

permanent revolution

The split in the League for a Fifth International

Another new group with a new publication? How did it come about? In the statement below we explain the recent history of a political struggle in the LFI and Workers Power Britain that led to the expulsion of 30% of the members of the LFI and nearly half of Workers Power. The political issues discussed here are of interest to all anticapitalists in the world today.

On Saturday 1 July 33 members of the LFI in Britain, Australia, Ireland and Sweden (30% of the LFI membership) were expelled by the International Secretariat (IS) of the League. They were all members of an International Faction (IF) that had been formed in the run up to the League's 7th Congress in July.

The formation of the IF was a culmination of a two-year long struggle beginning in Workers Power Britain (WPB) and extending into the League. That struggle was around perspectives and tactics. The majority perspectives adopted at the 2003 congress, and many of the tactics deployed by the organisation on the basis of these perspectives, were wrong, especially around the use of the slogan of a Fifth International within the anti-capitalist movement.

The errors in those perspectives became glaringly apparent in the years following the Congress. Yet the majority clung to them as though they were articles of faith. Perspectives were being transformed into doctrine and real developments in the class struggle and the economy were ignored wherever and whenever they contradicted the majority's "perspective". The political struggle to correct these errors became increasingly bitter, especially in WPB. That struggle has resulted in the current split.

Differences over period

The 2003 Congress of the LFI decided that globalisation had exhausted all of its economic potential, that world capitalism had entered a phase of stagnation and that the political situation could be characterised as a worldwide "pre revolutionary period". The IF challenged this view, arguing that world capitalism was benefiting from the collapse of the Stalinist states and the consequent opening up whole new markets and cheap labour for imperialist exploitation in China, Central Europe and Russia.

This had allowed imperialism, in the age of globalisation, to offset the structural crises of capitalism. We pointed out that global GDP had doubled in the last ten years and that the upward swings of the business cycles since 1993 had been strong, while the down phases had been relatively shallow and unsynchronised – hardly symptoms of crisis and stagnation.

For our part, we do not believe that capitalism has overcome its tendency to structural crisis. We continue to assert that imperialism is the epoch of wars and

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Morales and the Bolivian revolution

Bolivia went to the polls on Sunday 2 July to elect a Constituent Assembly (CA). The President Evo Morales has promised a new constitution that will allow radical reform. *Stuart King* looks at his record so far and whether the CA is likely to deliver.

Evo Morales, and his party the Movement for Socialism (MAS), are riding high in the opinion polls. The President had been getting 70% plus approval ratings after five months in office and he was hoping for a victory in the CA elections that would give him a two-thirds majority to push through a new constitution.

The results in fact gave the MAS only 53% of the seats. In a simultaneous referendum on autonomy in the country's nine provinces – something opposed by Morales – four, including wealthy Santa Cruz, voted for more autonomy. This will strengthen the right wing who want to use autonomy to thwart Morales' plans.

A new and radical constitution, Morales has argued, is the key to unlocking the "padlock" which has kept him from taking more radical measures in the interest of the poor and oppressed. The CA now has 12 months to draw one up.

Mass movement erupts

Morales came to power as the result of a mass revolt against neoliberalism and poverty. Having driven several presidents from office and some of the multinationals, who ran privatised water and other services, out of the country, the mass movement was instrumental in getting Morales elected in December last year.

The struggle pushed Morales left. Initially he was against the key demand of the mass movement, nationalisation of the massive gas

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revolutions. We do not, and none of our members has ever advocated Kondratiev's long waves, as the LFI statement of 1st July asserts. But following Trotsky we do recognise there are longer periods in the world economy, which decisively shape the duration, length and depth of the business cycle.

We recognised the need to open and develop a discussion about world capitalism today since it so clearly bore little resemblance to the picture painted in the majority's political perspectives. Unfortunately this attempt at a scientific debate was greeted with insults – we were “pessimists” who “welcomed good news for capitalism”.

We also argued that the working class, internationally, had moved from a period of international defeats (1980-95) to a period of recovery. But we did not mistake a period of recovery for a period of rude health. We recognised that in major sections of the international workers' movement militant organisations had not yet been rebuilt. Traditions

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of struggle and solidarity had not yet been become widespread. The legacy of the former defeats was still a weapon used by the reformist bureaucracies to hinder or hamper the struggles of today.

In short we believe that we are in a period of transition in world politics. We think the recovery has been uneven. In parts of the world, Japan, Britain, USA, Scandinavia, Russia, the trade unions and workers have remained on the defensive. In other areas – Latin America, France, Greece, the Middle East the struggle against neoliberalism, war and oppression has taken on major proportions. Unevenness and recovery have marked the world class struggle and these differing class struggle situations could not be swept away by simply declaring “a world pre-revolutionary situation”.

Because we were prepared to say this, the Majority yell in their 1st July statement: “they systematically ignored or grossly underestimated the strengths and scale of the movements

resisting neo-liberalism and imperialist war, regarding them as dead or as good as dead”. This gives a flavour of the caricatures and histrionics that marked the leadership's polemics against us in the latter period of the political struggle in the LFI.

The anticapitalist movement

Central to the 2003 Congress perspective was the idea that the “flowering of the anti-capitalist movement”, marking the new pre-revolutionary period, made the founding of a new Fifth International an immediate prospect. It meant “forming the new International as soon as possible – not in the distant future but in months or years”. The vehicle for this became the World Social Forum and its regional bodies, like the ESF, and a local social forum movement modelled on Italy. This was where “important elements of the new International were taking shape”.

In the years that followed 2003 this proved to be a completely wrong perspective. The anti-summit protests went into crisis after the repression of Gothenburg and Genoa (2002), the Italian social forum movement collapsed. In the two years following the Florence ESF in 2002, the WSF and the ESF turned further right under the leadership of the Brazilian PT, Italian RC, the PDS of Germany, (parties that joined or ran neo-liberal national or local governments).

These parties blocked all attempts to turn the ESF/Assembly of Social Movements into a co-ordinating body of struggle, let alone into a new revolutionary international. The Majority refused to recognise that the ESF/WSF has become an obstacle, not a vehicle, for the construction of a revolutionary International. Indeed it declared that, “We will not demand that the mass organisations within the ESF and allied international forums must first ditch their reformist and post Stalinist leaders before they can form a new international.” A new revolutionary international led by the likes of the Rifondazione's Bertinotti!

In truth the task of the day was to rally the best revolutionary elements, especially from amongst the radicalised youth and militant union organisations in this important movement, against the leadership and against very purpose that the reformists had now established for the WSF/ESF – an international talking shop which they could use to refurbish their left credentials. The Majority could not say this because they thought it was an embryonic international, they could not fulfil the Marxist duty to say “what is” – that this movement had to be split into

competing trends if a revolutionary international was to come about.

Instead the LFI leadership declared that “we were nearer the tasks Marx faced at the beginning of the First (international) than Trotsky in 1938.” That is, nearer to refounding the International as a united front with reformist leaders, but in this case where the revolutionary Marxists were an insignificant minority with little influence. The analogy with the First International was laughable. What was being proposed was an echo of the call made in the 1980s for a new international in which Trotskyists would be in the minority, a call popularised by the Argentinean centrist leader at that time, Nahuel Moreno.

This new strategy for the LFI was accompanied by a turn away from argument and discussion with leftward moving groups, often from the Fourth International tradition, and from the fight for revolutionary regroupment. The LFI was no longer interested in the “tiddlers” and “sectarians” who did not recognise the potential of the WSF/ESF. It was now able to address the masses gathering in an embryonic international.

But the LFI was a tiny organisation with little implantation in the global workers’ movement. The masses at the WSF/ESF had not responded to its shrill calls to form the Fifth International in the months or years following the 2003 call. Indeed no allies amongst other organisations had been found to unite with to fight for the Fifth International – or even take the next step in that direction. The leadership ignored these stubborn facts. It was now substituting delusion and schema for accurate perspectives and revolutionary tactics.

The perspective of a pre-revolutionary period and the assembling of forces for a new international in the ESF movement in the short term, led the Majority declaring that the London ESF in 2004 would present “unparalleled opportunities to transform, radicalise and re-organise class politics in Britain”. We said it wouldn’t, especially given the weakness of the anti-capitalist movement in Britain and the low level of trade union and class struggle. We were proved right but the Majority pressed on.

Building “local social forums in every town and city” (social forums were seen as part of the fight for proto soviet organisations in the pre revolutionary period worldwide) became a “key slogan”. The social forum “movement” – which didn’t actually exist – nevertheless became a key area of work.

Even after the dramatic decline of the mass anti-war movement in Britain the majority retained the slogan of building social forums. It had no resonance and was a complete failure wherever we tried to implement it. This slogan, along with the call for a National Social Forum, was only dropped after the small turnout at the

Gleneagles G8 summit siege showed how weak the movement was in Britain. But even at the point the LFI majority leaders insisted we had been wrong to oppose the slogan. The majority could not accept that the minority were right on anything. They were becoming impervious to all criticism.

The Workers’ Party and tactics towards reformism

Another area of difference, one that primarily affected the British section, concerned tactics towards reformism.

WPB had historically taken a critical electoral support position towards the Labour Party. We regarded Lenin’s description of the Labour Party as a “bourgeois workers party” – a party with a bourgeois reformist programme and leadership but with a working class base mainly through the affiliated trade unions – as correct and still accurate.

The united front – placing demands on Labour, trying to win its working class supporters to struggle and revolutionary politics, and mobilising reformist workers in a fight with their leaders, inside and outside the Labour Party – is still a crucial tactic in our view. Critical electoral support was part of this tactic – gaining a hearing with reformist workers, putting their party to the test of office, winning these workers to a revolutionary alternative.

This was a tactic not a strategy – if we had been larger we would have stood revolutionary candidates against Labour. We supported “class struggle candidates” where workers in struggle represented a real break from Labour and stood against the party. We actively supported and helped build the Socialist Alliance (SA). One of our faction’s members was a parliamentary candidate for it in Greenwich while another was on the SA’s executive.

Part of this struggle against Labour reformism was a fight to democratise the political fund. This was designed to break Labour’s monopoly hold on TU political funds and allow unions nationally and locally to fund and support other working class political parties as well as Labour – like the SSP in Scotland. This was the position WP argued for in the SA and was a tactic the Alliance used with some success with many faction members playing a leading role in mobilising a thousand strong trade union conference on the issue.

In the last two years, against our opposition, WP has abandoned all of these positions. It now calls on trade unionists to disaffiliate from Labour even though there is no “workers’ party” to affiliate to. This is a recipe for encouraging the growth of apolitical trade unionism – a danger that now faces the FBU since its disaffiliation

from Labour. The WPB leadership calls for a general abstentionist position in elections – calling on workers not to vote is somehow “relating to the vanguard”.

Worse, in one document they went so far as to say WPB was not “putting demands on Labour in this conjuncture.” So, no demands on them to repeal anti-unions laws, anti-asylum seeker laws and so on? This was getting ludicrous.

Rejecting critical electoral support was even the case where there was a real threat of fascist gains. While the UAF called on people to vote anyone but the BNP, WPB tells workers threatened with a fascist council election victory not to bother to vote at all!

Of course, we don't think voting Labour will defeat fascism. We need to defeat them on the streets and through a fight for a real revolutionary alternative to capitalism. But we do think it is necessary – indeed it is an elementary united front tactic – to block them building an electoral base for fascism wherever we can. If a revolutionary candidate or a serious candidate of struggle is not standing we should critically support Labour under such circumstances.

The Majority's statement on the split tries to make out that because we take this position we are “soft on Labour”. Far from it. The argument over the workers' party was about how to relate to both the vanguard who are deeply disillusioned with Labour and, at the same time, to the mass of organised workers and trade unionists who still vote Labour against the Tories. Many of these workers have illusions in Gordon Brown or other left figures and campaigns in the Labour Party.

The RMT, for example, which has been kicked out of the Labour Party nevertheless continues to support politically and financially left wing Labour MPs.

With the collapse of the Socialist Alliance, the diversion of many of its militants into a populist, non-socialist alternative, Respect, and a continuing low level of trade union struggle in Britain, we did not think the workers' party tactic was a central one to use in the current situation. In the absence of substantial organised trade union forces driving for a new party we thought it would have little resonance as an operative tactic – no more resonance in fact than the clear and straightforward idea that the party that workers needed was a revolutionary party.

There was no short cut to this goal, no quick fix via a “new mass workers' party”, and it remained vital to engage with vanguard militants on the need to join with us in the fight to build a revolutionary party.

We think the severely muted response, around the country, to the launch of the Socialist Party's Campaign for a New Workers Party (barely a regional or town meeting over 60 people and often a lot less) confirms that this tactic is not

useful for revolutionaries at the moment. Yet this has now become the central, “over-arching” campaigning work of WPB, the key, unifying element of the group's agitation.

The IS asserts that because we opposed the new workers' party tactic politically, the IF in WPB “boycotted the areas of work that they did not approve of, like campaigning for a new workers' party.”

In fact at union national conferences (Unison, NUT, Natfhe, for example) it was IF members who loyally pressed the case, and faction members initiated or were involved in campaign launches in Sheffield, South Wales and south London.

Finally and ironically, abandoning critical support was never applied to LFI sections in Sweden or the Czech Republic where the League continued to advocate a vote for neo-liberal social democratic parties that have been in power for many years.

The new turn to agitation

The Majority paints a picture of the IF resisting a new turn to agitation, that we “attempt to move the League firmly in the direction of passive propagandism and a discussion circle existence.” Moreover, we are an “embittered” group of trade unionists who are unable to recruit to WPB.

Of course any revolutionary trade unionist will tell you that after the defeats of Thatcherism, the shrinking of the unions and the strengthening of the reformist union bureaucracy via the anti union laws, it is not easy to win recruits to revolutionary politics. This is even more the case in a period like today of very low levels of trade union struggle. If it was as easy to recruit in the unions as the leaders of the LFI think the far left would not be so much smaller, and, frankly more marginal, now than it was even 10 years ago.

We recognised many years ago that there was a radicalisation amongst youth and it is through Revolution youth work that WPB has recruited. And all the faction supported this work. Indeed we helped build it. However, as the political struggle deepened the majority began to exclude faction supporters from youth work. They created or maintained separate youth branches and cells, even where those branches were patently failing to build independent Revo groups, as in London, for example. The youth branches and cells were used as exclusion zones by the majority - a purely factional decision by them to reduce our influence amongst a layer of their supporters who by this time were being systematically miseducated.

Yet we never learned from the majority what their new turn to agitation consisted of. For WPB it seemed to come down to “a few more stalls, more leafleting, more nights of activity”

and some talk about using the methods of Revo to attract workers – campaigns, street theatre etc. The only political campaign mentioned was the Campaign for a New Workers' Party – hardly a roaring success in getting workers along to meetings, let alone recruiting them to revolutionary politics.

The IS says the IF “favour of a tailist and routinist perspective in the trade unions.” The irony is that it is the trade union members of the faction, the bulk of the trade union base of WPB just expelled, were the ones who undertook some of the most political actions in the last period and demonstrated what real revolutionary agitation was. Our teachers, for example, were instrumental in bringing out their schools on strike in London, bringing pupils and parents onto the streets, the day Blair invaded Iraq. These were some of the only trade union actions against the war in the country.

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What the Majority leadership objected to, in their impatience and voluntarism, was that to rebuild confidence and organisation amongst workers and to begin to build a militant leadership in a workplace takes a lot of ordinary, everyday, union work, alongside communist work. Unfortunately the Majority duped a lot of young members with little experience of workplace and union work into going along with them on this, dubbing such work “routinism” reflecting a “conservative outlook”.

International youth work and democratic centralism

We are accused of attacking “the youth work that was so successful in Britain and Austria” in the LFI statement.

WPB had moderate success for a small group in this area of work. Revolution has been very good at drawing young people into WPB, less successful in establishing a genuine independent youth movement. Its annual national conferences have hovered around 40-50 people. But only in one town, Leeds had we managed to establish a self-sustaining active Revo group.

In Austria results are disputed, as half the organisation, mostly young members, left shortly after the Athens ESF leaving only five members in the section. The comrades who left claim the success of the Revo work in Austria is much exaggerated by the full-timer and International Secretariat member there.

The IF certainly thought that the rush to push the international Revo groups, which were often struggling to establish themselves nationally, into a fully blown international democratic centralist structure – while not wrong in principle – was premature. It flowed from the IS's desire to prove that not only a new Fifth international was on the cards but that we were on the way to building a youth international as well. In fact despite the occasional successful youth meeting at ESFs we had discovered few co-thinkers willing to join us in this task.

A Revolution International Committee (RIC) was set up, and a Bureau to meet in between. Neither functioned very well and at the first sign of differences a tendency, described by the IS as “libertarian”, in the German and Swiss Revo groups, were suddenly being denounced as people who “flouted” democratic centralism. We said that this problem demonstrated that the drive towards democratic centralism should be reconsidered. We were duly denounced as “effectively surrendering to the libertarian and anarchising trends that are trying to split Revo in Germany, Czech Republic and Switzerland away from its association with the League.”

We replied: “Whatever happened to the idea that we were trying to build broad, fairly loose Revo organisations that might contain members of other tendencies, including libertarians? Genuinely independent organisations, in their majority under our political leadership, a leadership not imposed but won through argument and activity?”

No, for the super centralists of the LFI majority all Revo groups must immediately follow to the letter the directions and campaigns decided by the RIC and a new two person bureau (of LFI members) in Leeds. This is a recipe for driving young people into the arms of libertarians, and for splits. It is completely inappropriate for the current stage and state of Revolution internationally. It is destroying it as an organisation.

The internal struggle and the expulsions

The LFI, WPB and most other sections, have a strong tradition of democratic debate, of political tendencies forming and dissolving and of a collective leadership representing various strands of opinion. This has been increasingly undermined over the last two years.

In WPB we were forced to turn from a tendency to a faction in order to guarantee our proportional representation on the National Committee at our national conference last March. As a result of us taking this justified action the NC majority immediately barred us from representation on the Political Committee (PC), the weekly meeting executive. This was despite the fact that two minority Tendency members had worked loyally on the PC for the entire preceding year without incident. From that moment the PC became a weapon in the hands of the majority faction to be used, systematically, against the minority Faction.

“The Majority had made clear that whatever the support the international faction had at Congress they would keep control of all of the executive committees.”

Soon disciplinary commissions were hunting down those suspected of talking to outsiders about the political divisions in the group (invariably faction members). Despite the Majority's efforts no evidence was ever found – because there wasn't any. The Manchester branch was unconstitutionally split with a “youth cell” being formed reporting directly to the PC – a measure about to be challenged at our National Committee before our expulsion.

When a crisis broke out in the Austrian section – leading to the resignations of half of the organisation – the IF was immediately accused by

the IS of meddling in it and using it for factional advantage. There was no evidence for this, but just as truth was no longer getting in the way of the majority's political perspectives it was now also no barrier to their organisational offensive against the faction. Indeed such was the scale of the witch-hunt against us that all personal e-mails between comrades in the League which even mentioned the Austrian crisis were demanded to be handed over to the International Secretariat on pain of discipline. The aim was a trawling expedition to “pin something” on the IF. These outrageous demands imposed on the Austrian opposition undoubtedly helped to drive the young comrades away from the League.

All factional struggles can lead to a breakdown in comradely relations. These measures contributed to a breakdown of trust of comrades in the LFI leadership.

By the time WPB assembled for its pre-congress aggregate in June the IF had been denounced as “passive propagandists”, “a petit bourgeois formation”, “a clique” and “liquidationists”. The leadership clearly thought it was re-fighting the 1940 Cannon-Shachtman struggle in the US SWP with quotes flying around from “From a scratch to the danger gangrene” – second time round this really was farce.

The Majority had made clear that whatever the support the IF had at Congress they would keep control of all of the executive committees – the International Secretariat and the WPB PC were by now virtually one and the same thing with overlapping membership. Given the IF's experience of what this factional control meant it was no surprise that discussions started on whether we would be better taking our differences and our politics into the class struggle

THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS OF THE LFI HAVE BEEN EXPELLED.

Adrian S (WPB) – member since 1984
Alison H (WPB) - 1989
Andrew J (Dublin) - 2004
Andy J (Galway) – 1975,
Founder member Irish Workers Group
Andy S (WPB) - Founder member WPB 1975
Bill J (WPB) - 1986
Carlene W (WPA) - 1991
Dan J (WPB) - 2002
Dave A (WPB) - 1993
Dave E (WPB) – 1988
Dave G (WPB) – 1992
George B (WPB) - 1986
Helen W (WPB) - 1979
James T (WPB) - 2003
Jason T (WPB) - 2001
Joel B (AM) - 1998

John C (WPB) - 1993
Jon B (WPB) - 1984
Kate (WPB) - 1984
Kath (WPA) - 1994
Keith H (WPB) - 1979
Kirstie P (WPB) - 1989
Kr (WPA) - 2004
Lisa F (WPA) - 1994
Mark H (WPB) – 1977
Maureen G (Galway) - 1985
Michelle R (WPA) - 2002
Pauline A (WPB) - 1980
Pete A (WPB) - 1981
Rekha K (WPB) - 2002
Steve F (WPB) - 1995
Stuart K (WPB) - Founder member WPB 1975
Yuen C (WPB) - 2002

outside of the framework of the League.

Recently we started polling members of the IF on the question of whether we should resign as a block before or after the congress. The vote was never completed before the IS gained access to (or hacked into) the Faction e-list and proceeded to expel everyone in the faction whatever their opinion on this matter. On the very day of the expulsions members of the IF were working loyally on the July issue of WPB's newspaper, carrying out the discipline of the group as they had done for the whole two years they were in opposition.

The Majority are publishing their side of the story – which the outside observer will note involves an awful lot of insults against this or that faction member but not very much about the politics of the dispute. We on the other hand have chosen to highlight the political character of our struggle inside the LFI. The reason for this is that, above all, we are political activists, now,

in the past, and for many years to come. We don't feel personally injured, embittered or demoralised by the political fight we waged in the LFI.

It is time to move on and we will leave the screaming and shouting to those who have expelled us. We will move on to the formation of a new organisation to continue our struggle and to the production of a new magazine in Britain – Permanent Revolution. We will be bringing into it the core of the established leadership of WPB and almost half the membership of WPB, including most of its trade unionists. We bring into it the Australian section of the League, WPA, plus comrades from Ireland and Sweden.

We are confident that our new organisation will press forward and win more adherents. We are ready to face our new challenge.

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Morales and the Bolivian revolution

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and oil deposits of the country but on May 1st this year Morales passed a decree for nationalisation. He could get away with no less if he wanted to survive.

But this nationalisation, though extremely popular, is no socialist measure. It certainly gives the government greater control over the direction and planning of the industry and a larger income, but real control continues to lie with the oil and gas multinationals. The nationalisations involve the Bolivian government buying out BP, Shell, Repsol-YPF, so that the government controls a minimum of 51% of the shares. This of course will saddle the Bolivian people with more debt.

While the gas and oil companies have complained, and shouted about the sanctity of contracts, they will continue to take their cut. The Bolivian Minister of Planning told a Spanish radio station that the companies "would maintain a 20 per cent profit margin, as well as recovering their investments". Morales emphasised in his visit to the European Parliament that "no one is being expelled, no one expropriated".

No wonder that even Paul Wolfowitz at the World Bank has expressed himself as "relaxed" about countries like Bolivia exercising their sovereignty in nationalising – providing of course they "honour contracts and pay compensation".

Obviously the context in Bolivia makes the measure different to the state capitalist nationalisations in the west after World War 2, by the Labour government in Britain for example. Bolivia is in a state of revolutionary turmoil, the masses have forced the government to reverse decades of privatisation and neoliberalism. As a result Morales has promised to use the rising state income (gas prices to Argentina and Brazil are being hiked and royalties on the

multinationals increased) on education, health provision and alleviating the chronic poverty. Whether these nationalisations can be turned from a reformist measure into a revolutionary one depends on whether the workers declare that the multinationals have already had their pound of flesh and demand that they should be expropriated and placed under workers' control, and used to aid the reconstruction of Bolivia in the workers' interests.

Morales would fight such demands tooth and nail, indeed he has already put proposals for further re-nationalisations, of rail and telecommunications, on hold. At the same time he quickly agreed to demands from the Santa Cruz business community to honour the previous government's commitment to the private exploitation of massive iron and manganese deposits at El Mutun.

Leaving the multinationals in place allows them to regroup and wait for the workers' movement to retreat. Already the Spanish Repsol YPF has declared it will increase its investments in Argentina at the expense of Bolivia – the opening shot in a war of attrition, playing one country off against another.

Land reform and poverty reduction

Meanwhile the Morales government has taken the first tentative steps in the direction of land reform. Thousands of Bolivian peasants and rural workers exist in dire poverty while huge estates and ranches make massive profits and leave large areas of land under-utilised. But only existing government land is starting to be distributed, further reforms await a new constitution. Already the Agriculture and Livestock Confederation, an alliance of big farmers,

defense groups” to deal with peasants occupying land. In Santa Cruz the landowners want to use provincial autonomy to take control of land reform – that is, prevent it.

The President and the MAS have also promised a poverty reduction programme. The goal is to reduce “extreme poverty” by 35% by the end of 2010 and create 100,000 jobs a year. These plans are based on using the increased gas revenues to alleviate poverty and increasing growth rates from the current 4% to 7.6% by 2010.

Morales has a clear, reformist political programme, what his government spokesmen refer to as “Andean capitalism”. He welcomes multinational capital as “partners” not controllers. The land reforms, he argues, are not just about redistribution, as the 1953 reforms were, but about “lands, markets and modernisation of farming”. That is, it is about turning the peasant farmers into successful small capitalist farmers geared to the foreign and internal market. The “productive and patriotic business owners” who involve themselves in productive investment are allies – those who take their money abroad and speculate are “parasites”.

Morales declared his hopes of such an alliance to the BBC: “We hope the delegates to the Constituent Assembly will represent not only the indigenous people and popular movements but patriotic professionals, intellectuals and business people. If these patriotic sections take part we’ll succeed.”

This was a familiar political strategy in Latin America in the 1960s, one zealously promoted by the Stalinists; it was called “independent industrial development”, using the state to lever enough space from imperialism to develop the nation’s industry in alliance with “patriotic capitalists”.

It was a utopia then, it is a utopia now.

Imperialism is a rapacious system which demands super profits from its semi colonies. It will not tolerate, for long, a government which tries to restrict its ability to exploit the resources and people of Bolivia or anywhere else. It might retreat, negotiate, prevaricate but it will re-assert its control with an iron hand, and it will use its multi nationals and “patriotic bourgeois” to do it, counter-revolutionary arms in hands.

The “space” Morales believes he has is provided by the governments of Venezuela and Cuba and the aid they are giving him. The President shortly after his election visited Caracas and signed up to the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA). This is Castro and Chavez’ alternative to Bush’s Free Trade Area of the Americas. It aims to undermine the neoliberal model for Latin America, one based on US hegemony and exploitation, and replace it with continental co-operation and “independent development”.

Chavez is providing significant aid to Bolivia, such as diesel oil in return for Soya and other goods. Venezuela is providing expertise in developing the state hydrocarbon company, and offering \$1.5bn in investment in eastern Bolivia to develop marginal

oil fields ignored by the multinationals. Cuba has provided 1,100 doctors for the poorer areas and 4000 Bolivian students are now studying medicine in Cuba.

Not surprisingly Washington is determined to break this alliance up. Alan Garcia in Peru and Alvaro Uribe in Columbia are the tools being used at the moment, both travelling Latin America warning of the dangers of Chavez and advocating bilateral trade agreements, like theirs, with the US. Washington has already indicated that Bolivia is unlikely to have its preferential trade agreement with the US renewed if its alliance with Chavez continues.

In Bolivia the right wing opposition is screaming that “Chavez’s troops have taken over Bolivia”. In one laughable account they had forced the Bolivian army to sing the Venezuelan national anthem! In Santa Cruz a large poster of the meeting of Morales, Chavez and Castro, prominent throughout Bolivia in the CA election campaign, was ordered removed by the right wing council. This is just a taste of things to come once the imperialists start mobilising the landowners and capitalists against the government.

Largely missing in the current CA election campaign is the independent presence of the working class and the popular movements whose massive and heroic street battles drove the previous neoliberal regime from office.

The Bolivian workers, led by the COB (Bolivian Workers Centre) and the miners’ union, alongside the militant peasants and coca growers, could be a major factor in ensuring a revolutionary constituent assembly is convened. Instead, because of the influence of Syndicalism and Zapatism, they have left the stage to the reformists of the MAS.

Instead of leading a political fight, both in the streets and in the parliamentary arena, the unions and the leaders of the popular movement have handed the masses over to the reformists. They failed to take the opportunity, when the masses were on the streets, to form a party that represented the real interests of the workers and peasants – a revolutionary workers’ party.

This can still be done. It needs to be a party that puts forward a clear alternative to the programme of Morales. One that demands the expropriation of the multi nationals and the placing of the natural resources, the mines, factories, refineries and offices in the hands of the workers. It should be a party that fights for an agrarian revolution based on the expropriation of the big farmers and for the redistribution of the land to the peasants and poor farmers.

It has to establish a revolutionary workers and peasants’ government, one that fights to end imperialist exploitation, not just in Bolivia, but throughout Latin America.

What is needed is not a new version of “Andean capitalism” but an Andean revolution that can sweep capitalism, imperialism and poverty out of the continent forever and become a beacon for anti capitalist struggles throughout the world.■

Spain 1936: lessons of the popular front

Seventy years ago this month General Franco launched a rebellion against the Spanish Republic. The civil war was to end in Franco's victory and a dictatorship that lasted until the mid 1970s. The Stalinist popular front strategy, which rejected the struggle for socialism to "defend democracy against fascism", played a major role in this defeat. Keith Harvey examines the lessons.

Seventy years ago this month, in July 1936, General Franco launched the Spanish army's rebellion against the Spanish Republic. A Popular Front coalition had won the elections in February 1936, made up of socialists (PSOE), communists (PCE) and left bourgeois republican parties.

The election revealed the rapid class polarisation that had been taking place in Spain after an uprising of Asturian workers in October 1934 had been crushed by the army.

The Popular Front stood on the programme of immediate release and re-employment of those imprisoned after the 1934 rising, land reform and the restoration of Catalan autonomy. The total vote for the Popular Front was closely matched by that for the Catholic, monarchist and fascist right. The parties of the centre - the large moderate Republican groups were obliterated.

The election victory inspired workers and peasants throughout Spain to push for reforms. The Popular Front passed a mild agrarian reform law on taking office.

Without satisfying the peasants it encouraged them to action. One report noted, the peasants "calculate that the agrarian laws plans fifty thousand settlements a year which means it will take twenty years to settle a million peasants and more than a century to give land to all. Realising this, the peasants just occupy the land."

The new government - which was made up of only respectable republicans from the coalition and excluded the left - was horrified. The Spanish Communist Party did all it could to pour cold water over the rising revolutionary militancy. But why?

The Popular Front

The Popular Front policy pursued by the PCE was dictated from Russia, and the result of a major re-orientation of Stalin's foreign policy. Prior to 1935, during the "Third Period", Stalin had made ultra-left denunciations of social democracy, treating these parties as worse than the fascists, while seeking an agreement with Hitler in an effort to forestall an attack on Russia. But once this attempted bloc with Germany was definitely broken, the Kremlin bureaucracy set its sights on securing an alliance with "democratic"

imperialism - principally with France - and the Comintern (Stalin's international) set out to exert maximum pressure to that end.

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935 committed all its national parties to the pursuit of the Popular Front. Nothing should be done that would incite France and Britain against Russia. That meant socialist revolution or workers and peasants' uprisings were off the cards. Everything must be subordinate to this new policy.

A PSUC (Catalonian Communist Party) leader explained it succinctly: "in the democratic-bloc of powers, the decisive factor is not France; it is England. It is essential for all party comrades to realise this so as to moderate (their) slogans at the present time. . . we should realise that the big capitalists in England are capable of coming to an understanding at any time with Italian and German capitalists if they should reach the conclusion that they have no choice with regard to Spain. (Therefore) we must win, cost what it may, the benevolent neutrality of that country, if not its direct aid."

After the February 1936 election victory PCE leader Jose Diaz said in his opening speech to the Cortes (Spanish Parliament) that the party "loyally supports the left Republican government." Naturally, the PCE became increasingly alarmed when the workers and peasants took steps far in advance of the Popular Front programme.

Workers' uprising

The decisive strike wave began on 1 June when 70,000 building workers struck indefinitely for higher pay. By the 4 July the Ministry of Labour had conceded the original demands the strike, but by then the workers had gone far beyond the basic economic demands. Many workers were armed, at first to protect themselves from attacks by fascist supporters of Franco, the Falangists. One of the largest union federations, the anarchist-led CNT, had formed a Central Defence Committee.

As the revolutionary tide accelerated the PSOE and PCE leaders in the other trade union federation, the UGT, called off the strikes after the original concessions, but the CNT refused to

do likewise.

Faced with this workers' upsurge the Falange and the Army made preparations for an uprising. This was well known to the Republican leaders but they chose to cover it up. On the night of 17-18 July, 1750 garrisons rose up against the government. Out of 15000 Army officers, only 500 stayed loyal to the Republic, together with 5,000 of the 34,000 civil guards.

Despite losing their armed support, civil governors loyal to the republican government refused to hand out weapons to the workers in many key cities in southern and central Spain. This ensured that the rising of rebel garrisons succeeded and control passed over to Franco's forces - usually with swift and bloody consequences for the workers. Within weeks the Army and Falange controlled half of Spain. The civil war had begun.

Civil war

In 1936 a favourite slogan of the left-wing of the PSOE was "if you want to save Spain from Marxism, then vote Communist". But what was a half serious election campaigns jibe turned into grim reality during the civil war.

The reactionary schema of the Popular Front included a false assumption that Britain would side with the Republic rather than Franco. In fact the reverse was true, because Britain rightly feared that a Republican victory would be but a passing phase in the Spanish socialist revolution and lead to long drawn out instability in European politics.

The opening weeks of the Spanish Civil War gave the Comintern and the PCE cause for concern. The working class were on the offensive. In the North and East they had disarmed the army, stormed the barracks and were in control. Within a week dual power had been established in the Republican held areas. By September 1936 Koltzov - Stalin's personal agent in Spain - estimated that about 18,000 industrial enterprises had been taken over by the workers.

The most dramatic upheavals took place on the land. In Catalonia the mass of peasants were small holders and leaseholders who were glad to be rid of rents and gain more land. Collectivization of the land was limited there. But in Aragon it was a different story. To begin with the fascists had encroached into the Aragon countryside and it took the best anarchist and socialist workers of Barcelona to repulse them.

But in the process they were also revolutionary agitators. Durruti, the CNT leader of the militia, said: "we are waging a war and making the revolution at the same time. . . Every village we conquer begins to develop along revolutionary lines." The bigger estates were collectivized by the agricultural workers of Aragon. Very soon 70%

of the population (about 500,000) in the area were in collectives.

The greatest advances of all were at the political level. PCE leader Ibarri could reflect in these weeks that: ". . . the whole state apparatus was destroyed and state power lay in the street." While the state was not destroyed it was certainly in complete disarray. The Republic had no army except that of the workers' militia.

The Republican government continued to exist but it was impotent. President Azana commented: "Faced by the revolution the government had the choice either of upholding it or suppressing it. But even less than uphold it could the government suppress it."

Real political power in Spain was being exercised by the workers' militias which went by dozens of different names depending on the region, and they in turn were under the control of different political parties including the centrist POUM. Only in Aragon did the regional governing body draw its authority from direct elections from local town and village committees.

Faced with this unfolding socialist revolution the Stalinists put their whole weight behind the attempt to derail it. For the Comintern André Marty stated: "The working class parties in Spain, and especially the Communist Party, have on several occasions clearly indicated . . . that the present struggle in Spain is not between capitalism and socialism but between fascism and democracy. In a country like Spain, where feudal institutions and roots are still very deep, the working class and the entire people have the immediate and urgent task, the only possible task not to bring about the socialist revolution but to defend, consolidate and develop the bourgeois-democratic revolution."

This argument was false to the core. The techniques of production on the land may have been "feudal" but the property relations were thoroughly capitalist. Land had been bought and sold for years, like any other commodity. The big landowners were completely tied up with - in many cases identical to - the captains of industry and finance. The banks held the mortgages on the land and stood to lose from any mass expropriations.

The notion of fascism as being a feudal reaction to democracy was a threadbare justification for the Popular Front. Spanish fascism, as with its German twin, was an instrument of finance capital against the working class. Only a socialist, working class-led strategy of permanent revolution - linking up the democratic struggles for land reform and autonomy for the oppressed nationalities in the north and Spain's colonies, with the workers' fight to overthrow the bosses in industry and finance, could have forged a popular alliance at the grass roots to defeat fascism.

Many Stalinist writers have claimed that the

lack of arms doomed the Republic from the start and that it was impossible to provide more. Even those with POUM sympathies - such as George Orwell - came to the same conclusion. The truth was that fascism succeeded above all because the Republic failed to arouse the peasantry to its side with a bold programme of land reform. Eventually the peasantry fell into despair and saw no qualitative difference between Franco and the Republic and hence no reason to defend the latter.

Everything the Stalinists did in Spain from the very first weeks of the uprising was designed to prevent the success of the revolution. While they did not wish to see Franco triumphant, their murderous policies ensured it nevertheless. Systematically, from late 1936 and throughout

1937 the PCE broke up workers' control of the factories, dispersed peasant collectives, murdered and imprisoned anarchist and Poumista militia. In so doing they destroyed the militancy and hope of the social classes that could have beaten fascism.

The policy of the popular front did not end in Spain. Very similar policies were played out in Chile in the years 1970-73 under the government of President Salvador Allende which ended in bloody defeat for the Chilean working class and 17 years of Pinochet dictatorship. By deliberately subordinating and constraining the demands and ambitions of the working class for socialism the fight to defend democracy is gutted of its dynamic and powerful engine, ensuring that neither socialism nor democracy are achieved.■

An Irish Lament that echoes still

This movie, the latest work by Britain's best-known socialist film-maker, has captured the coveted Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival. But that does not wash with *The Sun* which called it "a brutally anti-British film ... designed to drag the reputation of our nation through the mud" without having seen it. Michael Gove in the *Times* said it helps to "legitimise the actions of gangsters" - again without seeing it.

One person's gangster is another person's freedom fighter, of course, and that is what Ken Loach sets out to show in the context of the Irish war for independence during 1920-21, a war that had raged since 1918 when the freely elected Dail (Irish parliament) overwhelmingly backed candidates supporting independence from Britain.

What Loach and screenwriter Paul Laverty provide is something of a "history from below" with the fictional but essentially accurate story told from the perspective of a small band of IRA volunteers in County Cork with the "big names" of the period such as Collins and De Valera virtually absent from the stage. Ten years on from Neil Jordan's Hollywood-style biopic of IRA leader Michael Collins which sympathised with Collins' decision to sign the Anglo-Irish Treaty and so accept the partition of Ireland, the Loach film could be seen as a political riposte.

The early scenes of the film depict the brutality of the Black and Tans, a mercenary force made up of nearly 7,000 troops, largely from Scotland and northern England, who were often veterans of the First World War. The Brits appear as a largely undifferentiated group of uniformed thugs inflicting fatal beatings on defiant Gaelic-speaking teens and assaulting a train crew for refusing to transport British troops.

Obviously, the depiction of the Black and Tans' butchery has fueled the wrath of the film's reactionary critics. But if anything the film is restrained in documenting the savagery of this mercenary band. Without witnessing the early scenes a viewer not already familiar with the historical background would have been shocked by the decision of the central character, Damien O'Donovan, to join the IRA's ranks rather than take up his medical studies in London. Intellectual arguments from his older brother, Teddy (a local IRA commander) fail to pierce Damien's cynicism and sense

Film review by G R McColl: 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley', directed by Ken Loach

of foreboding at the poor odds of kicking the British out of Ireland. But the unrelenting brutality of the occupying power - as in Iraq today - acts as a persuasive recruiting sergeant.

The film is never less than an engaging melodrama - beautifully shot, tautly edited and well-acted. At its best the movie illustrates the submerged tensions between nationalists and the more militant, if politically incoherent, wing within republicanism who followed James Connolly in believing that "If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the socialist republic your efforts would be in vain."

The last third of the film moves on to the civil war period that followed the 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty. This notorious accord accepted the partition of the six counties in the north east of Ireland and required Dublin MPs to swear loyalty to the British crown. It also ushered in a "carnival of reaction, north and south", as envisaged by James Connolly.

The fallings out and the divided loyalties are clearly portrayed as the Treaty tore apart the country and families. In one scene the previously united volunteers debate the pros and cons of the Treaty in a scene reminiscent of the debate about land redistribution in Loach's masterful 1996 study of the Spanish Civil War, *Land and Freedom*. But it fails to come alive in the same way. Indeed, the defenders of the Anglo-Irish deal, including Teddy Donovan, seem too few in number and too intellectually feeble to offer a credible case.

Some 30,000 IRA supporters refused to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty and waged battle with the forces of the new Irish Free State, equipped with British arms. They were, of course, ultimately defeated. What we do not really glimpse in the film is any sense of an alternative strategy to continuing to wage a quixotic guerrilla war by those who were committed to full political independence and a radical redistribution of wealth and power within Irish society.

Whatever its weaknesses, though, at a time when right-wing historians such as Niall Ferguson have regular access to the airwaves to perform for a fat fee as shameless champions of the British Empire, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* is a useful and welcome antidote to attempts to paint Britain as a force for good from Ireland to Iraq.■

Australia: after 28 June protests we need a general strike to smash the union laws

Almost a year to the day of the first national action against the ant-union laws tens of thousands of workers across Australia took to the streets of the major cities to say "No Johnny NO!" Carlene Wilson in Melbourne was among them

Many Australia Post workers defied threats of disciplinary action to take part in the day and there was a large and militant delegation of cleaners and other low-paid workers. Teachers – currently on holiday in Victoria – made up a large part of the protest.

There was no doubting the anger of the workers in Melbourne who marched from four separate rallying points to block the central business district but there was equally no doubt that the protests had shrunk from a 250,000 high in November and that the politics were clearly changing too.

Union sources estimated the crowd at 150,000, others significantly less. And the platform was dominated by not just the right of the trade union movement but by Australian Labor Party State premier Steve Bracks and ALP leader Kim Beazley. The firefighters at the front of the platform booed Bracks – his government is currently in dispute with the fires for their new contract and over serious lapses in supplying adequate safety gear.

KICK THE RACISTS AND FASCISTS OUT!

One ugly aspect of the Melbourne demonstration was the presence in the crowd of both the fascist Australia First party and the right-wing anti-semitic Lasrouchites of the CEC. Australia First were distributing a leaflet unsurprisingly blaming all the problems on foreign workers and posing as the real working class.

Naturally this message gets succour from the patriotic nonsense spouted from the platform. This intrusion into a workers' march must not be tolerated. Fascists and anti-semites must be swept off from such labour movement demonstrations by organised contingents of stewards. The labour movement will never be able to attract immigrant and workers from ethnic minorities into its ranks if it tolerates such scum in their midst.

But Beazley received a relatively warm welcome that ended with cheers and approving applause as he called the gathered workers "the real Australian patriots." He and others argued that the way to defeat the laws was to...wait 18 months for an ALP victory at the elections, a self-defeating strategy that will see many more attacked and lose their jobs under these laws by

the time an election comes around.

The continued pressure to fight from within Australian labour movement has forced the union heads into agreeing already to a further day of action. But this will not be until November. Rather than harnessing the obvious anger and willingness to fight now, the union leaderships are playing it safe – preparing to sit the laws out and wait for the ALP to win the election.

Its clear that union leaderships have been spending a lot of time that could have been used organising a fightback on negotiating with ALP leaders – Beazley has only just agreed that a future ALP government would remove the hated AWA's (individual contracts). It was a concession that had to be wrung from him and which he will only honour once elected if there is a continued mass and militant campaign in place between now and then.

In the meantime its equally clear that people are losing wages, conditions and indeed even their jobs at a shocking rate. The official platform included a number of workers who have had the laws used against them in the last months. But even with these people there telling their stories the lessons are ignored by the leadership.

Ever since the laws were first mooted Workers Power Australia has argued there was no time to waste – allowing the laws to be implemented then fighting them was always going to be a losing strategy. But it is the strategy that the union movement and even much of the Australian left agreed to.

At the huge nationwide protests in November last year, union leaders pledged to face gaol in order to defend workers victimised by the laws. But six months on these attacks have barely been defended against, let alone led to massive protests, civil disobedience or gaolings! The "touch one, touch all!" slogan that was key in November has now been conveniently set aside.

Victoria has always been the centre of the militant working class and the best elements of the union leaderships; Melbourne got the best and most militant demonstration. In Sydney, however, Unions NSW managed to side-track the whole national day of action into a marginal seats campaign – having the only march and rally in the outer suburb of Blacktown. It is a testament to the working class of Sydney that the rally still managed to pull 30,000 people if the officials are allowed to get away with this kind of stunt the

campaign will falter.

These laws are not going to go away without a fight and right now that fight is not coming from the ACTU tops. Some unions have begun to mobilise and there have been small victories. Where sackings have got out to the media or in the few cases where picket lines have been put back some workers have been re-instated and others saved conditions and wages. Each and everyone of these small flames of resistance must be used to spark a mass incendiary movement that aims to wipe the laws from the statute book before it is too late.

From the time the laws were first discussed a general strike was the only realistic way of preventing the legislation being passed. And given the attack was so self-evidently a class wide one a class wide response was possible. More so

than ever an indefinite general strike will be able to really take the challenge directly to this rotten government and overturn these laws. We must continue to demand the ACTU calls one but the only hope for this is to publicise every small fightback, work to get solidarity action alongside them, link up the dispersed struggles into one militant campaign and in this way generate a mass strike momentum that the ACTU heads cannot ignore.

The Australian working class has not yet been defeated – the big crowds in major cities and industrial centres all across Australia on 28 June show our class is willing to take action. But now we have to take the next step – if the union leaders won't call us out on the kind of action we need then we have to do it without them. ■

East London NUT backs no platform policy towards the British National Party! Now take it into the community!

On 3 July supporters of this magazine in the NUT successfully proposed the following action resolution to the East London Teachers Association in Britain. The motion is an attempt to mobilise the labour movement in support of anti-racist and anti-fascist activities in the Barking and Dagenham area following the election of 11 BNP councillors.

We urge all anti racist and anti-fascist activists to follow this example.

This union believes that:

1. The attack that took place outside Barking tube station on 18 May 2006 on an Afghan man is the tragic consequence of the climate of racism that has been whipped up during the BNP local election campaign that led to the election of 11 BNP councillors in Barking and Dagenham.

2. Despite the veneer of respectability that the BNP have tried to present at the ballot box, it remains a fascist organisation intent on carrying out acts of violence and intimidation against ethnic minority communities and anti-fascist activists.

3. The Labour movement must immediately launch a campaign against the activities of the BNP. Fascist organisations seek to prey on the fears of people and direct them against the most vulnerable groups in society. The BNP focused their campaign on housing suggesting that it is immigrant communities that are to blame for the shortages. We demand that the housing crisis is tackled by a massive programme of investment in affordable public housing that is accessible to all those in need.

This union resolves :

a) To call on its Executive to consult with other unions and call a national demonstration against the BNP in Barking and Dagenham at the earliest possible opportunity.

b) To organise and support initiatives that will lead to the BNP being denied any platform for their ideas. This should include counter demonstrations with the aim of breaking up their meetings/activities.

c) To demand that Labour councillors refuse to cooperate with the BNP by boycotting council meetings which involve their attendance.

d) To support the regular pickets that have been called by Barking and Dagenham trade unions of the Council meetings attended by BNP councillors.

e) To support any council workers who refuse to cooperate with the BNP councillors and to encourage council employees to boycott any work associated with the BNP.

f) To call on the Executive to produce and /or purchase anti-racist and anti-fascist publicity material that can be distributed in schools, workplaces and the wider community.

Our Schools Not For Sale. Support the rank and file conference to oppose privatisation of schools

A PR supporter and activist in Bolton NUT reports on the beginning of a national campaign against privatisation

Up and down the country school children as young as seven are experiencing huge mental stress as they are fed through the school testing system. There are reports of self-harm, extreme distress and even attempted suicides. Increasingly children in the British education system are being medicated to get through the tests bringing a whole new meaning to the phrase destructive testing.

Under Labour's Education Bill all schools will be opened up to private investment, national pay and conditions will be eroded and more students will be ground down by targets, levels, benchmarks and examination results: and the private owners will not only try to squeeze more and more results from a demoralised and defeated workforce but students will learn the biggest lesson of all: they are a cog in a machine to be tested, disciplined, assessed and ranked.

Gone will be any notion that education should be about self-discovery, active citizenship, democracy and emancipation. Those notions don't get you results and make profits.

Turnout:	31.5%
Yes Vote:	91.8 %
No Vote:	8.2%

However, teachers, other school workers and students in Bolton have other ideas. In a ballot for strike action against the Education bill Bolton NUT

members voted overwhelmingly for action.

This result was immediately declared invalid by the officials of the NUT. However, we in Bolton are determined to press on.

We believe that if we begin to organise among the grass-roots we can assemble the forces necessary to lead a fight on these issues. Since this impressive result *Permanent Revolution* supporters have won indicative ballots in Greenwich NUT and Hackney NUT.

Accordingly, Bolton NUT has agreed to organise a national conference Rethinking Education to spearhead the resistance to the privatisation and destruction of comprehensive

education. The conference is planned for January 2007.

We will be inviting school workers – including teachers, teacher assistants, anyone who works in a school, college or education workplace – as well as parents, students, trade unionists and others, including anti-racists, refugees and anti-deportation campaigners. This last point follows on from the unions support of refugee students through the Sukula Family Must Stay campaign (www.sukula.org) and our sponsoring of the No One Is Illegal trade union conference against all immigration controls (see www.noii.trick.ca/)

The conference will not only discuss ideas about how education can be improved both in the here and now and in the longer term but will crucially also begin to organise resistance, drawing together rank and file activists determined to take action, with our leaders if possible, on our own if necessary.

We are also discussing and planning a national parent and student boycott of SATs and whatever tests are brought in to replace them.

We believe that if the rank and file in the unions and in the communities begin to organise we can rebuild the rank and file networks necessary to seize control of the struggle against privatisation and testing as a prelude to seizing control of our schools and our communities.

Schools, like other workplaces and services, should be under the democratic control of the workers, students and wider community.

The work in Bolton NUT is an example of how long patient and systematic work by socialists in the trade unions can begin to recreate a rank and file strategy to regain control of the unions as organisations fighting for workers' control over our lives and link it in with a strategy to seize power for the workers of the world. ■

● Anyone wanting more information or to be involved in the planning of the Rethinking Education conference should contact Jason Travis on jason2inethiopa@yahoo.co.uk or 07976476181.

Palestinian presidency and government”.

The arrest of Hamas leaders seems designed to thwart the likely outcome of discussions by these same leaders on Israel. They looked set to bow to pressure and endorse a document drawn up by Palestinian prisoners. The prisoners demanded that Hamas recognise Israel and form a national unity government committed to a negotiated two-state solution. Under the agreement the new administration was to be led by “technocrats” in order to win international recognition.

The document also endorses all existing agreements between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel, some of which recognise the Jewish state and established the PNA as a precursor to a two-state solution. Abbas, President of the PNA, had issued an ultimatum, threatening to call a referendum on the issue if Hamas did not endorse the prisoners’ proposals.

While Hamas resisted this step and was embroiled in a developing civil war with PLO Fatah fighters in the occupied territories, Israel was able to pursue its chosen strategy; namely, proceed towards a unilateral redrawing of Israel’s borders (based on the new Segregation Wall) insisting all the while that it had no alternative because there were “no partners for peace committed to a negotiated solution”.

The attack and capture of the Israeli soldier was not sanctioned or sought by the Hamas political leadership in the occupied territories, but was the result of an action by the Hamas exiles, supported by the group’s military wing, who opposed the prisoners’ compromise document.

The Hamas prime minister bowed to Abbas’s ultimatum because he was helpless in the face of the economic crisis. His ministers were dispatched abroad to carry back suitcases of cash from friendly Arab governments but this barely made a dent.

But the leadership in exile, headed by Khaled Meshaal in Damascus which finances the military wing at home, saw

the sanctions and Israeli blockade of Gaza as a refusal to accept the Hamas election victory and evidence that there was little to be gained from a political solution.

A Hamas political leader in southern Gaza, Issa Ali Nashar, said the prime minister had had no knowledge of the attack, a reflection of the breach with the armed wing. “What happened is a completely separate operation from the political decisions,” he said.

This short statement sums up very well the utter bankruptcy at the heart of guerrilla movements like Hamas. Dedicated to military resistance carried out by brave but outgunned units, Hamas (like the PLO before it) carries out actions that dent and demoralise their oppressors but cannot possibly overthrow them.

The political wing in opposition is little more than a propaganda department for the armed struggle. But suddenly thrust into office the Hamas “politicians” show themselves – like Sinn Fein leaders in Ireland in the 1990s – to be little more than bourgeois politicians; appealing for aid and assistance from the west, for their diplomatic intervention against Israel, for running the local administration they control in the normal bourgeois way.

Cut off from a truly mass mobilised, political movement organised in its own democratic forums of struggle which can direct their leaders and hold them to account, the Hamas ministers feel adrift and susceptible to pressure from Israel’s negotiators, the west and Egypt’s interlocutors pressing for concessions through President Abbas.

In the end this pressure proves more insistent than that of the military wing of Hamas, precisely because there is no political mechanism in place that can translate the intransigence of the active fighters into mass pressure on the leaders.

The Palestinians urgently need an alternative to the bourgeois politics of Fatah and Hamas: one committed to a working class struggle against occupation, and for a single, secular, socialist state of Palestine.

permanent revolution

Blockade and assassinations will not defeat Palestinians

The leadership of Hamas in Palestine has crumbled under Israeli, US and EU blockade and agreed to recognise Israel. But the abduction of one Israeli soldier has given the Zionists the excuse to attack Hamas and impose a unilateral settlement

Collective punishment has long been a weapon of war. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians, their homes and communities has been used for centuries to deter people from supporting organised resistance against oppression.

So when the Israeli army (IDF) destroyed Gaza's one power station last month (which produces 60% of its electricity) and fired tank shells into villages and towns in retaliation for the kidnap of one of its soldiers, the Zionist state was only doing what comes naturally to all oppressors.

The Israeli government claims it is only acting in self-defence, that it left Gaza last year and that it is being used as a base of operations to attack Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank. This is a lie. Two days before the Israeli soldier – Corporal Gilad Shalit – was captured in an audacious operation by Hamas guerrillas, tunneling under security fence and surprising an Israeli unit, the IDF raided Gaza and detained two Palestinian militants.

They join the 9000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, about 900 of them in “administrative detention” – that is in Guantanamo Bay-like imprisonment, locked up uncharged without being brought to any form of trial. In fact the snatching of the soldier was an attempt to gain leverage over the Israeli government to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners. Despite many signed “agreements” between the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Israel on such a release, this has still not happened.

In fact, it is Israel that uses the West Bank as a base of operations. Israel is using it to continue to kill Palestinians, to isolate and punish them for daring to vote Hamas into office in elections to the PNA last January. In June Israel

killed at least 30 Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, including nine children and a pregnant woman.

Since the PNA election, Israel – with the full backing of the White House and the European Union – has denied the PNA its customs tax revenue and successfully blocked outside financial assistance. This means the PNA cannot pay the wages of tens of thousands of public sector employees. Even before

renounce its goal of overthrowing the Zionist state of Israel, recognise instead its right to exist and agree to negotiate a “final settlement” that confines Palestinian national aspirations to Gaza and a truncated West Bank.

In the last days of June as pressure increased for the release of the captured Israeli soldier, the Israeli Defence force (IDF) raided a Ramallah hotel and arrested eight Hamas cabinet ministers



these funds were blocked 43% of the Palestinians were living on less than \$2 a day; today hunger and malnourishment and disease is even more widespread.

With sickening hypocrisy the USA, European Union and Arab states call on Israel to “exercise restraint” and focus all their diplomatic efforts to secure the soldier's release.

Instead they should be restoring all their funds – totalling nearly \$1bn a year – to a democratically elected PNA.

Quite simply, Israel and its imperialist sponsors want to starve the Palestinians into submission and force Hamas to

and 20 MPs. This followed a raid that rounded up 64 Hamas officials in the West Bank, including the deputy prime minister, Nasser Shaer, and the ministers of finance and Jerusalem affairs. The Israeli's have threatened to assassinate Prime minister Ismail Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip if the Israeli soldier is not returned alive.

The chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, correctly said Israel was “waging an open-ended all-out war against the Palestinian people that aims to topple the

continued on inside back cover