whenever any country is attacked there is a tendency to tone down criticism of the regime”.

It is plainly untrue in the imperialist countries that, when a war breaks out against a semi-colony, there is a tendency to “tone down criticism” - the complete opposite is true! The media is howling with every criticism, true and untrue, that can be levelled at the regime to justify attacking it. Presumably, Mark Fisher, the author, means such a tendency exists on the left. While this may be true in some instances - for example, the Socialist Workers Party on occasion - the stronger tendency within the working class and even the far left is to what V.I. Lenin called “imperialist economism”, that is, refusing to side with the oppressed state against the imperial invader, because it is a capitalist state too, because its leaders are bourgeois too, because they are dictators, etc.

The question of whether you give unconditional support to the forces fighting imperialism is the crux of the matter. A case Hopi and *Weekly Worker* make frequent recourse to is the protest against the invasion of Lebanon by Israel in June 2006. For example, in its leaflet to the StWC conference, responding to Andrew Murray’s claim that they wanted to be an alternative, Hopi said:

“Rather than becoming an ‘alternative’ to the StWC, Hopi sees its main task as giving a voice within the Coalition to left activists inside Iran, who were deeply hurt and angered by pro-Hezbollah slogans raised in last sum-



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mer's anti-war demonstrations in London and elsewhere."

Even if it does not want to be an alternative, Hopi clearly does perceive its role as raising third campist politics inside the StWC. This, of course, should be its right, and it was nonsense for Hopi to be excluded for this.

But in our view, the anti-imperialist sentiment of the July 2006 demonstrations across Europe was to be celebrated, not criticised. It was a good thing that so many people on those demonstrations stood alongside Hezbollah in the war against Israel. When Israel was defeated, this was a victory not only for the people of Lebanon, but also for workers across the Middle East and the world. We do not need to give any political support to Hezbollah whatsoever to be alongside them against Israel.

### Permanent confusion

Quite aware of the third campist politics of its founders, we criticised one formulation in the Hopi motion to last autumn's Stop the War Conference that stated the "Iranian regime is not anti-imperialist in any sense". Our reasoning, simply, was that this implies we do not side with the Iranian state in the event of war. Certainly, the Iranian regime is not consistently anti-imperialist, but in the event of a war with the USA, it will carry out military actions against the imperialist armies, which should have our support. In this respect, we should be pleased that the founding conference of Hopi in December amended out this formulation, in favour of the correct formulation: "the Iranian regime does not represent a progressive or consistent anti-imperialist force".

There are also other demands we agree with in the founding statement. Hopi is clear on fighting for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and the whole gulf region. It is opposed to Israeli expansionism and aggression. It supports progressive and working class forces in Iran against the regime. Hopi also took a principled stance on protests for imprisoned trade unionists organised by the International Trade Union Confederation on 6 March. They argued correctly that it was not permissible to support protests organised by these forces, because they were silent on (and have a record of complicity with) US imperialism. The founding conference also passed an amendment which said the "main enemy was imperialism".

Hopi also now includes Permanent Revolution. Unlike the *Weekly Worker*, it is not third campist, but has a revolutionary defeatist position on imperialist wars. Permanent Revolution

intervened into the founding conference and improved some of the founding statement's formulations. It also moved the deletion of the formulation in the founding statement that called for a "nuclear free Middle East", arguing, quite correctly, that semi-colonial states have a right to nuclear weapons, if they so wish, in order to defend themselves against imperialism (but lost the vote).

Members of Permanent Revolution have argued that Hopi is not third campist, by pointing to its principled positions on the immediate withdrawal of US/UK troops from Iraq, and then contrasting this to AWL's refusal to raise this demand. But in truth the AWL's refusal to call for the withdrawal of troops in Iraq - the logical development of third campism - does not make Hopi's founding declaration in any way inconsistent with third campist assumptions. It is quite clear that the CPGB sees Hopi's founding declaration as entirely consistent with its third campist outlook, for example.

### Hopi's identity crisis

There is nothing wrong with third campists and revolutionary defeatists uniting in a solidarity campaign with Iranian workers, students and youth, who oppose the regime - though one has to say that it has not organised any actions, or practical solidarity

that could match fine words with deeds. The problem is that Hopi clearly perceives itself as a hybrid campaign - including elements of solidarity work, plus making anti-imperialist and third campist propaganda.

In this respect, Hopi has something of an identity crisis: it does not know what it is or where it is going. If it is a campaign of actions to stop the war on terror, then it is attempting to be an alternative to StWC - one that is far smaller, far less likely to stop any future war. If, as the quotes above suggest, it wants to be an alternative "political centre" within the coalition that makes propaganda for third campist politics, then that is its right, but it is not something revolutionary defeatists are interested in.

The attitude of Workers Power to the whole campaign is the following: we will support any actions Hopi calls that we agree with, but we will not support a propaganda bloc, which carefully words its founding statement so that revolutionary defeatists and third campists can agree on it. Rather than clarifying the principled differences between the discourse of the "third camp" and a revolutionary defeatist stance, such a bloc serves only to confuse it.

If Hopi becomes a campaign of actions, then reaching programmatic agreement is not necessary, as one only needs agreement on what action to take

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All history proves that the capitalists will never relinquish their property peacefully - to claim otherwise in the age of 'Shock and Awe' is either hopeless naivety or wilful deception. There is only one way: their apparatus of state repression must be overthrown by force. The capitalists' monopoly of military power - armies, police and security forces, prison systems, civil servants, judiciaries - must be smashed to pieces and replaced with the rule of the working people themselves.

This can be done - the majority of humanity can cast off the tiny minority of parasites. It will take mass organisation, an unambiguous strategy and, when the hour strikes, courageous and ruthless action.

Some may balk at this, but the alternative to revolution is not decades of undisturbed peace. Basing a global civilisation on the empowerment of a few thousand and the impoverishment of six billion is like lodging depth charges in the planetary core. If the logic of capitalism is left to unfold, our world will be torn apart by starvation, disease, poverty, environmental catastrophe, and war.

In the struggle against capitalism, greater energy is equivalent to greater humanity. For with the suppression of our exploiters and an end to the tyranny of profit, human history can truly begin.



around which slogans. For example, take the Palestine solidarity demonstration Revolution and Workers Power initiated in Leeds recently with Palestinian activists and other leftists. This action was organised around very basic agreement - end the siege of Gaza, freedom for Palestine. A solidarity campaign need not require a great deal of programmatic agreement. Look at the brief statement of principles of the Columbian Solidarity Campaign. In contrast, Hopi throws into its founding statement a whole number of programmatic positions.

But, at the same time, if Hopi wants to go down the route of hammering out programmatic agreement, then its current statement is far from sufficient. For example, it says that it supports "socialism in Iran". Naturally, we also support this - but this poses more questions than it answers. How exactly does one get socialism in Iran? What programme should revolutionaries advance in the country? If we can agree with Hopi on what the revolutionary programme for Iran is, then we have a principled duty to take further steps towards revolutionary unity: i.e. a common revolutionary organisation to fight for this programme.

Of course, the problem is that we know from the outset political differences with Hopi's main forces are likely to stand in the way of programmatic unity. Not only is there the difference between revolutionary defeatism and third campism in the event of a war, but we also have other programmatic differences - for example, the *Weekly Worker* rejects the transitional programme and method.

### Propaganda

It seems very unlikely that Hopi could lead to real programmatic agreement between its component elements. But this makes the whole thing quite problematic for as long as it remains little more than a propaganda campaign. In the event of any war against Iran, either *Weekly Worker*, on the one side, or Permanent Revolution, on the other, could adopt the other's position. Or, more likely, the "unity" of Hands off the People of Iran would effectively break down, as different tendencies in it produce, well, different propaganda on the war.

There is something peculiarly British about the drive to set up such campaigns with a highly propagandistic founding statements over the last ten years. Look, for example, at the SWP's ill-fated Globalise Resistance, which drew up a radical democratic, anti-capitalist but non-socialist programme of demands. It effectively collapsed - surprise, surprise - when it ceased taking action on the streets.

# Origins of the "Third Camp"

The Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and the threat of an imperialist attack on Iran, have revived arguments that socialists should abandon the principle of support for the oppressed nations in their struggle against imperialism, in favour of a supposed "third camp" of the working class. *Dave Stockton* unearths the origins of this debate.

The ideas of the Third Camp, or third campism, was a position developed by James Burnham and Max Shachtman on the eve of the outbreak of World War II. The announcement of the 1939 Stalin-Hitler pact, the division of Poland between them and the invasion of Finland by the Russian armed forces in 1940 led to enormous outrage within the liberal intelligentsia, and in trade union and reformist party circles. This was hardly surprising, since Joseph Stalin's about-face brutally dumped the very forces that had, since 1935, been central to the antifascist Popular Fronts (blocs of bourgeois liberals, social democrats and the Stalinist Communist Parties).

Under pressure from this outrage of the democratic petit-bourgeois strata, Burnham and Shachtman abandoned the position of the Fourth International of defence of the USSR in wars against capitalist or imperialist states, and characterised the latter as imperialist, too. Instead they claimed to side with a Third Camp.

As originally conceived by them the other two imperialist camps were USSR-Germany and Britain-France. Trotsky condemned this as a petit-bourgeois abandonment of a class position based on a class analysis of the conflicting parties.

In *Petit-bourgeois Moralists and the Proletarian Party*, he wrote:

"...the 'Third Camp'. What is this animal? There is the camp of capitalism; there is the camp of the proletariat. But is there perhaps a 'third camp' - a petit-bourgeois sanctuary? In the nature of things, it is nothing else... But the whole trouble is that two warring camps do not at all exhaust the bourgeois world. What about all the neutral and semi-neutral countries? What about the United States? Where should Italy and Japan be assigned? The Scandinavian countries? India? China? We have in mind not the revolutionary Indian or Chinese workers but rather India and China as oppressed countries. The schoolboy schema of the three camps leaves out a trifling detail: the colonial world, the greater portion of mankind!"

And, he continued:

"If there exist in this world, in addition to Shachtman and Burnham, only two imperialist camps, then where, permit me to ask, shall we put India? A Marxist will say that despite India's being an inte-

gral part of the British Empire and India's participating in the imperialist war; despite the perfidious policy of Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, our attitude toward India is altogether different from our attitude toward England. We defend India against England. Why then cannot our attitude toward the Soviet Union be different from our attitude toward Germany despite the fact that Stalin is allied with Hitler? Why can't we defend the more progressive social forms, which are capable of development, against reactionary forms, which are capable only of decomposition? We not only can but we must...

"As if this 'third camp' (what is it? a party? a club? a League of Abandoned Hopes? a 'People's Front?') is free from the obligation of having a correct policy toward the petit-bourgeoisie, the trade unions, India and the USSR!"

Trotsky's position - indeed that of the entire communist movement in the time of Lenin - had been that critical support in struggles or defensism in wars was not based on political identification with their leaderships, their governments or their policies, but on the necessity for the proletariat to defend its own gains and organisations - unions, parties, and states - however bad their leadership. This applied not only to workers' organisations against capitalism, but also to oppressed nations against imperialism.

From Trotsky's point of view all these constituted the camp of the proletarian revolution. Against this was ranged the camp of capitalism, of the world imperialist bourgeoisie. Of course, there were agents of the capitalist camp within the camp of the proletariat and the oppressed nations, races, etc. Indeed they occupied leading positions - as trade union bureaucrats that betrayed strikes and supported imperialist wars, as reformist party leaders who even shot the leaders of the revolutionary workers (Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, etc.) and last but not least as Stalinist bureaucrats in the USSR (who murdered Lenin's old companions, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Nikolai Bukharin as well as thousands of Trotskyists).

A relentless struggle had to be waged to replace these traitors, remove them, and expel them from their positions of leadership. But this struggle was a part of the struggle to defend the unions, the par-



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ties, the workers' and semi-colonial states from attack by fascism, capitalism and imperialism.

For Trotsky all talk of a third camp was ducking this duty of defence, based on subjective political revulsion for the counter-revolutionary leaderships of these organisations or struggles.

In *A Balance sheet of the Finnish events*, he wrote:

"The policy of defeatism is not punishment of a given government for this or that crime it has committed but a conclusion from the class relationships. The Marxist line of conduct in war is not based on abstract moral and sentimental considerations but on the social appraisal of a regime in its reciprocal relations with other regimes. We supported Abyssinia not because the Negus (Haile Selassie) was politically or 'morally' superior to Mussolini but because the defence of a backward country against colonial oppression deals a blow to imperialism, which is the main enemy of the world working class. We defend the USSR independently of the policy of the Moscow Negus for two fundamental reasons. First, the defeat of the USSR would supply imperialism with new colossal resources and could prolong for many years the death agony of capitalist society. Secondly, the social foundations of the USSR, cleansed of the parasitic bureaucracy are capable of assuring unbounded economic and cultural progress, while the capitalist foundations disclose no possibilities except further decay."

Historically third campism arose to get ex-revolutionaries of the hook of hav-

ing to defend the abhorrent Stalinist regime when that regime clashed with the interests of democratic imperialism. After all, it had been wiping out hundreds of thousands, if not millions of political opponents, workers and peasants for several years without Shachtman and co. thinking this necessitated a dumping of defencism.

Shachtman to justify his characterisation of the USSR's war against Finland as imperialist, developed the idea that it was a new, hitherto unforeseen class society - "bureaucratic collectivism". Showing his fundamentally eclectic method, driven by subjective impulses (not to outrage the opinions of the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia and the labour aristocracy), he went through a series of reformulations of what bureaucratic collectivism was, and what tactics and strategy it dictated.

First he was defeatist only on Finland, remaining defencist of the USSR if it were attacked by imperialism (despite his characterisation of the USSR as imperialist!) At this point he considered bureaucratic collectivism more progressive than capitalist imperialism. Then, after the war, he evolved back to dual defeatism (USSR and the USA were equally bad), and finally arrived at the position that the USSR was worse than democratic imperialism - it was indeed a sort of barbarism. Shachtman ended up back in the American Socialist Party on its anti-communist right wing, a distinct cold warrior.

Why is this of interest today, with Stalinist regimes reduced to North Korea and Cuba? Largely because the Alliance for Workers Liberty and its predecessors revived Shachtman's positions, when they

themselves were under the pressure of the so-called second Cold War (1978-88).

But as Trotsky observed, "third campism" as a method also relates to the struggles against imperialism by semi-colonial countries. These, too, demand unconditional but critical support, defencism in war, without in any sense prettifying their present leaders, or ceasing to struggle to overthrow them, subject to the tasks of defence.

Third campists like the AWL simply refuse to take sides, claiming their paralysed inaction is the camp of the working class. However, like Shachtman, they wobble towards preferring democratic imperialism, because it will supposedly improve the conditions for the class struggle (a lie as Iraq shows).

As the issue has shifted to the defence of semi-colonial countries, after the collapse of Stalinism, the AWL dumped a great deal of Lenin's theory of imperialism, so as to make countries like Iran or Argentina just as imperialist (though smaller and weaker) as the USA, the UK, etc. In fact the method of the Third Camp, though claiming to adopt a third position, always tends to collapse back into one of the camps - that of democratic imperialism.

Those wishing to genuinely defend the working class and the oppressed will have to dump the whole third campist method. The only camp independent of imperialism is that of the revolutionary working class, its long-term allies (poor peasants, oppressed nations, etc.) and its episodic tactical allies (a semi-colonial regime actually resisting an imperialist attack).

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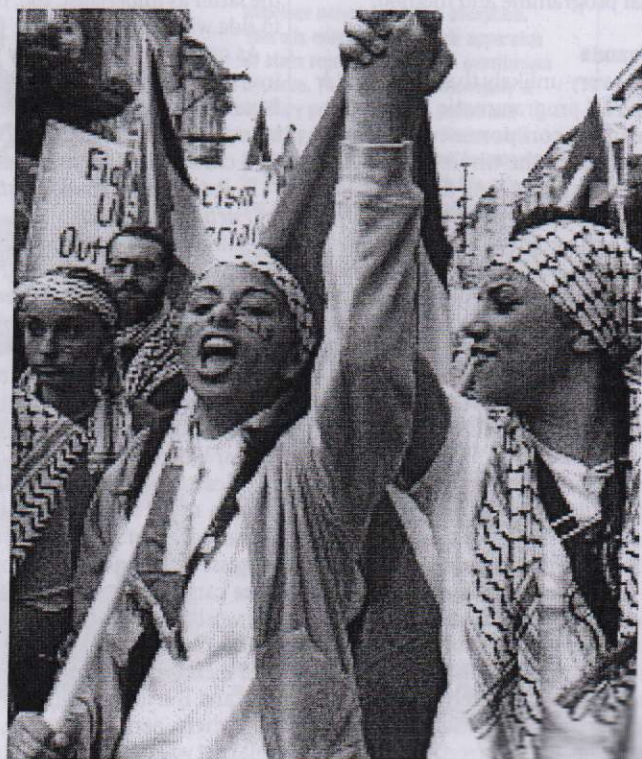
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## LOVE MUSIC HATE RACISM

# So how can we stop the BNP?

By Alasdair Byrne

The rise of the fascist National Front in the 1970s saw the foundation of the explicitly anti-fascist and anti-racist Rock Against Racism which organised huge carnivals and concerts in 1978. It was launched by left musicians in the winter of 1976-7 in a response to pro-fascist statements by prominent rock artists Eric Clapton and David Bowie. The former called on fans at a Birmingham concert to vote for Enoch Powell to stop Britain becoming a black colony and the latter claimed Britain was ready for a fascist dictator. Groups like the Clash and Tom Robinson played a prominent role in turning the tide of youth culture strongly against racism. But it is a wrong to think that it was just concerts and carnivals that "stopped the Nazis." Before the carnivals in 1977 came the militant London mobilisations in Wood Green (April) and Lewisham (August). Thousands of antifascist fighters and ordinary members of the black community in these areas first physically harassed and then prevented the NF marches through areas with large immigrant populations. The SWP played a key role in these confrontations, going on to initiate the Anti-Nazi League in the same year.

Today Love Music Hate Racism (LMHR), which was set up in 2002 in an effort to fight against the rise of the British National Party and is closely tied to Unite Against Fascism (UAF), has recently organised its own 100,000 strong free anti-racist carnival in London. Now, in response to the election of the BNP's Richard Barnbrook to the Greater London Assembly (GLA), LMHR proposes to take its carnival to the streets on 21 June. But the message pushed from UAF and LMHR platforms is much less radical than those of its 1970s precursors.

LMHR's website states the organisation's aim to "use the energy of our music scene to celebrate diversity and involve people in anti-racist and anti-fascist activity - as well as to urge people to vote against fascist candidates in elections." But this focus on trying to convince people to "use their vote against the BNP" which LMHR and UAF share with the anti-fascist movement is wrong from the start.



Mass action drove the fascists off the streets of Lewisham in 1977

The main strategy which LMHR and UAF use to get voters out in elections is to name and shame the BNP as Nazis and criminals and ask that people vote for any other party standing against them. They also focus on building the "broadest possible movement". At first glance this appears to be a good method; certainly the anti-fascist movement needs to be broad in the sense that only a mass movement will be able to win the battle against the BNP and with holocaust denier, Nick Griffin as its chairman, the Nazi nature of the BNP should be obvious to all. But to beat the BNP we need to tackle the cause of their growth.

Everyone except hardened antisemites can agree that the holocaust was one of the greatest tragedies in history, and so by limiting itself to identifying the BNP as Nazis, UAF allows almost anyone to present themselves as an anti-fascist, even if they support racist beliefs about asylum seekers. The racist immigration policies of Labour and the Tories, combined with the demonising of Muslims and asylum seekers in the media have lent themselves to a growing wave of racism, particularly in the form of Islamophobia, which the BNP have capitalised on, for example in 2006 when they called on voters to turn the council elections into a "referendum on Islam". At the same time Labour has betrayed its traditional working class driving them in elections to abstention, but also growing support for the Tories and for the BNP.

### New party needed

So when LMHR "urge people to vote against fascist candidates in elections" who are they asking them to vote for? Apparently the answer is

anyone but the BNP, but how can they expect disadvantaged, white workers - the group which the BNP is targeting with its anti-immigrant scare tactics and fake pro-worker rhetoric - who are often voting BNP as a protest against Labour to vote for the party which has consistently betrayed them? The Liberal Democrats share the same privatisation fetish, even going as far as to suggest privatising the prison system, and also want to introduce a National Border Force. The Conservatives, traditional enemy of the British workers, are willing to move their own immigration policy ever rightwards in an effort to scoop up some of the BNP vote before the BNP become, a serious contender.

In short a vote for any of the major political parties is a vote for continued attacks on workers rights and public services, while at the same time ensuring the continuation of a racist, anti-immigrant climate in both government and media. These are the very reasons why the BNP continues to gain support and so the tactic of voting for the mainstream parties to keep the BNP out of power will only delay their electoral victory while they continue to amass support.

The BNP aims to divide the working class by spreading lies about migrants and Muslims and taking advantage of workers disillusionment with Labour. So to prevent the BNP from gaining support we need to challenge and answer these racist lies wherever we come across them, something that UAF promises when it claims it will "challenge the racist lies and myths spread by the BNP". But how can the myths be challenged? Not by backing the mainstream parties which themselves

have spread these myths in the first place.

The solution to this problem lies in addressing the lack of working class political representation which fuels the BNP. To stop the BNP capitalising on white working class disaffection with Labour and using it to divide workers among ourselves, we need to build a new workers party, for the whole working class, black and white, including workers whose families have been here for generations and migrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, South America and Asia.

It can be done. Campaigns against rising prices, against Brown's pay cut, to defend the NHS, postal service and council housing, against the war for oil in Iraq - all these can unite workers of all ethnic backgrounds in struggle.

If all sections of the working class and oppressed united, they would form a force effective enough to win these battles and in doing so together would come to realise that they have more in common with another worker, whatever their colour or country, than they do with a pro-business farm-owner like Nick Griffin. To organise such campaigns effectively a mass party is needed, one committed to combating fascism by fighting against its root causes in the capitalist system itself.

Wherever the BNP has gained support racist attacks have increased. The BNP are more than a racist parliamentary party like UKIP. They are a fascist organisation which wants to organise on the street to intimidate Muslims, ethnic minorities and anyone who doesn't share their bigoted views through force and physical violence.

So in addition to answering the BNP's lies, we also need to be prepared to take on BNP on the streets. Although they try and present themselves as respectable, suit-wearing politicians they are vicious, racist thugs whose strategy for taking power is based more on building up gangs of thugs on the street than winning seats in parliament. Wherever the BNP organise rallies, marches or leafleting, anti-fascists need to organise to stop them. We have to deny them a platform for their views.

In short we no need a popular front with capitalist politicians, bishops and celebrities - we need a workers united front able to enforce its key slogan 'No Platform for Fascists.'



## LEBANON CRISIS

# Hezbollah's doomed compromise

Lebanon's slide into civil war seems to have halted. Hezbollah defeated the pro-US government's attack but then went on to strike a constitutional deal with the government.

*Marcus Hallaby* argues that this is no solution for Lebanon's workers and poor.

On one side stood Hezbollah, the Shia based resistance movement that ejected the Israeli occupation in 2000 and defeated Israel's invasion in 2006. On the other side in Lebanon's near-civil war stood Sunni Muslim and Druze militias backing leading pro-government billionaire Sa'ad Hariri, son of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, whose assassination forced the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005.

In May, the country was right on the brink of civil war when Hezbollah and its allies seized mainly Sunni Muslim West Beirut and disarmed the militia of Hariri's Future Movement, before handing it over to a Lebanese Army unwilling to side with the government. They were also successful in putting down the fighters of pro-government Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, although without damaging his popular base to the same extent. Meanwhile, Hariri's supporters in the north of the country took revenge for their humiliation on the small Alawite minority in Tripoli, and massacred 14 pro-Syrian activists in Halba.

The peace deal granted the Hezbollah-led opposition practically all the demands it had made since its decision in December 2006 to withdraw from the government coalition and launch mass street protests. Hezbollah now has a third of the seats in a transitional cabinet (giving it a veto over controversial decisions), pending parliamentary elections to be held under a new election law favourable to Hezbollah's Christian allies (the Free Patriotic Movement of former army head Michel Aoun).

In return, the opposition has pledged to cooperate with the pro-government March 14 coalition in electing a new President (an office left vacant since the expiry of pro-Syrian president Emile Lahoud's term of office in November 2007), and promised in future not to use the "weapons of the resistance" to resolve internal conflicts.

This of course is an empty promise, as is the implication that newly reappointed prime minister Fouad Seniora will not use force either.



Supporters of Hezbollah marking the eighth anniversary of Israel's troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May

After all the government - and the Sunni, Druze and Christian sectarian parties supporting it - had just tried to resolve its crisis of legitimacy through the use of force, in a failed attempt to close Hezbollah's optic-cable telecoms network. It was this network that Hezbollah used to such effect in defending the country against Israel's 33-day bombardment in 2006. The scale of this latest provocation, and the complete unpreparedness of the official and pro-government forces for real fighting with Hezbollah, suggests that the government may have been counting on US or even Israeli intervention against a "terrorist coup d'etat". In the event, George Bush and Ehud Olmert decided discretion was the better part of valour.

The Seniora government's actions were a blatant attempt to start the disarmament of Hezbollah, the only effective military resistance to the Zionist state. This is a key US policy objective since Israel's defeat in 2006, and the first step towards bringing Lebanon into a pro-US bloc confronting Syria, Iran and the Iraqi resistance. In this bloc too are the reactionary Arab regimes, principally Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt.

It was correct for working class forces in Lebanon to side with Hezbollah's resistance to the government's attempt to disarm it. Yet Hezbollah's pursuit of a rotten deal that gives it an enhanced place in Lebanon's undemocratic confessional system (where power is shared out on the basis of religious affiliation), should be condemned. Indeed the Islamist movement is blocking of

genuine democratic and social reforms, and re-enforcing a system which divides of the working class and popular masses along religious lines. Despite its military resistance to Israel, Hezbollah's policy therefore ultimately weakens the ability of the Lebanese masses to resist Israel's aggression and US imperialism's regional designs. Whatever the courage of its resistance fighters, Hezbollah's Islamist politics are not the answer to the problems of Lebanon and the Middle East.

A principled working class party in Lebanon - while uniting in action with all forces fighting Israeli and US aggression - would seek to build a radically different axis of resistance, an alternative to Hezbollah and the Islamists.

In contrast to the merry-go-round of elections, electoral laws and constitutional compromises, it would raise the slogan of a constituent assembly elected on the basis of one person, one vote, without religious weighting, in which the relations between Lebanon's minorities, its relations with Syria, Palestine and the Arab world, and the question of what sort of social and economic regime - capitalist or socialist - the country should be based on could be openly debated out in front of the whole people.

To convene one would require a working class struggle against the confessional system, against the system of capitalist exploitation obscured and protected by it, against the subordination of all the Arab countries to imperialism under the armed guard of the Zionist state.

A starting point would be the struggles of the workers and exploited classes (of all religions) against the pauperisation induced by neo-liberal globalisation. The political crisis in Lebanon is related to a massive economic crisis - a huge national debt, inflation and the collapse of public services that have hit the urban poor especially hard - an issue that was not even touched on at the so-called "peace talks" in Qatar.

As economist Karim Makdisi noted, "the opposition... is more or less in agreement with the government in regards to social and economic policy... Both... have attempted to sweep the main social and economic issues facing Lebanon under the carpet".

That the Shi'a form a large part of the urban poor - and that Hezbollah's ally Amal more or less controls the trade unions - has allowed the anti-government opposition to exploit the workers' grievances in their bid for power. Workers' strikes over the minimum wage and against power cuts have themselves been turned on and off, as the opposition have tried to prevent them acquiring a momentum of their own.

The Lebanese Communist Party, for its part, has failed both to give a class lead to these struggles and to develop a force independent of the religious confessional parties. This is a consequence of its "two stages" theory - a legacy of Stalinism - which insists that the struggle for democratic demands and national freedom are a separate stage that must be completed before the working class can fight for its own government.

By contrast, the programme of authentic Leninism-Trotskyism bases itself on the strategy of permanent revolution: on the recognition that in countries like Lebanon, the bourgeois parties - of whatever religious stripe - cannot and will not lead even the struggle for democracy and national independence to a successful conclusion. For that, the working class must come to the head of the struggle and, on seizing power, must pursue its own class goals: the abolition of capitalism in Lebanon, the spreading of social revolution across the region, the formation of a Socialist United States of the



## BOLIVIA ON THE BRINK

# Landowning elite threaten civil war - workers and peasants can stop them

The Bolivian business and landowning elite - in collusion with the United States - are threatening to split the country rather than hand over a fairer share of its natural wealth to the impoverished majority. The masses need to launch an offensive to crush the secessionists, writes *Keith Spencer*

In May just over 50 per cent of the population in the province of Santa Cruz participated in a referendum on autonomy for the province from the Bolivian state. Some 85 per cent of those who voted supported a de facto secession. The right wing prefect of Santa Cruz, Rubén Costas, told a delirious victory rally: "Today we begin in Santa Cruz a new republic, a new state."

The purpose of the right wing is simple: to grab the oil and gas reserves of the country, and to prevent a land reform which would hit the big ranchers in the most agriculturally productive part of the country.

Santa Cruz is the most populous of four departments which comprise the so-called Media Luna (half moon) in Bolivia's eastern lowland provinces - the others being, Pando, Tarija and Beni. These three other departments plan to hold their own autonomy votes in June. The Media Luna accounts for some 60 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, whilst containing only 35 per cent of its population.

President Evo Morales has agreed to the Bolivian parliament's sudden implementation of a recall referendum for his post, that of the vice president and prefects of all nine of the country's departments. Morales believes, probably correctly, that he will easily defeat the recall vote, thus enhancing his democratic mandate.

The recall referendum is due on 10 August. Of course socialists should call on Bolivians to vote "no" to the recall of Morales, since those voting yes will be aiming to abort Morales' attempt at land reform and nationalisation of the country's hydrocarbons. However, in the departmental referendums, socialists would of course campaign for a yes vote, to recall those prefects who want to rob the masses of the wealth of the country.

But what about Morales' strategy? This whole referendum game, the pointless attempt to win new democratic mandates when the



Rubén Costas voting for autonomy for Santa Cruz

majority of the masses have repeatedly expressed their demand for land reform and nationalisation of the huge oil and gas reserves, is a dangerous and unnecessary ploy. It gives the secessionists more time and potentially can demobilise and demoralise the masses.

The right are simply not bothered about the niceties of the Bolivian constitution and will continue with their plans to form their own state. Already they are setting up a parallel administration, tax collection system, police and elements of an armed force - all with the collusion of the US Embassy and backing from Latin American and US business interests greedy for the mineral wealth of the country. US ambassador Philip Goldberg has been channelling money and logistical support to the secessionists.

And yet, instead of countering these plans by decisive action, Evo Morales continues to talk about a negotiated settlement with the racist, anti-democratic oligarchs. The mass of the Bolivian people, workers, peasants, the indigenous majority, cannot afford such conciliation; they must demand the Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo help mobilise and arm the masses to fight

the right, otherwise they will be defenceless in the face of an outright secession, or a military coup claiming to "defend national unity" by giving the right all they want.

The coup plotters and secessionist leaders should be arrested, their backers stripped of their property, their referendum "victory" annulled, their marches banned and their reactionary supporters driven from the streets. The secessionists' support should be undermined by granting land to the poor peasants in Santa Cruz, and by appealing to the rank and file of the army to oppose the break-up of the country.

All through the political crisis of the past two years, Morales and the MAS have offered negotiations with the oligarchs. They have postponed referendums on the constitution and land reform, undermined pensions reform, and retreated from full nationalisation of the oil and gas industry, which has been fought for by the revolutionary mass movements of the first half of the decade. Large sections of the peasant and indigenous organisations, and the trade union confederation Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), have condemned these concessions and mobilised for more decisive action.

The workers and indigenous people must demand that the MAS carry out its promised reforms in full and without paying a cent of compensation to the reactionary plotters. The land bill must be enacted now; it would prove overwhelmingly popular and strike at the heart of the oligarchs, evaporating much of their social base in the countryside. The MAS must also fully nationalise the hydrocarbon industry - with no compensation - not the fraud of increased taxation. The land and the businesses of the oligarchs should also be taken over and run by committees of workers and peasants.

The COB and the local mass coordinating bodies, like the Fejuve of El Alto, should take the lead in forming a united front of workers', peasants' and indigenous organisations to defeat the counterrevolutionary forces and their plot to keep all the natural wealth of the country for themselves. They should form militias as a matter of urgency to defend progressive forces against the landowners and the fascistic youth organisations.

While the army has kept out of politics so far, due mainly to the fact that Morales has not asked it to enforce central decisions against the secessionists, the Bolivian people cannot rely on it under its present officer corps and high command. However the rank and file soldiers must be won over to the cause of the people, granted political and democratic rights, including the right to elect their own officers and NCO's and join hands with the workers' and peasants' militias.

Last, but not least, Bolivians need their own mass revolutionary party that is prepared to prosecute the class struggle against the oligarchs and the multinationals to the end, to the seizure of power, the installation of a workers' and peasants' government and the abolition of capitalism in Bolivia. The COB and other workers' organisations have been debating the creation of their own instrumento politico (political instrument) - now is the time to do it!



## US ELECTIONS

# Barack Obama's dilemma of race and class

Barack Obama is on the verge of winning the Democratic nomination for the November presidential elections. Yet since April, Hillary Clinton has won several states by concentrating on low-income white voters, suggesting that such voters will not support a black candidate. *Andy Yorke* looks at whether racism could keep Obama out of the White House.

After his victory in the Oregon primary on 20 May, with only three more to go in early June, Obama has claimed the nomination is "within reach." Though Hillary Clinton still refuses to admit defeat, the Democratic establishment has turned towards Obama. In mid-May he passed Clinton's tally by winning a steady stream of endorsements from superdelegates - the 796 national party leaders, representatives, senators, and governors who will have the deciding vote in the nomination.

With defeat looming, Clinton has resorted to playing the race card, arguing that, almost regardless of the primary results, she should win the nomination because a black candidate could not win the presidential election itself. Contests in West Virginia (13 May) and Kentucky (20 May) saw high votes for Clinton (67% and 65%) due in large part to racism among poorer white voters: Her vote among non-college educated whites in Kentucky rose to 69 percent, among whites with a family income below \$50,000, she won 75 percent of the vote. In a CBS exit poll, eight out of 10 Clinton voters said they would be unhappy with Obama as the Democrats' candidate, with only 33% willing to vote for him while 41% said they would vote for McCain.

## Obama: a "post-race" candidate?

Given the heritage of the country, race was always going to be a major issue in the campaign. Obama's chosen strategy has been to acknowledge the issue but play it down. He pointed to his own campaign as proof that the US has changed because a Black man could now stand for president. On the eve of his first victory in Iowa, he argued: "People are willing to look beyond race, particularly on issues as important as who is going to lead the country." He claimed his campaign would appeal to all, rich and poor, black and white, old and young, Democrat and Republican, seeking to unite "a divided America" with a new direction, under the watchwords "hope" and "change", promising "to heal the nation and repair the world."

At the same time, he insists that he takes his inspiration from the civil rights movement but balances his appeals to black history and struggle, the historic possibility of a black president, with a broader, populist appeal to the poor and working class as a whole. All this is combined with a coded assurance to the rich and powerful that his "common-sense, practical, non ide-



ological solutions" will not make any inroads into their wealth. As a result, he has been able not only to generate a tidal wave of "hope", that is to say illusions, amongst black people and youth, but also to win huge financial contributions from bankers, financiers and venture capitalists.

In order to cultivate a persona acceptable to the mainstream media, Obama has also stayed away from campaigns fighting against racist injustice such as the Jena 6 (black teenagers unjustly accused of beating a white fellow student at their Louisiana High School that provoked a 20,000 strong protest march in September 2007). When three policemen involved in the fatal shooting of Sean Bell in New York City, were acquitted, Obama called it a tragedy, but argued the verdict had to be respected since the US is "a nation of laws"! On the economy, Obama has no policies to abolish the terrible poverty, housing crisis and failing schools that Black people face. His "post-race" candidacy doesn't mean leaving racism behind, but leaving its roots untouched and ignoring its crimes.

Indeed, the idea of a "post-race" candidacy has already been run over by the reality of racism in the US. Not only have many white voters refused to vote for him, all the rightwing media search out and circulate stories, pushing them into a willing mainstream media that scrutinises Obama more than any other candidate. Newsweek warned that, "the more he supports traditional black issues like affirmative action,

the more that will eat into his white base of support". Every time a racist incident occurs, the media demand that he comments on it, condemning him for prejudice if he takes a strong stand against racism. Hillary Clinton has pushed such stories, too, in order to advance her own campaign, for instance weighing in during the recent furore over his pastor, Jeremiah Wright.

Wright was a Black church leader in Chicago and mentor of Obama who supposedly inspired the young lawyer to become a practising Christian. More importantly, membership in Wright's church gave Obama, educated at elite Harvard University and president of Harvard Law Review, the credibility to begin his career in politics. Wright taught him the powerful rhetorical skills of the Black preacher and familiarised him with the story of Black suffering, struggle and redemption that, mixed with the myth of the American dream, have given him such an effective populist appeal. Obama thus obtained a passport to the Black community, plus the religious credentials the US media demand from any political figure.

## Obama's moment of truth

However, in early March, this political opportunism became a political nightmare as the media struck back at the "Obama phenomenon", circulating video clips of Wright condemning America's racism and imperialism, and arguing that the US had brought 9/11 on itself through its foreign policy, such as its support for "state



terrorism against the Palestinians and black South Africans", which killed far more than Al Qaeda. He articulated the reality of life for many Black Americans, slamming the racist nature of the criminal justice system and the billions spent on the war in Iraq while millions languished in poverty at home. The rightwing radio and cable channels publicised Wright preaching not "God bless America" but "God damn America"! Of course everything Wright said was perfectly true, but for the US ruling class such media-created "crises" are a means of testing out the reliability of candidates. Where did Obama stand? Would he be caught in the contradiction between the black community and the wider US society, and forced to choose? Or was he a clever enough politician to keep his Black support while demonstrating his total commitment to the state?

Obama finally confronted this on 18 March, in Philadelphia, in a speech regarded as something of a tour de force. Rather than cave in to the right, he forthrightly stated that discrimination in the USA had not gone away and that while he did not agree with Wright's statements, he could "no more disown him than I can disown the black community" - precisely what the mainstream media, Republicans, and Hilary Clinton were in effect demanding. But he then used the incident to appeal to white workers and middle class people by showing that they too were suffering the effects of globalisation such as downsizing and offshoring:

"In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience - as far as they're concerned, no one's handed them anything, they've built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pension dumped after a lifetime of labour. They are anxious about their futures, and feel their dreams slipping away; in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense."

Obama's speech was hailed as showing unusual honesty, giving a consistent message to both Black and white, rather than the usual two-faced positioning of politicians who are more radical speaking to niche audiences while being more mainstream on the TV. Similarly in his earlier Martin Luther King Day speech at a Black Alabama church he had, quite rightly, openly addressed anti-semitism, anti-immigrant sentiment and homophobia in some in the black community, as part of his argu-

ment that Black people cannot "walk alone" in the struggle for racial justice.

However, this approach actually ends up soft peddling and minimising racism and, at the same time, it deflects white workers' attention away from the evils of capitalism as a system and onto a narrow focus on globalisation. This is safer ground, shared by many US bosses and union chiefs. His insistence that discrimination and inequality be ended in housing, schools, and jobs was not accompanied by any clear proposals about where the resources are to come from to uproot racial and social injustice.

This was enough to defuse the issue in March. However Pastor Wright struck back in April with a series of interviews and press conferences defending his views and suggesting Obama's distancing was just a political manoeuvre. Faced with this, Obama finally broke with his former pastor on 29 April, condemning his views as "divisive and destructive...giving comfort to those who prey on hate."

#### Democrats and white workers

If Obama wins the Democrats' nomination, the Republicans will play the race card in a way that will put Clinton's efforts in the shade. The media will put him under the spotlight on every question that raises the race issue.

Already in five states there are initiatives opposing affirmative action (positive discrimination policies) on the ballots. They have the backing of powerful tycoons like Rupert Murdoch and the TV stations and newspapers he owns across the US. In states like Iowa, Vermont and Wyoming, up to 70 per cent of white males who supported Obama, nevertheless oppose affirmative action. Consequently, Obama has sought to avoid a clear policy on the issue. Those that knew him at Harvard say he stayed out of the big affirmative action battles in the 1980's. However, to bend the knee on this issue would lose him support among the black community.

So, can Obama avoid falling off his tightrope? His hope is that many white working class and lower middle class Democrats who voted Clinton will vote for him when they see McCain and the Republican campaign. He hopes that the message of unity will allow him to transcend these divisions:

"Bottom line is, I think people across the board are figuring out how are we lowering gas prices, how are we putting people back to work, are we going to make sure we're dealing with the war in Iraq and starting to bring our troops home now. I don't think there's a huge difference between the black working, the white working class, suburban, urban rural. I think people want to see the country make progress. So what I'm going to continue to do is address issues that

affect people's bottom lines, the issues they're talking about around the kitchen table."

However, so far, Obama has been long on verbal support for workers, such as the striking Axle auto workers, while short on condemnation of the bosses who forced them and others to strike.

What about social issues where religious conservatism dogs many in the poor white and black communities alike? On questions like gay marriage Obama has equivocated. One of his biggest so-called "gaffes" - in fact a simple statement of truth - was to say that small-town Pennsylvanians were "clinging" to religion out of economic despair. The media accused him of Marxism ("religion is the opium of the people") and he immediately apologised. Taunted with being weak on national security, he is moving away from his promise to open talks without preconditions with Cuba, Iran and Hamas in Gaza. Given the importance of the black vote, once affirmative action and similar issues are posed point-blank, Obama may be forced to come out in their defence. However, he could only prevent the right wing stirring up a racist backlash among sections of white workers if he could also address their elementary class interests, increased wages, protecting jobs, providing affordable housing and protection from repossessions, providing free medical cover. To provide the resources even for the reform packages of his Democratic predecessors Roosevelt (the 'New Deal' of the 1930s) or Johnson (the 'Great Society' of the 1960s) would today mean breaking with the financial interests and corporate backers that fund him.

Obama's loyalty to capitalism and enthusiasm for free market policies in healthcare or to address the repossession crisis, make clear that this is impossible. Of course the same holds true on foreign policy like escaping the Iraq quagmire without undermining US imperialism's interests in the Middle East. This will prove easier to address in heart-warming rhetoric than in reality.

Millions of workers, black and white, have bought Obama's message of "change" and "hope" for a better life. They see his presidency as a way to begin reversing the sinking real wages and decaying social structure that decades of free market policies have inflicted on the US working class. However Obama, and the Democratic Party, are bourgeois through and through, totally committed to US capitalism and its imperialist exploitation of the globe. Until a new party is built by the US working class to fight for socialism, elections will continue to divert the energy of hundreds of thousands of activists in the trade union, anti-war, and immigrants' rights movements into the dead end of the Democrats.



## ENVIRONMENT

# Biofuels: solution to climate change or cause of global hunger?

There has been a buzz around biofuels as a renewable and clean source of energy. *Joy Maccready* asks whether they can replace petrol and stop climate change?

Many politicians say that biofuels are the answer to our dependency on oil, ensure national “energy security”, and claim that they are environmentally friendly. The European Union has set a target that 5.75 per cent of transport fuels should come from biological sources by 2010. George Bush has called on Americans to cut their petrol use by 20 per cent over a decade, mostly through a near five-fold increase in use of home grown fuels, such as ethanol.

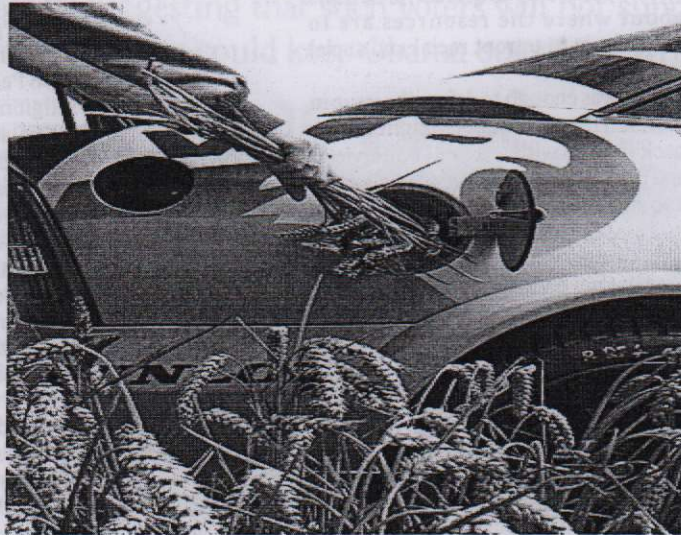
The term “biofuels” refers any fuel made from living things, or the waste they produce; most recently the focus has been on ethanol and diesel, made from crops, like corn, soya, sugarcane and rapeseed. Global production of ethanol doubled between 2000 and 2005, with biodiesel output quadrupling.

Studies show that biofuels produce up to 60 per cent less carbon dioxide than fossil fuels. But the environmental benefits depend on how the biofuels are made; for instance, if coal powered electricity is used during the production process, biofuels may result in greater emissions than using oil, not less.

## Food versus fuel

Biofuels are also making the headlines through bad publicity because land previously used for food crops are being turned over to biofuels. As Bush rails on about “energy security”, a billion people across the globe are demanding “food security”. Jean Ziegler, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, even called biofuels a “crime against humanity”, claiming they are responsible for driving up food prices.

Ziegler’s statement is misleading. It’s true that over the past year global food prices have increased by 43 per cent - but it is not because biofuels are taking what would have normally ended up on our plates. Speculation on international markets is behind much of the increase in food prices and multinational companies such as Cargill, which controls a quarter of all cereal



production, have enormous power over the market.

Although biofuel production has not (yet) played a large part in influencing the price of food, there is a future threat that, as countries move to increase biofuel production, this could have an impact on food supplies. While biofuels don’t take the food off someone’s plate directly, i.e. it is not mainly the same crops used in biofuels as those that we eat, governments’ drive to increase the amount of biofuel crops produced has led to massive subsidies, tax breaks and price guarantees for farmers who switch from food crops. For example, government subsidies have fuelled corn-based ethanol production in the US - hardly the untouchable “free market”.

To meet the 5.75 per cent EU target would require, according to one study, a quarter of the EU’s arable land. That demand on arable land cannot be met in the EU or the US, say the scientists, so the burden is likely to be shifted onto developing countries and lead to deforestation for monoculture plantations.

“Food versus fuel is not an issue in Brazil,” said Marcos Jank, the president of Unica, the Brazilian Sugar Cane Industry Association. Brazil leads the world in biofuel production and use, making about 16 billion litres per year of ethanol from its sugarcane industry. Yet 31 per cent of

Brazil’s population lives below the poverty line and is hard hit by rising food prices.

## Deforestation

But Jank and other Brazilian officials are on shakier ground when they deny that the thirst for ethanol is causing deforestation in the Amazon, as farmers clear trees to plant crops. Because sugar cane is grown in the more fertile centre of the country, they point out, no forest is cleared. But massive investment in the sector - an estimated \$30 billion between 2006 and 2015 - has put pressure on cattle farmers to sell their land south of the Amazon to sugar growers and buy cheaper land further north, on the edge of the forest. Once that land is taken, forest clearances could multiply.

Last month the Brazilian minister for Amazonian development, Marina Silva, resigned citing “increasing deforestation of the Amazon on Brazilian cattle ranchers and farmers”.

Some do not even have the option of selling their land. In Paraguay, the demand for land and the corporate impunity of large agribusiness firms are resulting in human rights violations. Peasants and indigenous people are being pushed off their farms and can no longer afford to buy food, let alone grow it.

Deforestation can counteract any gains in CO<sub>2</sub> reduction gained by biofuels. The journal *Science* reports that between two and nine times more carbon emissions are avoided by trapping carbon in trees and forest soil than by replacing fossil fuels with biofuels. Plus clearing forests produces an immediate release of carbon gases into the atmosphere, accompanied by a loss of habitats, wildlife and livelihoods.

The biofuels issue affects the whole debate around climate change - raising the question of who makes the decisions around what energy technology is invested in. In order to stop climate change, we need a global shift away from the burning of fossil fuels. Biofuels are not the only alternative; there are other forms of renewable energies that need resources invested in research and development.

## Basic survival

More than one billion people are facing starvation yet there is enough food to feed the world. Leaving food production and distribution to the free market is a recipe for disaster. We have to take it out of the hands of the private companies and put it under the control of the billions of workers, farmers, and peasants. The large capitalist agricultural conglomerates should be expropriated with no compensation.

The agrarian question is central to resolving the food crisis, especially in the developing world. The socialist programme is for land to be owned and run by those who work it. This means the nationalisation of large estates under the control of the rural workers, and - in countries with less advanced agriculture - for land to be distributed to the poor and landless peasants who should be encouraged to form cooperatives, with subsidies from the government to develop more productive techniques.

Above all we need an international plan of production to decide what is of the greatest need to humanity, not what makes a private profit. That plan will necessarily address the protection of the natural environment and the need to feed the world as efficiently as possible.



# WHAT WE STAND FOR

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We fight to:

- Abolish capitalism and create a world without exploitation, class divisions and oppression
- Break the resistance of the exploiters by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution smashing the repressive capitalist state
- Place power in the hands of councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry, the poor - elected and recallable by the masses
- Transform large-scale production and distribution, at present in the hands of a tiny elite, into a socially owned economy, democratically planned
- Plan the use of humanity's labour, materials and technology to eradicate social inequality and poverty.

This is communism - a society without classes and without state repression. To achieve this, the working class must take power from the capitalists.

We fight imperialism: the handful of great capitalist powers and their corporations, who exploit billions and crush all states and peoples, who resist them. We support resistance to their blockades, sanctions, invasions and occupations by countries like Venezuela, Iraq or Iran. We demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. We support unconditionally the armed resistance.

We fight racism and national oppres-

sion. We defend refugees and asylum seekers from the racist actions of the media, the state and the fascists. We oppose all immigration controls. When racists physically threaten refugees and immigrants, we take physical action to defend them. We fight for no platform for fascism.

We fight for women's liberation: from physical and mental abuse, domestic drudgery, sexual exploitation and discrimination at work. We fight for free abortion and contraception on demand. We fight for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men and against their harassment by the state, religious bodies and reactionaries.

We fight youth oppression in the family and society: for their sexual freedom, for an end to super-exploitation, for the right to vote at sixteen, for free, universal education with a living grant.

We fight bureaucracy in the unions. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice, and earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. Rank and file trade unionists must organise to dissolve the bureaucracy. We fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers control.

We fight reformism: the policy of Labour, Socialist, Social-Democratic and the misnamed Communist parties. Capitalism cannot be reformed through peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by force. Though

these parties still have roots in the working class, politically they defend capitalism. We fight for the unions to break from Labour and form for a new workers party. We fight for such a party to adopt a revolutionary programme and a Leninist combat form of organization.

We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must, therefore, be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a socialist political revolution is the only way to prevent their eventual collapse.

We reject the policies of class collaboration: "popular fronts" or a "democratic stage", which oblige the working class to renounce the fight for power today. We reject the theory of "socialism in one country". Only Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution can bring victory in the age of imperialism and globalisation. Only a global revolution can consign capitalism to history.

With the internationalist and communist goal in our sights, proceeding along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International.

That is what Workers Power is fighting for. If you share these goals - join us.

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## Tax the rich not the poor

By Peter Main

Labour's triple electoral defeats in the local elections, London mayoral elections and in the Crewe by-election have focused attention on its tax policy. The immediate issue was the abolition of the 10p starting rate for income tax which was announced by Gordon Brown in his last budget before becoming Prime Minister last year. When the change came into effect in April, nearly six million low paid workers found that they were paying hundreds of pounds per year more tax. Their payslips showed their monthly income tax rate had doubled.

This shocked workers all over the country. After all, Brown had stressed his reduction of the "standard rate" of income tax from 22p in the pound to 20, as if this reduction would automatically benefit everybody. But the idea that Brown, Alistair Darling and their Treasury officials did not know the full implications of their policy is laughable. In the age of the spreadsheet, the precise effects of every possible change in tax rates can be calculated in seconds. The simple truth - which has so shocked traditional Labour voters - is that they didn't care about the lowest paid workers in Britain.

Far from using the taxation system to redistribute wealth from the richest individuals and corporations, as millions expected of a Labour government, Brown has done exactly the opposite. On three occasions, as Chancellor Brown reduced corporation tax so that it now stands at 28per cent. Under Margaret Thatcher it was 52per cent! And just in the last year, Brown and Darling have caved in to the demands of the super-rich by changing the rules on Capital Gains Tax so that companies and investors pay 18per cent rather than 40per cent, and maintaining tax exemptions for millionaires who claim "non-domicile" status.

When they were forced to raise the individual "tax allowance" by £600, to offset some of the effects of the abolition of the 10p starting rate, this still left over one million people worse off.

Even the supposedly "progressive" side of Labour's tax policy - the use of tax credits to raise the income of the lowest paid - is of greater benefit to bosses than workers. Quite apart from the fact that workers under the age of 25 cannot claim, and the system is so complex that an estimated 40per cent of those who are entitled do not claim the credits, the real effect of the whole system is to subsidise the bosses who pay the lowest wages. If the minimum wage were set at a decent level and trade unions were not restricted from taking effective action by Thatcher's anti-union laws

(which Labour has preserved), the whole complicated system could be scrapped and workers would be no worse off.

What should workers demand of a party that says it is committed to their interests? What would be the main planks of communist taxation policy?

Karl Marx laid down the most fundamental guiding principle in the Communist Manifesto when he said that the task was "to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production

### **Taxation for communists is not just to provide funds for the provision of services but to take away the property of the capitalists who own and control the productive forces at the heart of the economy**

in the hands of the state" and that, with regard to tax, should be a "heavy progressive or graduated income tax". In other words, the purpose of taxation for communists is not just to provide funds for the provision of services but to take away the property of the capitalists who own and control the productive forces at the heart of the economy. The extent to which this can be done by taxation, "by degrees", as Marx put it, will depend on how much pressure the workers can put on the capitalists, and ultimately on which class has state power in its hands.

Even before the establishment of a government committed to the expropriation of capital, communist policy aims to make real inroads into the wealth of the capitalist class and to relieve the burden of tax on the working class. At the forefront of our proposals is the abolition of all indirect taxation, such as VAT and other sales taxes. Such taxes must, by definition, weigh heaviest on the working-class because virtually all a worker's income has to be spent on consumption goods of one sort or another. The wealthier a person is, the smaller the proportion of their wealth is spent on necessary consumption and more is accumulated or invested as

capital. We call for the abolition of all regressive taxes, like the Council Tax.

Instead, there should be a single, progressive tax not just on income but also on accumulated wealth. Rates should be set so that the workers do not pay, while the rich pay at very high rates. Funds raised would be used to support existing public services and to extend them so that, increasingly, all the essentials of modern life such as housing, transport, water, energy, medicine and food can be provided as services rather than bought and sold as commodities. Beyond that, taxation would also be a weapon to alter the direction of economic development and discouraging pollution and carbon emissions for example.

Inevitably, this would make taxation even more of a source of social and political conflict. It would be a reformist illusion to believe that taxation alone could effect a transition from capitalism to socialism. The more effective a policy is in really undermining the social power of the capitalists, the more certain it is that the capitalists would try not just to avoid payment but to bring down the government imposing the policy. That is why, alongside taxes aimed at socialising the wealth of the bosses, communists struggle to break up the capitalist state in a revolution, and establish in its place a workers state that will dispossess the capitalist class, taking over the banks, supermarkets, utilities and major corporations and instituting a democratic plan of production and distribution in place of the madness of the market.

If politics is ultimately about the control and use of society's wealth, then taxation is the clearest expression of a government's real policy, the clearest indicator of whose interests it really defends. Millions upon millions of workers in Britain, who once thought that Labour would act in their interests, now see the stark truth that Brown & co are totally committed to the interests of the rich. The desertion not only of Labour voters but of many Labour activists has brought the party to the verge of bankruptcy. Already, the party leaders are turning to the unions to bail them out. Their pleas should be rejected out of hand. If it is true that the likes of Brown and Darling could be held personally responsible for the party's debt then that would be a rare example of justice under capitalism.

Instead of giving Labour a new lease of life with which to continue its attacks, the unions should make a real investment in the future, using their funds to promote the creation of a new workers' party committed not only to a progressive system of taxation but to the overthrow of capitalism and the building of an egalitarian, socialist society.