

workers power

revolution
against
global
capitalism

July 2001

Issue 255 ★ Price 50p

www.workerspower.com

IN THIS ISSUE

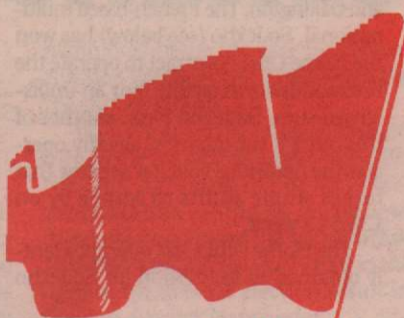
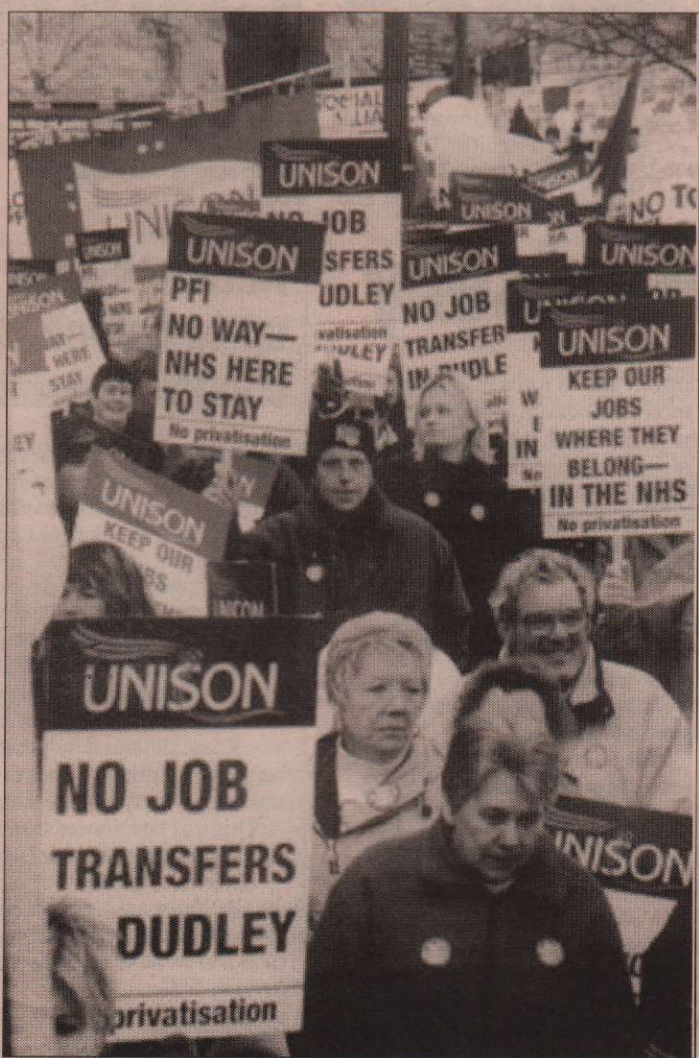
- Gothenburg - the full story
- Everywhere is Genoa!
- Indonesia faces crackdown
- Bangladesh sweatshop strike
- Intifada at a crossroads
- Is globalisation good for you?

Declare war on privatisation

Stop council house transfers

Strike against PFI

Renationalise the railways



Socialist
Alliance

Build a socialist alternative to New Labour

PLUS: Fighting back against racism and fascism pages 2, 10 and 12

Take back the tracks from the corporate killers

Rail privatisation has been a disaster. It is urgent that we force Labour to renationalise now, writes *GR McColl*

THE REPORT by Lord Cullen into the Ladbroke Grove rail disaster finally appeared in June. The crash between two trains that killed 31, and injured dozens, more was a direct consequence of rail privatisation, it revealed.

Cullen highlighted inadequate training for drivers and poor communication

with signalling staff as among the immediate causes of the Ladbroke Grove disaster. But Cullen's words were most damning of Railtrack, the private company created in the early 1990s with the supposed mission of overseeing the maintenance and upgrading of the nation's railway infrastructure.

In the words of one Railtrack director "the culture of the place had gone seriously adrift".

The report makes clear that Railtrack officials had known since at least 1993 that drivers had experienced significant difficulties in reading the notorious Signal 109, resulting in dozens of incidents classified as "Spads" (signals passed at danger). It was also evident that Railtrack had done nothing to remedy the situation.

The report is a staggering indictment of Railtrack and, to a lesser extent, the privatised train operators, especially Thames Trains.

But predictably Cullen stopped short: his report fails to highlight the general context for the disaster, namely the dismantling, carve-up and eventual sell-off to the private sector of Britain's rail network.

Despite receiving more in subsidies than the old British Rail, Railtrack has failed the travelling public abysmally because its explicit, foremost aim is to generate a profit.

The best guarantee of avoiding a repeat of tragedies like Southall, Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield remains the renationalisation of Railtrack and the train operating and leasing compa-

Timetable to disaster

September 1997: A train derailment in Southall kills seven. The train driver carries the can as bosses sweep aside criticism for underinvestment in safety.

October 1999: Ladbroke Grove crash claims 31 lives as a Thames commuter train collides with a First GWR intercity express due to inadequate signalling at a junction.

October 2000: Four die as GNER train crashes due to a broken rail, left unrepaired for several months.

November 2000: Railtrack's Chief

Executive, Gerald Corbett, suddenly resigns as the spotlight falls on the company after the Hatfield tragedy. **19 June 2001:** Findings of Lord Cullen's inquiry published, condemning "a combination of incompetent management and inadequate procedures". Cullen report names former Railtrack boss Gerald Corbett for "complacency" and "institutional paralysis". Ladbroke Grove crash survivor, Tony Knox, declares that Corbett has "blood on his hands".

nies. They should be taken back into state ownership - this time without any compensation to the private bosses. They should be run under the control of the workers who provide the service and the passengers who actually use the system.

No amount of gentle persuasion and reasoned argument will persuade this government to re-nationalise the rail. Only a campaign of mass protest and strike action by RMT and ASLEF members can do that.

Close down Britain's concentration camps

The election's over so it's business as usual for the Home Office... locking up families who have fled repression and forcing them to work for sub-human wages.

THE TORIES fought the general election campaign pledging to lock up all asylum seekers in the equivalent of internment camps. New Labour objected on the grounds that the Tory proposals would cost too much!

In reality, the government had already embarked on a programme to expand the numbers of asylum applicants detained both in prisons and purpose-build facilities.

In any given week the British state holds between 1,000 and 1,500 asylum seekers for the "crime" of having sought refugee status. Many face the same or worse conditions than remand prisoners and convicted criminals, spending up to 23 hours a day in cells.

Very few of these people face any criminal charge and most are detained on the say-so of immigration officers who are specifically exempt even from the limited provisions of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

An incident in late April involving asylum detainees held at Cardiff jail provoked an outcry even within the Welsh Assembly. Up to 40 detainees, none of them accused of much less convicted of any crime, were taken in handcuffs through Cardiff's streets for routine medical checks at a local hospital.

By early next year the Home Office wants at least 5,000 asylum detainees banged up. More than 10 per cent of those will be held at the recently revamped Harmondsworth detention centre, near Heathrow. The "new" Harmondsworth features 550 beds for men, women and children, compared to 60 places last year. Its official opening on 30 June attracted demonstrators from across London and campaigners who have fought for the closure of similar detention facilities such as Campsfield



Demonstration against Oakington Detention Centre, March 2001

and Oakington. The French-based multinational, Sodexho (see below) has won the Home Office contract to operate the Harmondsworth facility. For an undisclosed sum, Sodexho Pass, another of this outfit's subsidiaries, already operates the notorious voucher scheme that forces single adults to scrape by on £36.54 a week.

The Home Office has now apparently obtained an exemption for Sodexho

from minimum wage legislation, enabling the privateers to pay as little as £12 a week to asylum detainees to cook, clean and maintain their de facto prison.

We say:

- Close down Harmondsworth and all other detention facilities
- Release asylum detainees now
- Abolish the voucher scheme and

- forced dispersal programme
- Scrap the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, and all other immigration controls.
- Asylum seekers are welcome here.

To get active contact: Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, BCM Box 4289, London WC1N 3XX. E-mail: info@defend-asylum.org www.defend-asylum.org

Sodexho: getting rich on global misery

AT THE start of the 1990s Sodexho was a relatively modest, family-owned catering company. The past decade, however, has seen Sodexho mushroom grow into one of the world's top two catering corporations.

It operates in 70 countries in various guises from the USA to China, and employs a global workforce of 275,000. By the late 1990s, its annual turnover amounted to £4.1 billion.

Much of its rapid expansion has stemmed from taking on privatised and outsourced contracts for catering and ancillary services. It gained a major foothold in NHS, local authority and educational institutions through the 1995 acquisition of Gardner Merchant before moving on to the private prison sector.

A Sodexho subsidiary is the biggest institutional shareholder in the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the most important player in the USA's burgeoning private prison sector. The company controls over 70,000 prison places - more than the total number of inmates in Britain's swollen jails.

But Sodexho's activities have met with stiffened resistance in recent months. The campaign against this arch privateer is becoming global too. In the USA the Prison Moratorium Project has helped co-ordinate an anti-Sodexho campaign focused on college campuses where its Sodexho Marriott subsidiary

runs many a university dining hall. Several college administrations have now pulled out of contracts with the corporation over its role in the private prison sector.

In Britain, Camden Unison members have started a campaign to unionise Sodexho staff employed in the Town Hall

canteen and to force management to cancel the Sodexho contract and bring the workers in-house. Meanwhile, the Unison branch at the South Glasgow NHS Trust have scored a significant victory with Trust management agreeing to take ancillary and domestic staff back in-house from Sodexho.

Other asylum-denial fat cats:

- **WACKENHUT** is a Florida-based private corrections company that now holds Home Office contracts for the transport of asylum detainees, security operations at several British air and sea ports, and the management of the Manchester detention centre. In addition Wackenhut runs the Tinsley House facility near Gatwick Airport and the privatised Doncaster prison, which in 1999

led the league table among British prisons for attempted suicides.

- **GROUP 4** has operated the asylum detention centre at Campsfield since its opening in 1993. It also operates the Oakington facility at a former military base in Cambridgeshire. This prison-style complex holds up to 400 asylum applicants, including children on a fast-track to deportation.

STOP PRESS!

The government's programme of mass deportations of Kosovar refugees has moved into high gear.

While school pupils in Newham, East London, have been petitioning to keep two of their classmates in Britain, deportation snatch squads have removed many Kosovar children and families from their homes in Haringey.

An ad hoc committee of teachers, pupils and refugees has come together to call a demonstration against this latest example of New Labour's racism. Assemble 12 noon, Saturday 7 July, Finsbury Park, N4 (nearest tube Manor House).

Activists gear up to defend council housing

Sixty representatives from council housing defence groups met in Birmingham last month to plan the next phase of the Defend Council Housing campaign.

With Labour back in power, the pace of estate sell offs will grow.

The aim is to launch a Stand Up For Council Housing day on 22 September with one million leaflets, loudspeakers on cars, a campaign bus, street stalls and public meetings, a significant presence at TUC and Labour Party conferences.

This will be followed by a DCH national conference in late October.

In terms of trade union support the GMB have agreed to affiliate to DCH. The MSF and GMPU conferences also supported affiliation, as did Unison's NEC.

More details at: www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Lessons of Dudley

The Dudley anti-PFI strike is over – but it has put Labour on the defensive and showed why action led by the rank and file is crucial, writes *Dave Ashton*

TEN MONTHS of strikes by 600 Unison members in Dudley hospitals against a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme have ended. The process of transferring non-clinical staff from NHS employment to Interserve, part of the PFI consortium, is now under way, despite the longest industrial battle ever waged by British health workers.

In the light of Tony Blair's pronouncements about the intensification of PFI in New Labour's second term, learning the lessons – positive and negative – of Dudley will be essential for all those committed to opposing the privatisation bandwagon in healthcare and the emergence of divided, two-tier workforces.

The Dudley workers mounted more than 180 days of strike action to keep their jobs in the NHS, and were as determined and united in that aim at the end of the strike as at the start. The strike action stayed solid, not least because of the support the strikers met whenever they managed to speak to working class audiences. Thousands could immediately see that a victory at Dudley would not just mean protecting their working conditions. It would have been a step towards keeping healthcare in the public sector.

In contrast to the UCLH dispute, Unison gave support to Dudley as an official strike from the start. The Dudley strike was an early sign of renewed confidence among workers that strike action could win, after 20 years of defeats. But there is little doubt that the Dudley workers needed the official backing – however lukewarm.

Equally vital in maintaining unity was the extremely democratic organisation of the strike itself. The strike leadership did not rest solely on existing branch officers. Instead, a strike committee drew in other strikers, who were playing a leading role. Mass meetings were also held regularly, so that all strikers had the chance to have their say on all the major decisions about the next steps.

Despite all this, Labour eventually pushed through the PFI contract. The strike's isolation from other groups of workers facing PFI proved to be critical. Without the funds raised to supplement Unison's strike pay, the low-paid Dudley strikers could not have held out for so long. Though essential, this support was not enough to win.

On the strikers' initiative, West Midlands Unison called a regional day of action. Many local hospitals held lunch-time meetings. But nowhere was there even a call for any actual action. In the Dudley hospitals themselves the strikers lacked the necessary support from the rest of the workforce. The electricians, who also face transfer to private sector employment under the PFI scheme, were balloted for strike action. The ballot was lost. The picket lines failed to challenge the agency scabs, brought in by the NHS Trust management.

Although the Dudley strikers themselves are now working for the PFI consortium, their resistance (following that of the 1999 UCLH strike) has forced New Labour to make some cosmetic concessions around the implementation of



PFI. For now at least, no jobs will be transferred to the private sector at the next two PFI hospitals.

Health minister Alan Milburn has announced that, instead, non-clinical staff will remain in the NHS – though managed by the PFI contractors. Workers in existing PFI hospitals whose jobs have been moved into the private sector will stay there, according to Milburn.

Unison's general secretary Dave Prentis praised the Dudley strikers at the union's recent national conference, but Unison's national leadership remains opposed to the key steps that would be necessary to mount an effective campaign that really could halt PFI in the NHS and elsewhere.

It still won't back forums such as a special delegate conference that could be essential to laying the basis for co-ordinated industrial action capable of beating New Labour and the privateers, so keen on state-subsidised profits.

Unison vote shakes New Labour

THE EIGHTH annual conference of Unison witnessed a significant leftward shift in this key public sector union, whose leadership had remained critical friends of New Labour throughout the Blair government's first four years.

The union leadership suffered a major rebuff on the conference's second full day as delegates voted by a majority of nearly 92,000 to re-examine the union's links with Labour.

The 2,000 delegates had heard general secretary Dave Prentis launch an attack on essential elements of New Labour's agenda for the second term.

Prentis' rhetoric frequently matched the mood of a conference repeatedly characterised by a new level of disquiet and increasingly widespread bitterness about the reality of New Labour over the past four years, not to mention the prospects of far sharper attacks on public sector workers in the second term.

He described public private partnerships as a "passport to poverty pay" and conceded that "for far too long this union has been taken for granted by the government".

Meanwhile, Labour minister Stephen Byers was heckled loudly during much of his speech.

The debate around the union's Affiliated Political Fund was sparked by a motion from the Bromley local government branch, led by Socialist Party supporter, Glenn Kelly.

www.workerspower.com

It gained eloquent voice in contributions from Middlesbrough branch secretary, Teresa Higgins, and a young activist from Newcastle branch, Chris McDermott – both of them Labour Party members. McDermott highlighted the prospect of local homecare workers mounting an electoral challenge in 2002. He stressed the need to allow Unison resources for such a campaign against the very immediate prospect of privatisation.

Bolstered by the vote of the City of Glasgow branch, historically associated with attacks on the organised left in the union, the move to launch a major review of the union's political funds upset the odds.

But this was only one of symptom of an important shift in a union whose members are certain to bear the brunt of the next round of Blairite attacks.

Unison's national executive committee (NEC) not only backed a call to renationalise the rail, but also supported return to public ownership of the other privatised utilities and industries. NEC member Dave Anderson rounded on both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, indicting them for having failed to "seize the opportunity" to create a more equal and just society.

In defiance of the NEC's pleas, a third of the delegates also backed an amendment to its motion, proposed by Derbyshire County delegate and Workers Power supporter, Alison Higgins, who

hammered home the case for nationalisation without compensation to the "fat cat" privateers.

There were other signs of a left turn by the top table at conference, with the NEC agreeing to put an emergency motion calling for an autumn demonstration against the fascist British National Party and National Front in the light of the general election result in Oldham, Greater Manchester.

The union's leading bureaucrats backed off their historic opposition to the Anti-Nazi League and also agreed to a new working relationship with the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers.

There is, of course, a danger in taking the previously unheard "fighting talk" of Dave Prentis at face value. His position is relatively insecure within the union and he needs to cultivate "left" allies, but at the same time he also recognised that the union's very existence is under threat from the proposals lodged within the Queen's Speech, the most blatant charter for the privatisation of public services yet unveiled.

Whole branches of Unison are getting "lost" as privatisation unhooks them from state services. The union's membership could be severely depleted if wholesale privatisation goes ahead.

The recently launched Unison United Left currently bears all too many hallmarks of previous broad lefts. Our strategy is to sharpen its programme and its rank and file orientation. And we must step up the fight to break the growing layer of dissatisfied Labour-loyal Unison members away from New Labour and towards the Socialist Alliance.

■ Now turn to page 6

What we think...

Unite to fight privatisation

Labour is on a collision course with millions of working class people over privatisation. At stake is whether public services will be run to meet the



needs of millions or the greed of millionaires.

The union leaders, who fear union membership will be culled as public jobs are handed over to anti-union privateers, have finally opened their mouths in protest.

But it will take a lot more than conference speeches and Downing Street dinners to stop Blair and Brown selling off Britain's multi-billion pound state sector.

The mass privatisation that is now underway is demanded by the global capitalist system that Labour is so keen on. To shore up falling profits, the employers need new, stable sources of income. They are signing treaty after treaty that will force the privatisation not just of ancillary services but the core services of health, education and local councils.

Labour politicians say it is not really privatisation. "Don't we already buy school desks from private firms," they ask: "What's wrong with buying some management and teaching from them as well?"

There's nothing wrong with it if you think the world should be run for the benefit of the rich.

But if you think the needs of children and the sick and elderly

come first, then backdoor privatisation makes no sense. **Labour insists on paying private capitalists way over the odds to build new hospitals and schools**

The PFI schemes that

Labour has pioneered are not value for money for taxpayers. Governments can borrow money cheaper than any private capitalist. But to balance the books, Labour insists on paying private capitalists way over the odds to build new hospitals and schools at grossly inflated prices.

For Labour and the privateers it is "win-win": Labour can keep public spending figures down, the bosses get guaranteed profit rates of 10 to 15 per cent over 30 years.

But the big losers are working class people.

Privatisation can be stopped. The key is co-ordinated strike action backed by a mass campaign.

But as the Dudley strike and the RMT action on the London Tube show: the strikes have to go beyond what is allowed under Britain's anti-union laws. We have to link the strikes and make them overtly political – not just aimed at protecting the conditions of the threatened workforce. Otherwise, as in Dudley, we will be picked off piecemeal.

And we need a coherent alternative to PFI and PPP. We can only fund the massive investment needed to rebuild the public service infrastructure by:

■ Taxing the rich, to deliver an immediate 25 per cent increase in public spending on health, education and local services.

■ Renationalising all public services – including PFI and PPP schemes – with no compensation to the profiteers.

■ Running public services under the joint control of committees of workers who provide the service and the people who use it.

Unless we adopt this radical solution, we can kiss the public sector goodbye.

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Next stop Genoa!

WITH THE three shots fired in Gothenburg, we have seen a tremendous step up in the anti-capitalist struggle, both in the eyes of the protestors and in the state. From the protestors' side, everyone has clocked it.

I read a quote from a Ya Basta! member, Francesco, who said: "Our instruments of self-defence can become instruments of attack." This reminds me of a saying: "Every tool is a weapon, if you hold it right." People are gearing up for the next battle which will be in Genoa.

But at the same time, the state is gearing up too. Gothenburg shook the EU states and each one is falling over the others to "crack down on the anti-capitalist thugs" and the "travelling anarchist circus chaos boys" - which is a misnomer in two ways: 1) not everyone is anarchist; and 2) there are chaos girls that are just as hardcore and kick ass.

Germany, Italy, France and Britain are about to widen their anti-football hooligan legislation to include: "Politically motivated hooligans." It took Britain less than a year to switch the focus from sports to politics. They are passing information between states and are closing the borders to known protestors.

Within Italy itself, there has been a media campaign of hysteria that surpasses the media hype around Mayday in the UK.

One paper said protestors were going to throw HIV infected blood at the cops, as well as the usual rumours of bombs, guns and samurai sword charges.

This doesn't seem to have scared the people of Genoa of which, according to opinion polls, 50 per cent are in favour of the protests.

I heard that the Italian fire brigade union has refused to train the cops to use fire hoses because they say that hoses are to be used to put out fires, not turned on protestors. Even Genoa's mayor has argued for the right of the protestors to be able to take to the streets and exercise their democratic right.

But the right-wing national government of Berlusconi (which is packed with ex-fascists and closet fascists) is playing hardball: 20,000 officers; reports of practice "war games" being held; tear gas and water canons on tap; 15 helicopters, four planes, seven naval boats and a few submarines for good luck; rooftop squads, hidden cameras, satellite surveillance; plus 200 body bags have been ordered.

Just for safety's sake, George W Bush will stay on the USS Enterprise - the USA's biggest nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. What's the betting they won't have their phasers set on stun!

The city will be under siege within a ring of steel. There is a red zone where no one is allowed in, and then the yellow zone, where you can go but demonstrations and occupations of public

At a Workers Power rally last month, *Joy McCready* explained why thousands of protesters will this month converge on Genoa, to spoil the party of the most powerful nations on earth. This is a transcript of her speech

spaces are illegal. If anyone has seen the map of Genoa, this takes out pretty much the whole city.

The airport, train stations and roads leading to Genoa will be closed for four days. Someone said to me that they should hold their next meeting in Alcatraz and I thought "Why not? They're more than 90 per cent of the way there."

There is talk of holding the meetings on the aircraft carrier or moving it last minute to Rome. But that would be viewed as a massive political retreat. Already the World Bank has cancelled its meeting in Barcelona due to the fear of protestors (see below). The WTO has had to hold its next meeting in Qatar because Seattle had turned into such a disaster for them.

So what's all the fuss about? Why are people going to Genoa and who are the G8?

The G8 are the most powerful countries in the world: France, Italy, Britain, US, Canada, Japan, Germany and now Russia. These are the economic heavyweights that move around the world exercising their muscle against smaller countries. Born out of the oil crisis in the mid-1970s, this group of industrial powers meets every year to discuss how they are going to carve up the world, each getting a piece of the pie, and to ensure that they don't come into too much conflict themselves.

The G8 dictates to the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, as well as Nato and the UN. The bottom line is that what they say to the rest of the world goes - and they've got the might to back it up.

The G8 are the core of the imperialist system. The policies they apply and export worldwide create huge economic gaps between countries, and the class that is rich gets richer, and the class that is poor gets poorer. Imperialism is a world system that systematically rips off the poor and the developing countries.

In this meeting, the G8 will be talking about debt, the environment and intellectual property.

Let's look at the issue of patents. The TRIP treaty, which stands for trade related property rights, requires even the poorest countries to give new drugs 20 years of patent protection, thereby ruling out the possibility of getting cheaper drugs made by other companies. In Africa, 25 million people are dying of Aids. After the South African court case where the pharmaceutical companies lost their court action, the cheapest anti-retroviral cocktail still



Genoa action

● Join Workers Power and Revolution on our chartered coach. Come to the Global Gathering - or follow it all on the Web!

■ Wednesday 18 July:

Coach organised by Revolution, the socialist youth movement, leaves London for Genoa mid-evening. Details on 07951 493 232

■ Thursday 19 July: Globalise Resistance transport leaves Dover at 10am to arrive in Genoa early on Friday 20

Mass march of migrants (details at www.controg8.org)

■ Friday 20 July: Start of the summit. Siege of the G8 summit by land and sea, called by Ya Basta! Goals of the protest are being debated on the web at: www.tutebianchi.org

At the same time Italian trade unionists are supporting the call for a citizenship strike - a city-wide general strike. Follow the action on the web at www.destroyimf.org

■ Saturday 21 July: A mass demonstration to unite all components of the protest movement. More details from infog8@leoncavallo.org Globalise Resistance train leaves Genoa at 11pm

■ Sunday 22 July: Revolution contingent moves on to a site near Genoa for the World Revolution Global Gathering.

■ Monday 23 Wednesday 25 July: Revolution Global Gathering. Three days of education, debate, activism at a site near Genoa. Phone 07951 493 232 for details. www.worldrevolution.org.uk

■ Don't forget to log on to www.destroyimf.org and www.indymedia.org for realtime coverage of the Genoa protest.

costs around £650 in Kenya, which is actually a drop of 80 per cent. With more than half the population earning less than \$1 a day, only 1,000 Kenyans are currently taking these drugs. About the same number are dying of the virus every day.

Take a look at the multinational institutions that back-up this madness: the WTO, the pharmaceutical companies, the IMF imposing structural adjustment programmes which means countries spend more on debt repayments than health care. But who enforces or backs these up? The armed might of the G8 nations. America still operates the List 301, which names countries that may incur trade sanctions if it is thought they are infringing drug and other patents. And after sanctions, its war. What they say is "We must protect our profits even if a whole continent dies."

Coming back to my first point, what we are seeing is an escalation in the anti-capitalist movement.

People are standing up against the insanity of the capitalist system - we are not going to take this anymore! Ya Basta has issued a Declaration of War against the Italian government. It reads: "Your choice to deploy your armies and special forces against humanity, takes you closer to your allies in the global south where everyday they kill, starve and persecute those who don't accept the neoliberal exploitation. In your Genoa meeting too, you want to impose a world that is exclusive, a world where the only ideology is that of money, profit, market, goods and bodies. Your world is an empire, you are the emperors and billions of people are simply your subjects. From the outskirts of this empire, from the several worlds that resist and grow dreaming of a better life for all, today, we, rebel subjects, formally declare war on you."

That's brilliant! Now the task is to build roots nationally and internationally. Lay the foundation and radiate out, drawing in as many people as possible.

We are going to Genoa to build for strikes, to sink roots in the Italian working class. We're going to show that we all stand on common ground, that we are fighting the same struggles.

The anti-capitalist movement is moving into a new phase and may face severe repression. We want to broaden the movement out so that we don't become isolated and smashed by the state. The only way to stop this is to build a mass movement.

This movement doesn't rely on summit hopping. It doesn't even matter if we make it to Genoa or not. If they stop us at the borders, then Genoa is there.

Our voices will be heard - protest loud and clear. So get involved and get active and make an impact.

For more on the anti-capitalist movement see this month's four-page pull-out: **Workers Power Global**

Barcelona protesters force World Bank no-show

More than 30,000 people demonstrated in Barcelona on 24 June, as part of the campaign against the World Bank meeting in the city. The festive atmosphere was only marred by the secret police provocateurs, who managed to turn the centre of Barcelona into a battlefield.

Thirty thousand marched by the Stock Exchange expressing their rejection of its values, and managed to ignore

the constant provocation of police officers armed with wooden batons, rubber-bullet rifles, helmets and shields. The demo ended in Plaza Catalunya with a speech highlighting the three victories to date:

- The cancellation of the World Bank's meeting.
- The last-minute authorisation of the demo by the authorities.
- And the high turnout at the event.

Afterwards, demonstrators gathered in the square for a performance and a street party.

Throughout the day police agents were doing their best to provide the riot cops with an excuse to criminalise the demonstration.

Various witnesses saw masked men walk out of a crowd of police, carrying sticks, and start a fight at the main assembly place, drawing in a few demon-

strators. The riot cops then waded in.

During the party the police started moving towards the centre of the square and pushing against the crowd. Initially the demonstrators responded by lifting up their arms in a peaceful gesture showing their contempt for violence. The police charged a second time, this time much more violently and managed to break up the street party.

Hundreds responded to the police

attacks by defending themselves and tried to fight back.

Dozens of demonstrators were wounded, and between 30 and 70 people arrested. Some activists are still being held in jail.

A campaign against the police violence has begun in earnest.

★ For more info go to: www.rosadefoc.org <http://barcelona.indymedia.org>

Gothenburg: Free Paul Robinson

During the demonstrations against the EU summit in Gothenburg many demonstrators were brutalised and arrested including a man from London, Paul Robinson. Paul is facing charges of violent rioting and attempted assault. These charges carry a maximum prison sentence of four years.

Paul went to Gothenburg to protest against the threat of Bush's National Missile Defence system, the destruction of the planet by global warming, and the violence inflicted on the world's poor by global capitalism. He is held in isolation on remand in Gothenburg, as the Swedish legal system does not have bail, or a jury system.

Paul Robinson is a trade unionist and member of Unison. He was inspired by the Seattle protests, on 30 November 1999, and attended the solidarity demonstration at Euston Station, London.

He was arrested at this demonstration for defending himself from police attack and was charged with violent disorder. However, at a jury trial, in which he defended himself, he proved that

his actions constituted reasonable self-defence of himself and others on the demonstration against the over-reaction of the police and was acquitted.

The Swedish police have decided to disregard the verdict of the British jury and plan to use evidence from this case against Paul, because their own case is lacking evidence.

Activists who are helping defend Paul fear that Paul is being made an example of, especially when they found out that the Swedish chief of police is a personal friend of the British ambassador to Sweden.

What to do:

■ Write to Paul Robinson, Göteborg Remand Centre (Häktet), Göteborg Polis Headquarters (Polis Huset), Box 429, 40126 Göteborg, Sweden.

■ Send donations to help pay for flights, legal advice etc to: 'Defend Paul Robinson', c/o. PO Box 29689 London E8 2XR. Make cheques payable to Paul Robinson.

■ For more information see www.resist.org.uk/paulrobinson.html

Nike on the run in Melbourne

Every Friday night for the past 13 weeks, activists have successfully blockaded the Nike Super Store in central Melbourne, writes *Hamish MacPherson in Melbourne*.

We are protesting against Nike's exploitation of sweatshop labour in Australia and internationally, and demanding Nike sign the Fairwear Home-workers Code of Practice.

The first blockade was formed by about 30 people linking arms to close the store. Since then, numbers have grown to over 150 participants each week. Nike has admitted publicly that the protests are costing them between \$A10-15,000 (about £3,500 to £5,000) each week. The protests, in the central city mall, have had a massive impact, with many people observing or joining the lively action.

Nike has attempted to use the Melbourne City Council by-laws officers and the Victoria Police Force to break

the protest. Initially, some protesters were charged \$A500 for distributing leaflets under an antiquated Council by-law. The by-law had not been used since the anti-Vietnam war struggles of the early 1970s. Following community outcry, the council has not pursued the charges.

The Victoria Police (Special Operations Group) was sent in to break the blockade. The police, in large numbers, attacked the blockade.

Five activists were arrested and charged with "besetting", an anti-trade union law last used against pickets of the Builders Labourers Federation in the mid-1980s.

This heavy-handed response has only strengthened the resolve of the protesters. The weekly action is now supported by Victoria's Trades Hall Council, who mobilise union members to join the blockade. Last month 30 members of the Australian Manu-

facturing Workers Union joined the blockade.

The campaign is putting our demands to Nike and serving notice that if these demands are not met we will escalate the campaign to include a half day blockade on 3 August and a full day blockade on 11 September.

The 11 September is the anniversary of the 20,000-strong blockade of the World Economic Forum meeting at Crown Towers, Melbourne.

Activists are also preparing for mass protests at the Commonwealth Business Forum on 3 October 2001 to demand cancellation of Third world debt and no new WTO trade round. There will also be massive protests at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Brisbane on 6 October.

For more on the struggle against sweatshop multinationals visit: www.nosweat.org.uk or www.usasnet.org

Three killed in Papua protest

Three people were shot dead and 17 others were seriously injured after police moved to disperse protests against the IMF and World Bank on 26 June, writes *Seamus Murray*.

The repression shattered five days of peaceful protests by 3,000 University of Papua New Guinea (PNG) students, workers and unemployed outside the offices of the PNG prime minister, Mekere Morauta, at Waigani, some 10 kilometres from the centre of the capital, Port Moresby.

The protesters had rallied outside the government offices to present a petition to the government calling for:

- The suspension of the entire privatisation scheme.
- A complete severing of ties with the World Bank and IMF.
- A scrapping of the customary land registration scheme.
- The prime minister's resignation if he fails to implement this programme.

After prime minister Morauta accepted the petition and had promised to return with answers the protesters' ranks dwindled to a few hundred. At this point the police moved in, teargassing and opening fire on unarmed demonstrators, who refused to leave until Morauta returned as promised.

As news spread of the deaths and shootings of unarmed protesters, thousands of people came out on to the streets of Waigani, attacking and burning government and commercial buildings as well as a police barracks.

"The government district of the city looked like a battleground, with streets strewn with rocks, and bunt-out cars and buildings", according to an Aus-

tralian journalist, who flew over the area in a helicopter.

In response to the shootings, PNG trade unions, which were not part of the student protests but are opposed to privatisation, called for Morauta to step down. Unions threatened to close ports, shut down the national airline, and disrupt power supplies. Shops, schools and government offices were closed the next day, and the streets of the capital deserted.

The following day, the Port Moresby university campus was surrounded by police, in order to keep most of the students contained.

A student, who had taken part in the demonstrations, said afterwards that "we are not just fighting the IMF and World Bank, it is now apparent that we are also fighting our own government".

As a former Australian colony, which gained political independence in 1975, PNG has stumbled from one crisis to another. The resource-rich country has been mired in recession for the past six years. To obtain a US\$200 million injection into the ailing economy, the government turned to the World Bank last year. In return for the loans, the government guaranteed public sector reform and the privatisation of state

enterprises.

The latest protests followed the announcement of plans to sell off the only government-owned bank, the PNG Banking Corporation, as well as the state-run airline, Air New Guinea. Over the past three years, PNG's water supplies and electricity generator have been sold to the private sector in an unsuccessful attempt to bail the country out of its economic crisis.

The gap between the already impoverished PNG masses and a tiny elite widens. This divide will only grow the more that PNG is subjected to the unfettered rule of multinational corporations: a point well-understood on the streets of Port Moresby.

The fatal shootings will not deter those activists who want to see an end to PNG's domination by the IMF and World Bank, and Australian-based mining giants like BHP and Rio-Tinto.

Since the murders on the streets of Port Moresby, protests have been initiated across Australia in solidarity with the PNG activists and against the IMF and World Bank. The demonstrations come as Australia's foreign minister has reaffirmed the Liberal government's support for the PNG privatisation programme.

Debate: Self-defence

Jeremy Dewar reviews the arguments on non-violence

Demonstrators who fought the police in Gothenburg were condemned by predictable sources: Blair, Schroder and Bush. But they were also condemned by their so-called friends.

Susan George, a leading anti-globalisation campaigner condemned the demonstrators who defended themselves against the police (Attac newsletter No 87, June 2001). She argues that a) violence rebounds onto non-violent protesters and drives them away; b) you can't beat the capitalist state; c) you can't build a mass movement on the basis of those prepared to get killed; d) it's not democratic to fight back if the majority are against it. She writes:

"In sum, I've had enough of these tyrants [ie the demonstrators, WP] and I fear that if this sort of violence continues uninhibited, it will ultimately destroy our movement, the most beautiful political hope for 30 years."

Workers Power believes self-defence against police violence is justified. It is not the aim of the movement to attack the police. But when they attack peaceful marches - as in Gothenburg and in Barcelona - it is with the aim of stopping the mass movement. You can't build a mass movement if you vacate the streets when teargas is fired.

So the question of self-defence is being posed point blank in the anti-capitalist movement. Either we begin to organise self-defence against the cops or we get maimed, killed and defeated.

Organised self-defence - as opposed to the disorganised and sometimes wanton destruction favoured by anarchists - is also the best way to minimise the impact of violence on the cohesion of our movement.

So what does Globalise Resistance think about this? And what's been the response of the SWP, the main force inside it?

In a London Globalise Resistance meeting Workers Power members put forward a resolution asserting our rights to assembly and free speech, "and to defend ourselves in the process from any unprovoked attack, whether that be from fascists, corporate thugs or the police, who are after all just civilians in uniform".

We proposed that "GR will therefore organise self-defence - stewards, squads to breakthrough and de-arrest, spotters, phones, etc. - to stop our demonstrations from being attacked, broken up or kept away from our goal".

Obviously, a rich and full discussion could have clarified misinterpretations and even improved on our proposals. But a leading SWP member proposed an alternative resolution, which stated: "Defence squads will provide no effective protection against state repression. Because they create an elitist, professional image of demonstrators they discourage ordinary people from joining the protests... Calling for 'breakthrough squads' and the like is irresponsible as it would end up excluding many people from the GR network, dividing and weakening a growing movement."

The SWP could only offer, as an alternative, bigger numbers, more protesters. How big do our protests have to get? There were 50,000 in Gothenburg, 35,000 in Barcelona last month. Both got smashed up.

We are capable of organising self-defence, in proportion to the threat we face, and in a manner which does not alienate people from our movement.

Full democratic debate in forums like the Genoa Social Forum and the Monopoly May Day Collective can agree on the aims of the demonstration: for example to get into the summit, or to have a street party in Oxford Circus. We could elect experienced and trusted individuals and representatives to come up with a gameplan. Information should be fed back on a need-to-know-when basis, volunteers called for various tasks and appropriate training given to all. No extra importance should be given to the arguments of those who organise or participate in self-defence: measures should be taken to make sure it does not become the preserve of a macho elite.

In the name of preserving unity the SWP refuses to contemplate organised self-defence within the anti-capitalist movement.

No one is in favour chucking anyone out of the movement: we are just fighting for the best way forward. As SWP member John Rees in an article on the united front wrote: "Unity in name only, unity in passivity, achieves precisely the same as disunity - nothing. A united front is only a united front when it acts, otherwise it is merely a discussion circle".

Defending a demonstration from police attack may not overthrow capitalism but it's a step in the right direction. Why then will the SWP not fight for defence squads?

Because it wants to build a protest movement in a permanent alliance with the self-appointed gurus of middle class "anti-capitalism". Then it can - as SWP member Julie Waterson did in a fringe meeting in Gothenburg - preach revolution from the wings, while centre stage is given over, without criticism, to the reformists.

This dishonest policy is prepared to put the interests of "the party" above and against the interests of the class. Youth are being systematically misled for the sake of unity with people who have already shown they will run a mile when the going gets tough.

What do you think? Email paper@workerspower.com

www.destroyimf.org

DestroyIMF is the world's first protest portal. It's got links to everywhere else on the anti-capitalist network and a summary of what's going on. Check it out.

Alliance must organ

The Socialist Alliance votes in the election were disappointing. But while there was no mass break from Labour at the election, the union conferences that followed showed that activists are sick of Blair. *Mark Hoskisson*, a member of Socialist Alliance election committee, outlines the way ahead

The Socialist Alliance election campaign had a massive impact on working class politics. In the final days before 7 June, activists in almost every town reported they were receiving real support on the doorsteps and in workplaces. That is why, as the votes were counted up, delivering on average between 1 per cent and 2.5 per cent, many activists were disappointed.

The impact of the campaign just did not translate into votes for the SA.

Overall, despite the efforts of thousands of activists, the Socialist Alliance vote was disappointing – there was no major break from Labour beyond a number of areas where special circumstances bumped the vote up. Obvious highlights were St Helens, where local firefighter Neil Thompson stood against Blair's imposed millionaire ex-Tory, Shaun Woodward, and Coventry North East, where former Labour MP Dave Nellist was the candidate.

But the election campaign itself was successful in a number of respects, regardless of the vote. At its best it was a dynamic, imaginative and active campaign. Candidates toured workplaces; high-profile stalls took the message to tens of thousands of working class shoppers; there were lively hustings and, during the post strike, it was the Socialist Alliance who went to the picket lines and supported the unofficial national dispute.

In Greenwich & Woolwich, Workers Power supporter Kirstie Paton was determined to go beyond traditional election tactics. Her campaign tried to reach out to the anti-capitalist movement and young people – as well as workplaces and estates. So Greenwich & Woolwich SA organised an action against privatisation in the area that saw youth dressed as pirates boarding the Cutty Sark (a local landmark) and dropping a "No Privatisation – Vote Socialist Alliance" banner from the rigging.

The campaign reached out to the working class and allowed socialists to put down a marker for the future.

Of course mistakes were made and lessons need to be learned. The tendency on the part of the largest component of the Alliance – the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) – to restrict campaigning and leaflets to the "priority pledges" and not use the full range of policies in the manifesto as the basis for publicity and campaigning was a mistake.

Issues came up and the local alliances needed to respond to them with the policies outlined in the manifesto and not just keep repeating the pledges as though they were the be-all and end-all of the Socialist Alliance's message. This minimalism restricted the scope of the socialist message we were taking to people.

And it was no accident. The SWP

always saw the pledges as a minimum programme that would allow activists to avoid the hard arguments with workers breaking from Labour, such as Troops Out Of Ireland or Abolish All Immigration Controls. Paton's campaign in Greenwich was one of the few where the candidate repeatedly spelled out the need for workers' control, revolutionary struggle, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalist direct action.

In addition, unnecessary conflicts took place over canvassing. Following a circular from the national office discouraging canvassing – penned by Rob Hoveman, John Rees (SWP) and Mike Marqusee and John Nicholson (independents) – many SWP local organisers took this to be an "instruction". Both in Lambeth and Islington hard and fast decisions not to canvass were taken. In other areas canvassing went ahead.

But rows over this hampered the work and confused the issues. Instead of creatively discussing where it might be best to do targeted canvassing as a means of opening up discussions with workers, a false polarisation of "canvassing versus leaflets" was set up.

Workers Power supporters attempted to do focused canvassing. We accepted that it was impossible to canvass everywhere – but canvassing is important:

- to get identify the vote and get it out.
- to find out what issues are affecting a particular working class area.
- train the activists in addressing real issues, not allowing them to hide behind left papers and leaflets.

Last, but not least, the SA made a big mistake by not standing in Oldham. Here we had the chance to stand an Asian candidate (an SWP member), or failing that a leading and well respected anti-racist local trade unionist (a Workers Power supporter). Either of them could have helped rally young Asians who were engaged in an anti-racist uprising to the socialist alternative. We might not have beaten the fascists but we would have begun to lay the basis for a working class alternative: a revolutionary strategy to fight poverty, forge class unity and organise self-defence.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance argued that we did not have the resources to stand such a candidate. The local SWP, despite supporting the idea of standing in principle, went along with this when it came to the vote. It was a big mistake.

Despite all this the election was a brilliant experience for all activists because it started a process of learning how to win socialist arguments among much wider layers of the working class and the oppressed than we are generally able to speak to.

The future development of the Socialist Alliance as a real alternative to Labour depends on our ability to look at our record critically and assess where we can best improve.

The coming national conference – provisionally set for 3 November and running for two days – must improve both the structure and political profile of the Socialist Alliance. The debate over the Socialist Alliance constitution at the national conference should result in the consolidation of that organisation as a real national force.

Workers Power has argued that the logical development of the Alliance should be to become a party – we believe it should be a party unambiguously committed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. At the moment we

are in a minority. Many of the independent ex-Labour activists would be happy with a party – as long as it was not dominated by the SWP and as long as it was not revolutionary. Meanwhile the SWP is dead against forming a party, and has advanced a "third way" between party and united front as a way of maintaining an alliance with the left-reformists.

Workers Power cannot and does not want to impose the party solution: we want to win the argument.

However, we do believe that in the next period the need for a party will pose itself ever more sharply. Insofar as the Socialist Alliance is able to grow and attract new forces, it will have to adopt a structure that enables it to intervene like a party in the struggles that will ensue. Moreover, the policies that will be needed to win those struggles will, in practice, have to be revolutionary policies even if those supporting them do not as yet consider themselves to be revolutionary.

There are three principal arenas of conflict that the Socialist Alliance must relate to:

- The growing international anti-capitalist movement.
- The struggle against racism and fascism.
- The battles that trade unionists will undertake against both privatisation and the monopoly hold over their political funds by Blair's Labour Party.

At the moment the SWP see the SA as principally a united front between revolutionaries and reformists breaking from Labour. It is, in their oft-used phrase, a "political home" for the latter and the job of the left, says the SWP, is to make it hospitable for them.

That is why the SWP deliberately restricts the programme of the Socialist Alliance to minimum demands. It is why it wants the alliance to adopt a structure based on individual membership.

Meanwhile, the SWP believes it can use other organisations – Globalise Resistance, rank and file papers in the unions, and the ANL – to relate to the areas of struggle outlined above.

This is self-defeating – and a product of the SWP leadership's sectarian-

We can bre

On the day before the general election *The Times* ran a major article about the growing influence of the Socialist Alliance within the trade unions. Christine Buckley observed:

"Hard-left groups such as the Socialist Alliance may not win any parliamentary seats tomorrow but they are making strong inroads in another area – the trade unions."

This was not simply a run-of-the-mill, red-baiting piece. It was a considered assessment of the growing gap between the aspirations of ordinary trade union members and Blair's government. And since the election, it has been proved correct.

Three events have concentrated the bosses' minds on the danger of a resurgent left in the unions:

- The historic vote by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to decide that its political fund could be used to support candidates in elections other than those of the Labour Party.
- The unofficial, all-out national postal strike.
- The resurgence of militancy on the railways – evident in a series of massive "yes" votes for strikes on both the rail network and the London Underground.

After the election, the threat to Labour's monopoly over the political funds of the trade unions continued at Unison conference. Dave Prentis, Unison's general secretary, warned the conference that a resolution to review the use of the Affiliated Political Fund (APF) would merely strengthen and encourage the Socialist Alliance. He attacked the SA by name repeatedly in his speech. Despite this, Unison conference voted to support the resolution by a majority of nearly 92,000 votes.

At the same time, unrest has continued in the Royal Mail after it was revealed that Labour is busily preparing to privatise sectors of Consignia, slash

jobs – 1,300 in North London alone – and train scabs for a national strike. All the signs are that Blair wants to take on the postal union, the CWU, as a key part of his strategy to break general union resistance to privatisation. The CWU conference had, days before the election, rejected a call to break with Labour – but with one third of conference delegates in this big union voting for the Socialist Alliance-backed resolution.

In this context the bumbling stalwarts of the trade union bureaucracy have started to panic. Muffled cries of protest against privatisation have been made by Bill Morris and John Edmonds (leaders of the TGWU and GMB respectively). At a hastily convened dinner for these bureaucrats Blair made clear that nobody would be allowed to stand in the way of his plans for private involve in public services.

Following the Unison and FBU votes the *Financial Times* devoted a big article to the resurgence of the left in the unions. Citing RMT assistant general secretary Bob Crow and general Secretary elect of the civil service union, PCS, Mark Serwotka, as Socialist Alliance supporters, the *FT* warned:

"The new radicals reflect a growing mood of discontent among members in some niche unions in a position to block change and defend working practices through the use of old-fashioned muscle."

Indeed, the *FT* even blamed the Socialist Alliance for the unofficial postal strike and the rash of RMT action.

The background is a slow but sure resurgence of militancy: strike days in the year 2000 were double the 1999 figure and the highest annual total since 1996. There is growing political unrest in the unions with Labour's pro-big business agenda.

In the context of Labour's stated plans to attack the public sector through privatisation these two developments are of enormous significance. They offer the Socialist Alliance the chance to turn

Realise the fightback

ism that its members must fight against.

It will give the SWP three separate organisations within which it can operate as the dominant force and thereby extend its influence and win recruits to its ranks. That is fine for the SWP, but it does not provide a way forward to harness the political processes at work in these movements and turn them in a revolutionary direction.

Since Globalise Resistance is being built in a permanent alliance with liberal pacifists, and the SA being kept at the level of left-reformist minimum demands, and the ANL is tied to a legalist approach to anti-fascism – all those moving to the left are offered an ultimatum: join an opportunist, pacifist “front” and/or the SWP.

Our perspective is different. We do not believe the Socialist Alliance can become a revolutionary party overnight. But we do say, openly, that we want it to move in that direction. If it doesn't then the many individual, often reformist, activists it wins now will simply drift away. Or, worse, they will only get involved around elections. If that happens, The Socialist Alliance will

become a purely electoral organisation.

To avoid this we argue that the Socialist Alliance must become, above all else – including above elections – a direct action organisation. It must be oriented to the anti-capitalist movement, the anti-racist uprisings and campaigns, and must lead the fight to transform the unions.

In the battle against privatisation more is needed than just keeping services in the public sector: we need investment funded by taxing the rich together with a new system of workers' and users' control. To get this we will need action by trade unionists.

To get such action the Socialist Alliance will have to begin to organise within the unions. It will have to build on the gains so far made in the FBU and Unison, and initiate new campaigns to fight the corporate takeover of public services.

In the fight against racism and fascism we must emphasise the need for more public spending to counter divide and rule tactics – but also organised self-defence. The SA must fight for a relentless struggle against the racist

police forces as the only effective means of defending black and Asian communities under siege. It must fight for working class support for black self-defence. It must reverse its Birmingham conference decision not to call for disbanding the police. It must forget the reformist utopia of “police accountability”.

The ANL, which repeatedly calls for the racist police to ban the fascists, only for such bans to be used against the left, is totally inadequate to the task of combating fascism. Militant self-organisation to impose no platform for fascists must be the rallying cry of the Socialist Alliance.

Above all – as the echoes of the police guns in Gothenburg continue to ring around the organising centres of the anti-capitalist movement – the Socialist Alliance must become a pole of attraction to the thousands of militant youth in this movement and the millions of young people who are alienated by mainstream politics.

It must become an anti-capitalist organisation itself. That is, it must present to such youth not a collection of

socialist reforms but a strategy for destroying the capitalist system.

If the Socialist Alliance is to grow outside of election periods, it must present a coherent face in each of these areas of struggle. It must present a revolutionary answer.

If it does, thousands could be attracted into its ranks. Those thousands will breathe new life into the left. They will be the ones to decide whether or not the Socialist Alliance should become a party, and whether its strategy should be reform or revolution.

Because we are convinced we can convince them in struggle, our main proposal to the Socialist Alliance for the period ahead is: fight on these three fronts, recruit the mili-

itants to the SA, and open a period of democratic debate on the question of what sort of party we need.



Break the unions from Labour

the FT's fantasies about the SA's influence in the unions into reality.

That fact has not been lost on Labour either. Blair's response to the conference votes on political funding was swift and decisive. A proposed rule change has been tabled for discussion at Labour's conference. It reads:

“Organisations which support, financially or otherwise, the candidature of any person standing for election in opposition to a duly endorsed Labour candidate, or which support a registered party other than the Labour Party (in areas where the Labour Party is organised) shall be ineligible for affiliation to the party.”

There is only one registered political party that Labour is worried about – the Socialist Alliance.

And this bureaucratic rule is designed to stop the unions having the right to discuss and decide democratically which candidates their money should be used to support. It is a threat to those

unions that, if they allocate a proportion of their money to the Socialist Alliance, then even if the bulk of the money still went to Labour the union will be expelled from the party.

This is a breathtaking attack on democracy. It should be a wake-up call for union militants still loyal to Labour.

At a local level, the union link to Labour is wearing thin anyway. The Labour Research Department conducted a survey of 178 union branches and found that two thirds of them had absolutely no involvement in the activities of the local constituency Labour Parties. Less than one third of the affiliated branches (133 were affiliated to their local Labour Party) have regular reports from the party, 15 per cent have never even had a report back. A branch secretary in the MSF commented: “The Labour Party has lost interest in the unions. There is no longer any overlap between active MSF mem-

bers and active Labour Party members in our branch.”

At a national level, Blair may still invite a few trusted bureaucrats to dinner. But as the right winger Peter Kilfoyle lamented in *Tribune*, the unions are “a source of income but not of influence”.

In these circumstances the opportunity to break the unions from servility to Labour is posed. How should the Socialist Alliance realise this opportunity?

- We must prepare a cross-union campaign demanding the right for unions to decide how to allocate their political funds on a proportional basis. If one-third of the members support a Socialist Alliance candidate then one-third of the money should be allocated accordingly. If Labour threatens expulsion of the union for this, every union should withhold funds from Labour altogether.

- We must fight in Labour-affiliated unions for a democratisation of the Labour conference block vote on similar lines. Votes for policies that challenge Blair must get a voice within the party. It is anti-democratic for a union to use its entire block vote to support a policy that, say, a third of the members have voted against. The block vote must be broken up and used proportionally.

- We must link these democratic questions to an active fight against privatisation – sponsoring a united front within and across all unions to fight with all forms of action necessary, including those which breach the rotten anti-union laws, this assault on our services, jobs, wages and conditions.

To draw all of this work together we should organise a Socialist Alliance trade union conference on both the political fund issue and the privatisation issue in January 2002.

All of this begs the question of how we should organise trade unionists who support the Socialist Alliance. Workers Power believes that we need rank and file organisations in every union



Postal workers signaled their readiness to fight with wildcat strikes at the end of May

to democratise them from top to bottom, kick out the unaccountable bureaucrats and replace them with officials elected annually, paid the average wage of their members and recallable by their members during their term of office. By these means we can begin to rebuild the unions as fighting organisations committed to solidarity, direct action and a resolute defence of working class interests.

At the moment there is a wide range of rank and file groups, left caucuses, broad lefts and so on. The Socialist Alliance should not set up a separate Socialist Alliance union campaign, even though Socialist Alliance supporters should form united caucuses in every union.

But the job of such caucuses should be to promote the building of real rank and file organisations, either by calling for and forging unity among such groups where they already exist or by building them where they do not. Such organisations should embrace people who do not yet support the Socialist Alliance – left Labour people, syndicalists who reject political organisations and so on.

The extent to which such a strategy

is successful will determine whether the Socialist Alliance can capitalise on the gains in the unions it has already made.

And if, over the next year those gains are substantial and more unions come to consider supporting the Alliance, even affiliating to it, then the project of transforming the Alliance into a party will move from the realm of speculation to the realm of organisation.

The next four years could see increasing numbers union activists involved in an organised break with Labour: a historic event and one that poses the question of their political destination point blank.

Will they create a new version of Old Labour – with policies that resist privatisation but rely on pacifism and bureaucratic methods? Or will they create a revolutionary alternative to Labour that links up with the youth activists and the global class struggle?

Only if the existing militants in the Socialist Alliance fight for a revolutionary alternative will we stop the union break with Labour simply creating a re-run of the reformism of the past. And that will only happen if the SWP, the leading force in the Alliance, is forced to change tack by its own members.

FBU resolution 101 - Political Fund

“Conference notes with concern the continuing attacks on the Fire Service by Labour controlled Authorities.

Therefore, Conference agrees that the Fire Brigades Union Political Fund will in future be used to support candidates and organisations whose policies are supportive of the policies and principles of this Union. This may include candidates and organisations who stand in opposition to New Labour so long as they uphold policies and principles in line with those of the Fire Brigades Union.

When considering any request for assistance the Fire Brigades Union and Regional Committees should carefully examine the



policies and record of all such individuals and organisations.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to prepare any necessary subsequent rule changes for Annual Conference 2002.”

Carried on a card vote
For - 27,498
Against - 23,924

Solidarity with the Palestinian masses

Behind the current ceasefire and shuttle diplomacy, Israel continues its murderous, racist occupation. The world working class must come to the aid of the beleaguered Palestinian masses

THE PALESTINIAN Intifada which erupted in the Occupied Territories last September and has since claimed more than 560 lives has reached a crucial stage.

After months of watching from the sidelines, the Bush administration has in the past weeks opted for active diplomacy in Palestine. Bush held a meeting with Israel's prime minister Sharon in Washington and secretary of state Colin Powell flew to Egypt and the West Bank to speak with Arafat and Mubarak.

The objective of the new diplomacy remains, as always, to force the concessions out of the Palestinians that Israeli repression alone cannot achieve: the halting of Palestinian attacks on settlers, on civilians in Israel and a clampdown on those responsible inside the occupied territories for them.

But the US has its own agenda too. A raging Intifada, a break down of life on the west Bank, communities kept going by UN food handouts, and surrounding Arab countries that have broken off ties with Israel – none of this is good for US business interests in the region.

That is why the US government became alarmed when it appeared a month ago that Sharon might be escalating the conflict to the point of all-out war on Arafat, reoccupy PNA-controlled territory and effectively put an end to the Oslo process.

The ceasefire agreed in mid-June amounts to little more than the US demanding no more offensive actions by either side. In practice this means that the PLO have agreed to "stop violence" while the Israelis have agreed to look at putting an end to settlement building in some weeks' time. Sharon, therefore, has achieved a major concession after rejecting the recommendation of the Mitchell Commission that an end to PLO armed resistance be reciprocated by an end to the aggressive programme of settlement building.

Sharon's coalition government embarked on a war strategy against the Intifada. Suicide bombings, firearm and mortar attacks from the Palestinians have been met with F-16 fighter planes, tank shells, bulldozing of communities and invasion (and occupation) of sovereign PNA territory.

So far Arafat has refused to agree to the Israeli demand to arrest Hamas and Islamic Jihad supporters in PNA areas, many of whom were arrested in 1996 as a way of securing compliance with the peace process and then released last October once the Intifada was under way.

After an eight-month investigation, the Mitchell Commission on the causes of the Palestinian Intifada called on Israel and the Palestinians to observe immediate, unconditional ceasefire.

The report called on Palestinians to: "Prevent gunmen from using Palestinian areas to fire on Israeli positions".



Palestinian youth deserve better support than that offered to them by Arafat



It also called on Israel to "freeze all new construction of settlements" which they have refused to do. Instead, the government has announced the start of 700 more settlement housing units near Jerusalem.

At present, 20 per cent of Gaza has been given over to 6,500 Israeli settlers while more than one million Palestinians are crammed into the rest of a territory the size of the Isle of Wight.

This latest diplomatic offensive is an attempt to defuse the Intifada, while failing to deal with the underlying causes that gave rise to the explosion last September. A freeze on settlements that have been illegally constructed would do nothing to remove them as organising centres for Zionist armed terror against Palestinian villagers nearby.

During the Oslo process, the numbers of settlers and settlements has continued to grow from little over 100,000, when the agreement was signed in 1993, to more than 200,000 today.

The settlers are an essential part of the Zionist plan to establish Israel's borders throughout historic Palestine. They are the armed front line troops of Zionist expansion.

The Zionist denial of the Palestinians' right to independence, the willingness to re-occupy the Palestinian territories of the PNA, the failure of the Israeli government to accept the principle of the right for self determination, the complicity of Arafat and Fatah and PNA during the 1990s to repress militant opposition to the Zionist occupation – all this fuels the forces of the radical Islam.

Most Israelis rejected the sitting prime minister Barak in favour of Sharon at the last election because they believed that he could contain the Intifada and halt the loss of Israeli lives.

Workers Power (Occupied Palestine) writes: Twenty mainly young Israelis were killed and around 100 injured in a suicide bomb attack in a night-club in Tel Aviv. The Islamic Jihad organisation claimed responsibility for the attack in an announcement broadcast on Abu Dhabi Television. This was the fifth bomb attack in a major city in a week.

While actions against settlers and IDF forces are entirely justified and legitimate, these bombings against Israelis who are not directly involved in the repression of the Palestinians are reactionary and should be stopped. Killing youth going into night-clubs doesn't further this struggle but merely gives legitimacy to the Israeli butcher Sharon in the eyes of the world.

This act suggests that the aim of the Palestinian people's struggle for national liberation is to kill all Israeli Jews, drive them from Palestine. The militants of the Islamic Jihad only cause damage to the option for a democratic and a bi-national future in Palestine and serve the interests of the Zionist bourgeoisie.

We call on the Islamic organisations to stop immediately these suicide bombings not aimed at military targets. We call on the resistance organisations – the Fatah, the Democratic Front, the Popular front and so on – to bring these activists to account.

Their actions hinder the emergence of a democratic, popular and proletarian leadership. The growth in popularity of the Islamic organisations presents a danger to Palestinian workers, women, students and youth; if the radical Islamic goal was achieved it would resemble Khomeini's dictatorship in Iran.

We say to the Israeli masses that the quickest and only genuine way to stop the bombings is to break with their government's daily repression of the Palestinians to show that there is a genuine mass force for just settlement of the Palestinian national goals.

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

- An end to Israeli aggression; IDF out of PNA territory and the Occupied Territories; end assassinations, raids and destruction of homes.
- Withdraw the Israeli settlements, settlers out of Occupied Territories.
- Force the US to cease its \$3 billion a year subvention to the Zionist state. No arms sales to Israel; enforce existing agreements to block settler food from West Bank labelled as Israeli.
- For massive economic aid to the Palestinian authorities.
- For an end to Fatah cronyism and corruption, and brutality aimed at its critics.
- For mass town and camp committees to elect representatives to armed local councils of struggle and to a Palestine-wide Constituent Assembly.
- No return to Oslo, the cruel deception that peace and injustice were compatible!
- For the right of all post-1947 refugees to return to their homeland
- No to a "two state" solution. Zionism and Palestinian right to self-determination are incompatible. For a unitary, bi-national, secular socialist state of Palestine. No to anti-semitism!

What an illusion!

Israel will continue to reap a whirlwind for its oppression of the Palestinians. The Palestinians have endured 50 years of land theft, blockades, sweatshop labour, bulldozers, deportations, bans on foreign travel, arbitrary arrest, torture and assassination.

Meanwhile their Israeli Jewish oppressors continue to enjoy or aspire to privileged European lifestyles and close their eyes and ears to the sound of their Arab neighbours' agony

Israeli society is being polarised by the Intifada and Sharon's response to it. Most people in Israel want a halt to the expansion of the settlements.

A minority are trying to bring food to Palestinian villages suffering hunger as a result of the blockades and the disruption of economic life. Some Jews try to monitor and defend Palestinian human rights.

Outside of Palestine millions watch with revulsion the daily slaughter of the Palestinians in an unequal struggle between PNA police AK47s and Israeli tanks, between teenagers' slings and IDF sniper fire.

Televised images bring to mind the worst crimes of the apartheid state in South Africa and ask why do many EU and the US governments stand by and let it happen? They ask how can a state that was seen (wrongly) as a refuge from the anti-semitic horrors of the 1930s, turn with such racist savagery upon another oppressed people?

The answer is simple and brutal. For the USA, Israel is the lynchpin of its whole Middle East foreign policy. It has been the Zionist state's most fervent backer for decades and gives this small state more than \$3 billion a year in aid and access to its most advanced arms. With these it keeps the Arab neighbours divided and cowed, which in turn allows the US to guarantee the continued supply of precious oil to the USA.

The EU has a more independent rhetoric but will not do anything that the US deems is against its interest. The European Union has miserably failed for more than a decade to properly enforce its formal ban on food products being imported into the EU from Israel.

These products, in fact, originate in the Occupied Territories.

The official leaders of the labour movements of Europe and the USA are little better, refusing to take an open, critical stand against Israel's actions against the just claims of the Palestinians.

It is time for a mass working class campaign in solidarity with the Palestinians. They are heroic but beleaguered, exhausted but determined. We must help. We must mount pressure on the trade unions and the social democratic parties to break with the pro-Zionist positions of the EU and North American governments.

The Indonesian parliament will meet to discuss the impeachment of president Wahid: he has a problem – not only are the politicians ranged against him but also the military. *John Mckee reports*

INDONESIA

Generals warn Wahid

ON 1 AUGUST both houses of Indonesia's parliament, the MPR, will meet to discuss the impeachment of the president, Abdurrahman Wahid.

Wahid, leader of a relatively small party in parliament, has lost the support of the coalition of Muslim parties that brought him to power less than two years ago. His vice-president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, leader of the PDI-P, seems likely to take the presidency if he is removed.

The last few months have seen Wahid manoeuvring to prevent parliament from discussing his record in office – a preliminary to impeachment. After threatening to mobilise his Muslim supporters in East Java to "invade the capital" he has now threatened to call a "snap election" and declare a state of emergency if the parliament tries to remove him.

Wahid has a problem though. Not only are all the major parties ranged against him but also the powerful military and police. They spent 20 years repressing democracy under the Suharto dictatorship, but now say they must "defend it" against the president.

The army sees the deep divisions between the ruling class parties as a golden opportunity to restore its reputation as defender of stability. It has made clear that Wahid's nominal position as "supreme commander" of the armed forces only applies to defence matters not in the "political and social arena". In other words they will not go along with a state of emergency. The generals have also warned the politicians not to

bring their supporters onto the streets saying this would lead to an "all-out response" by the armed forces – a direct threat to Wahid not to mobilise his mass base in East Java against the parliament.

Wahid has been trying to placate the army by giving them an increasingly free hand to crush the rebellion in Aceh led by the independence movement GAM.

Peace talks have all but abandoned as the army has attacked "GAM bases" – often simply villages declared as GAM supporters – and burnt them to the ground. Hundreds have been killed in the last few months.

In the midst of the killing, Exxon-Mobil the massive US oil company, is trying to re-open its huge Arun gas fields in Aceh, closed for months by GAM actions. It has been guaranteed three battalions – 2,000 troops – to guard its installations over an area of 80 kilometres. Meanwhile, the oil giant is being taken to court in the USA by human rights activists for colluding with military death squads over many years in Aceh.

Wahid has also been trying to bolster his support internationally, visiting Australia and changing his economic team to placate the IMF.

The IMF had promised a \$5 billion loan to help Indonesia pay its debts to the western banks, providing it pursued the normal structural adjustment programme. This means privatisation combined with ending subsidies on fuel, electricity etc – one of the few measures to have cushioned the poor from



Wahid discusses with his generals (above). Human rights activists in Aceh (below)



plummeting living standards. Wahid's economics minister was considered too critical of the IMF plan, and the IMF had refused for six months to disperse the latest part of the loan or even visit Jakarta.

In June Wahid brought in a new economics minister Burhanuddin Abdullah, a Deputy Governor at the Bank of Indonesia, who had worked for many years at the IMF headquarters in Washington. Quickly the IMF programme started to hit on the poor.

On 15 June, Wahid announced massive fuel price rises averaging 30 per cent. Diesel prices, mostly, effecting the poor who rely on bus transport, rose by 50 per cent. Next month electricity prices are planned to rise by 20 per cent. The price rises sparked off widespread protests by both workers and students.

While the poor found basic commodities in the markets rising by 10 to 25 per cent because of rising transport costs, national papers were exposing the latest scam among MPs.

As well as getting free furnished apartments, free electricity, phones and water and massive allowances for travel – on top of their inflated salaries – journalists spotted brand new washing machines costing \$540 being delivered by courier to MPs' residences. The speaker of the parliament defended this latest perk as being necessary so that members could appear in parliament "with clean clothes".

Workers take to the streets

Two measures taken by Wahid's government have brought the workers back on the streets.

The government, under pressure from the employers, repealed a decree passed last year, that allowed sacked workers to receive compensation based on the number of years worked. The original aim was to cushion the mass redundancies and to prevent employers replacing experienced workers with new recruits from the countryside.

A series of demonstrations against the repeal have taken place in most major cities in Indonesia, led by the trade unions. In Bandung over 10,000 workers came into the provincial capital from the industrial areas to protest. MPs who tried to calm the crowd were stoned, and the police attacked

the demonstration with rubber bullets. Twenty demonstrators were arrested, including several members of the left party, the PRD, for the crime of being found "distributing leaflets asking workers to join strike action during a rally".

The decree to repeal the redundancy compensation law was suspended

The price hikes in fuel led to further protests. This time workers were joined by hundreds of students. Student demonstrations in Jakarta were broken up with rubber bullets and tear gas.

Bus drivers went on strike as they were prevented from putting up prices

despite the fuel increases. The government was so worried about implementing this IMF demand that they had placed over 42,000 police on standby. They remembered that massive riots over fuel price rises in 1998 led to the downfall of the hated Suharto.

This time too the government was forced to make some concessions. It extended subsidies for six months to keep fares down in some cities. The decree to repeal the redundancy compensation law was suspended – a considerable victory given the downturn in the Indonesian economy.

Clearly, these are temporary retreats by a weak government. Once the parliamentary crisis is resolved the bosses will once again demand the workers make the sacrifices.



The left falls for Wahid

There is a real danger that the student organisations, which have a fine record of struggle against the dictatorship, will end up supporting one bourgeois faction or another in the fight over the presidency.

The Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) has fallen straight into this trap and aligned itself with Wahid as representing some sort of "progressive wing" of the ruling class. This is, in part, because Megawati is now being supported by the parliamentary faction of Golkar, the party that supporter of the former dictator Suharto.

Socialists should take advantage of the parliamentary crisis not to support one faction over another but to expose the corruption and undemocratic nature of the parliament – which still has many unelected deputies and military representatives in it.

They should say no to a state of emergency, but yes to immediate elections. But this time we need a democratically elected constituent assembly, where all deputies are directly elected and paid the average wage of a worker.

But it is not just the PRD that is giving support to Wahid. The Democratic Socialist Party of Australia, one of the largest groups on the Australian far left, an ally and advisor to the PRD, continues to advocate such a policy.

A recent *Green Left Weekly* which devoted considerable space to the Indonesian crisis, noted approvingly "While maintaining their political independence, the progressive and democratic forces in Indonesia are giving Wahid their critical support in this struggle." The article then went on to show exactly what this means in practice, by painting up Wahid as a progressive democrat fighting a Megawati/Golkar axis, with not a word of criticism of his attacks on the working class.

The Indonesian workers and peasants have no need of cheerleaders for this or that bourgeois faction but do need a party that fights resolutely for the interests of the workers themselves – a revolutionary workers party.

Asiet conference under the heel

In early June, an international anti-globalisation conference, organised by Asiet (Action in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor) in Jakarta, was brought to a sudden halt on its second day when armed police stormed into the meeting.

All foreign participants, who included academics, and socialist activists from Europe and Australia, were arrested and carted off to Jakarta central jail where they were held overnight. Later they were put under hotel arrest for "visa irregularities". Meanwhile, extremist Muslim thugs, connected to the PPP, who had arrived with the police, attacked the Indonesian participants of the conference. Several were injured, two hospitalised.

By Monday 11 June a government said no visa offences had been committed by 29 of the 30 arrested. Farooq Tariq general Secretary of the Labour Party of Pakistan was accused of visa violations and deported.

The action of the secret police, acting in collusion with the military, shows the growing threat to the democratic rights won by the overthrow of Suharto.

In the lead up to the meeting, the Democratic People's Party (PRD), a major participant in the conference, was the target of a sustained campaign of "anti-communist" propaganda and physical attacks on their offices by hired thugs. The father of Budiman Sudjatmiko, the PRD chair, had his house bombed just weeks before the conference. Bookshops were raided by Muslim extremists of the Anti-Communist Committee searching for "communist works" to be burned. The attack on the conference was widely condemned by democratic activists in Indonesia who recognised the threat it posed to the hard-won freedoms gained since the overthrow of the Suharto dictatorship.

For more on the conference see: www.asiet.org.au

Roma fight back against centuries of oppression

Europe's eight million Roma population has survived centuries of oppression. *Mikhail Gatter* explains the roots of anti-Roma racism and gives an update on the case of Mario Bango, a Slovak Roma facing a murder charge for fighting back

THE CASE of the 18-year-old Slovak Roma Mario Bango gives a clear indication of the appalling situation of Roma in Eastern Europe.

The oppression of Roma – like that of Jews – has deep historical roots going back to the middle ages. Originating from India, they moved to the West in response to other population movements. In 1300 they arrived in south-east Europe and groups of Roma moved further to western Europe in the 15th century.

But feudal society, racked by poverty and sharp religious conflicts, was incapable of integrating the Roma. The church led a vicious campaign against the Roma. In 1427 the archbishop of Paris excommunicated them en-masse. There began a wave of anti-Roma discrimination, including pogroms, that has lasted for centuries.

They were excluded from most jobs

In Hungary in 1974-75, 24 per cent of all children in "special schools" were Roma - but only 5 per cent of the whole population were Roma

and attempts from above to "integrate" Roma into mainstream society failed because they were forced: children were stolen, the language and traditions were banned. In what is today Romania, the Roma were actually held in slavery until 1864.

To understand their social position we can borrow the term "peoples class" developed by the Trotskyist theoretician, Abraham Leon, to explain the status of Jews in Europe. For the Roma, as for Jews, the people and the class position were identical. Class divisions within Roma society were minimal: integration was blocked. But so was the development of the Roma as a nation.

In actual fact, in the last century, social discrimination was combined with an economic pariah status much worse than that suffered by Jews. As a result, the Roma were not touched by the assimilationist tendencies of urban society in the 19th century.

Twentieth century capitalism massively increased nationalism and racism, victimising the "alien" populations, and culminating in the Holocaust. The Roma called the mass extermination during World War Two "Porrajmos" – which means "the devouring".

Between 500,000 and 1.5 million

Free Mario Bango!

Mario Bango, a 18-year-old Roma in Slovakia, has been in prison since March and is now threatened with a sentence of up to 15 years. His "crime" was to defend himself, his brother and mother against a physical attack by a known Nazi. The Nazi later died.

A vicious racist campaign was started in the Slovak media against Mario and in praise of the Nazi skinhead. There was even a minute of silence for the "patriotic and honourable citizen" in the Slovak parliament.

Meanwhile Roma have to suffer physical attacks by the police and racists every day in Slovakia.

The League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) has defended Mario Bango from the beginning and initiated an international solidarity campaign. Hundreds of people marched through Vienna in support of Mario, and last month 60 people marched in Bratislava.

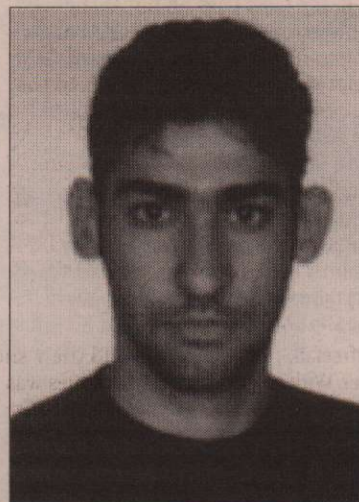
In Austria the Green member of parliament Ulrike Lunacek has declared her support for the demand of "no prosecution for murder", "for a serious investigation of the background of the dead Nazi" and "for a fair trial". She has met the Slovak ambassador and told him her point of view.

As consistent anti-racists and Marxists it is absolutely clear that we declare our solidarity with Mario's act of self-defence. Self-defence is no offence! Not only Roma people and

members of other national minorities but also trade unionists and leftists are victims of fascist violence. Mario's self-defence has become a symbol for the fact that Roma are no longer simply victims but will defend themselves! Fascist violence must not be answered with passivity and submission but with organised and determined resistance!

Pacifism is totally useless; it is an ideology propagated by slave holders for their slaves.

The workers' movement can successfully smash the evil of fascism only if it combines necessary physical confrontation against the Nazi-gangs with a socialist alternative to the poverty and despair on which fascism breeds.



Mario Bango, aged 18, faces 15 years in prison after defending himself against a racist attack by a known Nazi, who later died

How you can help

- Send protests to the Slovak authorities.
By email: urad@government.gov.sk
By post: Urad Vlady (Bureau of the Slovak government) Namestie Slobody 1 813 70, Bratislava, Slovak Republic
Fax: 00 421 7 5249 7595
- You can send postcards to Mario with a few words of solidarity (Mario only speaks Slovak so longer letters are not useful):
Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982 Ústav na vŕkon väzby priecinok 1077 Chorvatská 5 812 29 Bratislava, Slovakia
- Make donations to the bank account: MRCI, National Westminster Bank (bank code:60-20-31, 358 South Lambeth Road, London, England, Account number 28982630 - with a covering email to m.proebsting@netway.at
- Phone the international campaign on: 0043 (0) 676 406 8314

Roma were murdered by the Nazis. During the Nuremberg trials and popular accounts of the Holocaust, the Porrajmos was seldom mentioned. The reason was that the Allies needed to win over the German ruling class and did not want to make an issue of Roma oppression.

The victory of Stalinism in eastern Europe in the late 1940s had massive effects on the situation of Roma.

The ruling Stalinist caste needed a huge workforce for its industrialisation plans. For the first time, Roma were integrated in a modern economy. As a consequence a Roma working class was formed. Another consequence was the integration of some Roma into the educational system and the gradual creation of a layer of intellectuals.

Stalinism did not abolish Roma social oppression: it transformed it. Most Roma were in the lowest paid sections of the working class. According to an investigation in Hungary in 1970, only 11 per cent of Roma workers were qualified workers. The rest had scant education and were mostly employed in marginal sectors or in agriculture.

This second-class status was combined with discrimination in the education system. The Roma were considered as "backward" and this was used as justification for sending their kids to special schools for those with behaviour problems and learning difficulties.

In Hungary in 1974-75, 24 per cent of all children in "special schools" were Roma – but only 5 per cent of the whole population were Roma. The proportion in such schools increased to 37 per cent in the late 1980s.

On top of all this, in many countries, the existence of Roma as an ethnic minority was simply denied. According to the Stalinists in Czechoslovakia the Roma were a "socially backward section of the Slovak nation".

This was reflected in a systematic discrimination against the culture and language of Roma. Naturally this had massive consequences for their integration, since many of them speak Romanes – today approximately 60 per cent of Roma in Romania speak Romanes as their first language. According to Roma activists, around 80 per cent of Roma in Slovakia speak Romanes, even if not necessarily as their first language.

But the Stalinist state refused to allow any printed schoolbooks in the Romanes language.

The Stalinists allowed for the first time the integration of Roma people into the production process. But at the same time their oppression as an ethnic minority persevered. The result of this was a massive discrimination of Roma in all parts of East Europe, a continuation of the anti-Roma racism and the blocking of their integration.

How should we understand Roma oppression? This question does not just perplex modern sociologists – it is a key question for Roma activists themselves.

Some Roma organisations, particularly the International Romani Union (IRU), demand the recognition of the Roma as a separate nation with representatives in the European Union.

On the other hand the Stalinists – for example the Slovak CP member Jaroslav Suzs in his book published in 1961 on the "gypsy question" – say that Roma have no specific ethnic identity and are a "socially backward part of the Slovak nation".

There are approximately 10 million Roma living in the world. Eighty per cent of them are in Europe and around 5.85 million – or roughly 60 per cent – in Eastern Europe. In some Eastern European states they are a significant minority.

Statistics are inaccurate, partly because many Roma fear revealing their identity in censuses, because of racism. But the following figures are roughly accurate. Roma make up around 11 per cent in Macedonia; 10 per cent in Slovakia; 9.5 per cent in Romania; 9 per cent in Bulgaria; 7 per cent in Yugoslavia (Serbia & Montenegro); 6 per cent in Hungary and 2-3 per cent in the Czech Republic.

Under capitalism the abolition of Roma oppression is impossible. Racism is historically closely linked with modern capitalism.

There is no geographical area where Roma are concentrated. And not all Roma speak Romanes as their first language. It should also be noted that there are many different dialects of Romanes and the IRU has made major efforts to develop a unified written language.

Despite all this there is a clear national consciousness of all or even the majority of Roma.

The Roma are not a fully formed nation – but they are not just a socially deprived group within East European society. They are a racially oppressed minority. Some elements of Roma society point in the direction of assimilation, others in the direction of forming a nation.

Under capitalism the abolition of Roma oppression is impossible. Racism is historically closely linked with modern capitalism. Capitalism needs an "alien" community to victimise. In Eastern Europe, since Jews were largely eradicated, the "gypsies" and immigrants are targeted for this purpose.

Marxists fight for the maximum freedom of social and cultural development of oppressed peoples.

If the Roma want to be educated in their language we fight for this demand. If the Roma demand their own TV station in their language we support this too. But our goal is the common struggle of the workers, peasants and youth against capitalist society and its inter-linked racism. The struggle against the specific oppression of Roma is inalienable part of the socialist perspective.

The Roma have no reason to trust the traditional leaders of Roma parties, including the International Roma Union. Their leaders act like patriarchs or clan leaders, without democratic accountability to the rank and file. They are generally looking for posts and privileges within the racist system.

Particularly unfortunate examples of this are those Roma leaders who made alliances with the reactionary chauvinist party HZDS in Slovakia or those who, bribed with money from the EU have been integrated into the establishment. For them the idea of fighting for the full civil rights of Roma is an alien concept.

■ <http://sop-irki.webpark.cz>

Briefing by Keith Harvey

The world's two biggest economies are in synchronised recession. This has led *The Economist* to lament: "The world economy is starting to look remarkably, even dangerously, vulnerable."

During the first half of this year, US manufacturing output has plunged by 8 per cent compared to last year. It is worse in Japan. It is in its fourth recession in 10 years; output has slumped by 8.5 per cent between January and June 2001. One analyst said: "Japan's economy is falling off a cliff".

Meanwhile, in the European Union (EU) growth is slowing and the EU's powerhouse, Germany, is slowing fast.

The prospect of the big three engines of capitalist growth conking out at the same time is now very real. One estimate even suggests that the total industrial output of the EU, Japan and USA actually fell by 0.5 per cent in the three months up to May.

The generally recognised causes of the end of the global expansion lie in the massive overinvestment in most lines of plant and equipment that gained momentum after the flight of capital to the US in 1997-98 and the fevered speculation in technology companies in 1999-2000.

Consumer spending had driven demand. But given the stagnation of real wages this could only come from depleting savings (which are now "negative") and borrowing on the basis of anticipated stock market and property gains.

The end of dotcom fever in April 2000 led to a slide in stock prices. Suddenly the sales projections of the technology giants went into freefall. They issued one profit warning after another. With some time lag, this worked its way through to a downturn in manufacturing investment and, finally, this spring to a slump in consumer spending. Fixed investment by business in the USA is now in absolute decline after two years of feverish growth.

The investment collapse has hit the capital goods and technology sectors especially hard. Profits have fallen dramatically. While in the US as a whole they are down 14 per cent in the second quarter of this year compared to 2000, in the technology sector they fell 40 per cent in the first three months and by 60 per cent in the second quarter.

Nortel, a telecoms equipment maker, announced the second biggest quarterly loss ever:

a staggering \$19.2 billion.

Alan Greenspan, head of the US central bank, made emergency cuts in US interest rates in January. This steadied the stock market until early March, when his refusal to repeat the treatment sent New York share prices to two-year lows. A further 0.5 per cent cut was seen as too little by

the banks do not want to lend until there is evidence of the restructuring of corporate debts, laid bare by the slump in share prices.

Personal tax cuts will help restore household savings, but their impact will not be felt in the economy for nearly a year.

So how long the recession lasts in the USA

the lack of a social security system.

The new prime minister, Junichero Koizumi, has taken office promising to let the recession rip and so force insolvent firms out of business. This might erode the bad debt that has crushed profit margins for 10 years and deterred private investment. Koizumi is also committed to public spending cuts.

If he implements this programme, unemployment will definitely soar and social stability will come under severe strain.

The large-scale restructuring of capital – the destruction, devaluation and take-overs of major industrial companies and banks – has only just begun in Japan and there is a long way to go before the capital accumulation process can resume.

The continuing stagnation of the world's second largest economy and biggest exporter naturally closes down options for the world's bosses should the US recession prove protracted.

More than 25 per cent of Asian growth outside Japan in 2000 depended on exports to the US. This year regional growth rates are likely to fall by 50 per cent or more. Countries like Indonesia, already failing to cope with the effects of the 1997 crisis, will be hit again, further fuelling the political fires.

Whatever happens, these events have nailed down the coffin of the "new economy" theories that grew up during the dotcom boom. The theory went that new technology had delivered a sustainable hike in US productivity – and above all predictability – that, combined with permanently low inflation, could end the cycle of boom and bust.

We argued then that it was more likely that the productivity gains of the USA in the late 1990s were a one-off. And we argued that the increased "transparency" created by new technologies – that allowed companies to "see into" their supply chains and customer bases – would not offset the tendency to overproduction.

Perhaps the greatest proof that we were right was provided this year by Cisco Systems. One of the top three companies in the world, Cisco was so technically advanced that it could calculate profit and loss accounts, not annually, not quarterly, but daily.

That did not prevent Cisco accumulating £3 billion worth of unuseable goods joining the profit-warning rush. Even Cisco could not escape the crisis-ridden logic of the profit system.

www.workerspower.com/ideas

Will the world economy fall off a cliff?

the markets and their slide continued. By 22 March the Dow Jones was 20 per cent down on the January 2000 high. The Nasdaq index – where technology companies raise money – was 60 per cent below its all-time high by mid-March.

As a result of the steady slide in share prices since April 2000, more than \$10 trillion in "paper wealth" has been taken out of the US economy. After a modest rebound in the first half of the spring, the Dow Jones has resumed its downward trend and June's timid 0.25 per cent did nothing to reverse it.

Are these measures enough to shorten the duration of the recession?

Lower interest rate are always welcome to companies that borrow. But this will not tempt them to borrow more in the short-term. Massive overcapacity will have to go first. Similarly,

depends on the fate of the stock market, the impact of closures and sackings, and on whether the rest of the world can expand even as US consumer markets decline.

At present, despite a wave of pre-emptive sackings demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour in the US remains strong. Only now is unemployment starting to climb. But this rise in joblessness could well prove the brake that brings consumer spending to a dead halt. In turn, this would ensure the spread and intensification of the recession.

Japan's latest downturn has occurred despite the dramatic growth in public debt in the last decade (\$1 trillion worth of public spending) to boost demand. Unemployment (5 per cent) is at an all-time high and consumers refuse to part with their money for fear of further collapse and

Laura Folashade Williams 1954-2001

Courageous fighter against racism and imperialism

Laura Williams, who died last month, was a courageous and determined black militant. For most of her politically active life she was a member of Workers Power, and became a leading member of the group and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International.

Laura came into political activity in the late 1970s, when socialists and black nationalists were staging a sustained fightback against both state racism and street-level thuggery. This activity was accompanied by sharp discussion and debate.

Laura became convinced of the case for revolutionary socialism and working class unity but also the necessity, within that common class struggle, for black people to take a lead in the fight against their own oppression.

She contributed to the development of Workers Power's position on the fight against racism and oppression. She put her views into practice as a leading militant within Birmingham NALGO and later Unison. She was a founder member of both the local and



Laura Williams... helped form UNISON black workers group.

national black workers' group in the union.

She also served on the executive of Birmingham Trades Union Council. She became an accomplished speaker, and training herself to speak boldly and confidently to large audiences.

Laura made a tireless contribution to the fight against deportations. She was a key

member of the campaign to defend NALGO member Muhammed Idrish's right to stay in Britain. She fought doggedly to ensure this became a trade union issue. The campaign culminated in strikes and a march led by the national NALGO banner through Birmingham, and eventually Idrish won the right to stay.

Laura was a committed internationalist, contributing to our theoretical work on West and Southern Africa, and she consistently advocated dedicating scarce resources to the LRCI's international work.

In the late 1990s, the pressure of victimisation at work and the difficulties of sustaining morale in a period of diminished struggle affected Laura, as it did many militants after years of defeat. She left work and dropped out of political activity.

But we remember her determination, her moral courage and the way in which she would throw herself into any task at hand – whether it was politics, study or dancing till late at night. She was a fine example for the new generation of fighters.

join the network

workers power

Want to get involved in changing the world? Then join the Workers Power network. Just sign up for our regular email NEWSWIRE and order 10 copies of Workers Power each month (£5). We'll send you a full listing of our activities and invite you to regular local discussion meetings.

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- Support black/Asian self-defence
- Drive the fascists off the streets
- End segregated housing policies

Smash the BNP!

OLDHAM, BURNLEY, Accrington...and the press speculation points to Bradford as the next target for the Nazi roadshow of the National Front and British National Party.

Britain's fascists are high on the oxygen of publicity. They are being interviewed all over the "respectable media".

If that is the reward you get for invading Asian areas, beating up pregnant women and terrifying pensioners in their homes no wonder the Nazis think they're on a roll.

The BNP's high votes in three constituencies in north-west England (including BNP leader Nick Griffin's 16 per cent of the poll in Oldham West & Royton) highlight the deadly danger that fascism poses.

This hate-filled collection of social misfits and psychopaths has tapped into a mixture of racism and the alienation many workers feel from mainstream politics.

The breeding ground for fascism is racism – and the blame for stoking up racism must lie with the mainstream parties. They have played with the fire of racist rhetoric on asylum – and in poor white working class communities it falls like a spark on petrol. As Griffin himself put it last year, "The asylum seeker issue

BNP leader Nick Griffin addresses "rights for whites" rally outside Oldham police station. Weeks later, police stood by as Nazis attacked the Asian community



BNP leader Nick Griffin addresses his racist thugs

has been great for us. This issue legitimises us."

Racism is being boosted by deep poverty and chronic unemployment. New Labour, revelling in the support of middle England, hardly cares about or notices the generations whose lives are blighted by industrial decay in the so-called "heartlands".

Long-term and youth unemploy-

ment rates are way above national averages in both predominantly black and white areas of Oldham and Burnley.

The first duty of every anti-racist is to support the Asian communities under attack: support their right to fight back in self-defence when invaded by Nazis and against the police who protect the Nazis.

The second task is to go on the offen-

sive against the racist lies of the media. It was Radio 4's Today programme that first propagated the fantasy of "no-go for whites" in Oldham. Now, in the name of "balance", the media feels obliged to interview a Nazi every time there is an Asian uprising in the north west.

We should deny the fascists any platform for their views. They are a flick-knife aimed at the jugular of the working class and ethnic minorities. We should mobilise to stop their meetings and marches.

It is pointless to call for, or rely, on bans on marches by the Home Secretary in a growing list of towns. From the 1930s and the time of Mosley's black-shirts onwards such measures have been used largely to clamp down on the left.

The police are a fundamental part of the problem and not just because many of them are viciously racist individuals. The Lawrence inquiry highlighted what became known as "institutional racism" in the police, but the reality of recent weeks in Oldham and Burnley has shown once again that the police will criminalise those who are legitimately fighting back.

The Nazis are not about to replicate their recent successes across Britain generally, but there is no room for complacency either.

The workers' movement must stand foursquare with the Asian communities under siege. It must be prepared to challenge the fascists physically as well as providing the political antidote of working class solidarity to their corrosive ideological poison.

But the experiences of Oldham, Burnley and elsewhere are also indictments of the failure of capitalist politics.

That's why we need to build the Socialist Alliance as a radical anti-capitalist alternative to New Labour as an urgent priority.

What we fight for:

- A TUC-led demonstration against racism in Oldham
- Direct action to deny the fascists a public platform
- Labour movement support for organised community self-defence against racist, fascist and police attacks
- An end to segregation in housing and education
- Massive public investment to create useful jobs building decent housing, schools and leisure facilities at trade union rates.
- ▼ For more on asylum and anti-racism turn to page 2

Voices from the sweatshops

BANGLADESHI garment workers are on the march. The inflow of foreign investment over the last five years, as global capital searches for sweatshop labour conditions, has created a new working class that is fighting back.

There has been a rapid expansion of the garment industry in Bangladesh, which now employs approximately 1.5 million people.

Bangladesh launched Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in 1978 to attract foreign capital and earn export dollars. The EPZs are basically a vehicle for the transfer of public money into private hands in the form of bargain rate land and energy, tax breaks and subsidies.

In 1993 the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) was set up and imposed a blanket ban on trade union activity. The EPZs now employ 70,000 workers, mostly in the garment and shoe-making industries. National labour laws do not apply in the EPZs, leaving BEPZA in full control over work conditions, wages and benefits.

However, BEPZA ignores even its own shoddy standards. The guaranteed minimum monthly wage of \$US 70, 40 and 25 for skilled, unskilled and probationary workers respectively is a laughable fiction.

So is the entitlement of permanent workers to annual festival bonuses, medical coverage, and accommodation and a transportation allowance.

A Workers Power supporter in the Democratic Workers Party of Bangladesh sent us this report. For more on the anti-sweatshop struggle see inside and log on to:

www.nosweat.org.uk

BEPZA has consistently refused to give out written contracts and does not hire any workers on a permanent basis. In reality, earnings average about \$20 per month – less than half the official rate – and workers do compulsory overtime under threat of dismissal if they refuse. It is also normal for pay to be withheld for months on end.

The situation in the garment industry at large is even worse. The nation's top export earner employs 1.5 million workers under conditions of super-exploitation. The majority are young women from rural areas who moved to the urban centres in search of work.

The sweatshops are more like prisons than factories. There are no fixed hours, regular breaks or days off. Workers earn between \$7 and \$10 a month, for an average of 13 hours a day, up to 27 days per month. This comes to an hourly rate of two or three cents! The industry currently owes \$US300,000 in back pay, a staggering amount considering the miserly wages.

Garment workers change jobs fre-

quently because of wage arrears, lay-offs, ill health or harassment from the bosses and their "security guards". As the vast majority of employees are girls and young women there are many cases of physical and sexual assault at factories.

Not surprisingly, the level of unionisation among workers is very low. Where unions are involved, they act more like extortionists, taking money from management to keep the employees in line while at the same time collecting dues from their members, with whom they have virtually no contact.

Most of the unions have direct or indirect links with local and foreign NGOs, and receiving lucrative grants seems to be their main goal. However, sometimes the workers do stand up for their rights, but with varying success.

This year there have been heated confrontations between workers and management. On 3 May, garment workers and supporters staged a peaceful protest against a sudden wage cut in the Savar EPZ, 50 km north of the capital Dhaka.

The management of Ring Shine called in police, who attacked the 1,500 strong gathering.

One knitting operative, Rafiqul Islam, and one union supporter, Mosharaf, were shot dead. Two hundred workers were injured. Outraged demonstrators ransacked the factory in revenge. Six people were arrested, and a further 80 face charges of property damage.

In mid-May the Bangladesh Garments Workers Unity Council (BGWUC), comprising 11 basically sham unions, secured an agreement under which Ring Shine agreed to pay the medical expenses of all injured workers, drop the charges filed against the demonstrators, pay back wages and follow the BEPZA rules regarding minimum wages and benefits, as well as compensation of about \$US4,000 to the families of the two men killed by police.

Under the agreement the BGWUC promised to undertake "the responsibility for peaceful operation of the factory and will ensure that the workers will not create any further problem in future in the factory." A rival union, Garments Unity Forum, staged a demonstration condemning the deal as a sell-out but a few days later put its seal to the same agreement.

Such "compromises" are not in the interest of the workers, benefiting only the self-serving union bureaucrats and playing into the hands of the bosses.

The Ring Shine incident is the most

recent example of the volatile situation within the fortress-like compound at Savar, comprising 33,700 workers. In 1997, 15,000 of them went on strike in defiance of the ban, demanding trade union rights and job security.

On top of injuries sustained in work accidents, fatalities occur all too often. The industry is notorious for fires, which are estimated to have claimed over 200 lives in the past two years, though accurate figures are hard to come by. Tragically, one recent blaze in Dhaka resulted in 13 deaths. As seems to be the case with all garment factory fires, the high toll was due to the workers being locked inside.

In protest, the BGWUC called an industry-wide strike in early September 2000. However, after an intensive campaign to gather support, the strike was suddenly called off the night before. The union had reached a deal with the bosses' organisation, agreeing to the formation of so-called welfare committees to look after workers' interests in the place of trade unions.

These are also to function also inside EPZs. The garment workers' trade unions are more than happy to participate in such sham committees, as it allows them to appear to be working hard for their members' good. In effect, however, it lets them off the hook when it comes to the real struggle for union rights.

What is urgently needed are militant and independent unions.

workerspower

GLOBAL

Theory & practice in
the class struggle
July 2001



● Gothenburg: the full story
● Is globalisation good for you?

THE BRUTAL police repression dealt out to demonstrators in Gothenburg, from 14 to 16 June, marks a turning point in the anti-capitalist movement. Any illusions that our movement can develop and move towards realising its goals in a context of playfulness, humour and non-violence were rudely shattered.

Despite the Swedish government's claim that it would set a "Gothenburg model" for peaceful protest based on "negotiations" and "dialogue" between the police and demonstrators, the state forces acted from the outset to suppress democratic rights, break all the agreements they had made with the organisers, and used violent repression – up to and including the shooting of three demonstrators.

Their aim from the outset was plainly to weaken, disorganise and disperse the movement from the very start.

The president of France, the German chancellor and the British prime minister were totally complicit in this resort to brutal repression. Indeed, in all likelihood they were its prime instigators when they criticised plans of the Swedish government and called for the strongest measures to "defend" their summit against unarmed and, at the outset, entirely peaceful demonstrators.

Thursday 14 June

On the morning of 14 June – before the start of the 10,000 strong anti-Bush demonstration, riot police laid siege to the convergence centre before ANY action had taken place.

Several hundred people were preparing defensive materials there for the march to the congress centre the next day. The raid was clearly designed to stop those best prepared from protecting themselves against police violence.

They militantly defended themselves. The White Overalls, Swedish AFA, Black Block anarchists and comrades from the Swedish section of the LRCI led several attempted breakouts.

These failed because of numbers and the relative scarcity of protective equipment.

Against the strong resistance of the dominating force in the leadership of the anti-Bush demo – the Swedish Left Party (formerly the CP) LRCI comrades, with the support of CWI and IST members, won several thousand people to march from the anti-Bush demo to the occupied convergence centre.

By distracting the police, the demonstrators allowed between 30 and 40 people to escape. This showed the strength of mass action. Several hundred people from the Black Block who broke away earlier from the demo to face the police at the convergence centre were unable to achieve much beyond trashing a few cars and throwing stones.

However the forces involved were still insufficient to raise the siege and the police stormed the centre and arrested all those who were not able to escape.

Friday 15 June – Batons, dogs, whips and...bullets

On 15 June the Swedish police stopped the march against the summit after a few hundred metres. Up to this point not a blow had been struck nor a stone thrown at the police. Suddenly the demonstration was attacked on its flanks by riot police using enraged dogs – which bit and mauled dozens of demonstrators (and some of their own handlers).

Then they charged it with mounted riot cops, lashing out with batons and whips. Despite brave resistance from the demonstrators – armed only with banner poles and stones – the cops split up the demonstration and forced people back into the main street to the assembly point and then into the broad main avenue of central Gothenburg.

Then the so-called riot followed. In essence it was the formation of barricades against the police advance from the chairs and tables of the street cafés which line the street. Some smashing of shop and bank windows clearly served no defensive function. But it was understandable as a reaction to the unbridled aggression of the riot police.

Anyone who condemns the "violence" of the demonstrators, faced with

dog bites, batoning and trampling by horses is – leaving aside consistent pacifists willing to suffer brutality in the name of their principles – a wretched apologist of the state's "right" to treat its citizens how it wills. No democrat – let alone a socialist or anarchist – could condemn such resistance. Self-defence is no offence!

In the afternoon lots of protestors and organisers were arrested in the streets and individuals chased by the cops. These arrests overwhelmingly did not occur during the fighting. In the

few hundred-strong, peaceful protest against the shootings, detaining them for hours within the police cordon. They then detained dozens of them in an ex-army camp under Paragraph 13 of the Swedish penal code. This allows the authorities to detain anyone they believe will in the future commit a crime for up to six hours.

Later that night anti-terrorist squads armed with machine guns and laser directed pistols raided a school where 200 or so people were sleeping. They made them lie face down, spreadea-

not only a fortress against the poor and oppressed of the "outside world" – the main subject of the demonstrations. It is also going to become a prison house for Europe's own peoples too – especially when they try to assert their democratic rights.

The social democratic German chancellor Schröder commented: "There cannot be any dialogue with these desperados." These infamous words should be burned into the consciousness of the millions of workers who voted for him. This man is a hardened agent of global capital, not any kind of democrat, let alone a socialist.

Nor are Blair, Chirac and Persson. They are now setting out to make the actual "Gothenburg model" a permanent feature of European life. They want to organise a continent-wide state of siege whenever people try to assert their democratic rights on an international level.

They want to extend their bans against "football hooligans" to "political troublemakers" and ban travel to international protests. A conference of EU-interior ministers will now co-ordinate police logistics for this purpose. In Brussels they will create a permanent bunker in which the meetings of the arrogant EU-leaders will take place – free from disturbance by their subjects.

Genoa will be turned into an enormous prison for its own people from the 18 July onwards and the German, Austrian and French borders will be closed.

Why has Gothenburg become such a turning point? The main reason is clear. For years we have seen the growth of an international anti-capitalist movement. We see mass protests in the semi-colonies, mass strikes, occupations of land. We have seen demonstrations of young anti-capitalists, immigrants, militant trade unionists, anarchists, socialists and communists – all joining in mass protests against global capitalism and its institutions.

This international movement is an undeniable reality and it is a real threat

This is what (social) democracy looks like



evening the cops – and some fascist thugs – provoked the street party into another confrontation which culminated in the shooting of three demonstrators, one critically injured.

This itself is a historic escalation of the violence, especially in Sweden where no similar action by the state has occurred since 1931 and where a long reign of social peace followed the election of a Social Democratic government in the 1930s. Again it is an attempt to intimidate, split and weaken the movement.

Saturday 16 June

A peaceful demonstration of 20,000 youth and trade unionists marched through the streets of Gothenburg. The police were no where to be seen.

In the evening, the police encircled

gled on the rain-soaked ground outside the school before a number of arrests were made.

During all these raids more than a thousand demonstrators were arrested, detained for six hours and photographed, although most were released without charge. Others were deported. Dozens have been rushed through quick trials for "breach of the peace", many without the presence of any lawyer or legal support. Some await trial on more serious charges. A campaign must be waged for their immediate release.

What are they frightened of?

The scale of repression in Gothenburg represents an organised violation of the civil rights of Swedish and European citizens. It shows clearly what "fortress Europe" is becoming. It is

Continued back page of supplement

Is globalisation

Since the anti-capitalist movement moved from the side streets to the main avenues of political life the leaders of the IMF, World Bank, the WTO and the main G7 governments have tried to rebrand themselves as the friends of the poor – portraying growth and free trade as the way to end of poverty. *Keith Harvey attacks this fraudulent claim*

In March this year, Horst Köhler managing director of the IMF intoned: "Widespread poverty in the midst of global prosperity is both unsustainable and morally unacceptable. World poverty is thus the paramount challenge of the 21st century."

Apparently, the IMF is no longer in the business of overseeing structural adjustment programmes which cut health and education so that foreign debt servicing can continue.

Apparently, the World Bank is no longer forcing development loans upon Third World governments so that US and European multinationals can turn a huge profit building dams and roads where they are not wanted by local communities.

Apparently, the WTO is no longer drawing up plans for prising open markets in the South so that peasants have to compete with the big agri-capitalists of the North.

No, these institutions have all had a makeover. Now their aim is to eliminate poverty, to work in co-operation with Third World peoples to make their governments more accountable and less corrupt, to raise education and health levels. In short, to make governments effective and markets efficient and to show that "globalisation is good for you"

Naturally, these institutions are not charities. The path to prosperity for the world's poor lies in promoting more economic growth and the best way to do this, they argue, is to continue to liberalise global trade and capital flows.

The director general of the WTO, Mike Moore, made exactly this point in his speech to the Third UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries in May, 2001. He claimed that one of its studies, "confirms that those poor countries that are catching up with the rich ones are those that are open to trade. The more open they are, the faster they are converging. . . The message is clear: freeing trade boosts economic growth, and helps to alleviate poverty."

According to *The Economist*, where poverty still prevails it is because globalisation has not gone far enough. Barriers to trade and capital have not been freed up enough. In essence, then, the leopard has not changed its spots. The goal of poverty reduction can only be reached by sticking to the same old prescription: tear down tariffs, remove capital controls, privatise, invite in foreign capital. Meanwhile, the "international community" will once again try to marshal aid to specific programmes that will allow the poor to live longer and stay at school so that some of them can take advantage of the new market opportunities.

So there we have it. "A rising tide lifts all" say the pro-capitalists and growing prosperity within nations is the best guarantee of peace within and between them.

However, the reverse must also be true: growing inequality and economic decline must give rise to greater social,

ethnic and political antagonism.

Which description best fits the reality of global capitalism today?

We argue that:

- all forms of capitalism promote inequality and the liberalisation of capital and trade in the 1990s has increased it and its rate of growth with tremendous social consequences

- the number of people in poverty around the world has grown in the 1990s

- although the proportion of the world's population in poverty has fallen slightly, mainly because of China's growth, in many countries it has grown

The orthodox neo-liberal view used to be that economic growth would naturally deliver "convergence" of rich and poor nations. But you no longer hear that particular line of defence from the main agencies and their supporters in the media.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) annual report for 2000 on the Least Developed Countries (LDC) concluded:

"Overall progress in increasing real incomes, reducing poverty and moving towards various international targets for human and social development has been disappointingly slow."

In fact, if we examine the evidence for "diminishing income disparities between countries within the global economy" it does not indicate even a slow progress but a sharp worsening of the problem. The weight of evidence proves beyond reasonable doubt that inequality of income and wealth in the world has widened during the 1980s and 1990s, exactly the period when liberalisation of trade and capital flows increased dramatically.

A recent World Bank study by Branko Milanovic gathered data for 83 per cent of the world's population for the years 1988-93, using household income surveys rather than GDP. Using the Gini coefficient (0 means perfect equality, 100 means one person holds all the wealth) this study proved that world inequality increased from 62.5 in 1988 to 66 in 1993. This is a faster rate of growth in inequality than was experienced in the USA and UK in the 1980s under Reagan and Thatcher.

A further study using the same data concluded that the share of the world's income going to the poorest 10 per cent of the world's population fell by over a quarter, whereas the share of the richest rose by 8 per cent.

Why has global inequality increased? There are four proximate causes:

- Faster economic growth in OECD countries than in developing countries.

- Faster population growth in developing countries.

- Slow GDP growth in rural China, rural India and Africa.

- Rapidly widening inequality between urban and rural incomes in China.

The sheer size of the populations in India and China, and their weight in the

The number of people living (billions)...	1987	1998
on less than one dollar a day	1.83	1.98
on less than two dollars a day	2.5	2.8

United Nations and World Bank's figures

world's total, together with the gradual opening up of India to foreign capital and the process of capitalist restoration in China, accounts for much of the increase in global inequality.

Indeed, given the faster pace of India's liberalisation after 1992 and the dramatic deepening of disparities between town and country in China over the past 10 years, there can be little doubt that a survey today would indicate a further sharp increase in inequality.

The process of capital accumulation and investment in the Third World in the 1990s was an extremely uneven one both within and between countries. In China, for example, capital investment has been heavily concentrated in the coastal provinces and some interior urban centres. This has sucked labour out of the countryside, raising urban working class wage levels in some areas but impoverishing tens of millions in the rural areas.

Official figures show that rural inequality nearly tripled between 1980-2000 and doubled in urban China in the same period. The richest 20 per cent of households receive 42 per cent of the income, whereas the poorest 20 per cent only receive 6.5 per cent. Added to this, population growth is greater among the poor, a phenomenon only too apparent in India and China.

The process of technological renewal and investment is invariably to the advantage of the countries in which the major multinationals are based. They retain a monopoly of key research and development facilities and monopolise the fruits of their application in terms of enhanced productivity.

One result of this is that the prices of goods and services exported from G8 countries are increasing faster than those of goods and services exported by the South. These price trends mean that the majority of the population of poor countries can buy fewer and fewer of the goods and services that enter into the consumption patterns of the rich-country populations.

Of course, it is not just within Third World countries, or between them and the OECD members, that inequality has widened under globalisation. It is no accident that the pacesetters of liberalisation and privatisation – USA and UK – have recorded the biggest domestic increases in income and wealth inequality

of all G8 countries.

Under the first Clinton administration (1993-96) the share of national income going to the top 5 per cent of the population increased at a faster rate than it did during the Reagan years. The top 20 per cent of the wealthy increased their share of national income from 46 to 49 per cent.

In the US, the mechanism for this growing disparity was clear enough: wages were pegged while the benefits of increased productivity went to the bosses

in the form of profits. Real wages were stagnant from 1979-95 and only grew at around 1 per cent a year for the rest of the 1990s. This was the point at which manufacturing productivity took off (3-4 per cent pa) leading to profit levels in 1997 being 100 per cent above the levels of the early 1980s.

Globalisation was central to this process since downward pressure on wages stemmed from a massive assault on trade union rights and organisation combined with export of jobs to Mexico (about 100,000 a year in 1980s) to take advantage of cheap labour and no union rights in the maquiladora border zone.

That inequality has widened is less and less contested. In its survey of India, *The Economist* observed: "Inequality is bound to grow when the guiding principle for sharing out resources shifts from entitlement to competition" (2/6/01). In the same issue, we find an article entitled: "Market reforms mean that China is becoming more unequal."

One response of the pro-capitalists has been to turn the argument around: "if inequality has increased in Africa, rural China and rural India they are victims of the lack of globalisation. It makes better sense to extend the scope of globalisation - which means addressing the causes of their isolation." (Economist 28/4/01).

What this conveniently ignores is that the process of world capitalist development is an uneven one. As the examples of China and India show, "opening up" such countries means forcing millions off the land because they cannot possibly compete with cheap imported food. Many gravitate to the cities where they provide cheap labour for export-oriented industries.

But those left behind become more and more impoverished as sources of

income dry up. In short, the relative prosperity of urban capitalist development is predicated on the decline of the rural interior.

The idea that rural India and China suffer from "too little" globalisation (i.e. opening up of markets, ending protection) is ludicrous, given that this is what has destroyed their way of life. Elsewhere,

The Economist admits that the next stage in China's embrace of globalisation, entry into the WTO, will worsen the problem of inequality as "state-owned enterprises collapse and other companies benefit from improved access to world markets. Rural incomes will be further depressed by increased agricultural imports."

The same pattern can be observed in Mexico. An average of one new factory a day opened in the 1000 mile border corridor with the USA during the 1980s, creating tens of thousands of new jobs, producing (or assembling) goods destined for re-export back to US consumers. The number of Mexican billionaires grew, but inequality widened as 40 per cent of the population were left beached by the globalisation tide.

A final argument against the idea that "globalisation has not gone far enough" is found in the record of the LDCs during the 1990s. UNCTAD's report for 2000 concluded:

"IMF data actually show that trade liberalization has proceeded further in the LDCs than in other developing countries. In 1999, for 43 LDCs for which data are available, 37 per cent had average import tariff rates of below 20 per cent coupled with no or minor non-tariff barriers, whilst amongst the 78 other developing countries in the sample, only 23 per cent had this degree of openness. . . Similarly, UNCTAD data for the late 1990s show that in a sample of 45 LDCs only 9 maintain strict controls on remittances of dividends and profits and capital repatriation. Twenty-seven LDCs have adopted a free regime, guaranteeing such transfers, whilst nine have a relatively free regime . . ."

Moreover, "the record of the 1990s shows that there has been an accelerating process of economic liberalization in many LDCs. In fact 33 out of the 48 LDCs have undertaken policy reforms under the IMF-financed Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) or Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) programmes since 1988."

Yet it is the LDCs who have responded most readily to IMF strictures for reform and more openness that have been most impoverished by the process. According to UNCTAD, "the number of people living in poverty is increasing in various regions of the world, and the poorest countries are failing to catch up with developed and other developing countries, and some are getting stuck in vicious circles of economic stagnation and regress... economic growth was too slow in most LDCs to make a significant dent in the unacceptably high rates of poverty."

good for you?



Shanghai stock exchange: a few have grown richer at the expense of the majority

CHINA AND GLOBALISATION

■ By the mid 1990s, 9 per cent of urban people lived below the official poverty line (\$217 a year). But this figure was 30 per cent in Xian and even 60 per cent in Shuangyashan, a city of 1.8 million which was devastated by state enterprise closures.

■ Official figures show that rural inequality nearly tripled between 1980-2000 and doubled in urban China in the same period. The richest 20 per cent of households receive 42 per cent of the income, whereas the poorest 20 per cent only receive 6.5 per cent.

If you cannot deny the fact of growing inequality nor its association with more and more globalisation, then why not turn it into a virtue?

This is the standpoint of those who argue that inequality is inevitable. Of course, this argument is in flat contradiction to the first. If inequality is inevitable, then it is hard to see how "more globalisation" will eliminate it by spreading the benefits of investment more evenly. This does not, however, stop the same ideologues putting the two contradictory arguments side by side.

Their argument is that inequality provides market incentives for entrepreneurs and companies to take risks and invest. This in turn boosts growth and this creates the "rising tide which lifts all".

What matters, goes the refrain, is not inequality but poverty. Irrespective of what happens to the rich minority, as long as the real incomes of the people at the bottom do not fall and the numbers living in absolute poverty do not rise, then capitalism and open markets are doing their job.

There are three responses to this:

● Rising inequality does matter and has profound social and political consequences which the pro-capitalists try to disconnect from their causes.

● Absolute poverty has increased in many countries even if it has fallen in others.

● The international agencies and governments have failed miserably to carry out the measures which they said would alleviate the poverty caused by liberalisation and have fallen way behind in the objectives they set themselves.

Rising inequality causes social conflict. Across the globe, as much as 60 per cent of the population may live in poverty. The realisation that within their own societies a minority prosper, while the majority suffer, fuels resentment and the demand for change.

China, so often praised for the single mindedness with which it has pursued market reforms, is a case in point. At a press conference in March 2001, Prime Minister, Zhu Rongji, admitted that "the general public has voiced fairly strong complaints about income distribution", which he said was now at 39 on the Gini co-efficient. Since a level of 40 is recognised as a "warning light" this was a stark enough admission.

But the official news agency has said it is 46 and other analysts say it is 60. Worse, possibly, than the level of inequality, is its rate of increase which provokes massive grievances; the gap between rural and urban incomes in China increased by 50 per cent in the 15 years up to 1999.

In May 2001, Beijing publicly recognised that market reforms had led to a wave of unrest across the country,

including armed demonstrations of tens of thousands and bloody clashes between workers and state officials. Looking to the future, the same report predicted that such instability would grow in intensity as a result of further reforms required for China's accession to the WTO.

The first thing to note is that the number of people in poverty has grown in the 1990s. According to United Nations and World Bank figures, the number of people living on less than one dollar a day grew from 1.83 billion in 1987 to 1.98 billion in 1998. Those living on less than \$2 a day grew from 2.5 billion to 2.8 billion in the same period.

The second thing to register is that, although the proportion of people living in poverty did fall during these years, this was only because of substantial growth in East Asia, especially China. Even here, the 1997 financial crisis reversed the trend in most countries. In South Korea, the proportion of people in poverty (national definition) increased from 8.6 per cent before the crisis to 23 per cent in early 1998 before declining to 15.7 per cent. In Indonesia, the proportion of poor people doubled during the crisis.

This tells us something important. Even during the long investment boom

in Asia (1990-97) and despite an extremely long upturn in the world business cycle in the 1990s, the numbers of poor kept growing. Capitalism's productivity could not keep pace with the increase in population. This fact alone condemns it as a social and economic system and calls for its replacement by something higher and non-antagonistic – socialism.

When the cycle turned down, the numbers of poor soared as the crisis of capitalism was solved at their expense through mass unemployment and loss of income. Wage earners were turned into paupers by the market.

In Russia, the ripping up of a non-market economy and the forced imposition of capitalism saw poverty rise from 11 per cent of the population to 43 per cent between 1989 and 1996, and then worsen again in 1998.

Even countries which have experienced rapid growth in the 1990s have seen large pockets of grinding poverty emerge. "In the cities of China, absolute poverty is increasing" according to *The Economist*. By the mid-1990s, 9 per cent of urban people lived below the official poverty line (\$217 a year). But this figure was 30 per cent in Xian and even 60 per cent in Shuangyashan, a city of 1.8m which was devastated by state enterprise closures.

Even at the heart of the most developed capitalist country in the world, poverty exists. In the United States, in the 1980s, one in four children lived below the official poverty line; 13 million people were pushed below the poverty line by Clinton's cuts in welfare programmes in 1994.

All in all, the United Nations 2000 assessment of likely progress in the decade 1997-2006, concluded that, "the promise of poverty eradication as a result of faster growth, consequent upon stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes, generally remains to be delivered."

At the UN millennium summit, member countries committed themselves to halving world poverty by 2015. A raft of development targets on health, mortality and literacy was laid out. Today, none are likely to be met by the UN's own admission.

At UN conferences on less developed countries (LDCs) in 1980 and 1990, development targets were set. For their part, the LDC's met their obligations to open up markets to trade and investment from western MNCs. We have already noted that the LDCs did more than the average Third World country in this respect.

In return, what did they get? The rich nations slashed development assistance by \$3.5 bn. The agreed target of each First World country was to donate 0.7 per cent of their GDP. This target was set two decades ago. Today, only five countries have met it.

The Third conference on LDC development, in Brussels, in May, 2001, did little to help except to seek even more openness in trade from the LDCs, and to promise to untie development funds and provide more infrastructural aid.

As a justification for this neglect and cuts in official aid, those who insisted that globalisation could be made to work for the poor said that private capital flows would fill the gap. Indeed, long-term private capital inflows into the LDCs did increase from \$323.1 million per annum during the period 1990-4 to \$941.9 million during the period 1995-8. However, about three-fifths of this increase has been concentrated in four countries – Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania.

As a result, most LDC's have experienced a fall in aid and not enough inward capital to compensate. The UN concludes: "long-term capital inflows into the LDCs as a whole have declined by about 25 per cent in nominal terms since 1990".

The UN holds out a gloomy scenario for the 43 most impoverished nations on earth if globalisation continues not to serve them:

"They will be pockets of persistent poverty in the global economy, falling behind other developing countries and obliged to call on the international community for aid to tackle humanitarian crises and peace-keeping missions. They will also be epicentres for the global refugee population and major sources of international migrant workers."

From boom to bust: the Asian crisis of 1997

In February 1997, Donald Johnston, head of the OECD, boasted of being "bullish about the future of the planet. Globalisation is extending economic interdependence and this will bring peace and stability." In July of the same year, Thailand's currency went into free fall, followed rapidly by those of the rest of the region. Over the next year, thousands of businesses folded, 15 million were made unemployed in Indonesia alone, ethnic tension and clashes multiplied.

Yet this was the region which had benefited most from globalisation in the first half of the 1990s. How did Johnston get it so wrong?

Johnston's naïve view of capitalism was that more economic ties meant less likelihood of wars; countries would have too much in common and too much at stake to risk war and a relapse into autarky.

Such a view assumes that capitalism develops smoothly and that its benefits gradually "trickle down" to reach the poorest countries and peoples. But capitalism does not work like that. It moves forwards in leaps and bounds with enormous disequilibrium built into its foundations.

Likewise, it suffers explosive convulsions and leaps

backwards as excessive investments and optimism rebound upon those who gained most from the upturn. In this sense, the Asian crisis of 1997 was only the normal consequence of capitalist development.

The story began in the mid-1980s when Japan agreed to revalue the yen against the dollar to help reduce its huge trade surpluses with the USA. As a result, Japan's MNCs relocated large parts of their operations to SE Asia to take advantage of cheaper labour. Between 1985-90 around \$15 billion of Japanese FDI flowed there, and billions more followed in portfolio investment and bank loans.

With the collapse of Mexico in 1995, fund managers the world over poured even more money into countries like Thailand. Thailand did three things to attract such funds. It fixed its currency to the US dollar to ensure foreign investors against currency risk, it liberalised capital controls and it maintained high domestic interest rates.

The money poured in. Around \$70 billion worth of investments in 1994-97 to be exact. Similar amounts found their way to Indonesia, South Korea, Philippines and Malaysia.

But there was a huge contradiction built into this "development model". To attract foreign capital, interest rates had to be kept high and exchange rates had to stay fixed. However, to maintain the economy meant increasing exports and that required a lower exchange rate. The two central parts of the model were incompatible.

In 1995-96, the US dollar appreciated and, with it, the SE Asian pegged currencies. This hit the competitiveness of their exports. In 1996, there was nil growth in exports in Thailand and Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the bulk of foreign investment was in property or equities, seeking short term results. It could leave at a moment's notice. By 1996, it was clear that there was a property glut and investors feared that their loans would not be repaid. They also realised that the export boom, which brought in foreign exchange to service the debts, was flattening off.

The strong currency that attracted them was now to be the cause of their misfortune. Mass flight began. Billions of Thai baht chased restricted numbers of dollars. Panic ensued.

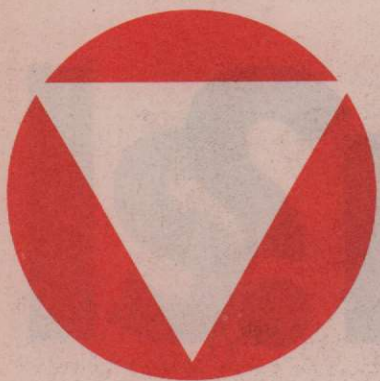
An account of how the capitalist market worked in this situation, when "emerging market" fund

managers all rushed for the exit sign individually, but simultaneously, would run something like this:

The news from Thailand is bad. You're not affected, your money is in Malaysia – but might Malaysia be next? You do not think so and you have good sources. But you must take into account how other managers might react. They do not have the good information you have, so they are more likely to react negatively and get out of Malaysia. Your only choice is to pre-empt them, sell your shares held in Malaysia despite your own assessment of their worth. But you are known for your understanding of Malaysia, when others see you getting out...

This is what capitalism looks like, not the idealised image that Johnston carries around in his head. The market is not, as Adam Smith presumed, an invisible hand working rationally to the good of all; each individual working to maximise their own good and, thereby, producing a collective good.

Globalisation will not end world poverty and bring peace and stability to the planet. Globalisation cannot be made "to work for the poor"; it cannot even give the poor work, it can only work to make the poor, poorer.



to the bosses and their governments. That is the reason why they are now starting to criminalise its activists, to try to isolate the most radical parts of it from the broad masses.

They fear that as it becomes better organised, as it develops links with the working class, an open anti-capitalism will come to the fore in the workers' movement. That is why they want to abort this movement now, why they want to destroy as much as they can now. That is why the bourgeois governments are calling to restrict or cancel elementary democratic rights, why they call for more and more repression.

This is a declaration of war on the movement – and we must organise NOW to repel this attack by all the governments of global capital, irrespective of whether they are staffed by “Socialists”, Liberals, Greens, Conservatives, and whether they incorporate the far right – as in Italy and Austria – or not.

Gothenburg proves again that every government in a capitalist state serves the interests of the ruling class – irrespective of whether or not it does so in the name of “dialogue” or “confrontation”.

That is why the whole workers' movement, why every student, why all oppressed and exploited must help build an international campaign to defend and win our right to demonstrate and organise for our right of free movement.

The political lessons of Gothenburg

How could the police succeed in splitting up the anti-capitalist demonstration after only 15 minutes, in arresting and deporting hundreds?

First, the leaderships of the mass unions and the social-democratic parties refused to organise contingents to Gothenburg at all. But even the ones who supported or organised the demonstration on the 16 June, like the Swedish Left Party, did their best to keep the anti-capitalists separated from the mass of workers and students. They sought to isolate those who wanted to break through the police barriers to make their protest known.

Reformist alliances like ATTAC and the Gothenburg Network tried to prevent demonstrators doing anything to approach the EU leaders fortified venue.

The Network, dominated by the Swedish Left Party, held a 10,000 strong march on the Friday evening that went nowhere near the conference centre and concentrated on “get out of the EU” slogans.

The Left Party leader, Gudrun Schyman, came out with a statement which could have been drafted by Gerhard Schröder or Chirac. On the march on 16 June she explicitly defended the police, saying: “The police had a very hard job to do against these troublemakers, who only want violence for the sake of violence just like football hooligans.” Again an infamous remark, with which she should be branded for life!

Why do the reformist leaders rush to clear themselves of the blame apportioned by the capitalist media for any fightback against the state? Because reformism is mental enslavement to bourgeois public opinion. It is a systematic trimming of “socialism” to what the capitalists will allow. Reformism genetically lacks a backbone. It must be driven out of the workers' movement.

The leaders of ATTAC did at least put the main blame for the violence on the

police but did not explicitly defend the demonstrators.

Sincere democrats – let alone revolutionary socialists – should refuse to be cowed by the millionaire media shrieking about “anarchist violence”. We do not “condemn the violence” – even the mistaken acts – of those resisting the organised and massive violence of the state that preceded and provoked that of the demonstrators. We condemn the violence of the state that violated our democratic rights.

Of course, we take no responsibility for the looting of shops and private acts of destruction which have no political meaning. But these were utterly peripheral, whatever the media says.

Misleaders like Schyman must take the main responsibility for keeping the workers' movement separate from the anti-capitalist youth. This separation was not due to the smashing of shop windows. Our criticism of the latter is not only that it is an inadequate revenge on the state and the bosses in itself but that it makes the work of Schröder and Schyman easier.

Schyman's words also show the political bankruptcy of the national centred “Out of the EU” movements. It only takes an international movement which threatens the capitalists in all countries for these EU critics to side with their governments.

We do have to prevent the media, the bourgeois parties, the official labour leaders from isolating, criminalising and effectively outlawing our movement. We have to launch a massive campaign to defend the democratic rights that Schröder, Blair and others are targeting: the right to assemble and demonstrate; the freedom to travel from one country to another.

But the key way to avoiding isolation is to turn to the rank and file of the workers' movement, to involve them in our actions, to patiently win them to militant tactics. Isolation of a small militant vanguard is obviously what the EU autocrats are about. But we shall not fall into their trap.

The European imperialists have demonstrated their determination to create a European imperialist superstate, able to stand up one day to the USA. They are not prepared to accept any form of sustained or effective protest against this.

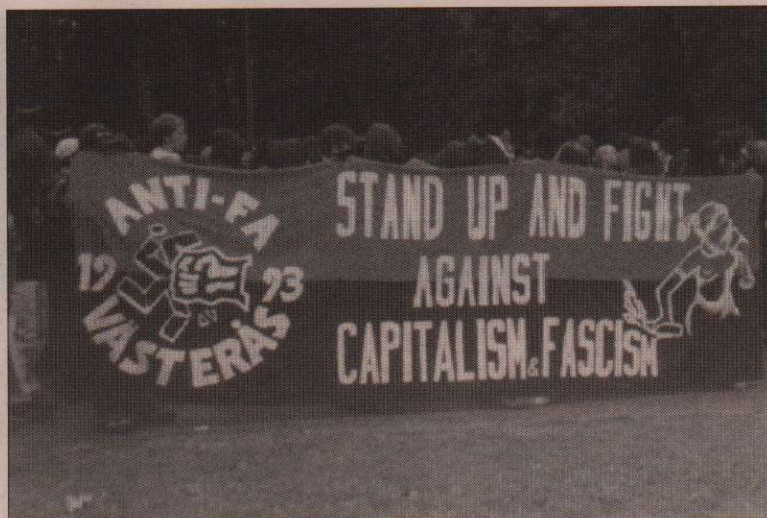
The German and Austrian foreign ministers could not hide their irritation at the “failure” of the Irish government to deliver a “yes” vote in return for the largesse they feel they have showered on Ireland over the last decade. They demonstrated their understanding of “democracy” by arrogantly demanding that the Irish government “turn around” this vote as soon as possible.

But the fight against the undemocratic and bourgeois European institutions cannot be won by defending one's own “independent” capitalist state. It must be done by fighting for the extension of democratic and social rights throughout Europe, by fighting against the EU's development into the racist fortress Europe.

The democratic aspirations of the masses have to be united in a struggle for a Europe wide constituent assembly. The election and convocation of such an assembly must serve as a means to organise the working class in local rank and file organisations across Europe.

Such an assembly can act as a bridge to a European revolution and a united socialist states of Europe. Based on workers' councils and militias it would tear down and replace the unelected and uncontrollable repressive state machines of the capitalists.

Gothenburg was a turning point for the anti-capitalist movement because it demonstrated the need for a political step forward. The reformist leaders showed their true face by denouncing the arrested protesters, not the cops. But their biggest service to the corporate capitalists is that through their stranglehold on the labour movements they can block the unity of the majority of the working class with the radical



The tactics of non-violent direct action (NVDA), those advocated by Ya Basta!, and also of those of the Black Block all have the disadvantage of fetishising one particular tactic, one particular form of struggle against all others.

young workers and students.

As we have seen in Quebec and Seattle, the protests were most successful when the anti-capitalists and the unionised workers were united in action. In Europe because of the historic roots of “socialist reformism” we have not yet succeeded in making such a breakthrough. In the mobilisations for Genoa we must do so. We need greater numbers and these can only come from mobilising the unions – from below – as well as radicalised young people.

Strategy and tactics after Gothenburg

Numbers alone are not enough. We need mass forces that are clear as to their aims. We need a democratically recognised leadership of the actions including all the political, social, trade union, environmentalist, anti-fascist, anti-racist organisations, parties and groupings.

Above all we need an organised defence of our demonstrations against police attack, one capable of helping the mass forces break through police lines and guard against police agent provocateurs. This means challenging not only the reformists, but also the many of the individualistic anarchist sentiments within the movement.

The tactics of non-violent direct action (NVDA), those advocated by Ya Basta!, and also of those of the Black Block all have the disadvantage of fetishising one particular tactic, one particular form of struggle against all others.

Worse, they pursue their chosen fetish even when it obviously disrupts and disorganises the task of winning sufficient mass forces so that their weight can be used to full effect.

In one sense they are parallel to the reformists (and some self-proclaimed revolutionaries) who fetishise the peacefulness and legality of mass demonstrations.

Both NVDA and the property smashing of the Black Block are ineffective ways to actually stop any determined repressive state apparatus. NVDA – whilst useful as a tactic sometimes – always presumes a high degree of restraint in the use of violence by the state itself. This is a vain hope after Gothenburg and it will be even more so in Genoa. As a principle, NVDA therefore is a dead end.

The same is true for the post-modernist symbolism of Ya Basta! and the White Overalls. Their public, media-seeking preparations, their disavowal of even defensive violence, their tactical visibility and relative immobility, all mean this is only a hyperactive, and rather élitist form of NVDA.

Once the state is no longer embarrassed to block frontiers, raid convergence centres, arrest anyone in a white overall and confiscate their equipment this novel tactic will be seen as a passing fad.

The danger is that those who had illusions in it will turn to fetishising violence as they once fetishised non-violence. The Black Block anarchists, antifascists and autonomes, whatever their street-fighting skills and undoubted courage, are usually not able to break through solid police lines, and they cannot build links with the mass of the working class, who are repelled by wanton smashing of property. This is not only because of long-standing reformist prejudices but because they (correctly) cannot see what use it is.

Still less is their strategy of street fighting with the cops able to undermine or destroy capitalism. They confuse a few police casualties and the destruction of some private property with destruction of the state and a social system. Their intentions may be good, and it is not accidental that they attract many radical youth, but force, like “peaceful” mass protest has to be directed in a way that consciously seeks to achieve its goals. It has to be done in an organised way if it is not to rebound upon its initiators. Only mass organised action can raise the confidence and horizons of the workers and youth involved.

Where Now?

The new Italian prime minister, Berlusconi's response has been contradictory. At first he threatened repression to ban the Genoa protests. He has said that the city will be sealed off for four days. The G7 leaders will be accommodated in battleships moored in the harbour! The borders of Italy will be sealed!

Then he promised to conduct a dialogue with the protesters and respect the right to demonstrate. Unless the Italians and European anti-capitalist and labour movement mobilises on a massive scale these “democratic” promises will be honoured in the “spirit of Gothenburg”.

There will be a strong tendency for the reformists and liberals in the anti-capitalist movement to run for cover, suggesting that “discretion is the better part of valour”. Certainly we can rely more on their discretion than their valour. We need to press on with our plans for a huge mobilisation to go to Italy for the G8 summit. We should try in every way possible to evade the Blair-Schröder-Berlusconi blockade.

This will require cunning as well as bravery. The maximum number must try to get through, but in any case WHEREVER WE ARE STOPPED IS GENOA. And there we must demonstrate, try to break through, discuss amongst ourselves and agitate amongst local workers and youth.

Those of us who cannot take the time or do not have the money needed for international travel can TURN OUR OWN CITIES AND TOWNS INTO GENOA for the duration of the summit.

Comrades in Italy could demonstrate in every major centre, win their country's militant workers to mass strike action, warn Berlusconi and his fascist-infiltrated government that they had better not lay a finger on their social rights.

Let's show that if they violate our rights in one place by sheer force of numbers of police and weaponry it will spring up with renewed force in a dozen, a hundred places. Nor will this be an empty gesture or “protest politics”. It will strengthen the movements of the working class, the oppressed and exploited worldwide for the struggle against global capitalism, against the lays-offs and privatisations of the multinational corporations and their obedient states. The arrogant rulers of corporate Europe have thrown down a challenge to us. They have declared war on our movement. We take up their challenge without fear or hesitation.

Blair, Schröder, Chirac and Berlusconi – you are ripping off the democratic mask of your European project. Well and good. It will help us to expose you for what you are. First to the young workers and intellectuals of the continent whose “hearts and minds” you say you seek to win for your “European project”. Then to the millions of workers who voted you into office, thinking they could protect their jobs and social gains.

Without resorting to petty nationalism we shall turn the hearts and minds of millions against you and your system. And these millions will organise and act against you. We shall organise an international movement powerful enough to unleash a political and economic class struggle that will sweep you and your “Third Ways” or “Neue Mitte” into history.

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