

workers power

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Monthly magazine of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

CHAVEZ CALLS FOR A FIFTH



INTERNATIONAL

How should socialists respond?

- See page 17 and back page

Inside:

- Leeds bin worker on strike victory
- The debate in the SWP
- Post dispute at crossroads
- Student revolt around the world
- World climate talks in Copenhagen



League for the
Fifth International

NEWS IN BRIEF

Supreme Court rules in favour of banks' supremacy

The new Supreme Court made its first judgment on 25 November, overturning previous High Court and the Court of Appeal rulings that allowed the Office for Fair Trading (OFT) to investigate bank charges on unauthorised overdrafts.

Last year, the OFT published a report showing that retail banks earned one third of their revenue from these charges, which it described as "difficult to understand, not transparent, and not subject to effective consumer control". In some cases, banks charged hundreds of pounds for small overdrafts, disproportionately affecting unemployed and low income workers.

The judgment is not only a blow to millions, but also revises established legal principles that make so-called "penalty clauses" unenforceable. This is particularly outrageous at a time when banks have been bailed out with billions in public money, enabling bankers to continue receiving bonuses while working class people are being made to pay with their livelihoods, their services and their security for the hole this has created in public finances.

More Unison witch-hunts

Officials of the trade union Unison seem to be spending more time harassing union activists than drawing up a strategy for a public sector fight back.

In the tribunal brought by the Unison-Four (all Socialist Party members) it was recently revealed by a unison member that Unison London officials had organised a training course in London for "dealing with Trotskyist activists".

Meanwhile, Caroline Bedale, who was the secretary of Unison's Manchester Community and Mental Health Branch, has now been barred from holding a union post for eight years. She was targeted for supporting Karen Reissmann, a leader of an all out strike in Manchester by mental health nurses and who was victimised by management. Caroline's alleged crime was in trying to find Karen Reissmann alternative legal advice after Unison withdrew its legal support. The latest victim is Andy Docherty, a Unison member who is a leading activist in the North East Shop Stewards Network.

It's time a united campaign was set up against the witch-hunts and for union democracy.

Letters of protest can be sent to David Prentis, Unison General secretary, Unison, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ

Iraq inquiry blasts UK government

The latest public enquiry into the Iraq war, led by Sir John Chilcot, has seen the former British ambassador to the US, Sir Christopher Meyer, admit what anti-war activists have been arguing for years: that UK prime minister Tony Blair had decided on an invasion of Iraq a whole year before the war, and that British officials were "scrabbling for the smoking gun" of Saddam's alleged weapons of mass destruction to provide a justification for a war that was already in preparation.

Meyer also mentioned a meeting between Blair and US president George W Bush in March 2002, during which no aides were present, following which Blair dramatically changed his public line on the issue of "regime change", having told diplomats that it was a "waste of time" trying to talk the Americans out of it. The government has also come under pressure to investigate British security forces' involvement in torture, Human Rights Watch published a report exposing the government's complicity in the torture of British citizens of Pakistani origin suspected of "terrorist activity" by the Pakistani security forces.

Go to www.workerspower.com for regular updates on the inquiry's revelations

DONATE

£4000

FIGHTING FUND

Anti-capitalism event a great success

Workers Power's annual event Anticapitalism was held on 14-15 November together with REVOLUTION, the socialist youth group. From across the UK striking trade unionists, school student activists, LGBT rights campaigners, antiracists, other left organisations, university students and people from all sections of society get together to discuss socialist solutions to a world in crisis.

Throughout the weekend, Workers Power members from the platforms and in debate in the different sessions argued for crucial policies to be taken up by the working class in Britain today: a rank and file movement in the unions that can act with the leaders where possible and without them where necessary; linking up struggles in committees of action to fight the crisis; an Antifascist Defence League to stop the fascists from taking our streets; and for a new anticapitalist party to turn the resistance today into a fight for revolution and socialism tomorrow.

The weekend was our biggest event for many years and took much organisation and money. So we are appealing for more money for our fundraising drive to build the organisation and intervene into the working class struggles both nationally and internationally. In the coming months we will prepare for the Istanbul European Social Forum 2010 and participate in the New Anticapitalist Party in France.

Please give us money at Christmas!

Thank you to all those people who donated to the fighting fund to bring it up to £1960. Special thanks to GD from Leicester, who raised £389 from book sales, all our supporters who volunteered for festivals in August and raised £312, donations amounting to £140, and a collection of £169 at our November Anticapitalism event.

Send us your money

If you want to help, and remember – every penny counts then please rush cheques and postal orders to Workers Power, BCM 7750, London, WC1N 3XX You can also donate online at www.workerspower.com and <http://www.fifthinternational.org>

£3000

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5

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EDITORIAL

Make 2010 a year of rebellion

Hugo Chavez's call for a Fifth International could not have come at a more propitious time. Workers Power does not agree with his version of "21st Century socialism" and does not believe that the Fifth International should be tied to any state.

However, Chavez is responding to a need felt by many people that in the midst of the economic, social and climate chaos gripping the planet, we need to coordinate a global fight for a better world against the warmongers and the profiteers.

Indeed, the economic crisis has not gone away. Just as the banks had started to boast of renewed profits and many governments were claiming that the worst was over – in late November stock markets took another tumble.

Dubai crisis

The cause was the sudden announcement that Dubai, part of the United Arab Emirates, was in deep trouble. Dubai, which is not an oil rich country, had concentrated on expanding its economy in the spheres of finance, construction, shipping and luxury tourism for the parasites living high off the oil wealth of a region where the poor lack the most elementary facilities and rights.

As its own housing boom came to an end after the collapse of Lehman Brothers, Dubai World, a state-owned holding company and Nakheel, the real estate subsidiary, seem to be in serious trouble. Around \$59 billion worth of the interest on bonds cannot be paid for at least six months, implying that the company cannot pay back its debts.

Australian, Japanese, US and British stock markets saw billions wiped of their value in one day. The panic was not as great as a year ago when Lehman Brothers collapsed, simply because since then various

governments have proven that they are willing to hand over billions of dollars of our money to keep financial institutions afloat.

Meanwhile, it is working people that are bearing the brunt of the crisis. Unemployment is still increasing globally, despite a growing list of countries that claim to be coming out of recession. But it is a recovery with still increasing unemployment.

Unemployment figures reached a 26-year high in the US in October, at around 9.8 per cent. In the eurozone, the jobless numbers are predicted to hit 10.7 per cent early in 2010. Over three million people may be unemployed in Britain by 2010. As long as this continues, the recovery will be weak and shallow and prone to fears of an impending double dip.

Yet in the banking sector bonuses for the high-flying fatcats are back, with billions being paid out, while ordinary bank workers are still being fired.

Clearly we cannot leave the future in the hands of the banks and the government that serve them. The jobless, sitting in dole offices, face a desperate situation, especially as all mainstream parties have threatened to slash government spending after the next election. We cannot let structural and endemic unemployment return to Britain as a result of these capitalist policies.

Fight back

Resistance to these plans is crucial. An unemployed workers movement, a militant trade union campaign and youth resistance can all help change the balance of forces.

Most importantly, the trade unions need to get off their knees and start fighting. Across the country union members want to defend their jobs and wages, most clearly shown recently by the victorious all out Leeds bin workers strike.

But all too often they are held

back by their union leaders, most damagingly in the CWU strike in the post. We need a campaign in the unions to organise the rank and file, to fight for control of disputes and negotiations.

But all these things cannot happen spontaneously or independently of each other. We need a party in Britain, and around the world, that can organise the fight back and lead the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

We are taking excellent steps forward in this regard. Our organisation held a successful conference in November in London which attracted workers and many young people from across the country interested in our politics. It concentrated on the need to build an anticapitalist party in Britain and a Fifth International.

Need for a party

Other groups on the left, such as the Socialist Party, the Communist Party of Britain and the RMT, are launching electoral initiatives, while the SWP seems crisis ridden and confused as to how to respond to the challenge of Labour's impending poll disaster in 2010.

Workers Power has been campaigning for a new anticapitalist party – based on a transitional programme – over the past year and finding tremendous resonance among working class militants on the picket lines and in the factory occupations. We have been arguing for united local committees of action to coordinate the developing resistance and a rank and file movement across the unions to fight the sell-outs of the union leaders.

Workers Power has grown substantially this year as a result of fighting for these policies. Readers who agree with these objectives and want to see them adopted in the labour movement should join Workers Power and help us bring this about.

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Go to www.workerspower.com for more

AFGHANISTAN

Troops out now!

As casualties continue to soar, Gordon Brown has pledged an extra 500 troops and President Obama is to send 30,000 more soldiers. *Marcus Halaby* criticises both the media and generals' campaign to promote support for the war and the puppet regime installed by the imperialists

The Afghanistan election in August differed little from that held in Zimbabwe last year – except in the reaction it produced. In both cases, the main opposition candidate pulled out of the second round in protest at blatant voter intimidation, ballot stuffing, violence and bribery by the incumbent president.

But, while Robert Mugabe's fraudulent "re-election" brought howls of protest from the G8 leaders, and increased sanctions on an already impoverished country, Hamid Karzai's produced merely mild disappointment from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Karzai, it seems, should have arranged a deal in time with his main opponent, Abdullah Abdullah.

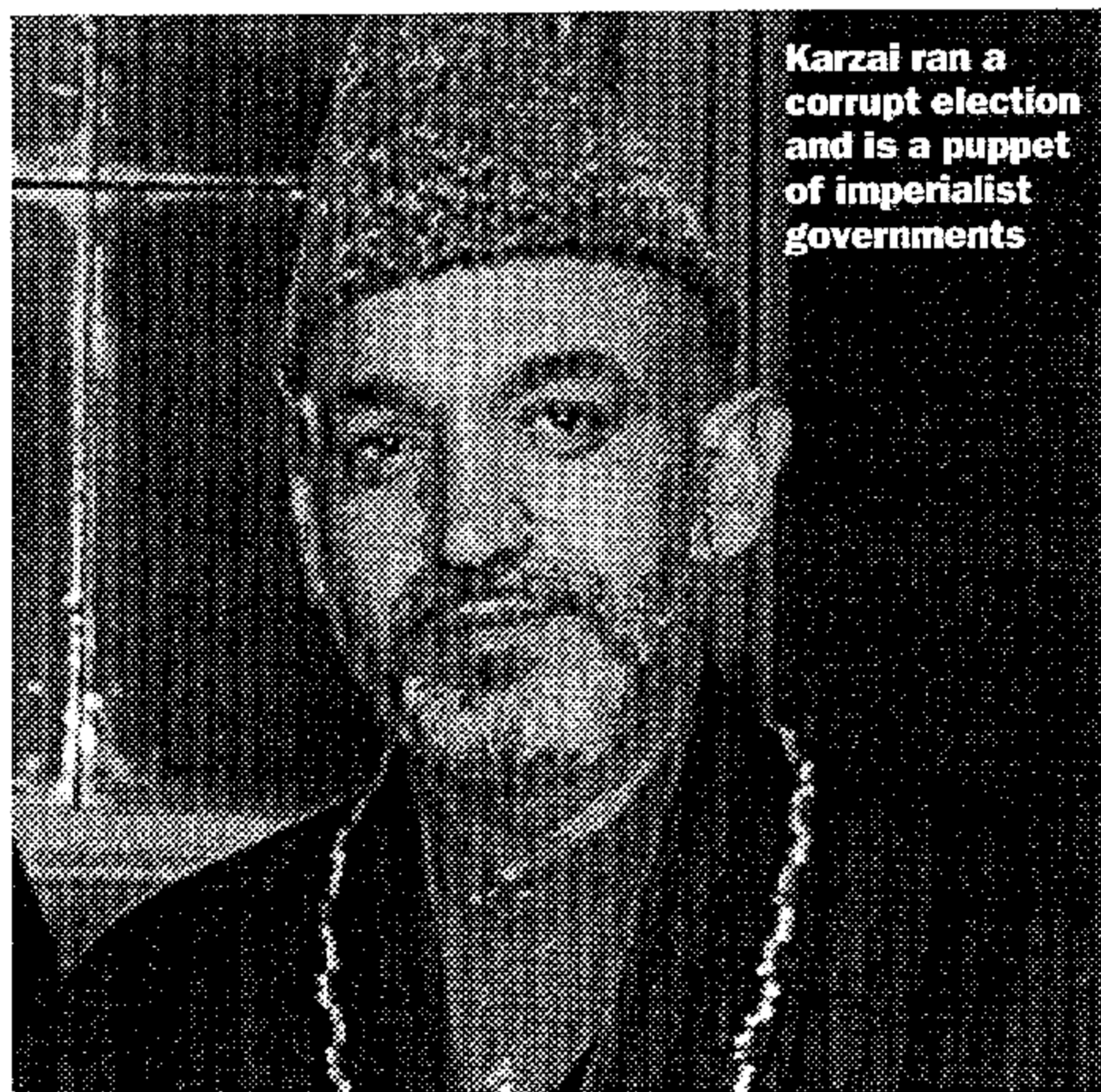
In fact, Karzai is a puppet president. He would be nothing without the 70,000 foreign troops occupying his country. His government's authority barely exists outside the capital, Kabul. In the warlord-ridden provinces beyond, he depends on those troops – and on the vast sums of money sent supposedly to fund "reconstruction".

Small wonder, then, that two cabinet ministers and 15 other former ministers are being investigated for corruption. Even US officials acknowledge that Karzai's brother is a leading drug baron in Afghanistan's lucrative opium trade.

This conflict was sold to the public as a "War on Terror" to spread democracy and protect women's rights. Instead, it has produced a corrupt dictatorship with the thinnest veneer of democratic legitimacy. Its warlord allies in the north of the country impose conditions on women even worse than under the Taliban, using the weapon of rape to reward loyalty and punish opposition.

Growing opposition

Opinion polls show that the war is becoming increasingly unpopular. In an *Independent on Sunday* poll in November, 71 per cent sup-



Karzai ran a corrupt election and is a puppet of imperialist governments

ported withdrawal of forces within a year. Almost half agreed that the war has increased the threat of terrorist attacks in the UK. In July, polls showed only 47 per cent opposed to the war.

The decline in support no doubt reflects the fact that this has been the worst year for casualties in the British armed forces since the Falklands war in 1982, with the number of dead nearing a hundred. This represents almost half of the 230-odd killed in total since 2001.

In response, the government and media have stepped up their efforts to win public support for the war. They have encouraged local councils to mount home-coming parades for returning troops and given maximum publicity to displays of public grief for those killed in action.

Stab in the back

More sinister has been the campaign, spearheaded by the generals and enthusiastically taken up by both tabloid and "serious" broadsheet papers, to blame the government for the increasing death toll among British forces.

Like the German generals who

promoted the legend of a "stab in the back" at the end of the First World War – blaming the German Social Democrats for not supporting the war hard enough – they are playing a dangerous game. The more they raise the question, "why are they dying?", the more the public will start to wonder, "why are they fighting?"

To detract from this, the generals argue that troops are dying primarily because they are not being given enough equipment. They want more and better flak jackets, helicopters and armoured personnel carriers, so that "our boys" can get on with making the world safe from Islamist terrorism, by killing Afghan civilians in hi-tech air strikes without comeback.

It does not occur to them that, if soldiers from some of the world's most advanced armies, with access to the most sophisticated weaponry on earth, are dying in a war in one of the world's most backward countries, with an enemy that relies on home-made bombs, then it might just be because the Afghan people as a whole do not want them there. It is telling that they cannot

even rely on the loyalty of their paid collaborators – as shown by the Afghan policeman who killed five British soldiers and wounded eight at the beginning of November.

It is also a measure of their racist hypocrisy that, while British casualties are humanised – with names, faces, ages, hometowns and images of distraught friends and families – neither the government nor the pundits mention the vastly higher numbers of Afghan dead. Estimates of Afghan deaths since 2001 range between 9,000 and Oxfam's estimate of 32,000, with up to 235,000 displaced from their homes. The UN believes that about 2,000 Afghans were killed in the first 10 months of 2009, about 200 of them in air strikes from unmanned drone aircraft.

Conscripted by poverty

Of course, British troop deaths are a tragedy for their families and their communities. It is obscene to see working-class soldiers – conscripted by poverty, boredom and unemployment – dying, while well-dressed and well-spoken newspaper columnists, politicians and officers squabble over who is responsible.

But the fact remains that they are there to fight a war to hold down the Afghan people. It is not those of us, who oppose the war and demand they be brought home, that have put them in harm's way.

It is certainly not our war, but part of a war for the bankers and billionaires to keep the region – and the world – safe for their system of exploitation. The longer they stay, the more people they kill, the more it will fuel the fire of Afghan resistance.

This unwinnable war is costing billions while public services are slashed, causing poverty and misery. The anti-war movement, linking itself to the massive discontent of the unemployed, the youth, and the workers threatened with redundancy and insecurity, should step up its campaign and demand:

TROOPS OUT NOW!

ENVIRONMENT

COP15: Deal or no deal for developing nations?

Joy Macready anticipates the climate talks in Copenhagen and predicts that the wealthy nations will not agree to a carbon-cutting deal that damages their profits

From 7-18 December, Copenhagen will host COP15, the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

At least 10,000 people are expected to attend, among them more than 60 world leaders (including Obama, stopping off en route to picking up his Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo), industry groups and non-government organisations (NGOs).

The summit's aim is to draw up a treaty to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocols, but even the UN is downplaying the possibility of reaching any agreement on carbon emission reductions.

Outside the conference rooms, more than 20,000 people will gather to protest against the wholesale sell-off of the earth's future, culminating in a mass demonstration on 12 December with a clear message: "System Change, Not Climate Change!"

Over 410 supporting organisations – trade unions, NGOs, charities, church groups, environmentalists, socialists, anarchists, development groups, greens, etc – are participating in protest marches, direct action, alternative forums like the Klimaforum09, and even a 12-day caravan journey from the WTO's

ministerial meeting in Geneva.

The question of industrialised nations financing developing countries to tackle climate change will be a hot topic in Copenhagen, yet previous promises of "climate aid" for developing countries have turned to nought. In 2001, 20 rich countries pledged \$410 million a year until 2008, yet only \$260 million has ever been paid into two UN funds earmarked for the purpose. Now the EU has pledged 100 billion until 2020. This is a pittance compared to the debt repayments by developing countries – Africa alone pays Western banks more than \$25 billion a year to service just the interest on its external loans (2006 figure).

Parts of the anti-climate change movement argued against protests of any type, saying that COP15 was the chance for the developing nations to club together and fight back against the industrialised world. But these talks are not a level playing field where everyone comes to the table with the same bargaining chips: there are those countries that wield economic power; and there are those that don't, who are pressured, cajoled, held to ransom and threatened into subservience.

We must also remember that class divisions exist in developing countries too. The "representa-

You couldn't make it up!

• Copenhagen police have assured NGOs that protesters wearing panda costumes during demonstrations would not be violating the ban on protesters wearing masks. However, the police warned that "the first panda who pulls out an iron bar will ruin it for the other peaceful pandas".

• Police have also said that "climate chefs", or those that offer carbon-friendly cooking demonstrations, must seek special permission if they wish to transport their sharp culinary equipment with them.

previously, some protesters argued for surrounding the conference centre to prevent delegates from leaving until an iron-clad, legally binding accord for reducing carbon emissions was hammered out – an agreement that was also fair and just for developing nations.

Although it sounds like a grand idea, the problem is that the majority of the delegates – well, the ones that hold real power – would rather chew off their right arm than sign up to anything that may hurt the profits of big national and multinational corporations. While a small layer of corporations think "going green" might be the ticket out of the crisis, the major polluters all refused to sign up to an agreement in Bali two years ago. This shows that profit trumps the environment every time, and means that the likelihood of any serious deal is slim to none.

But we must act now to prevent catastrophe, as leading scientists warn that global warming is happening even faster than previously thought. In a new report, 26 experts, many from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), say global sea levels could rise by up to six and a half feet by the year 2100. We can't wait for the capitalists to change – we need to overthrow the capitalist system that is causing this destruction.

tives" of these nations at COP15 may not be in the pockets of the multi-nationals in the same way that the G8 countries are – but they will not consistently fight for the interests of their working class and poor. We need thousands of protesters outside to give a voice to these masses and send a message that we recognise their fight is our fight too.

Instead of trying to stop delegates from reaching the summit, as done

Floods hit Cumbria... again

It is not just the developing world that is affected by radically shifting weather patterns – Britain is also susceptible to the effects of climate change. Cumbria has been hit by devastating floods yet again – in 2005 1,925 properties were flooded out and over 3,000 people made homeless. It took the council 12 months to re-house 70% of the

people displaced and some are still living in caravans today. A similar situation occurred in 2007. Today, it seems like a terrible version of *deja vu* for thousands of Cumbrians as they are forced out of their homes, with over 1,500 properties damaged.

Despite the Labour government's claims that it has done all it could to prevent such a disaster; we

cannot rely on them to protect our communities from the effects of global warming, let alone to reverse it. We therefore call on the working class movement, environmental campaigns, tenants and residents' associations and anticapitalist youth to launch a mass campaign to force the government: a) to fund a massive programme of public

spending for the expansion of the flood defences, and b) to take serious action to minimise the impact of climate change.

The necessary measures should be paid for by an emergency tax on the rich to ensure that the flood crisis is not used as an excuse to further attack our public services, such as the NHS, with cuts.

POSTAL DISPUTE

Restart the strikes – with or without the officials!

A growing chorus of postal workers are calling for the suspended strikes to be put back on. A *CWU postal rep* explains why – but warns that this will probably mean taking wildcat action

London Division officials are demanding the CWU's Postal Executive Committee restore the national strike because of Royal Mail's continued attacks on postal workers. They are absolutely right to do so. Renewed strikes, if they started soon and aimed to stop all mail for three or four days in a row, with the threat of all-out action behind them, could still bring Royal Mail to its knees.

More and more postal workers realise that strike action is the only language Royal Mail managers understand. London rep Martin Walsh summed up the situation in the capital since the interim agreement was signed on 6 November at a solidarity meeting:

- Postal workers are losing up to £6,000 a year since managers moved them from a four to a five day week.
- Offices have lost up to a quarter of their jobs.
- Delivery staff are having a whole day's pay docked if they refuse to finish their work on unpaid overtime.
- Scab mail centres, like the one at Dartford, have not been closed down.
- Casual workers and scabs are being offered extra work before CWU members.

Workers Power warned that this would happen. Not because of a few rogue managers, but because Royal Mail and its shareholder, the

Labour government, soon realised the problems of taking on the whole union at once, and so have decided to tie the national union to meaningless "talks", while continuing to hammer the more militant areas: the Eastern region, Essex, London and Bristol.

After Christmas, they will return to an all-out assault, hoping to have crushed our spirits. That's why branches all around the country, especially the 500-plus that already have local mandates for strike action, should send in emergency resolutions to back up London and make sure that we stay united. We should also call for an emergency conference to hammer out a strategy to win (see box left).

How to win

Royal Mail's attacks on London are the real sticking point for the CWU leadership, since London is Dave Wards' base and accounts for 10 per cent of all postal workers. But it is extremely unlikely that CWU tops will restart the strikes without massive pressure from below. They dragged their heels in calling the national strike and will do everything to delay restarting it.

Activists, branches and regions need to come together into a rank and file movement to hammer out a strategy to win the strike – with the backing of the PEC if possible, without it if necessary. London Division and the other militant branches should call an emergency conference to do this, and organise a campaign to bring the rest of the union out with them.

The dispute is not just against modernisation cuts but also the privatisation of Royal Mail, which is still the threat underpinning the offensive. This therefore inevitably put us on a collision course with the Labour government.

This is what frightens not just Billy Hayes, but Ward, too. They and the pro-Labour national executive are not prepared to risk a governmental crisis. Nor are they willing to launch the kind of action – an all-out indefinite strike – that could win such a confrontation. But rank and file postal workers have no choice.

Victory can still be ours – but we need to seize the moment!

What is in the interim agreement?

The national strike was suspended after a great start, with a 76% vote for action, and two solid strikes. Then on 5 November, Deputy General Secretary Dave Ward and the Postal Executive, signed up to an "Interim Agreement" – suspending all strikes, even local ones, without so much as a vote.

The deal contained not a single concession on the company's "modernisation" drive to slash up to 60,000 jobs and boost workloads. As Royal Mail said, "the agreement is on all key issues the same as that discussed last month with the union" and that "it is clearly very pleased that the CWU has now decided to accept the agreement".

Sabotage

Postal workers are at their strongest in the run up to Christmas. It would have been wrong to drop the strike in return for only "talks" at any time. But to do so when we can cause maximum disruption is sabotage.

This has left workers in the strongest areas angry. Even more are confused, thanks to the near complete silence of the union's lead-

POSTIES ON THE DEAL

- "It's just a ploy to get us to work over Christmas."
- "We've been sold down the river, it's just like two years ago."
- "We should just have gone out for two weeks over Christmas and stuck it to them."
- "Why haven't our reps even been consulted?"

ership – some falling for the spin that the agreement means no strikes before Christmas. The union has mailed out only one letter to members explaining the situation.

Managers in many areas haven't changed course at all, while in other areas, such as the North East, they continue to push forward plans that will cost thousands of jobs, with only token concessions in order to dampen down resist-

ance. Royal Mail is consciously trying to divide and rule.

The national strike united 90 per cent of postal workers behind the fighting wing, centred on London, which has taken up to 25 days of strike action since the summer. The interim agreement sabotaged this unity, killed the momentum of the strike, and left militants to face Royal Mail's cuts and bullying alone.

Reviews

Reps were told that fortnightly reviews, with an independent arbiter, would give the union the opportunity to restart the strikes at any stage. The first of these took place on 26 November.

Unofficially the word is that there has been almost no progress. Rumours are leaking out of things no postie will want to hear: six items of compulsory junk mail (the current limit is three) to be delivered door-to-door, a back-breaking hike in workload; no word of the 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

The officials are steering towards a rotten deal like the flexibility agreement of 2007. Now, like then, they are selling out a strike to do so.

The postal strike and the left

Like all significant strikes, the Royal Mail dispute has highlighted the merits and problems of the left's trade union policy. **Jeremy Dewar** looks at the SWP and Socialist Party's record

Socialist Workers Party

The SWP has been prominent in the CWU for some years. Its *Post Worker* bulletin has run for over a decade and boasted a wide circulation. SWP National Secretary Martin Smith promoted it as a model revolutionary agitator-organiser in the unions (*The Awkward Squad: New Labour and the rank and file*, 2003)

According to Smith, *Post Worker* should be a party paper other militants can join, whose purpose is to "organise the rank and file". It should stand "for the election of left officials and unofficial action whenever necessary".

Instead, there has been nothing to join and it has never stood candidates in elections. It has been limited to a paper not only for militants but also officials, with non-lefts - such as General Secretary Billy Hayes - writing in it. Consequently, while backing unofficial action, *Post Worker* could not fight the

2007 sell-out.

Indeed, during the 2007 and this year's strikes, *Post Worker* virtually disappeared in favour of SWP postal bulletins. Just when a rank and file paper - promoting a rank and file movement - becomes urgently needed, the SWP drops it.

It's clear why. The party's leadership prefers a front allowing blocs with left leaders. The SWP provided platforms for London reps Martin Walsh and Mark Palfrey, but failed to build an independent organisation of rank and file postal workers. So when the London leadership backed Dave Ward and called off the strikes, the SWP's strategy collapsed - exactly as in 2007.

The weakness of the SWP's method was further revealed when its leading postal activist, Jane Loftus, CWU President and Chair of the Postal Executive, backed suspending the strikes. This is a step further to the right for Loftus, in 2007, she

voted against the sell-out deal but refused to campaign against it.

The SWP/*Post Worker* have avoided warning workers of the union bureaucracy or criticising leaders. They never tried to organise the rank and file to control action, official or unofficial. The excuse: It's "too early" to develop a rank and file movement. If so, why does the SWP promote left caucuses in unions with less militancy and grassroots strength, when the CWU has seen major strikes in 2003, 2007, and 2009?

The SWP correctly called for solidarity committees in support of postal workers and were enthusiastic builders of meetings up and down the country. The committees aimed to raise solidarity, collect money, visit picket lines, etc. But such committees could have also laid the basis for cross-union committees of activists ie the beginnings of a rank and file groups. Again, the



Jane Loftus at the Labour Party conference lobby in September

SWP limits its organising workers to building groups that fail to challenge the bureaucracy.

Post Worker and the Jane Loftus affair show the SWP talk about "rank and file organisation", but in practice orient toward the left leaders. Instead of developing such organisations, it tells militants to "join the party".

The Socialist Party

The SWP's main rival, the Socialist Party, simply swallowed the officials' line. It backed the Interim Agreement, putting a "left" spin on it. In the *The Socialist* (11 November), under "What we think", the SP saluted the postal workers' action... then backed the leadership abruptly cancelling strikes.

No criticism of the no-strike clause imposed on local branches/regions; no condemnation of the undemocratic way the strike was pulled without a members' vote. Instead, the article mentions "confusion and questioning amongst ordinary CWU members", claiming the deal "contains a number of concessions forced out of the bosses."

Postal workers were not "confused", they were angry - so angry, in at least one London office, they debated walking out on 6 November - despite/against the sell-out. If, as the SP notes, the strike was so

strong it forced Royal Mail onto the defensive, why abandon, wasting the Christmas period when we pack the most punch?

The article stresses the gains - closing scab mail centres, ending victimisation, offering overtime, - but ignores the "modernisation" agenda of 60,000 job cuts, part-time working and privatisation.

The SP spins this, claiming the deal "does allow the CWU to regain some element of trade union control in the workplace" and "the union in the final agreement will, if not have a veto, at least be part of the process."

By dropping the demand for workers' control in favour of negotiating rights, this editorial shows the SP has adopted the officials' worldview. "Being part of the process" is what the CWU bureaucrats have fought for from the start, saying "Negotiate don't reiterate". Dave Ward has repeatedly interpreted this as "accepting the need for

cuts" and made it clear this right comes with the "responsibility" to rein in militants.

The Socialist Party reaches a new low when it starts lecturing about "leadership": "The job of leadership is to know when to advance and when to retreat... what has to be taken into account is the readiness of your own troops to continue to advance as well. Many postal workers were looking to Christmas as time to be with their families and to have a well-earned rest."

But there was no sign the strike was weakening! This is the old bureaucratic game: "blame the members" - when it is the leadership that has failed. Socialists who conceal this with fake "left" arguments are tools of the bureaucracy, not tribunes of the workers.

For example, the SP has been integrated into the bureaucracy in the PCS, defending sell-outs on pensions in 2005 and pay in 2008. It has blocked the Shop Stewards Network

from organising independently from the bureaucracy. For example at a NSSN steering committee in September, SP members amended out proposals to have the NSSN organise rank and file postal workers, leaving instead a vague call for solidarity meetings (to do what?).

Traditionally weak in the CWU, this breaks new ground for the SP's broad leftism, which postal workers hopefully will reject.

Postal workers urgently need a rank and file movement acting independently of the left wing of the bureaucracy. History shows it takes a party with a clear vision of the tasks ahead to help build such a movement.

The SWP and SP have shown that they are not up to that task; both subordinate such independence to support for the London Division leadership or the national leaders. Workers Power doesn't. Join us - help us fight for a real rank and file alternative!

WORKPLACE

Leeds binman speaks out on strike victory

More than 600 bin workers and street cleaners have won a great victory after an inspirational 11 week strike – with most winning thousands of pounds and the council renouncing privatisation. A Unison workplace representative in Streetscene, talks to *Workers Power* about the strike and the deal that has been reached with Leeds Council

Workers Power: What were the reasons for Streetscene workers taking strike action?

Rep: We went on strike because of the pay cuts the council was trying to impose. In 2007 it became law that women had to have equal pay, so the council decided to re-evaluate everyone's jobs. Rather than bringing women's pay up, the council tried to knock men's pay down but we all knew that the real aim from the start was privatisation.

WP: All of the workers went out together and refused to be divided. Why was the strike so solid?

Rep: The council tried to bite off more than it could chew. In the past it took things off us bit by bit and we backed down or the unions didn't work together, but this time we stood shoulder to shoulder. The council thought that the most we would do is a one-day strike. It was wrong. The council didn't talk to us for two weeks, then it proposed deals that would divide us but we stayed out together.

WP: What was the level of support like?

Rep: Tremendous. It never wavered from week one to week 11. We were still getting donations and food on the picket line in the final week. The public understood from the beginning that we were defending our wages. If you went up to someone and said: "Could you survive without a third of your wages?", they'd say "No" – simple as that.

WP: A deal has been reached with the council, would you say it's a

victory?

Rep: Not totally. There's a small minority who are still going through the review process and this won't be completed until Christmas. There are also people that are losing £517 and others have to work longer shifts and weekends.

It was a victory for the majority and we won a lot of ground. But everyone knew there were people going back to the depots who had stood with us for 11 weeks but whose situation hasn't been resolved.

WP: Is productivity completely agreed or do you think there could be further disputes over that?

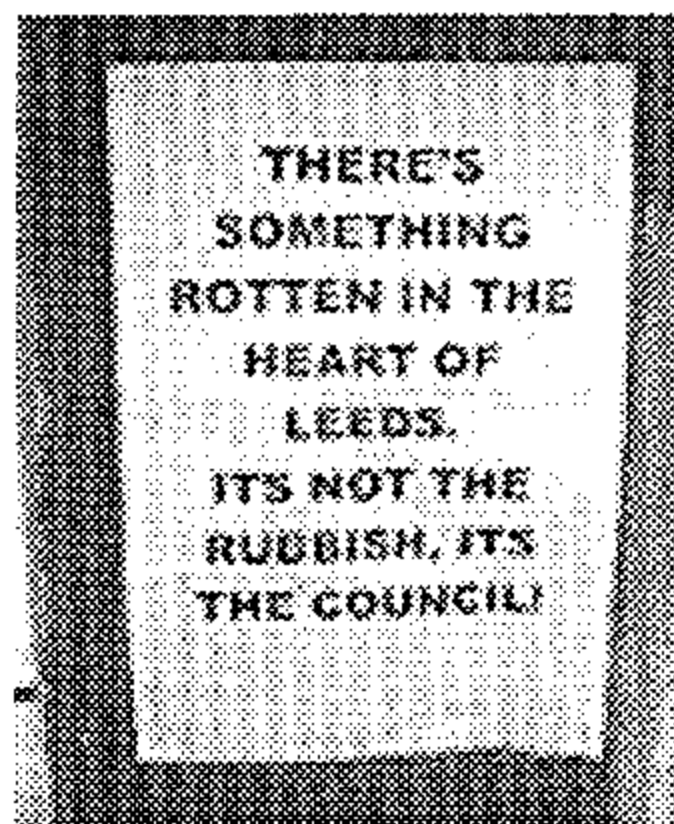
Rep: Some details still have to be finalised. I don't know how they're going to work out our productivity without following us around all day because the bins in the city centre are constantly in use. Plus there's absolutely no trust between us and the council.

WP: Do you think the council will stick to its word about not privatising the service?

Rep: Maybe up until the local elections – beyond that it's anyone's guess. The council's threat for the last 15 to 20 years has always been: "Do what we say or we'll privatise you."

WP: Your strike inspired Brighton bin workers to go out on strike and win. How does your strike fit into the national picture of workers resisting cuts?

Rep: It could be a sign of things to come because we've demonstrated that indefinite strikes can get results. There were a lot of councils across the UK watching our



strike to see which way things went.

WP: The local Labour Party supported the strike from early on. Do you think they jumped onto the bandwagon?

Rep: To an extent, yes. For the first two to three weeks we got no support from anyone, but then Labour saw we were going to fight and got on board. The cuts must have been discussed on the council before they were announced so Labour had to have known about them but didn't warn us or try and stop the cuts.

Whichever party was in opposition would have got on board for their own benefit. They certainly didn't fool anyone into thinking they were doing it for anything other than their own interests and their own political gain.

WP: Workers Power argued that, rather than the unions supporting a Labour candidate against council leader Richard Brett, the bin workers could stand their own candidate. Do you think this is a good idea?

Rep: I'd say yeah. A lot of people don't see any difference between

the three main parties now. If you come across a mugger in the street, you don't give him half your money and then let him hit you over the head for the rest of it, so why do our unions keep funding Labour?

Working people have been supporting Labour for years and when they came to power, they didn't repeal the anti-union laws – and we still can't even do secondary picketing. When we're working, we can be asked to work anywhere across the city; but when on strike, we could only picket our main workplace and this stopped us from building solidarity with other workers.

WP: What are the main lessons of your strike?

Rep: That solidarity does work – that at the end of the day when you go on strike you make a commitment not just to yourself but to the people standing next to you.

The workforce has to drive the strike, because ultimately it's us who win or lose. The union officials don't lose because they get paid no matter what happens – it's us on the picket lines who can lose.

And you can't put an expiry date on a strike because that gives your employer the room to put plans in place to defeat you.

The unions should make a conscious effort to stop the council from using long-term agency staff. They should be a short-term solution, not kept on under false hopes and never given a contract.

WP: Why did you join Workers Power?

Rep: I became more aware that there is an alternative and the present system doesn't work. It's a chance to have a serious talk with people who have a similar view.

London tube: vote 'Yes' for strike against pay freeze

By Jeremy Dewar

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union is balloting its 10,000 members on the London Underground and Transport for London for strike action against a two-year pay freeze.

Unite, which represents 600 maintenance staff, has already voted for action short of a strike, while white-collar union TSSA has walked out of ACAS talks with London Underground.

The bosses have offered a derisory 1.5 per cent "rise" for this year and the RPI inflation rate (currently zero) plus 0.5 per cent next. In effect this may mean not just a freeze but a real pay cut because fuel and food prices are rising in London.

Alongside this, there is a target of 3,000 job cuts. RMT's London organiser, Steve Hedley, told a solidarity meeting that already there

are 500 vacancies unfilled - a policy of "job cuts by stealth".

But LU and TfL bosses, no doubt under the close supervision of London Mayor Boris Johnson, are playing a vicious game of divide and rule. They have signed a clandestine pay deal with drivers' union ASLEF, which includes an exclusive clause guaranteeing them alternative jobs, should any driver need to be redeployed on medical grounds.

It was this that forced TSSA back into dispute. Unsurprisingly, ASLEF's leadership is now recommending its members to accept the pay offer.

RMT activists are working hard to get the best possible vote for action. They must not be put off by the ASLEF leaders' betrayal, nor by the fact that Unite members only voted for action short of a strike, while rejecting a call for strike action. A 48-hour stoppage in June

caused widespread disruption and forced management to increase the offer by 1 per cent, even though only RMT members were officially on strike.

Division is a weakness

But neither should they be complacent. The division between the rail unions - RMT, ASLEF, Unite and TSSA - is a real weakness that only benefits the bosses and sell-out union officials. The RMT has, to its credit, sought to organise all grades, from cleaners and station staff to permanent way workers and train crews. The struggle for industrial unionism is part of the fight against misleadership and bureaucracy in the unions.

Now they should try to get members of other unions to take out dual union membership, switch to the RMT or force their unions to instruct members not to cross RMT picket lines. This is not pie-in-the-

sky thinking - RMT and ASLEF members have supported each other with tremendous effect in recent times. Only last month, ASLEF drivers took a form of unofficial action on First Capital Connect, halting all trains on the Brighton to Bedford and some East Anglian routes, which proves that ASLEF members are capable of militant action.

Boris Johnson is out to crush militant - that is, effective - trade unionism on the underground. This is partly because he wants a reputation as a union basher (he was the originator of the Tories' proposal to count abstentions in industrial ballots as votes against action) but also because his class, the capitalists, want a submissive workforce in time for the 2012 Olympics.

The RMT ballot closes on 21 December. Between now and then, tube workers have an opportunity to put Boris back in his box.

Buses stop for striking workers

Faced with pay freezes, bus drivers across the country have taken strike action. *Mike Tate* argues that, if the bus companies cannot pay decent wages, they should be nationalised

Leeds First Group bus drivers have voted by 86 per cent to strike. The 1,000-strong union is planning three one-day walkouts in December: on the 7, 12 and 19. Months of negotiations came to nothing but the union is still giving the management another chance to back down on 3 December.

The First bosses are trying to claim that they do not have the money to give the 1-2 per cent pay rise asked for by the workers. They have repeated this line on their Metro website, trying to smear the strikers. But Leeds First workers are the lowest paid bus employees in the whole of West Yorkshire.

The truth is First bus group made £134 million profit last year. The bus workers are therefore right

to take offence at the pay freeze - which will become a pay cut, once inflation kicks in.

This also has to be seen against the background of constant harassment and disrespect towards the employees. Workers are regularly called up on minor infringements and the bosses have tried to hound sick people, using - or rather, abusing - their absence policy.

Nationwide

The Leeds strike is just the latest in a series of walkouts, which have paralysed the bus company bosses. As we go to press, we can report that 2,300 workers at East London Bus Group struck for 48 hours on 21-22 November, mounting mass picket lines of 50 or more; Essex First Group workers came out on 23

November; and Stagecoach drivers in Rotherham and Barnsley are out for three Mondays in a row, starting on 23 November. Bolton, Bury and Wigan have also voted by 75 per cent to strike, despite a recommendation from their union, Unite, to accept a three-year pay offer.

This all follows the great success of the Sheffield bus workers, who struck for four days before winning. Not one union member crossed the picket line. They are ready to strike again if concessions are not delivered.

We cannot allow the bosses to impose pay cuts on us under the guise of the recession. An all-out, indefinite strike in the buses would be the ideal way to push back the attacks of the bus bosses.

If the books don't balance, then

the first cut should come from the bosses' profit.

If, upon workers' inspection of the bank accounts, decent pay is still impossible, then the service should be nationalised under workers' control. We did not create the crisis, and we won't pay for it.

Workers Power has been involved in setting up solidarity committees for the Leeds bin strike and the post strike. This is the sort of organisation we need to support the bus workers and all others forced to defend their jobs and conditions. Together we can raise strike money for the drivers, and spread the message of solidarity across the class.

More on strikes on the buses at <http://www.workerspower.com>

Bonuses for them...

By John Bowman

Bankers in the City of London can continue to enjoy enormous payouts after threats to challenge their bonuses turned to dust. Labour government ministers promised that they would clamp down on bonuses that encourage "excessive risk-taking" but bankers have won two recent victories against efforts to curb their massive "top-ups".

And on the back of that, City bonuses are due to rise at least 50 per cent this year, with the state-owned Royal Bank of Scotland handing out between £1-5 million to its top 20 staff.

Champagne fizzed in the City as the Queen's speech omitted any plan to cap bankers' payouts. A second glass was no doubt poured when a review taking place into bank pay and governance found that there should be no requirement to name those bankers walking away with bonuses of more than £1 million. Banks will only have to say how many people are getting these obscene sums of money right out of the taxpayers' pockets.

Many people are rightly furious that, when £1.5 trillion was spent on propping up the banks, it is now our taxes that are ending up in the pinstriped pockets. Millions of people are so angry that the head of the IMF has even said that another



er bailout would be impossible in Germany or France and put in jeopardy democratic governments across the globe.

But, as per usual, the British government has an answer: just don't tell anyone! The Bank of England lent RBS and HBOS an extra £61.6 billion in secret loans last year, on top the rest of the bailout, which is equivalent to the education budget.

They claimed it had to be secret to prevent a run on the banks - just another example of how business secrecy must be ended so we can see where all the money goes, or, more importantly, who it goes to!

Parliament and the House of Lords have enshrined in law the right to fine single mothers with children above the age of one if they are not actively seeking work while receiving benefits. This is just one aspect of the Welfare Reform Act passed on 12 November, which aims to shift the cost of the capitalist crisis onto society's poorest and most vulnerable.

The Act also puts more stringent criteria on the ability to claim Incapacity Benefit, now known as Employment Support Allowance (ESA). The government's aim is to reduce those receiving these benefits by one million - by forcing them into low-paid, low-skill, slave labour jobs.

Penalising people when unemployment is so high has nothing to do with getting people back into decent employment, and everything to do with covering the budget deficit caused by the bank

bailout. The official number of unemployed people grew by 30,000 from July to September, is and now close to 2.5 million. Telling people to get a job or see their benefits cut off will see huge swathes of people caught in a vicious poverty trap.

The new "Work for Your Benefits" scheme is the capitalist solution to the crisis - providing companies with free labour while paying the dole claimant only the benefit rate. This means people will be working for less than £2 per hour - a workhouse of the 21st Century.

The anticapitalist solution to unemployment makes much more sense. We need an anticapitalist party that will seize the assets of the rich bankers and use the money for an extensive programme of public works to provide decent jobs for those who can work and welfare for those who cannot.

...but work-for-dole for us!



Schools fail poor white boys?

By Rachel Brooks

Recent figures on test scores for primary school students have concluded that it is "poor" white boys who score worst. In a BBC article it was reported that only 48 per cent of white males eligible for free school meals were achieving the required scores in Maths and English. It was also reported that children from higher income families would overtake those from lower income families by the age of six or seven, even though they may have started out in bottom abili-

ty groups as toddlers.

What does this mean then? That class has everything to do with our education and our ability to deal with the education system, even at primary school. Students eligible for free school meals score worst at primary school tests, and by the age of 11 perform below average in core subjects. If we assume that receiving free school meals puts students in the lower income bracket, then we can see that the problem is clearly the school system.

It is a system designed for middle class children, who even at

the age of six or seven are being prepped for further and higher education. A system full of exams, homework and test results is not best suited to families where parents work long hours for little pay.

It also highlights a big problem in the efforts of those in education development that have focused on the issue of race. For a long time Afro-Caribbean boys scored worst in most tests; however, this was also a matter of their coming from low income families. No figures have ever reported that white males from middle class families have performed badly, or Afro-

Caribbean girls who do not require free school meals, for that matter.

The findings from this report are worrying - essentially they show that the school system is failing working class students. Worse still, the far-right may well use these facts to play the race card, arguing that white students have suffered from a "favouritism" displayed to ethnic minorities.

The real threat is that, as the education system is further opened up to market forces, the standard of education provided to the least privileged is increasingly undermined.

IRELAND

250,000 workers strike against cuts in Ireland

Massive strike action across Ireland against public service cuts show extent of anger against the government. **Bernie McAdam** makes the case for a general strike to stop the attacks

In what is widely regarded as the biggest strike in the state's history, a quarter of a million Irish public service workers came out on strike on 24 November. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) had organised the action as widespread anger welled up at the government's attempt to slash public sector wages by 7 per cent. In fact this €1.3 billion cut in wages is part of a €4 billion cuts package, due to be sanctioned in the 9 December budget.

Schools, colleges, courts, civil service offices, hospitals and many local authority services were closed down. Only emergency services and flood stricken areas were exempt. Thousands of workers joined picket lines, while teachers protested outside the Department of Education in their thousands. The strike was a brilliant display of workers' action and will be followed by a second walkout on 3 December, if talks with the government prove meaningless.

This massive display of defiance shows that victory is possible. Unfortunately ICTU leaders' willingness to do a deal with Brian Cowen's government could lead this movement down the road to defeat. They still hold to the tired, old concept of social partnership with the bosses and the government. In reality this means accepting cuts but arguing over the timing and implementation. By focusing on pay cuts, the ICTU seeks to deflect attention away from the effect the cuts will have on public services as a whole.

But even on pay Peter McLoone, ICTU chair of public services committee, accepts cuts: "It would be necessary to agree some temporary measures to cut payroll costs in 2010 because reforms were unlikely to deliver the necessary savings before 2011." This might include, McLoone usefully suggested, cutting overtime rates, introducing unpaid leave, eliminating privilege days or establishing an 8-to-8 core day during which no



overtime payments would apply!

Economic crisis

Already families have been hit with €5,000 in additional taxes and levies in the two budgets since the end of last year. Unemployment has reached 12.6 per cent and is expected to rise to 14 per cent next year. The OECD reports that after tax incomes could fall by 10 per cent by the end of 2010. No wonder consumption of goods has decreased by 9 per cent.

The seriousness of the crisis is there for all to see. All seem to agree that working people did not cause this recession. But Cowen's Fianna Fail government is resolute on workers being made to foot the bill. Yet €54 million is to be found to set up NAMA as a "bad bank" to remove toxic loans.

Cowen has already forked out 11 billion to bail out the banks but workers' jobs, pension schemes and essential services are to be sacrificed – no bail out for workers!

In response to this ICTU should be saying, "Enough is enough – tax the rich". If the government won't give way then the unions should organise an indefinite general

strike. Instead we have a conciliatory approach, based on the presumption that "all of us" must make a sacrifice.

Workers must reject this strategy and organise against social partnership, independently of the bureaucratic leadership. Rank and file movements within and across the unions need to be built with the aim of developing a new fighting leadership. Militant action, including solidarity strikes, pickets and occupations, can turn the tide. Strike committees, democratically controlled by mass meetings, should lead and decide on the action and hold their officials to account.

More strikes needed

What we need is a general strike. We have already seen massive job losses and collapsed pension schemes in the private sector. The construction industry has taken a huge hit and foreign companies continue to downsize and relocate. Public services are now under the guillotine.

We are witnessing a class-wide assault on all workers by the government and its big business backers. Workers need a class-wide

response – a general strike.

When Minister of Finance Brian Lenihan says that public sector workers' "experience during this recession is far more benign than that of many in the private sector," he is deliberately trying to divide us. We should say the cuts affect all workers; the fate of all our public services is at stake. Unite in joint action!

Tuesday's stoppage is a good, though long overdue start but, by itself, it will prove inadequate to roll back the cuts. Even a strategy of more one-day strikes will take too long to stop the 9 December budget. The best and surest way to victory is an indefinite general strike, where public and private sector workers unite in a common battle to save jobs and protect our services.

Time is not on our side. The unions should launch indefinite strikes now and not wait for ICTU to prevaricate, and then sell out. Action councils should be built in every part of the country to coordinate the resistance, drawing in trade unionists, students, pensioners, migrant workers and the unemployed, and organising demonstrations and occupations.

EDUCATION

Student protests and sit-ins

By Theo Tiger

The Global Week of Action – “Education is NOT for \$A£” – initiated by the International Students’ Movement, proved a huge success.

On 17 November university and school students took to the streets in Switzerland, Poland, Austria, France, Italy, US, Serbia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Hungary, Macedonia and Sierra Leone. During the campaign week there were protests in more than 30 Countries.

Italy, with over 150,000 participants and Germany, with up to 100,000, were the biggest centres of the action in Europe. About 50 German universities in 30 cities saw sit-ins. In Berlin on 17 November there were 15,000 protesters on the street.

The German movement was inspired by the mass Austrian occupation movement, which had been already going on for three

weeks with many universities occupied. This “hot autumn” of protests centred on the neoliberal reforms in education, linked to the Bologna education; the harmful effects of these “reforms” are now beginning to be felt, as are the cuts in budg-

er, but also require both a narrow-range of subjects and a “dumbing down” of standards.

There have already been several waves of student protests against this new system. The last two years have seen huge movements in Italy,

organisation – had been mobilising for the ISM’s week of action since before the summer vacations. In Germany it had a large and lively contingent on 17 June day of action, in which 270,000 took part across Germany. On 24 November 9,000 demonstrated in Leipzig outside the Rectors’ Conference and on 10 December further protests are planned in Bonn, outside the Culture and Education Ministers’ Conference.

But to make a real breakthrough we need even more effective action. We need occupations and student strikes that halt the normal functioning of the universities. We need to link up with teachers and ancillary staff in the schools and colleges. We need to link up with industrial and public sector workers fighting against the effects of the crisis – against cuts in services and workplace closures. Setting a good example, students in Vienna supported and made links with the steel workers faced with job losses.

“The last two years have seen huge movements in Italy, Greece, Germany and France”

ets dictated by the huge bailouts of banks and private industry by the state over the past year.

The measures agreed by the European Union in Bologna in 1999 aimed at harmonising the continent’s degree system, making it even more subordinate to the needs of big business. They introduced something similar to the British three-year bachelor’s degree, to replace the generally five-year master’s degree as the final qualification. Obviously a shorter course would be cheap-

Greece, Germany and France. In the context of the crisis and a massive increase in unemployment amongst those graduating, it is no wonder the situation in European universities has become explosive. In Britain too, where neoliberal “reforms” have long been implemented, the wave of university occupations, triggered by the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, also linked to education issues and to budget cuts and closures of departments.

REVOLUTION – the socialist youth

A view from the German movement

Georg from REVOLUTION in Germany phoned through this report about the university occupations – including the one in Potsdam that he is currently involved in

German students have been inspired by the mass occupations which started in Vienna, Austria. Our education system is suffering many of the same attacks.

When I found out late at night that an occupation had taken place where I live in Potsdam, I got there as soon as I could. When I arrived at 1.00 am the atmosphere was amazing! 80-100 people were planning to sleep there overnight. When we woke in the morning there was a big meeting to decide to drum up more support by leafleting and telling people with megaphones what we were doing and why.

The occupation started off on a strong footing because we already had activities planned through the “Global Week of Action.” The Bologna reforms aim to make universities a preserve for a rich minority rather than ordinary people, by introducing more entrance exams, a three-tier grading system, and making students pay more. Here in

Germany many people have to do part-time jobs on top of forty hours a week study for university.

Solidarity

One of the best things about the occupation movement is the solidarity between workers and youth of all ages. I am a school student and REVOLUTION has worked to set up a strike committee in my school to spread the occupations to all those in education. One school in Germany was occupied for 2-3 days in solidarity with the movement.

After the 17 November demo, which many school students took part in, there is certainly a mood for further action. We’ve been trying to take it further by fighting for strike committees to be set up at more schools and by giving school students our new “action programme for education”. I would like to see a permanent union for school students come out of these struggles.

The European wave of struggle has

kept internationalism alive throughout. At first we exchanged speakers for the after-demonstration rallies with Austrian students. We have tried to make sure that our days of action fall upon the same days as theirs. Now we are building joint conferences. Two weeks ago a joint conference to discuss the next steps was held in Vienna. The next one will be held this weekend in Munich. This is a very encouraging sign.

Democratic bodies

But there are still some problems at local level. Some students feel that we shouldn’t have democratically organised strike committees and want to limit the political nature of this movement. I don’t agree. Strike committees would enable us to politically debate the direction we are taking and would provide an organisational framework to continue fighting if the occupations subside.

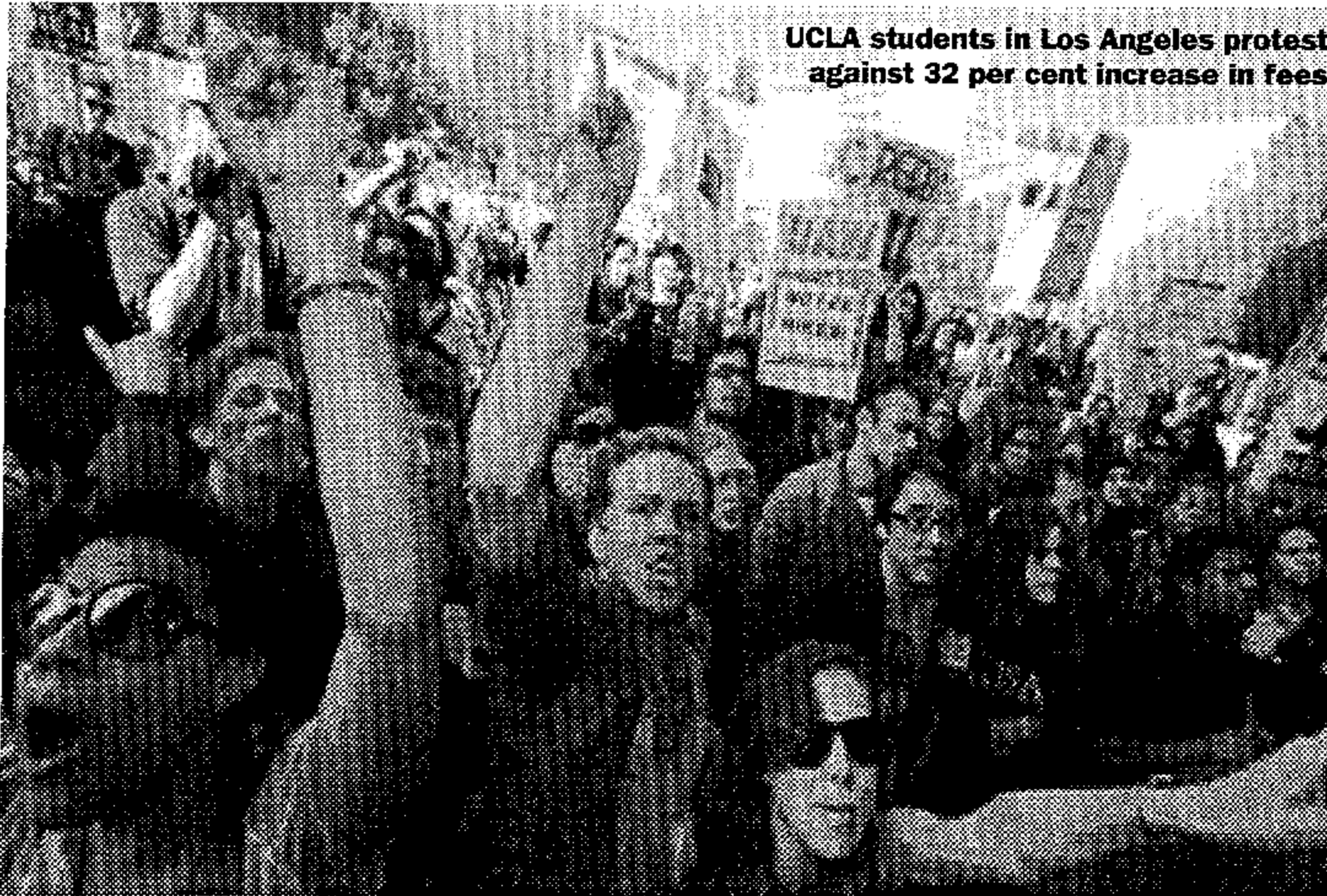
Students are already enraged that education is being cut back after so

much money was spent on propping up the rich bankers. The movement needs debate and discussion to make the link between the attacks on education and the capitalist system we live in. It’s the capitalists and their system that caused the recession and now they are using it to justify the cuts. We need to get to the root of the problem and get rid of capitalism altogether.

The message now is: continue to link up the protests in Germany and Europe. We need to bolster our democratic structures with more strike committees. We need to build the movement and take the bold step of occupying entire universities and put anticapitalism to the forefront. It’s not just a struggle over education, but about the capitalist system, which offers us nothing but cuts and unemployment.

For more on the occupations in Germany, Austria, France and other parts of the world go to www.onerevolution.com

spread across the world



UCLA students in Los Angeles protest against 32 per cent increase in fees

To produce a Europe wide movement of education strikes and demonstrations we need to overcome the prejudices, still widespread, in favour of decentralisation and consensus-only decision making. The alternative is majority decision-making in democratic assemblies, after full and open debates.

There we need to elect local and national coordinations, made up of recallable delegates. Indeed, we need to create an international coordination on the same basis. Though this method we can draw up a programme of demand that totally rejects the neoliberal reform process and demands instead a free, high quality education system, open to all who want it.

We need to realise that it is capitalism that stands in the way of this and therefore has to go. If we want to achieve this and beat back the attempts to make youth pay the cost of the capitalist crisis, we need to link up and support workers' resistance.

France: the struggle picks up

By Josephine Lefevre

November 24 saw strikes in the primary and secondary education sector and in the postal service. Earlier this year, there were regular one-day general strikes on a national level. But this was the first large-scale day of action since the summer and as people took to the streets across the country, it was clear that the will to fight back is still there.

The slogans and chants on the demos were against education cuts and the privatisation of the post as the protesters realised that if we allow the post to be privatised, education will be next. There are already big budget cuts planned for education in 2010 that would mean 16,000 job cuts in the sector. Sarkozy is also planning reductions in class time to make savings, most pressingly the recent introduction of the "bac professionnel". Completed in three years, as opposed to four for a normal bac (equivalent to UK 'A' levels), this will push working class school-leavers into the world of unemployment and low paid temporary jobs one year early.

• College students have also taken to the streets in their thousands over the last couple of weeks in protest against cuts and police repression. In universities too, mass meetings – *assemblées générales* (AGs) – have taken place across the country to organise the fight back against cuts and the privatisation of higher education. At my university in Toulouse, 1,000 students attended the first AG of the term. This was a great start to the year. Last year, at the height of the movement and the four month long occupation, 3,000 students attended the AGs. However, the second AG had to be cancelled after it was violently disrupted by autonomists. We must continue the struggle in our universities to build a movement, in spite of those who want to obstruct it.

• The struggle against the privatisation of the post continues with most of the population opposed to President Sarkozy's neoliberal project. After the 24 November strike, it is now high time for action committees to be set up by rank and file postal workers to organise the resistance. Furthermore, solidari-

ty committees of workers and users must be launched because the privatisation of the post should be an issue for the whole population.

• Meanwhile, the strike of the *sans papiers* (immigrant workers without legal recognition) continues with the number on strike now up to 5,200. In spite of police repression, their struggle for equal rights and pay and regularisation continues. Immigrants are being regularly scapegoated for the problems caused by the recession. That is why it is imperative that the whole working class gets behind their struggle, organising solidarity groups and supporting their struggle.

The New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) is in a position to play a leading role among students, postal workers and the *sans-papiers*. The French working class has suffered due to the misleadership of the trade union bureaucrats who turn the class struggle on and off like a tap, failing to lead the struggles forward in order to put real pressure on Sarkozy and his government.

If the NPA can consistently for anti-capitalist politics, it can

replace the stunted leadership of the bureaucrats and reformists. But the NPA currently stands at the crossroads. It has built up considerable strength thanks to its explicitly anti-capitalist politics and its independence from the reformist parties and the Socialist Party and its left rivals, the Left Party (PdG) and the Communist Party (PCF). Yet the NPA, faced with next year's regional elections, is wavering as to whether to join the two latter on a reformist platform.

Over the next week all NPA members will be consulted on this issue in a referendum. It is so important that the majority vote against a united slate with the left reformists. The working class in France (as in the rest of Europe) needs an anti-capitalist party that fights for its interests on the street, in the workplaces and in the schools and universities, and leads a fight against the capitalist system as a whole. But the NPA will not be able to do so unless it breaks once and for all with the reformist parties, which – in government or out – have supported the neoliberal attacks on the workers' social gains.

DEBATE

How to build a new

The current economic crisis and the Labour Party's role in attacking workers have led to several initiatives to build a left party – including Workers Power's own Call for a New Anticapitalist Party. At Workers Power's Anticapitalism event, held last month, a round table discussion was held on left unity and building a left of Labour party. Here are the edited speeches

Nick Durie

Scottish Socialist Party

I am from the Murray Hill branch of the SSP and would like to state first of all that I am a strong believer in left unity.

Not long ago the local council announced plans to demolish my scheme in Glasgow. The scheme's status was for "options appraisal", which meant the landlord could demolish it to sell the land off to a private developer. I got the house under the 2001 Housing Act in Scotland that grants people the right to a house if they are homeless - this Act was a result of a mass tenants' movement in Scotland. The Scottish Tenants Organisation had over 700 affiliates and bargained with the government to improve the social wage.

By 2005 this movement had been crushed. I got involved in a community centre that was basically trying to improve matters on the ground and re-build the tenants' organisation. There were about 12 lefties in this scheme of about 3000 people – a dozen communists in this wee scheme. These lefties weren't connected up – people of ideas that just weren't focused on the area they lived in even though, as communists, their houses stood to be demolished too.

We launched a local monthly newssheet, the Burgh Angel, and the first issue covered the council's planned programme of 76 school closures over three years to save the council £2m. My scheme was also part of a plan to demolish a huge slew of social housing – two-thirds of the social housing in the northwest was to be demolished to make way for private housing and, on the back of that, a liberalisation of council services. This was tied to the boom and is what they are going to do on the back of the great success of the financial services industry that is made up of nonsense. They needed to demolish social housing to make way for new private housing that the banks can invest in.

I think that local action should form the basis of socialist activity – how we relate to ordinary people, how we advance our ideas, and how we provide leadership. The phrase 'committees of action' has been used several times today and I think that is a useful concept because we may not all agree on the wider context or strategy of different disputes but what we can agree is that if there is no tenants' organisation, then we can't present a community challenge; if we don't have an organised workplace, we can't challenge the bosses.

There is obviously a need for a new political movement to develop our capacity as workers to present a challenge to the cuts that are happening and also try to advance our social wage as we work towards revolution – we hope – but that must be on the basis of activity on the ground.

A new anticapitalist party has to come from

the ground up and be based on activity because if we work together, as we found with the Burgh Angel, we can build organisations. I am happy to see similar projects – the East End Eye and the Crane in the Southside – which are bringing together socialists to present that challenge in the community and hopefully in our workplaces, too.

Duncan Chapel

Executive member of Socialist Resistance and one of the editors of International Viewpoint, the Fourth International's website

The people on this platform have a number of things in common. First, we want a working class party to the left of Labour – a new party with a socialist programme that is able to confront the dual crises of economic and ecological disorder, which is putting working people and peasants around the world deeply in peril. Second, we want a pluralist party in which anticapitalists are hegemonic and influential but not monolithic – a party where people don't have to be Marxist to join but one where Marxist ideas, socialist ideas, are dynamically influential. Third, we want a party of struggle, built from the ground up, not just a voice at elections but one that can serve, develop and lead real struggles.

But what's the next step? Socialist Resistance is advancing a number of ideas. First, we need a party based on the struggle, not just for elections. In this crisis, the capitalists are launching a massive offensive against social and democratic rights to increase the exploitation of labour and protect profits. The brunt of the offensive does not fall on the unionised workplaces of the west, but on women, black communities and the developing world. So we need a party that builds itself up from the grass roots and links up with struggles, like the recent post workers dispute.

There's a space to the left of the Labour government and a number of parties stand in that space: Respect, which I am a member of, the SSP, the new coalition of the CPB and SP which many of the left have welcomed this week. And it is encouraging that there is a vote beyond Labour even at a modest level. But many people are becoming passive – they aren't holding their nose while they vote for the social democratic party, but are staying home. This is why we need a party that picks up the challenging task of building an electoral presence but also puts down real roots in communities.

It is also important to start at the start, not at the end: realising what the party will look like at the beginning and not forcing that as an ultimatum what it should be at the end. We can learn

anticapitalist party

from the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France, where a new workers' party might not even start out calling itself communist. This means that we have to engage with the real movement as is.

The NPA is based on community and organisations with revolutionary and communist past; it is explicitly socialist and talks about the need for a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist order. In Britain, there is a possibility, because the space to the left of Labour is so huge, that a new party could do what the Left Bloc has done in Portugal, which is to expand to take over the whole space to the left of social democracy – not just to build a Marxist party that regroups the space that Marxists occupy, but an anticapitalist party that occupies the whole space left of Labour.

In order to do that, the party must be based on democracy. If you want a party that just gets on the ballot paper then you only need money to buy a deposit and some signatures, like the Socialist Labour Party. Although the SLP started with a moral authority, people found out that only Arthur Scargill's opinions really counted. The Socialist Alliance, on the other hand, was a exponentially more democratic organisation than the SLP ever was. We learned that having democracy was essential to building and dynamising an organisation.

A new party can't just focus on the needs of organised workers but must put the needs of women, migrant workers and the black communities first. Women are the first victims of the world recession. There are massive attacks on people from the developing world not only in the third world but also here as migrant workers. In Britain, we also see a scandalous level of youth unemployment.

We need to link up all these struggles in a new party – fighting against the attacks by the employers, the state and the fascists – with a programme that allows us to build an active alternative on the ground, as well as at the elections.

Andy Yorke

Communication Workers Union rep

In the struggle for new anticapitalist party, the trade unions are an important angle because they are the working class' biggest organisations. Therefore any party that seriously wants to destroy capitalism and build an alternative has to focus

on the bedrock organisations of the working class as one of its key starting points.

Today, you can group the British unions in three simplistic categories: first, unions like the FBU and RMT that have already had direct confrontations with Labour – the leaders have faced tremendous pressure from their own members to break from Labour but haven't founded a new party. They have developed a pick-and-mix approach at elections, even to the point of supporting the Lib-Dems, a pro-capitalist party. You can see how without a working class party to support, a minimalist – almost apolitical – tendency can arise in the unions.

Then there is the Big Three – Unite, GMB and Unison – where there is a struggle against an oppressive bureaucracy, particularly in Unison which is actively witch hunting the left. In these unions, a guerrilla war is waged to get the question of a new party on the national conference agenda. I think my union – the CWU – falls into this category.

Then there is the PCS and NUT that historically don't have political funds but are under pressure from their own members to address the question because of massive job cuts and privatisation.

I think the CWU is the best example of how abusive the relationship with Labour is, why it needs to be ended and, most importantly, what are the obstacles to break our unions from Labour and develop an anticapitalist alternative.

The CWU has given 7 million to Labour since 2001 and what have we got in return? The opening of the postal market stacked against Royal Mail to drive it and our pension into crisis – now the pension fund hovers over the whole industry like an axe, demanding wage cuts and modernisation. The Labour government has tried to privatise it once already – and will try again. They keep management which is aimed at breaking the union. So not only does Labour bite the hand that feeds it but they take the trade union support and votes for granted. And the only way they try to keep the BNP from clawing away their vote is by blaming immigrants, waving the flag for the Afghan war, etc.

For years at CWU national conference, resolutions called for disaffiliation and every one failed by 80-90 per cent. Finally after pressure from London, the most radical section of the union, the union balloted that region and 96-98 per cent were in favour of disaffiliation. Even I was shocked it was that high. What that

shows is that there is a thin layer of officials and union bureaucrats who have held back this struggle and control the structures of the union.

Billy Hayes, general secretary, is a rotten Labour loyalist. His line is: "We are supposed to start up a new party. This is another way of saying that there isn't an alternative party that the CWU could support. As there isn't an alternative, then I suggest that we continue our current policy." So we are supposed to defend ourselves from privatisation with a campaign, but "since there isn't a campaign, then I propose we continue not having a campaign."

The London ballot showed that if the debate is had out then the members would democratically choose to disaffiliate. There are also some that want to build an alternative. Our own experience has been that an appeal for an anticapitalist party is very popular among workers in struggle.

In the unions we need to mobilise the rank and file to break from Labour and fight for a new party because this is part of the struggle to break the grip of the bureaucracy and renovate the unions. In that sense it is not just about building a new party but also about building other organisations that are needed to defeat the crisis.

Carl Zacharia

Surrey United Anticapitalist Society

The Surrey United Anticapitalist Society started off as a small group in Guildford, the richest town in the country which doesn't have many left wing groups or people. In some ways this is an advantage because if we didn't come together we would be totally ineffectual. We have a students' society at the university and a large organisation outside of university made up of Socialist Workers Party, anarchists, CPGB, independents, Peace Party, environmentalists and others.

We decided to get a community centre together to have meetings and some of the younger members decided to open up a local authority building – a care home abandoned by the council turned into a squat we called the "Mother-ship". We organise many different activities: healing, political meetings, reiki, meditation classes, DJs, etc. The meetings grew to about 50 people, which may not sound like a lot but remember

In the unions we need to mobilise the rank and file to break from Labour and fight for a new party

DEBATE

it is a town of 60,000 people and also the richest town in the country.

Through our experiences, we began thinking differently to the political parties that we belonged to. We realised that what we really want is local groups. We have to come together on a local level because we don't believe that the national groups, whether Socialist Party, SWP or others, are capable of a meaningful unity. Yes, we would like to see a new party but it must be built from below – initially it must be an umbrella organisation to connect 'disparate' local groups.

SUAS is an organisation that can intervene into strikes, turn up to the postal picket lines, support and house homeless people, support other groups whether anarchists or ecologists, and we think that this is a model for the future. One of our proudest achievements was when the BNP turned up on the high street. One of our members phoned me and I said "Don't panic – go through your phonebook and call everyone you know and get them to network it and meet us on the high street and we will take them away." And in a few minutes the BNP were gone. We had a few nicks and bruises, but we had their agitation off the streets within five minutes of them setting up their stall.

In Guildford – as everywhere – there are a lot of different communities and we have actively built alliances. This is the model for the beginnings of an anticapitalist party – anyone who is genuinely anticapitalist – for the destruction of the capitalist system – can come together in broad agreement.

We may look at elections if we want to. Now we are looking at local elections and the Peace Party in Surrey have asked for our endorsement but we are not sure we will give it. The national elections for us are not really paramount but we are looking at local elections, actions and interventions. We discovered that a lot of the parties latch onto strikes and industrial actions. When you read 'What is to be Done' by Lenin, he specifically said that economic struggles are not the main thing. There are a whole range of issues that have to be explored.

Richard Brenner

Editor, Workers Power

It has been an interesting and diverse discussion. We have a number of people speaking on this platform that have supported Workers Power specific initiative – the appeal for the formation of a new anticapitalist party in Britain. Since we launched the appeal, hundreds of people have signed it for a very simple reason – because it expresses a widely felt feeling – mainly repulsion after the European elections when the BNP got 900,000 odd votes and two MEPs, but also disappointment as various parts of the left tried to unite but fell short of people's expectations. Therefore, this call has struck with the grain of what a layer of people on the left were thinking.

Members of other socialist organisations, such as the SWP and SP, have signed the petition, whether their leaders agree or not. We want their leaders to sign it as well because

we believe that the working class movement is facing a serious situation – the crisis is a real crisis and is accelerating. If a party was formed, it would rally thousands of people from every struggle and every town and city across Britain to it because it would place the blame – not on the immigrants, workers and youth who are being targeted by the right – but the capitalists, bankers and bosses who are wrecking this country and every country in the world.

After the European elections, the SWP wrote an open letter calling for a conference of the left, which I think was a very important initiative. National organisations, as well as local ones, need to come together in a conference to hammer out what our response to the crisis should be, to mobilise mass forces to force the bosses to pay the price for the crisis, and how we can use the election to get those ideas out there as widely as possible.

Workers Power argued that the conference should decide on the policy, not the leaders of different groups behind the backs of everyone else. But, above all, we said that workers need a party because they deeply sense that if something calls itself a tentative alliance, it lacks the self-assurance to rule. When workers vote in elections, they know they are voting for a group that wants to govern society.

The situation has been complicated by the fact that the SP has aligned with the leadership of the RMT and CPB for an electoral challenge. Earlier this year, the same alliance decided to stand in the European elections, but not on a working class ticket, not on an internationalist ticket, not on a 'make the bosses pay for the crisis' ticket, but on a 'down with the EU' ticket where they blamed every capitalist class in Europe except their own for the crisis. Absolutely extraordinary.

The same alliance decided at a conference last weekend that it would stand candidates at the next elections – how does our proposal for a new workers party relates to that? We don't know. We do know that the train towards a new party is coming in but it may not choose to stop at our station. Second we don't know if it is going in the right direction. In the meantime, we need to step up the argument in favour of creating a new party.

Do we say that from day one that anyone that doesn't agree with our programme shouldn't be in it? Do we say that the process of adopting a programme has to take place on the first day rather than having a discussion, maybe lasting many months about what the programme and policies of the party must be? No, we want it to be an open process.

Do we say that we want it to be a pluralist party? I hate to disagree with Duncan, who has been so constructive on the platform, but I do disagree with him because it is not true that everyone on this platform wants a pluralist party. What does pluralism mean? To my mind it means many many views and voices and different ideas. Now we know that we are going to start with that – we don't want to tell people how to think and we want a democratic party in which everyone can say what they think. But another feature is that we want to win the argument for revolution in the party. We want to start the argument and for the argument to take place in a democratic way – but we don't think that it is great that everyone has different ideas because some of those ideas will lead to defeat and some will lead to victory.

That is why we want to conduct this whole process in order to convince the party of the need for revolution. And in order to advance a programme, which starts from the struggle today, organises against the sell-outs of the trade union leaders, brings together people from the different struggles in order to coordinate and link them up, organises an anti-fascist defence league to drive the EDL off the streets, which gets out on the doorstep and answers the racist lies, calls for nationalisation of the banks, calls for the expropriation of every business that is declaring redundancies, and which argues in favour of the total transformation of this society forcibly and does so in the process not only of the struggles today and the general elections but generally after that. That means that our call for an anticapitalist party for us is not an alternative to a revolutionary party of the working class, it is actually a way of getting a revolutionary party of the working class. And I urge all of you to sign our appeal (below) and also to support our efforts, policy and programme in the period ahead.

SIGN CALL FOR A NEW ANTICAPITALIST PARTY

WE NEED A NEW
ANTICAPITALIST
PARTY

If you agree with our arguments for a new anticapitalist party then we need your support to build the campaign. Go to workerspower.com and sign the appeal or e-mail the address on the right. Also tell your friends and work colleagues about the campaign and raise it in your union.

Call for a new
ANTICAPITALIST
PARTY

SIGN THE
APPEAL

anticapitalistparty@gmail.com

WORLD SOCIALISM

Chávez calls for Fifth International

The International Secretariat of the League for the Fifth International's statement on the tasks of revolutionaries in response to the call of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela

Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez has announced that he intends to take steps to form a Fifth International. The proposal was greeted by a standing ovation from delegates from 39 countries attending an "International Meeting of Parties of the Left" in Caracas on November 20. They also signed a common declaration called the Caracas Agreement (El Compromiso de Caracas).

The League for the Fifth International has argued for many years that the assaults on the social and economic gains of the workers, carried out by the capitalist class under the banner of globalisation, neoliberalism and the war on terror, urgently required an internationally coordinated fight back. In the many international forums of the anticapitalist and antiwar movements that have been held over the last ten years, we have proposed concrete steps to found a new global party of socialist revolution, a Fifth International.

The left

Many of the groups that consider themselves followers of Leon Trotsky and VI Lenin responded by arguing that the call for a new International was utopian. They said the time was not ripe, it was "too soon", or "too advanced" because there were no forces willing even to consider such a step. Maybe Chávez's initiative will wake up such people - even though the world crisis of 2008-09 has not. Indeed, it is truly a scandal for organisations that call themselves anti-capitalist, be they of "Trotskyist", "Maoist" or "Communist" origin, that it has to be Hugo Chávez who makes this call. It demonstrates clearly the extent to which the "far left" has failed to address the needs of the day clearly and courageously.

Revolutionaries however cannot agree to entrust the initiative of founding a new workers' international to the head of a bourgeois state, that is, a state that defends capitalist ownership of the means of production and

enforces this by a standing army and police force against the workers and poor of Venezuela. Of course, Chávez has clashed repeatedly with US imperialism and has, under mass pressure, carried out important reforms for the popular classes in terms of healthcare and education. But, as he himself admitted in the very speech in which he called for the Fifth International, Venezuela remains a capitalist country and the state machine a capitalist one. This is a vital question, no matter many times Chávez has clashed with the US, its Latin American puppet Colombia's Alvaro Uribe, and the

To reply to Chávez' call simply with negative criticism would be to ignore the burning issue. The working class and the masses of the world do need an International and they need it now

business and landowning élite within Venezuela.

An International tied to such a state would not be a working class International committed to the socialist revolution, but one run by bourgeois nationalists merely dressed up as socialists. If it were to be founded under the aegis of Chávez and his bourgeois regime, then it would never be able to chart a course of class independence. It would become a glorified support mechanism for Chávez, Castro and his other allies. Indeed, it might even include such overtly pro-imperialist enemies of the working class as the Mexican PRI or the Argentinian Peronists (who also figured in Chávez's convention of "left" parties). It should not be forgotten that Chávez recently supported and solidarised with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's brutal repression of the workers, women and youth of



President Hugo Chávez

Iran who were fighting for democratic rights and with Robert Mugabe's prolonged attempts to do the same in Zimbabwe.

In the 21st Century, an era of a severe, indeed a historic, crisis of capitalism, strategic alliances with the "progressive" or "anti-imperialist" or national bourgeoisies, not to speak of a common International of workers and such bourgeois nationalists, would tie the working class hand and foot to a section of capital. It would block the road to the socialist revolution and a programme of working class power. It would repeat the errors and crimes of the Communist International under Stalin. Tying the international to the foreign policy of any particular state, even a workers' state, is no healthy basis for an International.

Workers, peasants and poor

Nonetheless, despite the bourgeois class character of Chávez's project, the Venezuelan president addressed a real need. A need felt by millions of workers, peasants and poor struggling against capitalist exploitation and imperialist rule. In order to repel the bosses' offensives, in order to prevent the governments making the workers pay for the crisis and also to prevent reactionary nationalist "solutions" to it, the working class does indeed need a new, fighting, revolutionary International.

It is vital to respond positively to this need.

Thus to reply to Chávez' call

simply with negative criticism, principled as this might be, would be to ignore the burning issue. The working class and the impoverished masses of the world do need an International and they need it now. They need it to repulse the attempts to make them pay the costs of the crisis. They need it to bring an end to the series of imperialist wars of conquest and occupation. They need it to bring succour to the oppressed nationalities like the Palestinians and the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Chaos for capitalism system

The working class and the oppressed of the whole world are threatened by a period of deepening chaos for the capitalist system. They face massive environmental destruction and new conflicts between the major powers as they try to redivide the natural resources and the exploitable labour of the world, conflicts that can only end in a new world war. They need a global party of socialist revolution, independent of all states and their rulers.

Therefore it is the duty of all who consider themselves anticapitalist, like the NPA in France, all who call themselves revolutionary socialists, communists, Leninists and Trotskyists, to combine forces and to convene a conference of their organisations. Such a conference must discuss an action programme for coordinating our defensive struggles, transforming them into a revolutionary counter-attack against imperialism and capitalism. And it must discuss the types of organisation needed to fight for such a programme.

The League for the Fifth International, which will, if it is able, intervene in Chávez's gathering in 2010, calls on all who support the struggle for a new International based on proletarian class independence and a new revolutionary programme, (whatever name or number they presently give to it) to join forces with us in 2010 to take real steps in this direction.

For more on the Fifth

International go to

www.fifthinternational.org

COLLAPSE OF STALINISM TWENTY YEARS ON

The Romanian Revolution

In December 1989, a revolution swept the hated regime of Nicolae Ceausescu from power. This resolution, written days after these events, explained what happened and what steps the working class had to take next to move towards socialism. Although capitalism was eventually restored in Romania, the revolutionary activity of the working class and youth showed the real potential for socialism to emerge after the downfall of Ceausescu

Eastern Europe's most repressive regime has fallen. Its most hated Stalinist dictator is dead. But the Romanian revolution is not over. Only its first phase is at an end. The most important tasks lie ahead.

The revolution and civil war between 16 and 25 December 1989 was the most courageous uprising against Stalinism since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. From the mass demonstration in support of the persecuted pastor Laszlo Tokes to the formation of the Provisional Government of the National Salvation Front, these were indeed ten days that shook the world.

The hypocrisy of the imperialists' rejoicing at Ceausescu's downfall is staggering. Previously they had calculated that the Kremlin's enemy must be their friend. For decades, he was the West's favourite 'communist'. He was hosted by the President of France and knighted by the Queen of England. His wife was given honorary degrees for bogus scientific talents.

Since 1965, Ceausescu ruled Romania in an increasingly autocratic and brutal style. The internal security force (the Securitate) spied on, harassed and murdered its enemies, whether at home or abroad. No larger machine of terror per head of population existed in any eastern European country.

This level of repression flowed entirely from the "Socialism in One Country" project of the Ceausescu-led caste. On the one side they eschewed military pacts with the USSR and fashioned a political independence from it. On the other, Ceausescu drew Romania back from its growing indebtedness to imperialism, fearing a reaction from the working class.

Consequently, Ceausescu embarked on a more autarkic path; cutting back debt and aiming for self-sufficiency. In a country of few resources, this inevitably involved a great increase in labour discipline and an even more heavy-handed attempt to steer agriculture towards export markets.

Ceausescu's assaults on the workers' standards of living undercut any support for him. His policies of forced destruction of villages and the creation of "agro-industrial complexes" alienated the peasantry still further. The bureaucracy became an isolated caste relying on naked repression alone to rule.

In recent years, this was increasingly directed against sections of the bureaucracy itself. The inner clique grew narrower with Ceausescu's family playing an ever more central role. They

displayed all the traits of the Stalinism of the 1930s: cult of the personality and a failure to comprehend the reality around them.

Having vilified Gorbachev's process of bureaucratic reform after 1985, the Ceausescus went to the wall on Christmas Day, its indirect victims. Slowly, but steadily, the effects of glasnost in nurturing oppositional movements penetrated the borders of Romania. The efforts of the workers of the German Democratic Republic [East Germany] and Czechoslovakia in particular gave hope where none existed before.

The revolution starts

It was natural that the gathering storm should first appear in the border areas amongst ethnic Hungarians, a population with more grievances than many. The students of Timisoara played a vanguard role. Then the workers moved into action. Together, they made the first and heaviest sacrifice for the revolution. They rose in mass support for a local dissident pastor. The security apparatus moved in to quell the movement between the 16 and 18 December and the army joined the fray against the workers and students.

Soon the 500 on the streets turned to 5,000. The Securitate tried desperately to drown the rebellion in blood. But on the 19 and 20 December the workers in the factories around Timisoara went on strike, some threatening to destroy their factories. Some 80,000 took to the streets, stole their first few arms and stood firm.

Faced with this resolve, the first units of the mainly conscript army refused to shoot. Disaffection spread like a bushfire until Bucharest

itself rose. Once again, the students initiated the action and led the storming of key installations.

Under pressure, army chiefs agitated for a return to barracks. They saw their own caste interests as lying in the ousting of the Ceausescu clique and making a pact with the process of "reform". Faced with the "fight to the death" stance of the security services loyal to the clique, reforms could only materialise if the army chiefs sided with the revolution from below. On 22 December, Milea, the Defence Minister, agreed to withdraw troops from the fighting. The Securitate promptly murdered him.

This act finally provoked the bulk of the 140,000-strong army into open revolt, as they sided with the workers and peasants. Open civil war raged across Romania. Dual power was established, especially in the provincial towns and cities, where the workers and peasants set up armed revolutionary committees to fight alongside the army.

The final days of the civil war witnessed the most vengeful actions of the security services loyal to Ceausescu. As the leader and his inner clique fled the retribution of the proletariat, thousands died fighting the Securitate. Finally, Ceausescu was tried and executed by a military tribunal.

There was a new Provisional Government of the "National Salvation Front" (NSF) under Ion Iliescu, a Minister under the old regime up to the mid-1980s but now a well-known Gorbachevite. The NSF had no existence prior to the uprising. It is a loose, politically incoherent coalition of purged bureaucrats, members of the bureaucracy outside the Ceausescu clique, workers and sections of the intelligentsia. Its reported aim is to establish a free market economy and multiparty (bourgeois) democracy out of the ruins of the Stalinist dictatorship.

The imperialist powers are seeking to develop political leverage within the NSF by swift recognition of this unelected government and the deployment of their aid agencies. The Kremlin, by contrast, was cautious in the midst of the storm. In order to prove itself to Washington and Europe, it observed its "non interference pact" even in its own "backyard". It was willing to risk the possibility of a Ceausescu victory. Either way, the Kremlin and the White House can agree: the Romanian revolution must end.

The new government's final physiognomy is



The executed Ceausescu

and the fall of Ceausescu



Tank crews fraternise with people during the Romanian revolution

not yet decided. Although all factions are keen to end the remaining elements of dual power and to disarm the workers and students, it is likely that the most pro-capitalist elements will seek to strengthen their position via the manipulation of popular protests.

The Romanian workers must not be deprived of the fruits of their sacrifice. They must stop the bourgeois-democratic counter-revolution in its tracks. The second phase of the revolution, the proletarian political revolution must now begin.

The revolutionary committees must refuse to give up arms to the forces of "law and order". The armed power of the workers is the only guarantee of further success: of implementing the promised reforms; of rooting out every last agent of the security services now in hiding. The workers must ensure the distribution of arms to the revolutionary committees and form their own militias.

It is urgent that democratic soldiers' committees are built with the right to elect their own officers, to investigate and punish the misdeeds of the previous officers. Arms in hand, the workers must continue the unfinished business of their revolution: the crimes of the old regime must be brought fully to light!

No one will grieve over the summary trial and execution of Ceausescu and his wife. But there are many in the army and NSF who hope that the Ceausescus will carry their secrets to the grave. The workers and poor peasants must not let the crimes of the bureaucracy be buried with the bodies of its leaders!

The revolutionary committees in every town and village must establish elected tribunals to investigate the activities of party bosses and local bureaucrats. People's courts need to deliberate and judge any charges.

After many years of savage repression, new

parties and programmes are emerging. None of them has a strategy to lead the workers and poor peasants to power. The workers, having achieved so much, must not stand aside and let the intelligentsia and discredited Communist Party bosses form the political parties of reconciliation, pro-imperialism and social counter-revolution. The working class needs a revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) party that can consolidate the gains already won and establish proletarian power in Romania.

The revolution starts

Already there are signs that the Romanian workers are taking the talk of democracy seriously. While the NSF appoints a government to speak for the people and promises elections next April, the workers in the factories are beginning to oust hated managers and elect new factory committees. Once again, the workers of Timisoara are in the vanguard.

It is essential that the urban workers lead the revolution in the countryside. The workers must help organise the peasants into revolutionary committees with their own militia in alliance with the workers and soldiers. The peasants' own organisations must be won to the drawing up of a plan for the modernisation of the villages and of agriculture itself. This plan must be integrated into a workers' plan for the entire national economy.

Factory-based workers' organisations must now be linked up with the local revolutionary committees at town, regional and national level. That is the key to further progress in the proletarian political revolution. Workers' and poor peasants' councils must be built in every village and town. Do not leave politics to the politicians, do not entrust the running of the economy to the "professional administrators".

The Romanian workers must hold full power: for a government not of the NSF or National Christian Peasant Party but of the sovereign workers' and poor peasants' councils. No support for the Provisional Government!

While this government remains in office, the revolutionary committees must demand that it recognises their authority and organise an election for a government based on these committees. The government must submit itself to the will of the workers and peasants. It must immediately repeal all the hated laws of the old regime. It must take measures to improve the position of women who, amongst many features of oppression, have been subject to the death penalty for abortion. Romanian women must have full access to free contraception and abortion; for the right to choose!

Ceausescu tried to eliminate religion by bulldozing churches. The only effect was to ensure its survival in the workers' and peasants' homes. Socialists must insist on the full freedom of religious observation, but without any privileges or subsidies by the government for any religious institution. For the strict separation of church and state.

The rural and urban workers must seize control of the factories, offices, banks and means of communication. There must be no privatisation of industry, no sell-offs to imperialists or exiled Romanian bourgeois.

The workers must take control of the central planning organisations. They must draw up a new workers' plan to meet the consumption needs of the masses, to increase equality and open the road to genuine socialism and communism.

The Romanian degenerate workers' state came into existence without the participation of the workers themselves. National minorities (Germans, Hungarians) were imprisoned inside its borders while ethnic Romanians were forcibly incorporated within the USSR in 1940. The political revolution in Romania has had a major effect on all these groups. Their legitimate grievances of many years are finally coming to the surface.

Romanian workers must immediately grant autonomous status to the oppressed nationalities and recognise the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination. For the right of areas in the USSR (Moldavia) with a Romanian majority to unity with the Romanian nation if they so wish.

The heroic actions of the Romanian workers and peasants have shown the path for all republics of the USSR. Not fratricide between national groups but unity against the hated Stalinist bureaucracy. Such must be the lesson for all the peoples of Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Resolution of the International Secretariat of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (forerunner of the LSI)
29 December 1989

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

The SWP is in crisis with a faction fight, expulsions and a major dispute on tactics for the period ahead. **Richard Brenner** surveys the dispute and examines the linked issues of party democracy, the united front, industrial policy and the fight for a new workers' party

Britain's largest socialist group – the Socialist Workers Party – is engaged in a sharp internal struggle in the run up to its national conference in the new year.

The crisis presents both a danger and an opportunity. The danger is that the dispute – accompanied as it has been so far by expulsions, threats and no small measure of political confusion – will demoralise and disorganise a significant proportion of Britain's radical left activists. As a result serious numbers of workers and youth could give up on the most important task of socialists today: building a revolutionary party.

But the opportunity is just as real. It is to use the internal struggle to clarify the political perspectives, tactics and tasks facing socialists

and Claire Solomon in Newcastle and London respectively – have been expelled for factionalism. Such expulsions, in the period just before a conference (the only time when factions are allowed according to the SWP constitution), are a violation of democratic centralism and an attempt to intimidate the membership.

The political content of the dispute centres on the party's application of the policy of the united front, and how the party should relate to the new situation that has opened up in Britain and internationally in the aftermath of the great financial crisis and the recession. The Left Platform argues that the SWP should launch a nationwide united front against the recession – what it tellingly calls “a broad united left organisation on a national scale”. It criticises the majority leadership for its failure to create a campaign that could play a role similar to that undertaken by StWC during the mass opposition to the invasion of Iraq.

The majority, however, says that insufficient attention was given over the past years to recruitment to the SWP itself, and that the minority is living in the past, seeking to continue an approach the party used in an earlier situation to the new conditions today. It rejects the call for a broad nationwide political body to be formed against the recession, and is focused on recruiting workers in struggle to the SWP and building the party's Right to Work front. In a new development, the majority accuses the minority of converting the communist policy of the united front from a tactic into a strategy.

As we shall see below, this is a charge that Workers Power has often made in the past against the SWP's general method, a charge which, until now, the entire SWP has reject-



CRISIS IN THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

today, strengthening the forces of revolutionary socialism in the process.

So what is the crisis about? The faction fight revolves around former central committee members Lindsey German, John Rees and Chris Nineham, who were closely associated with the failed Respect project and are still the main officers of the Stop the War Coalition (StWC). They have formed a faction called the Left Platform, which is proposing an alternative set of perspectives to the SWP's forthcoming national conference.

The majority – with key figures, such as national secretary Martin Smith and Alex Callinicos, the international secretary of the IST, at the helm – are resisting the minority's attempt to change the party's orientation. Activists associated with the Left Platform – Alex Snowden

ed. It is to be hoped that SWP members will rethink the whole issue.

At the same time, the SWP's industrial policy is in crisis. During this autumn's postal dispute – the key industrial battle in Britain today – the SWP's leading member in the post union, CWU President Jane Loftus, broke with the party's policy and voted for the rotten interim agreement that suspended the union's national strikes without securing any significant concessions from Royal Mail.

Unlike Snowden and Solomon, who were expelled for “factionalism”, and in Solomon's case for organising what appears to have been a successful anticapitalist event called Mutiny in east London earlier this year, Loftus was not expelled. The CWU President was asked to

admit her mistake publicly and correct it – refusing to do so, she resigned. The contrast between the SWP's summary expulsion of people who merely criticise the leadership within the party and the lenient treatment of a member who goes over to the side of the trade union bureaucracy and helps them call off a strike is startling.

Finally, in a positive development, a member of the SWP in Glasgow – Graham Campbell – is proposing to the SWP conference that the party take up Workers Power's call for a New Anticapitalist Party (see page 16). While Workers Power does not support everything in the comrade's document motivating his proposal – we specifically oppose his concessions to Scottish nationalism and his proposal for what would in essence be a separate Scottish party – his arguments in favour of our call are welcome and would represent a major step in the right direction by the SWP if they adopted them.

Workers Power has repeatedly urged the SWP, as the largest far left organisation, to follow the example of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) in France and initiate a movement for a new anticapitalist party. The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) has rallied ten thousand militants to its ranks and can play a major role in the resistance to the crisis while debating the fundamentals of strategy. The NPA has certainly not resolved the issues of electoralism or revolutionary strategy and has not yet adopted a consistent anticapitalist programme, but it is debating such issues in the context of common action and a much wider participation by working class militants and youth. That is what the SWP could play a key role in unleashing here.

But a prerequisite is an open and honest internal debate and a democratic conference.

Party democracy and factionalism

The new SWP leadership should be aware that, if they persist with purging the supporters of the minority, it will surely mean the loss of a substantial number of members and not only the supporters of Rees and German. Such unprincipled expulsions always demoralise and dishearten many more than the present active oppositionists. But the SWP majority's leaders are certainly not initiating a new policy by trying to intimidate oppositionists in the period before the organisation's conference. It is an old habit dating back to the 1970s.

The predecessor of the SWP, the International Socialists, underwent a number of internal struggles in that decade. The response of the IS/SWP leadership then was to impose a ban on factions,

except for three months before the conference. The system of elected branch and district leaderships, conferences with a substantial number of delegates, and monthly internal bulletins (IBs) open to all were abolished and replaced with a large number of full-timers, chosen by and replaceable by the Central Committee (CC) alone. The internal debate ended in a series of splits and expulsions including of the Left Faction, which became Workers Power.

It is not true, as libertarians claim, that this is the inevitable result of democratic centralism. Such actions are a violation of democratic centralism that places great emphasis on internal democracy in the run up to a conference. Trotsky summed this up very well:

“Democracy and centralism do not at all find themselves in an invariable ratio to one another. Before a conference, when the problem is one of formulating a political line for the next period, democracy triumphs over centralism. When the problem is political action, centralism subordinates democracy to itself. Democracy again asserts its rights when the party feels the need to examine critically its own actions.”

So to crack down on dissenters just before a conference is a bureaucratic centralist approach. It is evident that, despite the SWP's democracy commission last year, inner-party democracy remains very weak, with few avenues for ordinary members to express their disagreements or to formulate alternative policy to the CC. In reality the only “faction” allowed is the incumbent leadership. Such a system cannot train a loyal, disciplined but critical membership.

Central to the SWP's problems remains its rejection of the very idea of having a party programme. Without such a programme, tactical turns become extremely disruptive. Britain is one of the few countries where it is necessary to ask the question: what is a programme? The Labour Party, for example, never had one. Historical SWP leader Tony Cliff used to mock calls for programme as “a blueprint of a machine gun when what you needed was the gun.” A boomerang of an argument if ever there was one. Yes, in a sense a programme is indeed a blueprint – a blueprint for creating a party that leads the working class to power.

It is a concisely and clearly expressed document that not only states its final goal (workers power – socialism – a classless society), its revolutionary principles and tactical methods – it fuses all these with its perspectives for revolution and the key demands in every major field of the class struggle. Thus its strategy can be measured against those of reformists and those who zigzag between reform and revolution (centrists).

The SWP leadership has lurched into a series of largely pragmatic and increasingly unprincipled political turns

It is thus not only the basis on which people join the party, but also enables them to learn its methods of working apply and test them in daily practice. Only on the basis of this can the membership judge its leadership's tactics – not only from the standpoint of “did they bring success in terms of recruits”, but did they advance the party's influence within the working class and help workers in struggle?

Without such clear and universally understood principles, the SWP leadership has been able to lurch into a series of largely pragmatic and increasingly unprincipled political turns, rarely if ever accounting for failures and outright disasters like Respect. Every time a section of the members tried to criticise these turns, the leadership and its full-timers attacked them as “conservative” and out of touch – accusations designed to minimise the actual political debate in the party over the new line. Usually these members left or were expelled.

If the new leadership had – when it set up the democracy commission – sincerely wished to turn its back on this bureaucratic method, it would not have started a wave of repression before a conference. Even now we would argue with all SWP members, whether they support the political line of the majority or the minority, that they should call on the CC to immediately reverse all the punitive measures taken against its opponents and immediately extend an open and democratic pre-conference discussion with aggregates in every area, with speakers from all viewpoints, weekly internal bulletins and open electronic forums for the members. In addition, they should ensure the election of conference representation with a ratio of members to delegates so that it most accurately reflects the different views.

If this were done, the conference could focus on drawing up an honest balance sheet of the leadership's mistakes over the past period. This would necessarily involve those committed by majority and minority leaders – hopefully in the form of self-criticism as advocated by Lenin and the Communist International.

Wrong conceptions and misapplication of the united front

The dispute on the issue of whether the SWP should form a broad united front against the recession reveals that both the minority and the majority hold to a deep-seated and wrong conception of the Marxist policy of the united front.

The united front is a tactic applied by revolutionaries to attempt to unite the working class in struggle. It applies principally when the revolutionaries are – as today – a minority of the working class, and involves a clear appeal to the

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

reformist workers – to their leaders as well and their rank and file – to join with the revolutionaries in combined action against the bosses. If the reformist leaders refuse, this helps the revolutionaries to expose them to their working class supporters. If they agree – usually under pressure from the masses – it allows the revolutionaries to deepen their joint activity with powerful forces of reformist workers in conditions of a mounting struggle.

Key to the effective use of the tactic is that the proposal is for joint action, in which the revolutionaries maintain full independence at all times, criticise their reformist allies whenever necessary, and break the united front if the latter betray the common struggle. As Leon Trotsky summed it up: “March separately, strike together: please, do both.”

Should socialists in Britain, therefore, have launched a call for a united front against the recession? If we understand the united front in this way, then the answer can only be, yes. But the way the new Left Platform of the SWP poses the issue reveals that what they have in mind is very far from being an effective use of the revolutionary tactic of the united front. Rather, what they are proposing is another example of what both John Rees and Alex Callinicos have theorised as “the united front of a special type”.

Like the SWP, Workers Power has from the onset of the credit crunch and the recession argued for mass strike action and occupations to resist all job losses. The immediate obstacle to this, however, is the bureaucratic trade union leadership. The right wing leaders of Unite, Unison and the GMB are sitting on their hands and mounting no resistance to the jobs massacre, while the left union leaders zigzag between fighting talk and rotten compromises. Yet resistance struggles have burst out – Visteon, Vestas, the post, the bins, and the buses.

A united front tactic must involve a call to bring all this action together in mutual solidarity and work to extend it to the battalions of the big unions and the millions of unemployed. It must be a call addressed to the leaders as well as the rank and file and must be completely practical, so that every reformist worker can see that what the socialists are proposing is indispensable to the success of the struggles.



Questions are being raised by SWP members over the party's strategy and perspectives for struggle

Since we do not expect that the top union leaders will readily coordinate such action, the obvious way to try to unite the strikes is through local and regional committees of action. The solidarity committees that sprung up around Vestas and began to emerge around the post strikes could be extended in this way. Union leaders should be called on to back them and be exposed and strongly criticised if they refuse.

Expanding influence

The power of attraction these bodies would exert if they involved workers in action from different sectors would be enormous. And there is little doubt that, given the strikes that took place this year, the many thousands of activists that SWP members can set in motion would have enjoyed real success in getting such local committees off the ground. Any party that initiated such action would greatly expand its influence and many of those attracted would undoubtedly join it.

But this is not what either faction in the SWP has in mind when debating the united front. The majority, for example, in its argument rejecting the idea of nationwide united front against a recession, says:

“The SWP leadership has argued that simply proclaiming a new mass united front against the recession, donning orange jackets and marching across Britain to protest against unemployment is no guarantee of success.”

It seems the majority, quite as

much as the minority, cannot envisage the united front except as an individual membership campaign, organised and controlled by the SWP, with large rallies and a few friendly union leaders and Labour MPs on the platforms, and out of which the SWP can recruit.

A march across Britain against unemployment is actually a very good idea, but for a single, still relatively small party to try to control it would repeat the errors of the 1980s where the Communist Party kept the “People’s March for Jobs” in a tight bureaucratic stranglehold and the SWP’s “Right to Work Campaign” was not qualitatively better. As a result no mass movement of the unemployed – like that of the early 1930s – was created.

The majority seem to be aware of this when they say that “any such initiative had to have real forces on board if it were to be seen as anything other than a ‘party front’.” And yet the “party front” approach is very much what the majority has launched against the recession: its “Right to Work” campaign. This has held a conference, a demonstration at the Labour Party jamboree in Brighton, and a rally after the demonstration. Union leaders, like Mark Serwotka of the PCS, have spoken on its platforms. But it has not created any actual structures that any forces other than the SWP can meaningfully join at local level to build joint action.

At the Right to Work founding conference, Workers Power mem-

bers proposed that it should form local committees – we pushed for this as part of our fight for local committees of action to fight the effects of the crisis. Now the SWP minority’s perspectives document actually mentions this and observes that our proposal was passed, but not implemented:

“... we have had to start from scratch with every new dispute, instead of having a broad organisation that could carry forward the resources and support from one campaign to the next and help generalise the resistance. To resolve this problem, some comrades campaigned for the launch of a Right to Work campaign. They were opposed in the strongest possible terms by the CC, and one leading comrade even described the idea as ‘Guevarism’. The motion to establish such a campaign was defeated at the Party Council... Yet six days later at the Right to Work conference, which drew 300 people, although they were mostly SWP members, the CC instructed comrades to vote for amendments to the founding document which called for local meetings to be set up and campaigning to start on a nationwide basis. However, this turn to a real campaign has not been carried through in practice. The conference elected a steering committee but the full committee has never met, and the resolution for a nationwide series of public meetings has not been implemented. This has given the Right to Work campaign the character of a party-front, not a genuine united front.”

In fact, over the course of the recent struggles, when Workers Power and others have proposed that the Vestas’ solidarity committees should be broadened into general solidarity committees for all the struggles, or that the post workers’ solidarity committees should do the same, we have been opposed by SWP members who argued that each committee should be limited to a single issue. But now in the face of the faction fight and an upcoming Right to Work conference on 30 January, the majority is executing a late and unconvincing volte face:

“We should be organising ‘Right to Work’ meetings (that pull together key local struggles and campaigns) in every area. Organise ‘Right to Work’ activity in your area such as pickets in support of disputes, stunts over youth unemployment, protests over public sector cuts, and fundraisers for striking workers. We need to organise

broad-based local 'Right to Work' committees in the build up to 30 January to help us mobilise for the conference and organise local activities."

The method is clear. Assemble local activists under the auspices of a national banner of convenience already controlled and run by the SWP, without any democratic structures. This is not unity in action for common goals without pre-conditions – this is absolutely a front campaign. The way forward is to implement the conference resolution and establish local committees that can determine their own activity democratically and that try to knit the disputes together.

What of the minority's approach? Is it any better? Unfortunately not.

The Left Platform's proposal is: "The SWP should commit to spearheading a broad and political united front response to the economic crisis and its effects", and it takes as its model for this past blocs that the SWP has been central to building, like Globalise Resistance (its initiative in the anticapitalist movement in the early years of this decade), StWC, and Respect.

The Left Platform is taking as its model not Lenin and Trotsky's conception of the united front – march separately, strike together – but once again the "united front of a special type". This goes beyond the notion of joint action and seeks to create a "broad political organisation" within which the socialists do not criticise the politics and proposals of their allies, and end up sounding more and more like reformists themselves.

Yet in each of these initiatives, the SWP did not just unite in action with reformists, pacifists and – in the case of Respect – Muslim community leaders

from the propertied classes. They tailored what they said in public to avoid criticising their allies, while seeking to secure influence within these blocs, not by politically challenging the ideas of their allies, but by manipulating the structures of the organisations.

Quasi-party

This was most obvious in Respect, in which the SWP ended up establishing a quasi-party with a programme that was devoid of socialism so as not to offend Muslim community leaders, behind whom stood the community businessmen and women.

You don't even have to imagine what the minority's "broad united left organisation" against the recession would look like. Around the time of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, Rees and German hosted an SWP rally in central London fronted by bourgeois economist and Keynesian Graham Turner and the BBC Newsnight's Paul Mason speaking on the crisis. No one from the platform and no SWP member from the floor advanced a Marxist analysis of the crisis. The "allies" were politically in the driving seat and only Keynesian and bourgeois solutions, such as cutting interest rates and increased regulation, were advanced. This was a sign of things to come if the Rees proposal had been adopted: a "broad" political organisation offering an mélange of Keynesian and reformist "solutions" to the crisis.

The essence of the minority's wrong approach to the united front is clearly stated in their document. They define the united front in the following way: "For Lenin and Trotsky the strategy of the united front was essential to advancing the

interests of the working class. A united front unites broad layers of people around shared demands and simultaneously provides the conditions for the revolutionary party to flourish and grow."

On the contrary, Marxists believe that the united front is a tactic, to unite revolutionary and non-revolutionary workers and their organisations in struggle for common objectives. It does not and should not involve revolutionaries mixing up their political message with that of their non-revolutionary allies or issuing joint propaganda with them.

It is interesting that, in the course of arguing against the minority, the majority actually attack them for calling the united front a "strategy": "Strictly speaking, if one consults the classic discussions of the united front in the early Communist International and the writings of Trotsky and Gramsci, these tend to refer to the united front as a tactic (or, as Trotsky sometimes puts it, a 'policy'). The elevation of a tactic, however important, into a strategy is an instructive slip of the keyboard on the comrades' part."

Yet this "slip of the keyboard" is far from exclusive to the minority. On the contrary, the whole leadership has been arguing throughout the decade that the united front is a strategy – and prospective CC member and majority supporter Joseph Choonara in 2007 actually opened an article in *International Socialism* no. 117 with those exact words: "The united front is a strategy."

What is needed is neither a Right to Work party front nor a Rees-German model bloc in which the revolutionaries adapt their arguments to those of Keynesian reformists.

What is needed is the genuine tactic of the united front, in which the socialists fight for joint action, joint committees to link up the struggles at every level, addressed to the whole movement, leaders and members, and brought into being wherever we can. Within such bodies revolutionaries don't try to dominate and control through organisational means, but fight for a programme of action that can take the struggles forward and win.

Crucially this means fighting to take the control of the current disputes out of the hands of the union leaders and into the hands of the rank and file.

It means criticising the union leaders if they refuse unity and, if they accept, for any backsliding from their commitments. In all cases it means being eager to work alongside and help reformist workers organise in a thoroughly democratic way with no behind the scenes manipulation which can only discredit revolutionaries in the long run. This way a revolutionary organisation can grow into a party.

For more on the SWP go to www.fifthinternational.org/

Both the minority and the majority hold to a deep-seated and wrong conception of the Marxist policy of the united front



Above, SWP national secretary Martin Smith and, below, John Rees – now at loggerheads over the organisation's future



LATIN AMERICA

Tensions increase between

The threat of war looms in South America as Colombia and Venezuela clash. *Tim West* looks at what is behind the drive to war and what the tasks of revolutionaries should be

Bloody clashes between Venezuelan and Colombian troops have occurred on the border between the two countries. In November, two Venezuelan soldiers were killed, apparently by paramilitary hit men who had entered from Colombia. Eight Colombians were also killed: innocent civilians according to the government of President Alvaro Uribe; a paramilitary squad according to Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

Hugo Chávez responded by calling on Venezuelans to "prepare themselves for war", but later excused his remarks as simply a quotation of the maxim: "If you want peace, prepare for war."

Although the two countries are major trading partners, the relationship between the regimes has been deteriorating since the Colombian army killed FARC rebel leader, Raul Reyes, in Ecuador in 2008. This threatened to spiral into a military confrontation between Ecuador, supported by Venezuela, and Colombia.

Alvaro Uribe is the US's most loyal servant in Latin America, and has recently signed an agreement for seven new US military bases in his country.

This is part of Obama's "re-orientation" to Latin America after the Bush years, when US foreign policy was focused on the Middle East and Central Asia. But it is no surprise that most South American states – including less radical ones like Lula's Brazil – see these bases as a potential base for a new period of US meddling in their countries affairs.

During the eight years of Bush's Presidency, governments in the region felt free to increase their anti-US rhetoric, the most radical being Chávez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia. Venezuela and Cuba initiated the ALBA bloc (ALBA, Dawn in Spanish, is an acronym for the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) as an alternative to the US dominated Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). These two countries have been joined by Morales, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and three Caribbean states.

Obama in Latin America

Obama came to power knowing that Latin America its traditional "backyard" – needed to be brought back into order. To do so he combines "dialogue" with more outright coercion.

For example, Obama's rhetorically condemned the coup in Honduras while behind the scenes the US embassy gave it logistical support. His diplomatic efforts to reach a "compromise" whereby all the aspirations of the Honduran masses (particularly for a constituent assembly)



Alvaro Uribe does Obama's bidding

world be thwarted and Zelaya would not return as president indicates what the "good neighbour" policy amounts to. The corrupt and autocratic Honduran elite – landowners, business executives and military chiefs – are the instruments of US rule in the Central American semi-colony. Obama intends to keep it that way.

Together with the issue of the bases in Colombia, these examples show to the working masses of Latin America how hypocritical and

Colombia is acting as an agent of US imperialism, which uses the Uribe regime to help it police the region and encourage divisions between the working people of Venezuela and Colombia

cynical is Obama's claim to be a "change" from the Bush era.

One of the pillars of both the US and the European imperialists' approach to Latin America has been their close relationship with Brazil. However, this hasn't been free of problems: for example, Lula has asked for guarantees that US

military bases in Colombia will only be used "for Colombia's internal security".

Lula recently signed an arms deal with France, which represents the aspiration of that country's ruling class to increase its clout as a regional power. The Brazilian ruling class plainly feels insulted that it wasn't even consulted on the Colombian bases and is worried that the Pentagon may be planning some sort of "regime change" in Venezuela that could misfire and radicalise the whole continent.

But Lula has no answer to the US making "facts on the ground". To sign a mutual defence pact with Venezuela, for example, would mean he was jumping into the camp of the populist radicals and open him to internal destabilisation by the US and its Brazilian ruling class agents.

This inability of the Latin American ruling classes, even the so-called radicals, to effectively defend the most basic democratic rights against their US masters, was shown in Honduras. The Organisation of American States (OAS) negotiations in Costa Rica served only to shore up and legitimise the murderous coup and help Manuel Zelaya and his allies to channel the discontent of the masses into the negotiation room where they have been repeatedly frustrated. This has also been Chávez and the ALBA bloc's approach, as they too accepted "negotiations", themselves entertaining illusions that Obama's intervention could mean a restoration of democracy for the Honduran people.

As a result Chávez and his allies did not mobilise a region-wide action against the coup in Honduras. In fact only if Chávez, Morales and co had called for the masses to protest on the streets, across the continent, targeting not only Honduran embassies but the US ones might Obama have felt obliged to insist on Zelaya's return to power. But the response of the Alba states was feeble in the extreme.

This all confirms Trotsky's analysis that the ruling classes of semi-colonial countries cannot, despite the fact that some leaders like Chavez may genuinely believe they are "anti-imperialist", resolve the most basic democratic tasks such as independence from imperialism.

This because their class position forces them to constantly demobilise the only social force capable of defeating imperialism – a revolutionary movement of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry and the urban poor.

An example of this in Venezuela is the increasingly anti-democratic, or to use the precise Marxist term "bonapartist", right turn by the Chávez regime. Over the last year or so the Chávez gov-

Venezuela and Colombia



Colombia accused Venezuelan soldiers of blowing up a footbridge on the border

ernment has been trying to discipline the working class, impeding its right to organise independently of the state and the regime. We have already seen how the state has carried out repressions, either directly or through state governors, of workers at factories such as SIDOR and Sanitarios Maracay, both of which saw brutal armed repression by the state forces and many injuries and arrests, and the latter of which saw two workers killed.

The Chávez government has also proposed repressive laws, equating the just struggles of the working class with the actions of the right-wing coup-mongers: for example heavy prison sentences for activities which disrupt 'political equilibrium' or penalising strikes that sabotage the working of a state company with a prison sentence of up to 10 years and backed up by a threat to use the intelligence services on any "agitators".

This is a regime where 2,200 worker, peasant and student activists are estimated to be facing court proceedings and where the government couldn't stop a spate of killings by private hit men of six trade union activists earlier this year. It is scandalous that some groups claiming to be Trotskyist regard Chávez as the builder of "21st Century socialism."

US military bases and imperialism – out of Latin America now!

Despite all this, socialists should not fall for the hypocrisy of the Uribe regime in Colombia that accuses Venezuela's government of trying to shore up "national unity" at a time of crisis by identifying an external enemy. One phrase that has been bandied about is that this is Chavez's "Malvinas moment". We cannot equate Chavez's left bourgeois populism with Uribe's

government, the most reactionary and pro-imperialist in the region.

The truth is that Colombia is acting as an agent of US imperialism, which uses the Uribe regime to help it police the region and encourage divisions between the working people of Venezuela and Colombia.

Uribe's regime received massive aid increases during the Bush years under the "Plan Colombia" and "Plan Patriota" projects and, like Israel, used the same logic of the "pre-emptive strike" to justify its aggression towards its neighbours, such as the use of Colombian troops in Ecuador in the Raul Reyes case.

It also has domestically a long history of assassinations and massacres.

The "dirty war" carried out by the army and paramilitaries has directly killed thousands of peasants, trade union leaders, workers and political activists, and is not far off the tactics of state terrorism practiced by the region's sinister military dictatorships of the 1970's.

The regime is also responsible for the expulsion of thousands of peasants from their land, the surrender of Colombia's natural resources to the multinationals and signing of economic, political and military pacts with imperialism that have tightened yet further the stranglehold which the US has on the country.

What's more, Uribe is linked to sectors of the drugs cartel and the so-called para-police of Colombia. Fourteen of Uribe's supporters in the legislature (and six from other parties) are in jail for their links to the paramilitaries, and a number of high ranking officials have had to leave their command.

During 2008 more than 50 politicians were involved in legal scandals and photos of Uribe

himself with paramilitaries on his 2002 election bus were revealed, and he was accused of giving support to the formation of paramilitary groups while governor of Antioquia in the mid-1990's. The Colombian state has been armed to the teeth by the US: it has more than 400,000 full-time members of the army, air force and marines, while Venezuela has less than 50,000.

In Colombia, even before the installation of the seven bases, US marines and private mercenaries already operate openly, and there are three bases in place (at Tres Esquinas, Florencia and Villavicencio). It is no coincidence that the most repressive country in the region is the one that receives the most US aid.

Clearly the working class and progressive forces worldwide must come to the aid of Venezuela if it is attacked or provoked by Colombia. But we should not entertain any illusions in Chávez, who for all his bold anti-imperialist words, has during over ten years in government, refused to nationalise most US business interests in his country.

Permanent Revolution

The Latin American masses have historically showed their heroism in fighting imperialism and its agents at home, the oligarchies. What is needed for them to triumph is for the class organisations of the proletariat to come to the head of these struggles. We only need to look at the recent history of Venezuela to see this – a multinational such as SIDOR was nationalised after 14 months of struggle by its workers who had to overcome state repression, although Chávez ended up paying millions in compensation to the bosses.

It was the oil workers who were decisive in defeating the 2002 attempted coup against Chávez, first by going on strike against the military regime and later by running the state oil company PDVSA themselves in the face of a bosses lockout.

The pressing task of the working class is to organise the broadest movement possible across the whole region against the installation of the US bases in Colombia. The working class internationally must be ready to unconditionally defend Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and other Latin American states if the US and the reactionary state allies or internal elites try to launch military coups, cross border provocations, or new economic blockades.

All those in Latin America who want to see the region liberated from imperialism, need to fight for the working class to realise its full potential and take up the leadership of the mass movement with a programme for the revolutionary transformation of society.

For this it will need to create revolutionary parties of the vanguard of the ongoing struggles, united in a revolutionary working class Fifth International, independent of populist presidents and the capitalist state.

MIDDLE EAST

Palestine must be free



Palestinians protest against security fences and walls in Gaza

A year after Israel bombarded Gaza, *Kam Kumar* looks at the continuing siege of Palestinians

It has been a year since Israel's brutal and horrific attack on Gaza, in which one of the most densely populated areas in the world was bombed every single day for three weeks. Those left in Gaza dealing with the consequences of war, certainly do not have an existence anything close to a "life" in any meaningful sense.

More than 1.5 million people still live under a full siege, with no means of getting in or out. The Red Cross estimates that 80 per cent of people in Gaza live below the poverty line, while 85 per cent are dependent on foreign aid – for such essentials as food, sanitation and other basic necessities.

However, Israel's blockade of Gaza often means that even these supplies are not allowed in. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that growth-stunting malnourishment is increasing, and now affects more than 10 per cent of Gaza's children.

Israel has even severely reduced the amount of water that can get pumped into Gaza, in what amounts to a calculated and genocidal attempt to starve the Gazans into submission.

It is worth remembering just how mercilessly the Gaza strip,

where 1.5 million people live on land 25 miles long and five miles wide, was attacked between December 2008 and January 2009.

- More than 8,000 homes were destroyed.
- Israel used F-19 jets to drop thousands of tons of bombs – causing the deaths of 1,400 Palestinians, 314 of them children.
- Deliberate massacres were committed, such as the bombing of 43 refugees taking shelter in Fakhura United Nations school in Jabaliya refugee camp, on 6 January.
- The Red Cross estimated that 5,380 people were injured, of which 30 per cent were permanently disabled.
- Up to 50,000 people were left needing psychological support.
- NGOs were prevented from bringing medical aid to the wounded, and were themselves subject to harassment and attack by the Israeli forces.

Gaza has been under siege since June 2007. Israel's sanctions cover agricultural goods, concrete and steel, meaning that homes, hospitals and schools cannot be rebuilt. Gaza is totally dependent on Israel for water, electricity and gas. When Palestinians have attempted to

break the dependence on Israel, they are met with brutality. In 2006 Israel even bombed the independent electric power station that supplied almost half of the Gaza strip of its electricity.

While people were being killed and made homeless, the newly elected Obama said nothing about the attacks, and later even reassured Israel in a speech in Cairo that the United States and Israel still had a "special bond". However, mass protests erupted in outrage across the world, with hundreds of thousands showing solidarity with Gaza. This saw a revival of the anti-war movement in this country, with a new militancy seen in the university occupations, in confrontations with police and in the huge numbers of youth taking to the streets.

Meanwhile, the oppression of Palestinians in the West Bank continues. Under US pressure, Israel has approved a temporary 'restriction' of new settlements for a 10-month period – not even one year! About 500,000 settlers live in the West Bank and around Jerusalem alongside 2.7 million Palestinians. This restriction is not a complete freeze, and excludes East Jerusalem, which Palestinians want to be their capital. It also excludes new build-

ing projects already started.

The settlers enjoy apartheid-style privileges, where they live in exclusive housing, use special "Jews-only" roads and enjoy a freedom of movement denied to the Palestinians. They even have fresh water pumped to them and away from Palestinians who live on the same land.

Settler violence against Palestinians is also rife. Building new settlements is part of an overall Israeli policy of land grabbing, breaking the Palestinians up into tiny enclaves, and ensuring that the territory controlled by them can never become anything like a state.

Palestinians have been betrayed and sold out by PA president Mahmoud Abbas ever since he came to office. Significantly, his latest betrayal was precisely on the issue of Israel's bombardment of Gaza. He caused outrage in October when he tried to delay the endorsement of a United Nations report investigating Israel's actions, which could have led to prosecutions of Israeli ministers and officials for war crimes. This has further helped to prove to the Palestinian people, if proof were needed, that Abbas' corrupt and undemocratic government is a collaborator with Israel against its own people.

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 organisation.

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 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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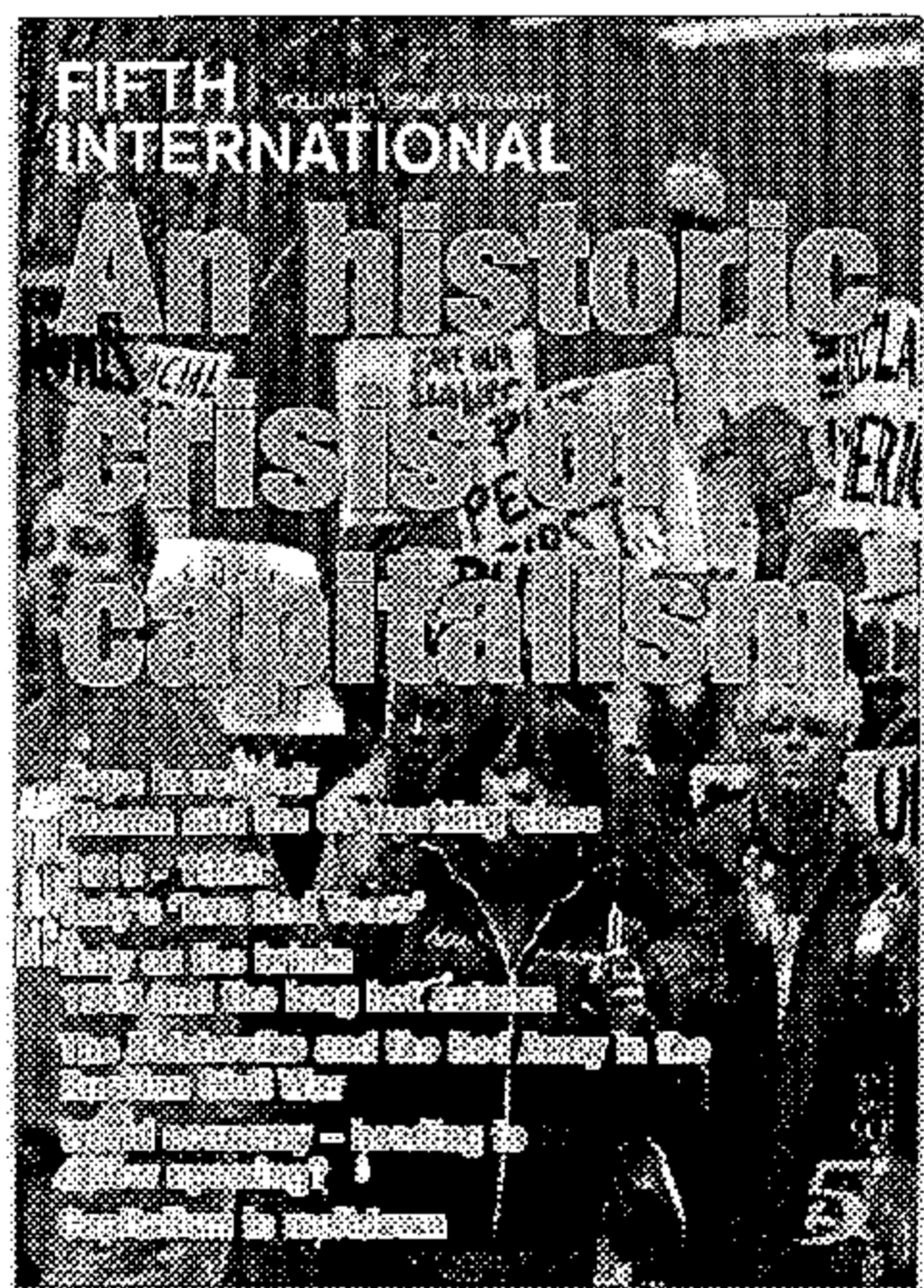
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The fight for a Fifth International

By Simon Hardy

In the last twenty years resistance to corporate capitalism and imperialism, with its wars of conquest and occupation, once again assumed a truly global scale. Ten years ago in Seattle we witnessed the first of series of militant sieges of summits, called to force through globalisation and its pro-business agenda.

Vast mobilisations took place against meetings of the global financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, and against the G7 summits of the imperialist countries. Continental and World Social Forums, cross-border protests, and joint days of action drew hundreds of thousands. All these helped change the shape and scale of the class struggle.

Despite a temporary setback after 9/11 when the US and its British ally bombed and occupied Afghanistan, which met with limited protests, a wave of global mass actions erupted when they used the lie that Saddam Hussein had "weapons of mass destruction" as a pretext for seizing Iraq and its oil riches. They were initiated by the European and World Social Forums and reached a high point on 15 February 2003, when 20 million marched across the globe against the impending attack on Iraq.

This – the highest level of coordinated anti-imperialist action in human history – showed the idea of internationalism, for decades little more than an aspiration of the most militant and far-sighted activists, had become a practical reality, influencing and strengthening resistance everywhere.

The League for the Fifth International issued a call for a new world party in 2003: "Internationalism has shaken the planet - now it must change it. To transform the imperialist 'War on Terrorism' into a global war on imperialist terror, to set millions in motion against the system that causes war, our networks, forums and co-ordinations need to take a new and bold step: the formation of a Global Party of Socialist Revolution – the Fifth International."

We took this call to the hundreds of thousands that continued to assemble in the Social Forums. We issued our call to the trade unions and anticapitalist initiatives, to the working class parties that actually took to the streets against neoliberalism, capitalism and war.

We argued for forming the new Interna-

tional not in the distant future but in the months and years ahead.

The response by many of the leading figures of the movement was that a new International is not needed. Instead we only needed to think globally but organise locally or nationally. In the age of imperialism when political questions rapidly take on a global significance, the short sightedness of this approach is clear to see. It also implies that socialists should not concern themselves with the struggles of people abroad, apart from the usual displays of solidarity.

Hugo Chávez' call for a Fifth International offers an excellent opportunity to popularise the idea of a new world party of socialist revolution

Others argued that the International must be "pluralistic", by which they meant composed of reformists, revolutionaries, anarchists and so on. Whilst it may indeed go through such a stage, where it attracts activists from all different radical political backgrounds, in order for it to succeed as a revolutionary International it must have a clear programme, combative parties and an international leadership. This will certainly mean a fight between the different political tendencies.

Hugo Chávez' call for a Fifth International in November 2009 offers an excellent opportunity to popularise the idea of a new world party of socialist revolution. As many socialists as possible should intervene, fighting for a clear revolutionary perspective. In contrast to Chávez' "21st century socialism" in Venezuela, which is in fact a mixed economy of welfare state and big corporations, socialists call for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its state, for workers' control of industry and a planned economy. Chávez conceives of the Fifth International as a support mechanism for his régime and its policies. But he will find that the revolutionary impulses of the masses will outstrip his limited notions of socialism.

The Fifth International must be a mass International, not composed of small groups and associations, but organising the vanguard of mass struggles across the world. In this sense it must be like the Second and Third Internationals before their political collapse. And learning from the fate of the Second International we must break from all those who rule on behalf of, or support the capitalist class and its state. Its parties must be the democratic centralist combat organisations Lenin created and which the early Third International tried to spread to the whole world. But its fate after Stalin took power is also a warning to all of us that bureaucratism and collaboration with supposed "anti-imperialist" or "antifascist" bourgeois regimes will weaken the independence of the workers and lead to historic defeats, as it did in the 1920s and 1930s.

Finally, the call for a Fifth International is important, because it recognises the historical legacy of Trotsky's Fourth International. The Fourth International never took on mass proportions, although its militants heroically participated in and occasionally led mass movements and revolutionary struggles. The Fourth International failed after the Second World War and, even though it exists today, it is politically a shadow of what Trotsky intended. Now it recognises the futility of its own existence and seeks to join a new International, should one be set up which is significant enough.

Chávez explicitly recognised the Fourth International in calling for a Fifth. He has praised Trotsky's Permanent Revolution and waved a copy of Lenin's State and Revolution in the air at his conference. But can he, as the president of a state machine that still defends capitalism, have understood it? The fundamental lesson of the 20th century was that socialism could not come about through reforms within capitalism. The state must be smashed and a new working class semi-state of workers' councils set up. Chávez could usefully start by halting police repression against striking and occupying workers in his own country, Venezuela.

The Fifth International is a vital weapon in the hands of the world working class and its allies. Its historic mission will be to overthrow capitalism and oppression across the world. It needs to be built, and it needs to be built on a revolutionary basis. Everyone who is committed to this project should join us in this fight.