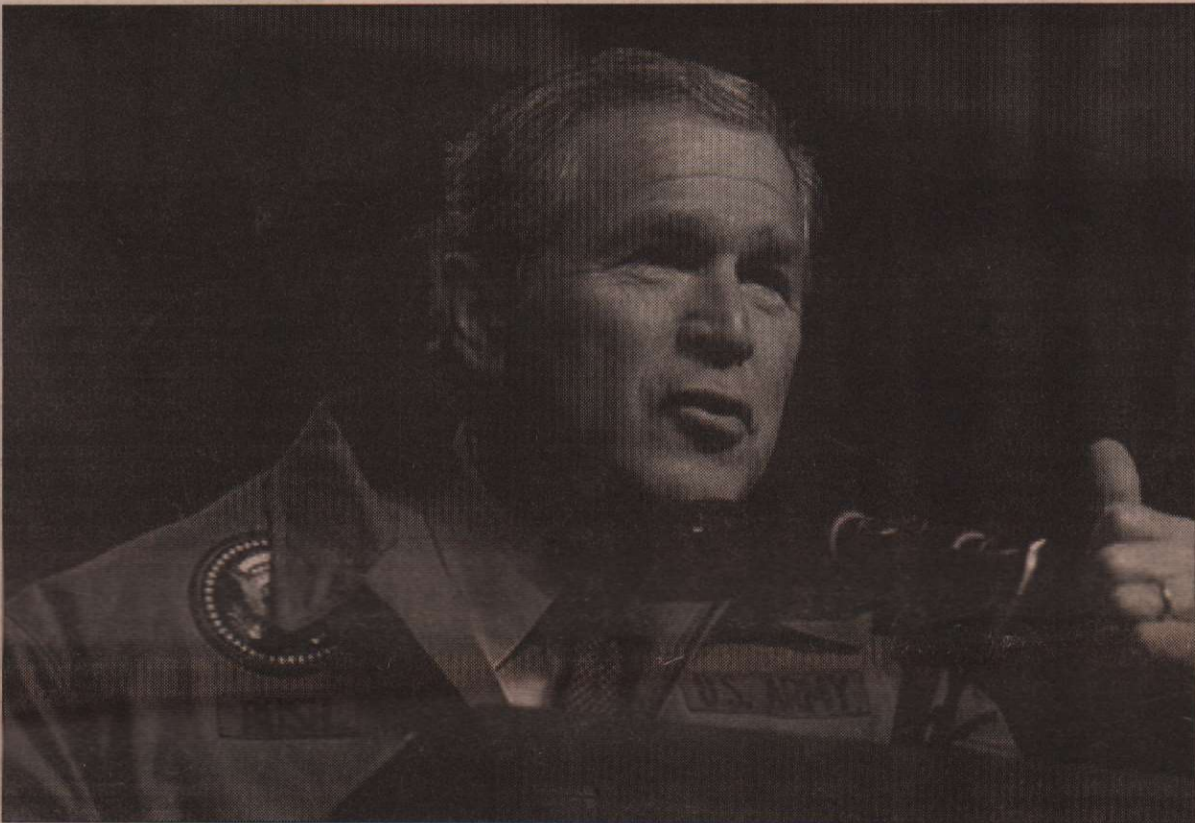


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They attack...



We fight back!

2003: Another year of transport chaos?

Last month the government admitted its transport targets can't be met. Privatisation means we are destined to suffer more traffic jams and delays, writes *Joy Macready*

Anyone who attempted to travel over the holiday season would sum up the state of the UK's strategic transport system in one word: nightmare.

Most travellers faced either a battle with over 18 million drivers on the roads or a scramble with the 2.5 million taking to the skies. The trains were not a last minute option as many were told that if they hadn't pre-booked a ticket, there was no hope of travelling on the overcrowded, unreliable rail rattlers that pass for locomotives on our privatised network.

It was like being in the late 1980s film *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* - where Steve Martin and John Candy battle against the odds to get home for Thanksgiving - but without the laughtrack.

The Disintegrated Transport Policy

A few days before the Christmas mayhem, Transport Secretary Alastair Darling released the second review of the 10-year transport Plan. He publicly admitted that the government cannot meet its targets on congestion and that train services might not get any better before 2005. "Since the plan was published, the scale of the task in front of us has become even more apparent," Darling said.

Only two years ago, the Department for Transport published the Transport Plan, setting "realistic" targets that would cut traffic jams and increase patronage of the railways. John "Two Jags" Prescott solemnly swore that it would be possible to cut congestion on major routes by five per cent, and increase rail and bus usage by 50 per cent and 10 per cent respectively by the end of the decade.

In 1997, when preparing the white paper on transport, he pledged: "I will have failed in this if in five years there are not many more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car. It is a tall order but I want you to hold me to it."

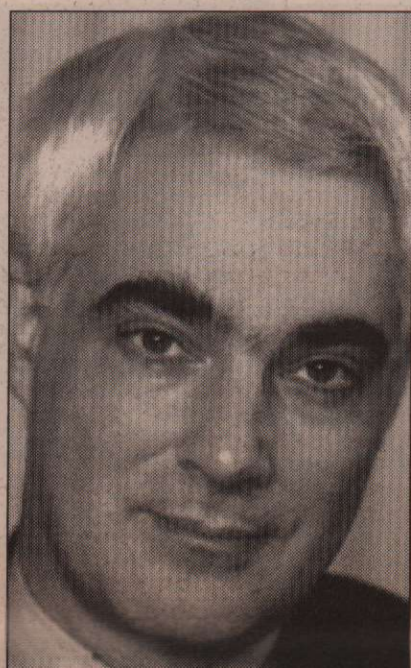
Five years later road traffic has increased by seven per cent. There are more than three million extra cars on the road while the rail network has descended into chaos. Now the congestion targets have been declared unattainable and the latest review forecasts an even more dismal future with rises up to 11-20 per cent in car traffic.

But Two Jags has moved on and forgotten his promises, and Alastair Darling is trying to bury them as fast as possible. The 10-year transport plan has derailed.

Trains

Train travel in Britain has declined by 1.7 per cent - down by four million journeys. The Department of Transport's latest figures show that the percentage of trains arriving on time across all the operators in April this year was 10 points lower than two years earlier.

And yet the price of travelling by rail is increasing. Connex South Eastern (which has recently been bailed out with a £58 million government handout) is raising fares by more than twice the rate of inflation (seven per cent). Fares on Virgin's Cross-



Alastair Darling: "The target due at 2005 has been cancelled...."

Country network - where six out of ten trains arrive late - will rise by five per cent.

The Labour government is still sinking public money into unreliable private train firms. Not only is it continuing to bail out companies to stabilise their profits - like it did for Railtrack for years - but now they are also underwriting development projects that have underestimated their costs. Major project costs have overrun by billions, such as the West Coast Main Line that Virgin eventually plans to run 125mph tilting trains on - the original £2 billion bill has now escalated to £12 billion.

The transfer of Railtrack's responsibilities to the not-for-dividends company Network Rail was a classic piece of Labour deception. First, the entire board and management team were kept in place. Next, a quarter of a million small shareholders were panicked into selling off their shares at knock-down prices. Finally, the big investment banks like UBS Warburg snapped up these shares and made a fortune when their lawyers forced the taxpayer to pay them 90 per cent of their pre-collapse value. That's why we must fight for re-nationalisation under workers' control and without compensation.

Although Darling has read "the riot act" to senior train operators, rail chiefs have admitted that the £33.5 billion of public money that is being allocated for railways will not be enough and they will be back asking for more money within a year's time.

The Hatfield crash was an eye-opener, exposing the state of the railways. After decades of chronic under-funding and years of private companies being more concerned with profits than with safety, there is only one answer: re-nationalise the rail and put it under worker and user control. Then we will have a railway system that is safe and works for the people that use it.

Automobiles

While the price of rail travel has increased under Labour, the price of motoring has

got cheaper.

With the ink barely dry on the original 10-year plan, lorry drivers blockaded roads in the autumn of 2000 in protest at the cost of filling their tanks. Ministers panicked and handed out £1.7 billion in fuel tax cuts in the 2001 budget.

Alastair Darling has changed the focus of reducing congestion to increasing road capacity at the expense of improving public transport. Road expansion projects will receive £59bn, while local transport plans, which include spending on local road developments, will also get £59bn. There are already 71 major projects in preparation or under construction.

But building more roads will not solve the traffic congestion problems, as these roads will fill up within months of being completed.

And the giant car companies are in no rush to develop cleaner-running vehicles. Ford abandoned its electric car project, Think Nordic, last month claiming the market was too small. Hydrogen fuel cell and gas-electric hybrid cars come up against the same objections: why spend billions developing greener cars when a captive market will have to buy the existing dirty models? Only a nationalised car industry can plan such a changeover.

The poorest 10 per cent of households spend seven times more on motoring than on public transport. Why? Because they are forced by economic pressures, like house prices, to live in areas on the outskirts of the cities that are poorly serviced by public transport.

The key to getting people out of their cars and onto public transport is to improve and extend the public transport system. This will substantially improve the economic and personal lives of the majority of the population.

The answer is not - as Labour has proposed and Ken Livingstone is implementing - flat rate congestion charges which are in effect an indirect tax hitting working class motorists hardest.

To ease congestion you need investment in an integrated public transport system. To get this the bus companies must be nationalised as well the rail. And workers and communities must be given a decisive say in running public transport and road building plans. Otherwise there can be no planned reduction of car use.

Planes

One critical component was strategically omitted from this review: air transport. The advent of low-cost airlines and charter flights has made the price of flying drop through the floor. More people are flying than ever before. (And why not when you can get a flight to Edinburgh for £1 while the train can cost over £80?).

And the Labour government is encouraging this trend. Air transport isn't subject to the same health and pollution regulations and taxes as other forms of transport. For example, airlines pay no tax on fuel. These exemptions distort the real cost of air travel.

But when Alastair Darling has talked of

the air traffic congestion, he is not talking of curbing air travel, only of expanding airports.

Transport Minister John Spellar has forecasted "for 2030 ... 500 million passengers (a year) of which 300 million will be in the South East. These are very big numbers." Friends of the Earth claims that this is the equivalent to six new airports the size of Heathrow.

Expanding airports or building new ones will also add to the road traffic congestion in the surrounding areas. This has become a major point of contention with environmentalists and residents that will be affected by this increase through air and noise pollution. Demonstrations against expansion are happening across the country.

But it's not just the local areas that will be affected by the increase in air traffic.

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution says that aviation is likely to be responsible for 6-10 per cent of climate change. Sir Tom Blundell, a professor of Biochemistry at the University of Cambridge, said, "Emissions from aircraft are likely to be a major contributor to global warming if the present increase in air traffic continues unabated." The problem is the emission by aircraft engines of carbon dioxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, hydrocarbons and particles.

The decisions on transport that are made in Britain directly affect the rest of the world.

The solution

Mobility is a vital part of our lives, whether you are travelling to work or visiting another city or country. Neither the environment nor people benefit from congestion and pollution. What is needed is a fully integrated transport policy that takes into account environmental and personal needs, not the needs of private business. We say:

- Nationalise all forms of transportation: the airways, railways, coaches, tubes, bus systems as well as the car companies. Put them under worker, user and community control so that we can fully assess the benefits and drawbacks of different modes of transportation and integrate them to make them work in our best interests.
- Improve public transport options in isolated areas.
- Explore and develop cleaner methods of transportation. Do not be a slave to oil companies.
- Expand and improve railway networks to replace short flights within Europe.
- Encourage cyclists by providing proper cycle paths. Selected roads should be closed off to cars and tarmac opened to buses and cycles.
- Make public transport cheaper and more efficient to use than private transport.
- Bring to justice the private companies that have skimmed on safety and through negligence have caused disasters like Hatfield and Potters Row to occur.
- For more on transport go to www.workerspower.com



It's official: a demo a day keeps the doctor away

Capitalism makes you sick... class struggle makes you better.

The bosses' press made quite a bit out of a report that suggested flexible working was the key to workers' happiness, and that higher wages were not the answer. Quite conveniently, this fits New Labour's Third Way philosophy and the employers' neo-liberal agenda to a tee.

Less convenient - and almost unpublicised - was a report from a team of psychologists at the University of Sussex. They found, after interviewing 40 activists, that "collective actions, such as protests, strikes, occupations and demonstrations" can have a beneficial effect on your health.

The researchers said that the sense of collective unity and solidarity were key to activists' experience of struggle. "Empowering events were almost without exception described as joyous occasions", said Dr John Drury, "Participants experienced a deep sense of happiness and even euphoria in being involved in protest events. Simply recounting events in the interview brought a smile to the face of the interviewees."

So there we have it. Capitalism is the illness, class struggle the remedy. Don't just take it from us, as Dr Drury says, "people should get more involved in campaigns, struggles and social movements, not only in the wider interest of social change but also for their own personal good." ● Our thanks to Reuters for this news... and a poke in the eye to all the capitalist poodle journalists who ignored it!

'The end is nigh...'

Tony Blair has surprised the population and the media with a New Year's message full of deep foreboding.

He talked of the country facing unusually "difficult and dangerous problems" in the year ahead. He cited war in Iraq, the threat of terrorist attacks, looming economic recession and claimed that "for many people the defining characteristic of the modern world is insecurity."

Naturally, he failed to recognise the origin of these threats. The impending war has not been forced on him and George Bush. It is a conflict entirely of their own making. Its purpose is to seize control of the world's second largest oil reserves and establish US world domination. Blair wants Britain to play hyena to America's lion, stripping the carcass after the US lion has gorged his fill.

Blair also forgot to mention that a large part of the increase in insecurity is due to his own deliberate undermining of employment rights, social welfare, pension rights - in the name of "modernisation". That is what the policies of deregulation and privatisation mean.

While he sheds crocodile tears over the lack of a peace settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians he again omits to mention that Ariel Sharon - with the active support of George Bush - is preparing another massive ethnic cleansing and expansion of Zionist settlements that will make any kind of state for the Palestinians impossible.

So is Blair's tone of gloom and doom just a con? Yes, in part. It aims to prepare us all for the months of misery ahead, to try to convince us this is all simply inevitable: that war and crisis are just forces of nature. But Blair himself has real cause to be worried.

Public opinion remains stubbornly opposed to the coming war. Millions know this is a war for oil, a war for US world domination. A bold lead by the anti-war movement could turn this into a movement not seen since the anti-Vietnam mobilisations of the 1960s and 1970s.

On the home front too Blair's attempt to imitate Thatcher and defeat the firefighters in November failed. Only the hesitation and vacillation of the FBU leadership and the behind the scenes chicanery of the TUC pulled Blair's irons out of the fire, temporarily at least.

The alienation of a large section of the unions from Blair, the cuts in union funding to the Labour Party - and even threats of disaffiliation from it - continue to grow.

What Blair is most frightened of is a mass movement against the war - one that draws in the

mass base of the labour movement and disrupts his stranglehold over the Labour party itself.

As war preparations proceed apace this month we must do all we can to make his nightmare come true. We must go all-out to undermine Blair on the home front and destroy any vestige of popular support or "democratic legitimacy" for the war.

This means organising anti-war demonstrations, locally as well as nationally. It means building for direct action and civil disobedience to bring the anti-war message to the consciousness of millions. Occupations of schools, colleges and universities can provide a base for teach-ins to train hundreds of thousands of new anti-imperialist militants.

In the workplace, protests - from putting up stickers right up to strike action and boycotts wherever possible - can threaten the power of the profiteers who press for war. Opposition to the war means inten-

sification of the class struggle. To take action now and in the coming weeks - against privatisation, job cuts, low wages - will weaken Blair on the foreign as well as on the home front.

We want to halt their war drive, to force the total withdrawal of their forces without them having achieved a regime change. This would be a huge

reverse for US plans for world domination. It would hearten and encourage resistance to the bullying and intimidation of countries in the global south. It would encourage workers and youth in the imperialist countries to go on to the offensive.

Some people will object that this will be victory for Saddam Hussein and would strengthen his dictatorial regime. In the short run, perhaps. Though in order to win he would have to mobilise the masses, arm them and thus relax and weaken his dictatorship. It would be a victory for the Iraqi and Palestinian people. And a victorious people will not for long endure a dictatorship.

But in any case only the Iraqi people can overthrow Saddam with progressive results for themselves and the peoples of the entire Middle East. Bush has stated clearly that he would be satisfied with a pro-US military coup. Another option he has canvassed is a US general ruling in Baghdad for 10 years. Either would simply preside over the looting of the country.

That is why revolutionaries are not afraid to say that we positively want Iraq to defeat the attacking US and UK forces, just as we want the Palestinians

to defeat their Israeli oppressors. We say this whilst realising how heavy are the odds stacked against them. But military hardware is not everything. A mass explosion of protest in the Middle East as well as in the United States and Britain could cause enormous disruption and undermine the unity and will to win of the imperialists.

Defeat for Bush, Blair and Sharon will greatly strengthen the resistance of the semi-colonial world to the imperialist offensive both military (the war against terrorism) and economic (the imposition of austerity plans, privatisations and free trade zones of the IMF and WTO). In the imperialist countries it will help the working class defeat the attempts by Blair, Bush, Berlusconi and Chirac to savage their wages and social gains.

Many left reformists, liberal pacifists, religious and trade union leaders are afraid to call for the defeat of the US and UK forces, afraid to openly link the anti-war struggle to the class struggle. Today this does not seem so crucial but when fighting breaks out many will be put on the spot. Do you support "our boys", "do you want Saddam to win?" Unable to answer these questions they may retreat to neutralist passivity from their present active opposition to the war simply because they fear the charge of "treason", and "betrayal of the nation".

Once the fighting begins we must intensify our actions and bring right into the forefront our agitation for victory to Iraq and defeat for the invaders, for victory to the Palestinians.

Not Saddam, not Al Qaeda but the masses of ordinary people - from the USA and Britain to Cairo and Baghdad - have the power to stop Bush and Blair.

Blair is gloomy because it's increasingly Tony and Dubya versus the rest of the world. The economic system he believes in is falling apart; the spin machine at Downing Street is in self-destruct mode and the workers are revolting. As New Labour starts 2003 crying "the end is nigh" a sustained working class struggle can make sure that prediction comes true for Blairism in the next 12 months.



...let's hope so Tony!

Labour's child poverty scandal

While the plans to batter and butcher Iraq were the principal backdrop to gloomy Tony's New Year message, he was mindful of his domestic responsibilities too.

One of Labour's main pledges - in both the 1997 and 2001 general elections - was to tackle poverty, starting with child poverty. On this, as on other economic matters, Blair claimed that his government has made steady progress:

"And where progress has been made it has been because we have held firm to the reform path."

What progress? What reforms? New Labour has presided over a growth in the gap between rich and poor in Britain. Inequality is rife. And poverty is getting worse. A recent survey, commissioned by Ken Livingstone, the mayor of London, has highlighted how bad the problem is.

Today, in London - one of the wealthiest cities in the world - there are 600,000 children in the inner city living below the official poverty line. Child poverty in London - where 53 per cent of children in the main boroughs are suffering deprivation according to the report - is now worse than in any other region of the country.

The knock-on effects of such poverty are wrecking lives. Educational standards are plummeting. Poor housing and other factors have led to the return and spread of tuberculosis. Black and Asian people find themselves pushed even deeper into the quicksand of deprivation, with some 75 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children living below the poverty line.

Inner London now has the highest unemployment rate of any sub-region

in Britain. The boom in jobs in the capital, the report reveals, has, since 1992, "been in occupational groups where a university degree or equivalent is the prerequisite." The poor are being left behind to rot.

Billions of pounds will be spent by New Labour murdering innocent Iraqis, yet we are told there is no money to launch the sort of social programmes that could begin to eradicate poverty on this scale. These are not the priorities of a reforming government. They are a clear indication of New Labour's determination to serve the bosses - here and globally.

If Blair wanted reforms to tackle poverty and inequality he could start by raising a wealth tax on the really high earners; he could raise the low level of corporate tax; he could authorise spending programmes to

repair the collapsing services and infrastructures in the most deprived areas.

Such measures wouldn't eliminate poverty because it is built into the very fabric of the capitalist system. But they would partially alleviate the devastating effects of poverty, at the expense of the ruling class. Which is precisely why Blair won't countenance even such limited tax and spending reforms. New Labour will not do anything to harm big business.

So in his new year message Blair was giving notice not just of his plans for war on Iraq, but of his plans for a never-ending war on the poor as well. Which is why our new year message is that we will wage a never-ending war on the warmongers and on the capitalist system of poverty and deprivation itself.

KEY DATES FOR YOUR DIARY IN 2003

- January 15-20 2003 Anti-war mobilisations in USA leading to a national demo in Washington DC
- January 23- 28 2003 World Social Forum number three, Porto Alegre, Brazil.
- February 7-9 2003 Mobilisation against the Nato summit meeting Munich.
- February 15 2003 ESF European Anti-War Day of Action
- March 8 2003 International Women's day and World Day of Mobilisation Against Sweatshops
- June 1-3 2003 Mobilisation against the G8 Summit in June 2003 in Evian, France
- June 20-21 2003 Mobilisation against the EU Summit, Thessaloniki
- September 2003 Mobilisation against the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Cancun, Mexico
- November 12-16 Second European Social Forum in Paris

Firefighters' strike

Let down by the leadership

Andy Gilchrist and the FBU leadership have failed to build on a solid strike and instead look like settling for 16 per cent with strings

The leaders of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) are now playing for a draw in a match they could easily have won. The new "awkward" breed of left union leader has, in Gilchrist, failed to deliver the goods when it mattered.

In the aftermath of the Bain Report on fire service modernisation the FBU expects a new deal to be offered along the lines of 16 per cent over two years in return for a long list of flexible working proposals. This is similar to the deal offered by the fire employers on 22 November and scuppered on the orders of Tony Blair. So what has changed?

In the first place the Bain Report identified £35m of "transitional funding". Together with council tax increases this could be enough to fund the £90m a year it would take to offer 16 per cent.

And then there was Cherie. It is a testimony to the corruption and moral sickness at the heart of New Labour that Cheriegate convinced the Downing Street clique that there was something more important than smashing the FBU. Namely, saving Tony Blair from a damaging corruption scandal.

It is an open secret that Blair pulled the plug on the overnight 16 per cent deal before the first eight-day strike. It was part of a strategy to provoke and smash the union cooked up in the back room of Number Ten by Blair's industrial relations adviser Phil Bassett. (Bassett was industrial editor for *The Times* under Rupert Murdoch and in 1987 wrote a pamphlet called "Strike Free" in which he extolled the virtues of the no-strike deals then being pioneered by engineers' leader Sir Ken Jackson).

To beat Blair, the FBU needed to continue with the action. But the FBU leadership's decision to call off future 8-day strikes before Christmas not only confused and demoralised many union members, it made it harder to build the 7 December demonstration in London.

The London demo revealed the full extent of the TUC's "support" for the FBU: the massed ranks of Congress House employees – from the secretaries to the press officers – were all that John Monks and Brendan Barber were prepared to commit to this vital struggle. Most other union leaders managed a token presence. Signal: there is no willingness to deliver effective solidarity with the FBU even among the left-talking union leaders. The TUC were in town to broker a deal not win a fight.

As it became clear that the government is out to rip up firefighters' terms and conditions, some FBU members have said: let's just accept a deal under the existing pay formula and tell them where to stick modernisation. But that is not an option: the government will try to abolish the crucial Section 19 of the Fire Services Act by rushing through an amendment to an existing Local Government Bill – giving fire service chiefs the freedom to close stations and slash jobs as early as this summer.

If the employers are once again prevented from doing a deal, the FBU leadership is now threatening "guerrilla warfare"

– a series of two-day strikes starting on 28 January and lasting a minimum of six months. This, it argues, will pin down troops without engaging in eight-day set-piece battles.

But the union faces guerrilla warfare against it come what may: with the government, employers and chief fire officers all ready to start slashing jobs, victimising militants and tearing up agreements just as soon as Section 19 is scrapped. The sacking of West Midlands FBU activist, Steve Godward, last month shows that this war against the union is already underway.

Yet the union leadership has devoted time and effort to stifling debate and repressing militants who disagree with the 16 per cent compromise strategy. Manchester FBU secretary Bob Pounder was reportedly marched out of the union office on the orders of Andy Gilchrist simply for publicly criticising the decision to call off the strikes. Members of the executive who disagree with the Gilchrist line are forced into silence by Stalinist "collective discipline".

So what should rank and file firefighters do? The leadership should be forced to fight for the full claim of £30k. It took all mention of 30K off official union banners for the 7 December demo; despite no democratic body of the FBU ever deciding on this. Likewise, while rank and file firefighters were still sporting the excellent T-shirt slogan: "Modernisation – My Arse", the leadership put up a banner saying "Modernisation Yes, Job Cuts No".

Even the leaked Pathfinder report, which considered changes to fire risk cover under plans to protect lives rather than property, said no changes to terms and conditions were needed. Yet the union leadership, which constantly quotes the Pathfinder report, is prepared to consider radical changes to terms and conditions in return for a pay increase just nine per cent above what would have been given under the existing pay formula.

The move to "guerrilla" two-day actions is an unnecessary retreat. Guerrilla wars are fought by people who haven't got the resources to face their enemies in pitched battles. Che Guevara, whose portrait is on Andy Gilchrist's office wall, was not a great strategist of industrial conflict: strikes need momentum to win. The two-day actions may seem like a clever tactic to the FBU leaders but it is self-deluding to see them as anything other than a retreat.

And why was retreat necessary? It wasn't. The FBU leaders claimed to militants in private that "some areas were crumbling" under the financial and media pressures of the eight-day action. But where is the proof for this? Because the union is run like a Stalinist party, with the NEC all powerful, there is no way for rank and file members from the militant areas either to test this out or address it through solidarity-boosting visits and communications.

The level of support for the strike – not only from the general public but from the organised working class – was solid.

The strike was going forward. To face down the increasingly aggressive attacks from the government an all-out indefinite strike was needed. A campaign for this course of action, energetically carried out by the union leadership, could have won the dispute before Christmas.

Instead the strike faded from the news. FBU members did indeed become confused and demoralised – by the actions of their own leadership, not because they themselves were lacking in resolve. Momentum was lost.

What we may get this month is a rotten compromise that could open the road to the slow erosion of the union's strength in the workplace.

To stop that happening rank and file firefighters need to realise the fatal flaw at the heart of Gilchrist's strategy: it is a classic, bureaucratic, Stalinist-influenced strategy.

It treats the FBU rank and file as a stage army to be marched in and out of the wings according to a secret script. They are kept in the dark. They are left isolated to face the pressures of a hostile press. But they are then expected to jump to attention when the EC clicks its fingers.

Union democracy becomes a sham: the "weakness" of some areas becomes an excuse for Gilchrist and his allies to duck and weave in and out of negotiations without any accountability to the members. The formal ability of regions to instruct and recall their EC members is meaningless as all votes are – on Gilchrist's demand – formally unanimous.

The very running of the strike starts to suffer. There is no national hardship fund arrangement; any attempt to up the ante through stunts and demonstrations and spontaneous actions are sat upon by the regional officials; planned for solidarity is undermined.

Finally, the strategy has a built in braking mechanism designed to facilitate bureaucratic control of the action and of the negotiations. The option of closing a deal is kept firmly in the leadership's hands. By limiting the strikes to eight (or worse, two) days, the bureaucracy stops the dispute from developing into an all out struggle.

By restricting the action to a series of protests – which is what discontinuous strikes are – you give the bosses the option of sitting tight until the protest is over. Then, when you sense that the protests have gone as far as they can in pressuring the bosses you call them off altogether, sit down and stitch up a deal. The membership are sidelined and, in the worse case, sold out.

These are the hallmarks of the strategy that has characterised Gilchrist's handling of the dispute. And it is a strategy that has allowed the government to move from the defensive to the offensive – with jobs and conditions now under threat – and pushed the union into retreat.

Militants need to organise themselves, into effective rank and file organisations that can fight for a total alternative to this disastrous bureaucratic chicanery.



Rank and file must organise to stop retreat

Rank and file political independence and organisation are vital. There are structures in place throughout the FBU that, if activated independently of the EC, could begin to run the action effectively and democratically. The London Regional Committee of the FBU for example has time and again instructed its EC members to vote against compromise, called for no more cancellations of action, and held regular briefings for more than 100 station reps.

But so far these structures exist in a parallel universe to the actual decision making on the strike action – and Gilchrist's harsh treatment of militants who step out of line, or attempt to use brigade and regional structures to actually take decisions reflects the fact that he knows there is a potential rank and file challenge.

The task for socialists within the FBU is to make it happen. So far the left has been too divided: there are probably several hundred individual socialist militants within the FBU who have the political insight and authority to form an alternative leadership on the ground. But they haven't co-ordinated themselves nationally during the dispute – and while many hold positions in regions, brigades and branches they are reduced to sending resolutions up to the EC, which are then ignored.

What is needed now is for the rank and file militants to get together over the basic issue of how to resist a 16 per cent deal which is virtually certain to be put to the membership once offered by the employers. If the 16 per cent is accepted there will be a brigade-by-brigade battle over conditions that only the rank and file can win.

Sixteen per cent would be a lousy compromise snatched from the jaws of what could have been a victory over Blairism. The union "modernisers" will emerge from the whole crisis with renewed authority, saying: look – the only one of the "awkward squad" of union leaders to actually take on Blair got a bloody nose, better to follow our strategy of compromise and passive criticism. Million pound ads in the *Guardian* rather than strike action are the way forward, will be the message.

There is still time to reject a compromise and restart the fight for 30k. But only the rank and file can do it and for that they need to get organised fast, by:

- Organising a national meeting of rank and file FBU members who support the fight for £30k and are ready to campaign for action to win it.
- Building resistance to the sackings (Steve Godward) and union witch hunts (Bob Pounder) of militants and campaign for real union democracy – freedom to criticise the leadership which should be accountable (through regular election and recallability) to the membership and enjoy no special privileges (higher pay and perks) over the membership.
- Launching bulletins, as London has done, to build support for action, keep members informed and build links with other workers.
- Establishing local strike committees – elected by and accountable to mass meetings – in every station, to build and organise action, link up with Firefighter Support Groups and to fight for rank and file control over the negotiations.

International support for firefighters

Dear brothers and sisters, firefighters in U.K.,

The Enterprise Trade Union Committee of the Nuclear Research Institute, Rez, Czech Republic, expresses the warmest solidarity with FBU strike action for fair pay of 30,000 GBP per year.

We would like to express our support for your struggle for a decent wage for workers who do very responsible work and risk their lives in order to save other people's lives and property. We stand behind you against the campaign of attacks and slanders your trade union faces from the government and mainstream media in Great Britain, but also internationally.

We would also like to assure you that in case that New Labour government moves against your democratic right to strike and protest we would not hesitate to send protest letters to the U.K. embassy in the Czech Republic and call on other trade union organisations in the Czech Republic to do the same.

In solidarity,
in the name of Independent Trade Union Organisation of Nuclear Research Institute, Rez, Czech Republic
Dipl. Ing. Vladimír Masarik, the chairman of ITUO of NRI

Wang Fan-hsi, 1907-2002

When Trotsky began the task of building the Fourth International, in the very difficult circumstances of the late 1930s, his first priority was to assemble the communist cadres who had survived the devastating defeats inflicted on the world working class movement by the treachery of the Social Democrats and Stalinists. Among those who had survived and remained committed to revolutionary Marxism were a handful of comrades in China who had regrouped in Shanghai under the very noses of the Japanese occupation. Here, *Din Wong* commemorates the passing of the very last of those heroic comrades, Wang Fan-hsi.

“I have spent the greater part of my life and effort in the struggle for socialism and against Stalinism.” – Wang Fan-hsi 1907-2002

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many on the left greeted the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the rise of US “New World Order” with dismay and despondency. But not Wang Fan-hsi, a life-long Trotskyist and Chinese communist revolutionary, who passed away in Leeds, England, on 30 Dec 2002, aged 95.

For Wang, the collapse of Stalinism was a vindication of his opposition to both its theory and practice, first in the Soviet Union and then in China. It was Trotskyists like Wang who consistently came out against the degeneration of the Soviet state, against its bureaucratic dictatorship and who exposed as an illusion the Stalinist idea of “building socialism in one country”.

Born in 1907 in Hsia-shih (between Shanghai and Hangchow), Wang became politicised in high school at a momentous turning point in Chinese history – the May Fourth movement. As a student at Peking University in 1925, Wang Fan-hsi joined the Chinese Communist Party, at a time when the CCP was under instruction from the Comintern to subordinate itself to the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang KMT) and Chiang Kai-shek in a fatally opportunist interpretation of the united front tactic.

For a brief period in 1926, Wang was in Canton during the 18-month Hong Kong-Canton General Strike during which the strike committee formed a virtual second government that established a workers’ militia and enforced a boycott of the coastal ports. This experience of revolu-

tionary working class politics and the need to fight for a working class revolution in China, as the Bolsheviks had in Russia, never left him and remained the bedrock of his politics.

After the betrayal and massacre of workers in Canton and Shanghai by Chiang Kai-shek in 1926-7, Wang Fan-hsi was sent to Wuhan, the power base of the “left” Nationalist leader, Wang Ching-wei with whom the Chinese Communist Party, under orders from Moscow, now made an alliance. He watched with growing unease as the Party once again agreed to the surrender of arms by trade unionists and workers’ militia to the local garrison as a mark of their “loyalty” to the nationalist government, just as they had in Shanghai.

In 1928, Wang Fan-hsi arrived in Moscow for military training at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, then in the thick of Stalin’s campaign against Trotsky and the Left Opposition. Persuaded by Trotsky’s analysis of the failure of the second revolution, he joined, and soon became one of the organisers of, the clandestine group of Chinese Left Oppositionists.

When he returned to China in 1929, Wang worked as an aide to Chou En-lai in Shanghai until he was expelled from the CCP. He then worked for the unification of the four opposition groups to overcome their divisions regarding the nature of the coming revolution and the slogan for a constituent assembly. Unfortunately, soon after he was elected with Chen Tu-hsiu to the leadership of the unified opposition group, Wang was arrested and jailed for three years by the Nationalists.

Undeterred by this setback, he



returned to Shanghai and, in collaboration with the South African communist Frank Glass and the American Harold Isaacs, threw his energy into rebuilding the Trotskyist organisation and publishing theoretical and political periodicals.

Just before the outbreak of war with the Japanese, he was kidnapped by KMT special service agents and endured another jail term. Under interrogation, despite torture, Wang refused to divulge the names and addresses of his comrades and was

put in solitary confinement. This period, described by Wang as the darkest days of his life, was cut short only by the action of a sympathetic jailer who unlocked his cell before fleeing from the approaching Japanese army.

Back in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, Wang and his comrades resumed political activity under very difficult circumstances and at great risks to their lives. Their efforts centred on education, propaganda, writing, translation and the publication

of Trotsky’s work.

Looking back on this period, Wang was proudest of his translation into Chinese of *The History of the Russian Revolution*. Just weeks before his assassination, Trotsky wrote of this: “The day I learned that my History of the Russian Revolution was to be published in Chinese was a holiday for me.”

This clandestine political activity continued in Shanghai throughout the war years. When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the Trotskyists were able, despite a split in their ranks and a ban by the KMT government, to take some advantage of the situation in the cities where the CCP’s concentration on the countryside had left a virtual vacuum in the leadership of the urban working classes.

When a CCP military victory seemed certain, however, Wang was sent to Hong Kong to set up a new co-ordinating centre. He was not at all a welcome arrival as far as the British authorities were concerned. They promptly deported him to Macau where he stayed until he came to England in 1975. His comrades in China were rounded up in 1952 and the last of them, Cheng Ch’ao-lin, one of Wang’s closest comrades, was not released until 27 years later.

In Macau, having lost his family, relatives, comrades and friends, Wang recollected his part in the Chinese revolution and reflected on the defeat of the Chinese Trotskyist movement in his memoirs, which have now been translated and published in English, French, German and Japanese. He kept a critical watch on events in China and continued to publish his writings which included translations of Trotsky’s works, studies on Mao Tse-tung’s

thoughts and the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”. He also wrote several plays.

Despite years of hard to mou existence, perilous threats to life and prison terms that were most injurious to his health, Wang was unshaken in his political beliefs. The terms of his exile in Britain did not allow him to be politically active, yet he kept up extensive political correspondence with revolutionaries around the world and, ever forward-looking, he encouraged and inspired, a new generation of radical Chinese youth in Hong Kong and Britain in the seventies and eighties.

With the recent partial rehabilitation of Chen Tu-hsiu in China, Wang’s *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary* and a new edition of his *Study on the Thoughts of Mao* have also now been published, although with restricted availability, in China. He was also very gratified to learn that some of his work is available on the Web, his only regret being that he was too old to learn how to use a computer.

If the downfall of Stalinism vindicated his commitment to the programme of Trotskyism, the emergence of a new workers’ movement in China and of the anti-capitalist movement globally, confirmed his continuing political optimism and enthusiasm. An internationalist to the end, he was still enquiring about the progress of the anti-war and anti-capitalist movements even in his very final days.

A modest comrade, without a trace of bitterness despite his suffering, he was generous and scrupulously fair to others in the Chinese Trotskyist movement with different views. His memory, and his example, will continue to inspire us

Joe Strummer, 1952-2002

Jeremy Dewar recalls the life, music and political passion of Joe Strummer who died last month

Joe Strummer, lead singer and political inspiration behind The Clash, died peacefully, at his home, from a heart attack on 22 December. He is remembered by millions as the major political force behind the punk movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Joe remained politically active right up to his death. His last London gig was a benefit for the Fire Brigades Union in West London – and dozens of firefighters formed an honour guard at Joe’s funeral.

Joe, enjoying a bit of a renaissance in recent years, was also central to the planning of a Robben Island concert and writing an accompanying single in support of Aids sufferers in southern Africa.

On both a musical and a political level, The Clash made a dramatic impact in the late 1970s with songs like *White Riot* and *I’m so bored with the USA*. Musically, The Clash did two things. First, they dealt a death blow to the over-elaborate and self-indulgent rock dinosaurs of the day returning to a fast and furious sound of short, angry songs. At one minute and 59 seconds, *White Riot* had no time for guitar solos.

When one *New Musical Express* hack

denounced them as a garage band, they simply snarled back, “We’re a garage band!” The message for teenagers like me at the time was clear: Don’t just consume, you too can be an active participant in this movement.

Second, they popularised for white youth a whole catalogue of Jamaican reggae music. Their cover of *Police and Thieves* on their first album and later collaborations with Mikey Dread led to Bob Marley penning the song, *Punky Reggae Party*. For the first time in Britain, white and African-Caribbean youth shared a bit of popular culture. Yet, Joe was not so naive that he romanticised the ease with which this could be achieved. His *White man in Hammersmith Palais* single grittily tells of his sense of being an outsider at a reggae gig.

But it was the political impact of The Clash that makes them such an icon for generations of youth. I am hardly alone in saying that Joe Strummer’s lyrics were an enduring influence on my early political development. The first demo I ever went on was the 1978 Rock against Racism carnival – because The Clash were playing.

White Riot encouraged white youth to



Joe Strummer playing at a benefit for striking firefighters November 2002.

fight for their rights, like black youth were correctly doing; *London’s Burning* condemned the miserablism that passed for official British youth culture. Albums like *Sandinista!* and *Combat Rock* moved the political lens outside Britain and opened sides with revolutions from Nicaragua to Iran.

As testimony to the international and lasting influence of these songs, *Should stay or should I go* was sung by students outside the Serbian parliament as the movement ousted Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Honk Kong student activists circulated the lyrics to Joe’s *Know Your Rights* while a north American anti-war activist is using his anti-conscription song *The Call Up*.

Joe Strummer will be mourned as his life celebrated by millions who were touched by his sincerity and passion. Because he has been, and will be followed by other Music is a key part of youth culture and despite the record companies’ and media moguls’ attempts to tame each generation of rebel music, we will carry on singing rebel songs till we have crushed the miserable bastards.

The first mass glob

The World Social Forum movement presents revolutionary internationalists with enormous possibilities. The recent European Social Forum (ESF), drawing together 60,000 anti-capitalists, socialists and trade unionists from all over Europe, took the first steps as a co-ordinating centre for action - calling European wide anti-war demonstrations for 15 February.

Within this forum several distinct political and social forces are working to push it in radically different directions. Revolutionary Marxists say openly that we want to help it develop into an international movement, able to direct the struggle against capitalism and imperialism - a new world party of socialist revolution.

Over a century ago the forces of Marxism faced similar challenges within a period of rising struggles when the movement, which came to be known as the Second International, was born. There are many lessons to be learned in the way that this movement was founded in 1889, writes Stuart King

The First International - the International Workingmen's Association - was founded in 1864 and officially dissolved in 1876. It had really ceased to exist in 1872, due to the internal conflict between Marxists and anarchists and the desertion from the International by the English trade union leaders. In addition the period of reaction in continental Europe which followed the defeat of the Paris Commune (1871) and the imposition of Anti-Socialist Laws in Germany, drove the workers' movement underground in key countries.

Marx and Engels thought the international class struggle would inevitably recover but not until major developments, both economic and political, had undermined the relative stability that Europe enjoyed in this period. They expected that a revolutionary outbreak in Russia against the Tsarist dictatorship would unleash revolutionary struggles throughout Europe, especially in Germany.

In the meantime they focused their attention on supporting the German Marxists, the Social Democrats. They not only survived the illegality of the Anti-Socialist Laws (1878-1890) but grew stronger, winning seats in the German parliament - the only loophole in the reactionary legislation.

In an 1882 letter to the key German-speaking activist from the First International, Johann Becker, Engels argued that, outside of the context of a revival of the class struggle and the outbreak of revolutionary upheavals, restoring the international would be "premature" and would only lead to "repression, secrecy and conspiracies". When the appropriate time came to launch the international "it would no longer be a small propaganda society but a society for action".

This had been the key question in Marx and Engels' struggle with Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International. Marx and Engels wanted the already existing mass organisations of the working class - its trade unions and parties - to be the basis of the international: not tiny conspiratorial groups or propaganda groups for various utopian projects.

Shortly before its collapse they won the First International to promote the creation of independent workers' parties in all countries. Through the international, with its regular congresses and a central General Council, they worked to develop the world



The Second international included leaders of British docks strike of 1889

labour movement in an anti-capitalist, socialist direction.

The early 1880s saw a number of moves to refound the International. Marx and Engels were wary about these initiatives. In 1881 Marx wrote to a Dutch revolutionary: "It is my conviction that the critical juncture for a new international workingmen's association has not yet arrived and for this reason I regard all workers' congresses or socialist congresses, in so far as they are not related to the conditions existing in this or that particular nation, as not merely useless but harmful".

The international initiatives of the early 1880s came to nothing but later in the decade the growing strength of socialist parties and rising trade union struggles across both Europe and the USA led to an unstoppable momentum in the direction of international collaboration.

By the late 1880s the German Social-Democracy had weathered the anti-socialist laws, introduced in 1879, and dramatically increased its support in the country and parliament. The French Socialists were divided in 1882 between the Marxists of Jules Guesde's Workers Party and the "Possibilists" led by Paul Brousse. Despite this they were leading important struggles for better working conditions and the eight hour day.

In the USA the workers' movement, led by the Knights of Labour and later the American Federation of Labour (AFL), was also involved in mass strike action for the eight-hour day. While in Britain the 1880s had seen the rebirth of a socialist movement, with the foundation of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) led by Henry Hyndman, William Morris's anarchist-inclined Socialist League, and the Scottish Labour Party of Keir Hardie.

The unions were still under the control of pro-Liberal right wing leaders like Henry Broadhurst, but they were being challenged from below by the younger left-wingers. Signs of the massive upheaval, which was to sweep the unskilled workers into the unions after the 1889 dock strike, were already visible in a series of strikes and militant unemployed demonstrations.

The centenary of the French revolution in July 1889 was to be marked by a huge international exhibition in Paris. This date became a focus for the French Socialists

to initiate a new international movement. They were divided into two wings: the Possibilists, so-called because they believed the workers' movement should concentrate on what was possible to achieve under capitalism, and the Marxists, who had a revolutionary perspective.

The Possibilists had already organised two International Congresses, in 1883 and 1886, open to trade unions and socialist parties. The British TUC had attended both. The 1886 conference had concentrated on co-ordinating demands for improvements in industrial conditions and shortening the working week. Shortly after the meeting the French trade unions adopted the policy of organising one-day general strikes to fight for the eight-hour day and they actively sought to spread this into a European wide action. The British TUC was asked to organise a further international congress in London in 1888.

The involvement of the TUC in these congresses took place only as a result of a struggle; the leadership - the Parliamentary Committee - being overruled on two occasions by the full congress. The Parliamentary Committee - named because it lobbied parliament on behalf of the unions - was the only central leadership they possessed. It strongly opposed participation due to its suspicion of "continental socialists". It was committed to seeking reforms through the main party of the capitalists, the Liberal Party of Gladstone. This class collaborationist trend was known as Liberal-Labourism or Lib-Labism for short.

Again in 1887 the Parliamentary Committee tried to oppose organising the next conference, even issuing a pamphlet criticising the "instability" and "unreliability" of the continental trade unions. But again the full congress instructed them to organise it. They did so, but like the leadership of the World Social Forum of today, they attempted to de-politicise it by completely excluding all political parties.

At the 1888 "International Trade Union Congress" only bona fide trade unions were allowed delegates. Of course socialist parties attended but only (as at the ESF in Florence) by subverting the ban. Thus the British trade unionists included well known socialist leaders like John Burns and Tom Mann from the SDF as well Keir Hardie, who was sent by the Scottish miners. A sig-

nificant number of women delegates attended: Annie Besant led a delegation from the victorious "match girl" strikers - now a union in their own right; Eleanor Marx was involved in the organisation and translation as was Emmeline Pankhurst the future suffragette leader.

But overall this congress was a step back. The German socialists did not attend because the Anti-Socialist Laws prevented them. The banning of parties led many socialist parties not to attend at all, including the Marxist group from France, led by Jules Guesde, a fact that pleased the TUC leaders who found the Possibilists' reformism much more to their liking. The chair was in the hands of a notorious TUC "Lib-Lab" who kept strict control of discussion and brushed aside Keir Hardie's protests at the ban on parties. It involved a few trade unionists, mainly in the mining constituencies, standing for parliament as Liberals.

One result of the poor attendance from continental socialist parties was that the organisation for the 1889 international congress, planned to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution, fell into the hands of Hyndman's SDF and the French Possibilists. It was Engels who quickly realised the full dangers of what had happened. The anti-Marxists (for Hyndman was deeply hostile to Marx and Engels and to the German socialists) had been given a free hand. Worse, they were intending to set up a new international with themselves as its leadership.

Throughout the first half of 1889 Engels - both through his contacts in London and by a stream of letters to the leaders of the German and French socialists - became the leader of a campaign to prevent the Paris congress, and a potential international, from falling into the hands of the anti-Marxists. He had to drop his work on editing Marx's third volume of *Capital* and plunge into the task of cajoling, warning and encouraging fellow socialists into building a solid coalition against the Hyndman/Possibilist axis.

It soon became clear that, in fact, two congresses were going to convene in Paris on 14 July 1889. The French Guesdeists issued a convocation for an "Internation-

al Socialist Working Men's Congress", a call supported by both the German Social Democrats and Belgian socialists. Meanwhile the Possibilists continued to canvass for their congress based on the call of the 1888 London meeting. After fruitless attempts to merge the two, attempts spurned by the Possibilists, the fight was on to rally the maximum forces to the rival conferences.

Engels initiated and edited a pamphlet exposing Hyndman's manoeuvres. It had a great effect, showing as it did the underhand methods being used to place the international congress in the hands of Hyndman and his allies. Tom Mann and John Burns, despite being SDF members, both expressed their disgust at these actions and Burns although delegated by his union to the Possibilist congress promised to carry the arguments there. William Morris published the convocation for the pro-Marxist conference, a curious move given that his Socialist League was by this time closer to the anarchists. Keir Hardie - a lifelong reformist - also threw his weight behind the "Marxist" congress.

By June Engels could confidently declare: "With the exception of the Social Democratic Federation, the Possibilists have not a single socialist organisation on their side in the whole of Europe. They are consequently falling back on the non-socialist trade unions."

Even at this late stage Engels did not rule out some sort of amalgamation of the forces being rallied in Paris. But he made clear that "the merger if it happens will not so much be a merger as an alliance. Hence it is a matter of thrashing out the terms of the alliance".

It was to be two more years before such an amalgamation was to happen. Meanwhile in 1889 in Paris, "two mutually recriminating congresses were held in separate halls by Possibilists and Impossibilists respectively, the anarchists being impartially present at both." This was how Hyndman reported the events for *Justice*. Things had certainly not worked out well for the SDF leader: while the Possibilist congress was bigger with 600 delegates, 500 of these were French. Germany with the most powerful socialist movement on the continent was not represented at it.

The Marxist congress, held at the Salle Petrelle, with 391 delegates, had a much broader international representation. There were 81 Germans, 22 British, 14 Belgians, 8 Austrians, 6 Russians as well as smaller delegations from Holland, Denmark Sweden, Italy, Spain, Portugal and many other countries. It also had an array of well-known socialist and working class leaders - Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel and Clara Zetkin from Germany; Victor Adler from Austria; Jules Guesde, Eduard Vaillant, Paul and Laura Lafargue from France; Georgi Plekhanov from Russia, Emile Vandeveld from Belgium; William Morris, Keir Hardie and Eleanor Marx from Britain, to name but a few.

Neither congress was politically homogenous. While the Salle Petrelle meeting was predominantly Marxist it had numerous anarchist and non-Marxist delegates such as Morris, Hardie and the Pankhursts. Indeed, it had too many anarchists for the German Social Democrats' liking as they were soon jumping onto chairs with placards denouncing "authoritarianism" and accusing the Socialist leaders of being enemies of the proletariat. The Possibilist meeting was even more heterogeneous and tended to give the anarchists more of a hearing. At the same time,

al gathering

many delegates moved from one congress to the other.

Despite the confusion and differences both congresses managed to agree on a unifying field of common action with the help of the American delegates. The AFL had two delegates at the Possibilist congress and an observer at the Marxist one. In 1888 the AFL had decided to launch a new campaign for the eight hour day with simultaneous strikes launched across whole industries.

The French had taken up the idea already and had launched simultaneous demonstrations and strikes throughout France in February 1889. The Americans had picked 1 May 1890 for their strikes and a resolution was put to do this simultaneously in all countries. This became the origins of May Day as a workers' day of demonstrations and strikes.

The Salle Petrelle resolution said that in the action "the workers will call upon the public authorities to reduce the working day by law to eight hours and to put other resolutions of the Congress of Paris into effect". The Germans, fearful that strikes would make a renewal of the Anti-Socialist Laws likely, added a clause saying the workers would have to take account of the particular situation imposed on them in each country.

Despite the fact that both in Germany and Britain demonstrations were held on the nearest Sunday, 1 May 1890 turned out to be an impressive show of strength of the

workers' movement and its new international co-ordination. There were great demonstrations and extensive stoppages of work in France, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Holland, parts of Italy and Spain, in the Scandinavian countries and the United States.

These united actions ensured that any future international congress would be a united one. This was convened in Brussels in 1891. But what sort of International was being built in the 1890s? It was certainly not a purely Marxist one. It included anarchists until the London Congress in 1896 when they walked out in protest at a resolution insisting on "political action", that is, the need for independent socialist parties to stand candidates in elections.

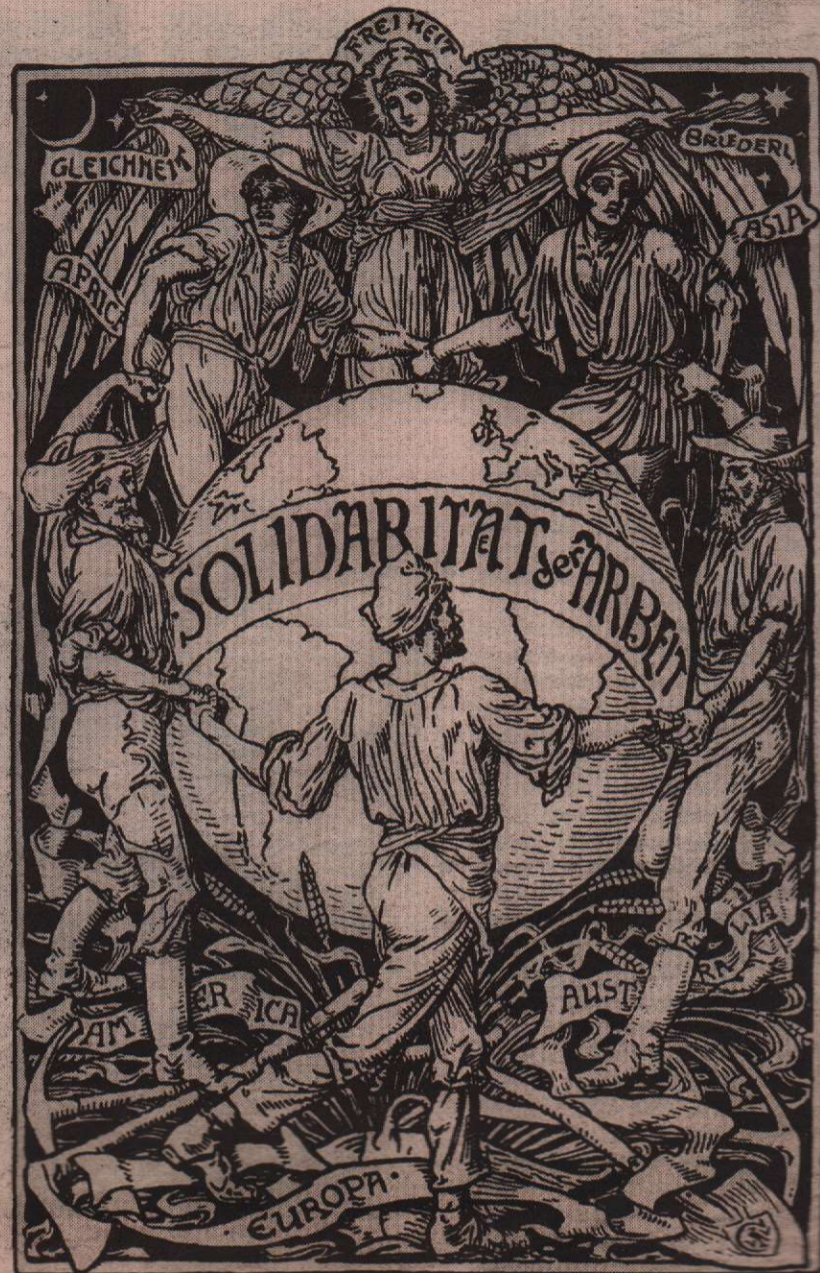
Trade unions, both national federations and local branches, were represented in the national delegations and they were, as often as not, of a reformist or syndicalist persuasion. Few Marxists were to be found in the British delegations, which tended to be made up of the groups that would go on to form the Labour Party (the Fabians, Independent Labour Party, local socialist societies) plus trade union delegates.

Reality had proved that despite the doubts of Marx and Engels in the 1880s the socialist and workers' movement was able to build and sustain a new international, carried forward on a rising tide of workers' struggles and the growth of mass socialist parties in Europe. The broad and polit-

ically heterogeneous International that came into being in the 1890s in many ways reflected the development of the First International.

Writing to an American socialist in 1887 Engels pointed out: "When Marx founded the International he drew up the general rules in such a way that all working class socialists of that period could join it - Proudhonists, Pierre-Lerouxists and even the more advanced section of the English Trades Unions; and it was only through this latitude that the international became what it was, the means of gradually absorbing all these minor sects with the exception of the Anarchists... Had we from 1864-73 insisted on working together only with those who openly adopted our platform - where should we be today? I think all our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our own distinct position and even organisation, and I am afraid if the Americans choose a different line they will commit a great mistake"

This policy successfully built two internationals, the First and the Second, under Marxist leadership. Such an approach, combining the flexibility of the united front in action with the defence of Marxist internationalism and revolutionary principles, and the steady fight for more and more elements of a Marxist programme could allow us to build a new international today.



War on the warmongers

War is a bloody and brutal business. Our rulers deliberately air-brush the images we get of the wars they start. The war against Iraq in 1991, the Balkan wars and the bombardment of Afghanistan last year were all reported by the media as computer-choreographed fireworks shows in aid of "democracy".

Only once the fighting stopped did we see pictures of hundreds of mangled and charred bodies on the road to Basra. Retreating Iraqis had been wantonly slaughtered by the US, British and other forces. Likewise the slaughter of Afghan prisoners last year by Northern Alliance and US special forces soldiers only became the subject of a documentary after the war was fought and won.

Unlike our rulers Marxists never try to prettify war in order to justify it. We tell the truth. Part of that truth is that war is an inevitable product of a class divided society and a world divided into competing nations. It is also a necessary part of the struggle to overthrow class society.

Unlike pacifists - who reject all wars - socialists oppose some wars, support others and will be prepared to wage war against the capitalist system. Our aim is to create a world free of national divisions and in which classes have been abolished: world socialism. Only such a world

can get rid of war altogether and to get it we will have to fight, arms in hand.

Clausewitz, a nineteenth century German soldier and philosopher, provided an important insight into wars when he wrote: "War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means."

Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all took Clausewitz's insistence that war was not something separate from politics as their starting point for analysing wars. They went on to analyse the class character of each particular war. Writing during the carnage of the First World War, Lenin noted that the key questions were, "what caused that war, what classes are waging it, and what historico-economic conditions gave rise to it."

By posing these questions Lenin drew the conclusion that there were both just and unjust wars. In the former category he included wars fought by nations oppressed by imperialism - Ireland's war for independence, for example.

In the latter category he pointed to the war then being waged between the major imperialist powers. He recognised that beneath the superficial question of "who fired the first shot?", lay the important fact that those powers were fighting each other in order to

divide the world between themselves.

Today, despite the repulsive tyranny of Saddam Hussein, Iraq is a semi-colony oppressed by imperialism. Since the last Gulf War (1991) Iraq has been starved, bombed and bullied by imperialism, led by the US and UK. Countless children have gone to their graves courtesy of UN imposed sanctions - a weapon of mass destruction if ever there was one.

The goal for the US and its UK ally is not "democracy". It is the conquest of a country with the second largest oil reserves in the world.

In the era of globalisation the US is determined to rule the globe unchecked. Its war on Iraq is part of its military strategy for securing such world domination. After Iraq it will select another target - perhaps North Korea.

In each case there is nothing just, nothing progressive about the USA's endless war. But those who resist it do have justice on their side. Their resistance - even if it is initially alongside a dictator like Saddam Hussein - is justified and necessary. It can help thwart the plans of the US imperialists and encourage real mass, popular resistance to them across the globe.

Only with a class analysis, an understanding of the politics of each war, can we understand why some

wars are just and some are unjust, and only thus can we determine whose side we are on, if any.

This method has proved vital for revolutionaries in many wars, but none more so than the two world wars of this century. Both, despite the supposedly "anti-fascist" character of the Allied war effort in the Second World War, were unjust wars as far as Britain, the USA, France, Germany, Japan and the other imperialist states were concerned.

Neither world war was fought to preserve democracy. Both were fought in order to redivide the world for exploitation between the imperialist powers. They were unjust, imperialist wars.

As Lenin put it with regard to the First World War:

"Picture to yourselves a slave owner who owned 100 slaves warring against a slave owner who owned 200 slaves for a more 'just' distribution of slaves. Clearly, the application of the term 'defensive' war, or 'war for the defence of the fatherland', in such a case would be historically false, and in practice would be sheer deception of the common people... Precisely in this way are the present day imperialist bourgeoisie deceiving the peoples by means of 'national' ideology and the term 'defence of the fatherland' in the present war between slave

owners for fortifying and strengthening slavery."

Lenin formulated a policy for Marxists that went beyond simply analysing the class character of wars and supporting or opposing them. He developed the policy of revolutionary defeatism - waging the class struggle in your own country against your own bourgeoisie even at the cost of it being defeated in war - as a means of creating the conditions under which imperialist war could be transformed into a civil war, a war by workers on their own ruling class.

Marxists stand for revolution. Revolution will be resisted by capitalists who stand to lose their fortunes, their privileges and their political rule. Always and everywhere they will fight arms in hand to defeat workers' revolution.

Civil war to defeat them will be necessary. It is a stage towards the creation of a world free from war, and such an objective justifies the use of warlike means to achieve it.

That is also why Marxists are not pacifists. We know we cannot defeat a powerful enemy other than by revolution and civil war. As Engels put it: "If the working class was to overcome the bourgeoisie it would first have to master the art and strategy of war." To say otherwise is a deception, one that will result in wars without end.

No way to build a party

Recent arguments in the Scottish Socialist Party have exposed the majority's concessions to reformism

December saw a series of charges and rebuttals thrown at each other by the two biggest tendencies in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). The offensive opened with a letter from the SSP Executive Committee, which is dominated by the ex-Militant tendency, led by Tommy Sheridan, now called the International Socialist Movement - ISM.

The letter charged that the Socialist Worker (SW) platform, made up of members who were previously part of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), were engaging in actions which were "disruptive, divisive and damaging" to the SSP. The specific charges were that the SW platform had gone behind the back of the SSP structures and was using a firefighters' rank and file bulletin *Red Watch* to do its own work around the strike.

This was linked to charges of ignoring the SSP's own firefighters' bulletin, failing to distribute a special electoral paper for the upcoming Scottish Parliamentary elections, following instructions from the British SWP and generally being unenthusiastic about the SSP project.

In two replies from the SW tendency it re-affirmed its commitment to the SSP and pointed out that the SW platform had a political project that was "different and distinct from that of the SWP in England and Wales" and that as an independent political body it could not be held accountable for the actions of the SWP. It hotly denied that it had boycotted the election special. It defended its right to distribute a UK-wide rank and file paper (citing SSP conference decisions) and declared that the executive should be opening up a discussion on the correctness or otherwise of the rank and file approach, rather than attacking SSP members "actively building solidarity for strikers".

At the root of this dispute are different approaches to how socialists should relate to the trade union bureaucracy. Tommy Sheridan and the founders of the ISM come from the tradition of the British Militant. Under the leadership of Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe this tendency was renowned for its long-term entrenchment into the Labour Party and its adaptation to its reformist host. At its most fundamental this was shown in its willingness to embrace the idea that socialism could come through gaining a socialist majority in parliament - a series of radical reforms to the state machinery were presented as an alternative to smashing the state machine through revolution, work-



ers' councils and a workers' militia. The ISM carried this perspective - one that we would describe as right centrist - into the programme of the SSP even after they split with Grant and Taaffe.

Building allies in the leadership of the trade unions in Scotland is considered by the ISM leadership to be fundamental to the forward march of the SSP on the electoral terrain, to replace Labour as the party of the working class in Scotland. Suddenly finding a large group of SSP members distributing a *Red Watch* bulletin, which rightly criticised the leadership of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) for calling off the strikes and seeking a rotten compromise on the firefighters' claim, was too much for the SSP leadership - especially as the Scottish parliamentary elections are only six months away.

The SSP executive make absolutely clear that no criticism should be made of the FBU leadership and no rank and file organisation should be built in the union to organ-

ise against a sell out: "The FBU leadership in Scotland have a tremendous record on a wide range of trade union and political issues. In these concrete circumstances, our emphasis is not to build a left opposition inside the FBU to its leadership in Scotland." (SSP Executive letter, 1 December 2002).

In other words as long as the FBU leadership in Scotland lends its name to a few of the SSP-favoured campaigns like the Scottish Campaign against Privatisation, they can be guaranteed in return a free run to sell out a strike without criticism or organisation in the union rank and file from the SSP.

Scottish Socialist Voice faithfully reflected this line with no criticism being made of the FBU leaders calling off the strikes. The SSV editorial greeted the decision by the FBU to suspend strike action and go to arbitration with the headline "Suspension of strike is far from defeat for FBU". In contrast, both *Socialist Worker* and *Red Watch*,

reflecting the outrage of the majority of militants in the FBU, criticised the decision of the FBU leadership to suspend an absolutely solid series of strike actions.

For the leadership of the SSP this dispute is about telling the SW Platform that it will not tolerate actions that threaten its cosy relationship with the union left leaders. Nor will it tolerate the SW Platform continuing to follow tactics developed by the SWP.

The SW Platform is in a cleft stick. The guidelines it agreed when it joined the SSP made clear that only SSV should be sold on public activities; *Socialist Worker* can only be sold internally in the SSP by SW Platform members. Using *Red Watch* was a means of getting round this - the alternative was remaining silent at a key juncture of the FBU strike and, worse, being limited to selling a paper that sows illusions in the FBU leadership.

But this problem is, in some respects,

one of the SWP's own making. The SWP wants to build an electoral challenge to the left of Labour, to scoop up Labour voters alienated by New Labour and Blairism. But it is convinced that this is possible today only on a non-revolutionary basis.

Aware that this approach - coming from a party - would amount to reformism, it tries to juggle with the concept of united front (a bloc of reformists, centrists and revolutionaries for action) but apply it to the completely separate question of common electoral propaganda between these currents.

It is positively in favour of building electoral united fronts on "broad programmes" (ones limited to reforms, plus vague aspirations to socialism) that are entirely acceptable to left reformists - namely, the Socialist Alliances in England and Wales, the SSP in Scotland. But because the SWP does not fully understand what a programme is for - that it is a guide to action for the class, advanced by the party in order to help the class win its day-to-day struggles and connect those struggles with the fight for revolution - they ignore the "blowback" that these left reformist programmes have on a party's whole method of work. Embracing and pushing a reformist programme as the answer leads a party towards becoming a reformist one. To avoid drawing this conclusion the SWP argue that it is merely an over-concentration on elections ("electoralism") that leads to these problems.

The SW Platform is willing to accept a reformist programme as the basis for work in the Scottish parliamentary election but is uneasy when the same methods come to dominate the trade union work of the party - trade unionism based on an unprincipled block with the "left" trade union bureaucracy.

Building fighting rank and file organisations in the unions that can pursue the class struggle, break the bureaucrats' stranglehold on the unions, and play an important part in the struggle for power, are a crucial weapon in a revolutionary party's armoury.

But they are not part of the SSP's plans. Nor would they be part of the Socialist Alliances' plans if they recruited significant forces on their current programmes and formed parties on the basis of them. This is the contradiction at the heart of the SWP's current "united front of a special (electoral) kind" policy and it is starting to unravel in Scotland.

Australia stokes racist fires

The persecution and harassment of refugees is a global phenomenon. Blunkett sponsors it here. And in Australia John Howard's "Liberal" (actually Tory) government is indulging in copycat racism.

Back in August 2001 Australia kept out a ship full of Afghan refugees to prove that it was prepared to get tough on asylum seekers. At the refugee camp in Woomera anti-racists responded by tearing down the camp's fences and helping a number of refugees escape detention.

Now acting immigration minister Daryl Williams, is hitting back. In response to a number of fires lit by refugees at Woomera and other detention centres, Williams has imprisoned 30 detainees without charge. The fires were lit in desperation.

Conditions in Australia's detention camps are appalling. Many basic needs are denied to inmates and both recreation and counselling services are negligible. The refugees are treated - as in Britain - as criminals. Yet these are people who have fled terrible conditions. Many have had to leave their country of origin because to stay would mean certain death.

Instead of finding a welcome in the imperialist countries whose military and financial policies have ruined their homelands they find race hate, spite and, in all but name, prison.

The trauma asylum seekers face is enormous. Louise Newman of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists said of the refugees who had lit the fires: "They feel a sense of despair and

hopelessness which makes them think they have nothing to lose from acts like this."

Yet such views cut little ice with Williams. His office had just issued papers to many of the refugees in the affected camps rejecting their appeals to stay in Australia. And when proffered advice by experts like Louise Newman he denounced her and all supporters of the refugees' rights for encouraging riots.

With the coming war against Iraq imperialism will ensure that there are more refugees on the planet.

But once its brutal acts have displaced them from their homes it will whip up a frenzy against them, barring their movement, blighting their lives and demonstrating once again its inherent racism.

Manifesto for World Revolution



The new draft programme from the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. Price £1.50 (including p&p). Available from Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to Workers Power.

Elections may open new stage in attacks on Palestinians

Bans preventing Arab-Israeli politicians from standing in elections are a reflection of Likud's racism, writes *Mark Robbins*

Israel's citizens go to the polls on 28 January to elect a new government. It is likely that it will result in a coalition even more right-wing than the one dissolved last October.

Labour will struggle to return the same number of MPs it has now, while the ruling Likud party is likely to lose votes to the far-right religious party Shas, which aims to expel all Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. A Likud-led coalition that embraced Shas would signal a new assault on the Palestinians.

A shift to the right in the parliament (Knesset) will be even more pronounced if the main Arab-Israeli parties, which represent many of the 20 per cent of Israelis who are Arabs, boycott the elections altogether.

This is a real possibility after the Central Elections Commission of the Knesset barred two prominent Arab-Israeli leaders from even standing in the elections.

The CEC disqualified Ahmed Tibi, who is third on the list of the Arab-Jewish Hadash party, and Azmi Bishara, who is currently a member of the Knesset. Likud and religious parties – a majority on the CEC – supported the ban.

Yet it approved the candidacy of the Jewish nationalist politician, Baruch Marzel,

from the right-wing Herut party. Marzel is a former leader of the Kach group which was banned after 29 Palestinians were killed in 1994 at a mosque in Hebron by one of its members.

Tibi described Palestinian resistance to army operations in the refugee camp in the West Bank town of Jenin in April as "an act of noble heroism". Bishara's support for Palestinian "resistance" in the West Bank was deemed to be an endorsement of the suicide bombers, despite Bishara's opposition to them. "I have spoken of the rights of a people under occupation ... to resist occupation," he said.

Under a new law the Knesset can expel a politician for denying Israel's existence as a Jewish or democratic state. The CEC decisions will be appealed to the Supreme Court and if upheld will lead to a mass boycott by Arab voters.

The hatred shown by the Likud and religious right towards the Arab Israelis flows from the increased level of sympathy and active support shown by them to their Palestinian brothers and sisters in the West Bank and Gaza since the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000.

Strikes and mass demonstrations inside Israel greeted the intifada in Arab towns and districts, and several were killed for their

Economic slump hits Israel

The social disintegration and political polarisation of Israeli society are being intensified by the gravity of the economic crisis which is the worst for 40 years.

Israel is in the grip of a recession brought on by the Palestinian uprising and slump in the hi-tech industrial sector which began in 2000.

In 2002, Israel's GDP fell by one percent, following a 0.9 per cent contraction in 2001. The population, however, grew by two per cent, pushing GDP per capita down three per cent from 2000. The last time GDP per capita fell for the second consecutive year in Israel was in 1953. Unemployment is now at 10.4 per cent – up from 9.4 percent a year ago.

The government, which receives \$3bn a year in funding from the US, has seen its revenues slump while its military costs soar as it occupies much of the West Bank.

Sharon is again looking to Israel's paymaster to get it out of the hole. Washington has been asked to quickly approve a request for \$10bn in financial aid, including \$4bn in military assistance and \$6bn in loan guarantees.

Unlike virtually every other country in the world that fails to run a budget surplus the IMF has not criticised Israel in its latest report for failing to meet its budget deficit target last year of 3.9 per cent of gross domestic product.

Even so the Knesset had to push through deep spending cuts in the last week of December to persuade international agencies maintain Israel's credit rating.

Naturally, the new budget makes cuts to welfare but maintains funding for Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

show of solidarity. Since then active cells of Arab-Israeli youth have grown – usually under the influence of the PLO Tanzim – which have provided logistical support for the attacks by West Bank Palestinians inside Israel.

The latest moves by the Knesset prove that Israel's nature as an exclusively Jewish state renders it utopian to seek to turn Israel into a democratic and equal state for all its citizens. This has never been the case for its Arab population as they have always suffered discrimination in jobs and housing. They suffer higher rates of unemployment than their Jewish fellow citizens and systematically receive less per head in government grants.

The decision to allow them to vote was a function of international pressure after Israel's founders expelled the vast majority of Arabs from their homes in 1947-48 in order to create Israel; it was hoped that it would help integrate them as a loyal and passive minority, and distance them from the plight of their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Diaspora.

But they are increasingly seen as an "enemy within" by the Zionist right to be further persecuted and marginalised. A new right-wing government coming out of the elections will intensify this process.

Fiat workers face jobs massacre

On 6 December 5,600 Fiat workers around Italy got their redundancy notices as a result of an agreement between the Fiat owners and the Italian government. The unions representing the workforce were contemptuously ignored.

Nevertheless, the deal bore the hallmarks of the spirited fightback of the rank and file of the unions. Their strikes and demonstrations undoubtedly forced the Agnelli family to retreat from its original plans and forced the government to step in with some guarantees.

The car bosses and Berlusconi have now agreed that the Termini Imerese plant will re-open in September 2003 for production of the Fiat Punto. Workers will be taken back on following a programme of training to be paid for by 60 million euros worth of state funding.

At Cassino, laid-off workers will be re-employed from spring 2003 onwards, though this will only be if there is a market demand.

In Mirafiori, Fiat is prepared to discuss the re-hiring of workers on the basis of the launching of new models of the Punto and B-MPV. Until then, bosses and government have agreed that workers will be able to rotate the lay-offs – meaning that they will take it in turns to go on the dole.

At the Arese plant, the bosses have agreed to participate in a "permanent table" of discussion with the government regarding business policies, and to employ about 2,000 workers from Fiat Auto and other Fiat companies who would otherwise have been laid off.

The 5,600 lay-offs demanded by the company will now be spread out by resorting to extended dole periods (workers receive about

two-thirds of normal salary) which will bring at least 2,400 workers up to early retirement age.

After the signing of this agreement in the first week of December, the union leaders were livid. On 6 December CGIL leader Epifani declared that during negotiations on matters of employment, work organisation and unemployment benefit, the union representatives had been cut out.

This, of course, is what he and the other union top brass are really annoyed about. Indeed, as Berlusconi noted, they can't complain about the content of the deal as they got what they asked for, namely, rotation of the dole periods and the promise not to definitively close the plant at Termini Imerese.

This has meant that all Epifani and the other leaders can do is claim that the plan's economic strategy is destined to failure. They can say nothing more than this, since they accept that Fiat is a private company that belongs to Agnelli.

Their declarations since the plan's signing have therefore been limited to begging calls to "reopen the negotiations". The alternative, of course, was an all-out general strike with plant occupations, a prospect which none of them dared consider, as it would challenge the Agnelli's property rights, which they actually respect.

In unison, the three trade union general secretaries have declared that they refuse to recognise the plan, but they refuse to do anything about it. They are merely forecasting that the economic plan behind the deal will fail in the course of the year and that as a result in the new year the company will be forced to renegotiate with the



Demonstration in support of Fiat workers

union bureaucracy.

The new-found "unity" between CGIL, CISL and UIL is a unity between the bureaucrats to contain the militancy of the Fiat workers whose protests were not only increasingly effective but gaining support. Workers took their struggle to the railways and motorways, blocking traffic. Workers also picketed the Agnelli-owned Rinascente shops.

Some of these actions the union hierarchy were happy to sanction as they lessened

pressure for an immediate occupation of all threatened plants. The leaders of CISL and UIL have been more honest than Epifani in making it clear that they did not want an escalation of the action, since it might have undermined the so-called "Pact for Italy".

This was an agreement which Pezzotta (CISL) and Angeletti (UIL) signed separately with the government. It agreed to the abolition of Article 18 (defence against unfair

dismissal) in exchange for empty promises which were based on exaggerated economic growth projections.

The Pact has since been blown to pieces by events. Not only have modifications of Article 18 been deferred (thanks to the massive worker militancy of 2002), but figures from international bourgeois economic sources project less than one per cent growth. By excluding even the CISL and UIL from the December accord, what the recent Fiat accord has proven is that the "Pact for Italy" was little more than a government boss scam to split the unions.

Workers must demand of the union leaders and the reformist leaders of the Democratic Left and Rifondazione Comunista that Fiat be nationalised and placed under the control of the shopfloor workers and their allies among the white collar sector, including the scientists, technicians and designers. Only these have a direct interest in producing top quality, environmentally friendly cars.

They have also shown time and again their vast knowledge of the sector and a far greater enthusiasm in car production than the rotten-to-the-core Agnelli clan and its parasitic financial backers. Not a penny should be given to the Agnelli family by way of compensation.

On the contrary, every euro and every square inch of their empire, including houses, museums, insurance companies, fancy cars and yachts, should be taken from them and placed at the disposal of the workforce.

And if the union leaders won't fight for these demands – through strikes and occupations, blockades and protests – then the rank and file must.

As the opposition led general strike in Venezuela entered its fourth week in early January, it was clear that the balance of forces was beginning to swing President Chavez's way, writes *John McKee*

Bosses strike against Chavez

The strike in Venezuela was launched by the country's bosses in early December. It was supported by the trade union leaders of the better-paid workers and managers in the oil industry. The aim was to oust Hugo Chavez, the democratically elected President of Venezuela.

Ten years ago Chavez, then an army colonel, took part in an abortive coup. He was jailed but re-emerged and entered politics, easily winning the 1998 election. The mass of people voting for him wanted to bring to an end the rule of a corrupt elite that excluded the poor in a country where 80 per cent live below the official poverty line.

Last year, Chavez introduced the "49 decrees", including a controversial Land Act that gave unused land to the poor. He installed his own personnel in key positions, including in the oil industry. He has tried to replace judges antagonistic to his regime.

The latest strike is the second attempt by Venezuelan business leaders to get rid of Chavez. They regard him as a dangerous radical with considerable support among the poor and dispossessed of Venezuela. Last April, following a strike and protests, Chavez was removed from office by the military. The US state department had a hand in the attempted coup. They installed Pedro Carmona, head of the chamber of commerce, as president, but Chavez's supporters took to the streets and their determined action split the military. Within two days Chavez was back in power. Carmona was placed under house arrest and the army generals implicated in the plot were retired.

This time the opposition claims it just wants early elections. Chavez's term of office expires in 2004, but the opposition is demanding he stands down with new elections to be held in the spring of 2003. The strike is an attempt to pre-empt a recall referendum on the President's record due to be held no earlier than August - as allowed for under the constitution.

The opposition aims to inflict a massive defeat on Chavez, and his supporters in the Movement for a Fifth Republic, by making the country ungovernable and driving him from office. This is the only way they can guarantee a safe outcome for any early elections. A group of powerful opposition leaders, the Caracas Mayor Alfredo Pena, the head of the employers' federation Carlos Fernandez, and the president of the CTV unions Carlos Ortega, have been calling on the military to "abide by their mission", code for launching a military coup.

The struggle is centred on the state owned oil industry. Oil production accounts for 80 per cent of the country's export income and more than a third of the country's GDP; its shutdown is estimated to be costing Venezuela \$40 million a day. Estimates put lost oil revenue and damage caused by the month long strike at \$2 billion.



Top left, Chavez is surviving but is having to increasingly rely on neutrality of police and military (right). Bottom left, petrol station closed by oil strike.

Since coming to power Chavez has been trying to break the hold of the old directors on Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) and to allocate more of its profits to state development projects. The writer on Latin American affairs Richard Gott has noted: "The state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, often described as the fifth largest oil exporter in the world, is an important supplier to the US. Nationalised more than 25 years ago, it has been run over the years for the exclusive benefit of its employees and managers - its profits being invested everywhere except Venezuela. Before the arrival of Chavez, it was being prepared for privatisation, to the satisfaction of the engineers and directors who would have benefited. But with a block placed on privatisation by the new Venezuelan constitution, the company's middle class and prosperous elite has been happy to be used as a shock weapon by the leaders of the Pinochet-style opposition, and they have tried to bring their entire industry to a halt."

The current opposition strike was failing in its first week until these directors brought the PDVSA into the "strike". They were soon joined by tanker captains who downed anchors and refused to load oil. State refineries were hit when the management closed them down, paralysing distribution centres and causing shortages at petrol stations. Airline pilots joined the strike, followed by bank workers.

The struggle between Chavez and the management of the PDVSA is a make or break question for the government, and both sides know it. Troops were sent in to take

control of distribution, and the navy attempted to get the tankers moving amid reports of some crews being against their captains' actions.

In mid-December the president ordered private lorries, planes and ships to be commandeered by the military to get oil moving again. The strike had caused widespread disruption, with whole areas without cooking and fuel oil and shortages of basic foodstuffs, with shops closed and transport disrupted.

The privately owned media - TV and newspapers - have been talking up the crisis, demanding that Chavez goes and calling on the army to intervene. Only the state TV station remains on the government's side with Chavez delivering long broadcasts every Sunday.

Mass demonstrations by the opposition and the largest trade union federation have been met with mass counter demonstrations from Chavez's supporters from the poorest suburbs. They have surrounded the private TV stations on occasion, chanting "shut it down" and "tell the truth".

PDVSA headquarters has been subject to similar demonstrations with demonstrators chanting "long live Chavez - the oil belongs to the people". Meanwhile the opposition has brought tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands onto the streets, blocking traffic and main highways.

Off-on "reconciliation" discussions led by the secretary general of the Organisation of American States are being used to try to broker a deal. In December the US government stated that it saw the only "peaceful and politically viable way out of the crisis

through the holding of early elections", publicly throwing their weight behind the demands of the opposition. Given their initial support for the short-lived coup in April this should come as no surprise. The US administration increased the pressure by withdrawing all their diplomatic personnel and advising all US citizens to do the same - other western diplomats duly followed suit.

As war approaches in the Middle East they are determined to seek a more "reliable" regime in Venezuela - one of their biggest oil suppliers. The timing of the second coup attempt is not accidental. War against Iraq will push up oil prices giving a much-needed boost to Chavez. Attacking him now, before he can benefit from increased oil revenue, seemed like the best option for the bosses.

But they appear to have shot themselves in the foot. Chavez is still in office despite all their efforts. The failure of the current strike to oust him has meant his regime is actually benefiting from the highest oil prices in two years.

Just before Christmas the Supreme Court had made a ruling ordering a resumption of work in the oil industry. The oil tanker Pilin Leon, whose captain had become a hero of the opposition for refusing to bring it to port to unload, was taken over by troops and brought to an oil terminal to unload - by seafarers who were against the strike. This was a serious blow to the opposition.

Brazil's new PT government despatched an oil tanker on Christmas day with 520,000 barrels of oil for Venezuela's domestic market. This was followed by the docking of a Russian tanker, with further supplies on the way from Trinidad. It was announced that a food for oil deal had been struck with the Dominican Republic and that Colombia was sending emergency milk supplies.

With other Latin American countries supporting Chavez the first signs that the opposition were weakening could be seen, with a leading Caracas councillor calling for an end to the strike and a concentration on the referendum. Negotiations, sponsored by the Organisation of American States (OAS), between Chavez and the opposition were resumed.

In his pre-Christmas broadcast Chavez raised the question of sacking the striking oil managers and prosecuting those responsible for damaging the economy. Four executives had already been removed. Now Chavez was talking about "cleansing the PDVSA" and predicting oil production returning to normal within 45 days. Brazil's state oil industry had offered oil technicians.

While not yet guaranteed, Chavez's survival will be a blow to Washington in its historic "backyard". But the failure of the reactionary strike will not resolve the underlying crisis. This will require the emergence of a new party of the poor and working class against the bosses and US imperialism.

Workers and poor need to organise



Chavez supporters must be won to socialism

It is undoubtedly true that over recent months Chavez's base of support among the electorate has shrunk. But he is still the single most popular politician in Venezuela. Every poll confirms this.

The middle classes and better off workers are certainly being hit by recession. The economy shrunk by 6.4 per cent in the first nine months of this year, and probably by 12 per cent in the last quarter. Official unemployment reached 17 per cent in September. An investment strike by Venezuela's rulers, and backed by Washington, is taking its toll. The currency is sinking and inflation growing - the current paralysis of the oil industry can only make things worse.

While the poorest sectors of the community have become increasingly organised in their active support for Chavez, often through his Bolivarian circles, Chavez and his movement have taken far too few radical or socialist measures which could have won over the organised working class to his side.

His regime increasingly has to rely on the neutrality of the army and a narrow base among the urban poor to survive. As the April coup showed, such neutrality will be short lived if the crisis deepens. Chavez's days in power could yet be numbered.

Chavez dare not - and without an actively mobilised working class, as well as the urban poor - cannot take decisive measures against the rich and the powerful. The capitalist repressive apparatus cannot be used to expropriate and disarm the capitalists.

To defeat his enemies he should, of course, seize the wealth of the "investment strikers", of the US and EU-based banks and corporations and put this wealth at the service of the impoverished millions. He should take the weapons away from the professional officer caste and create a mass workers' and people's militia. He should encourage and help build organs of working class and popular resistance - councils or committees of action - as an alternative to the capitalist state machinery.

If he does not do these things then, sooner rather than later, he will meet the fate of Salvador Allende, the Chilean reforming president whose government was overthrown by a military coup in Chile in 1973. More importantly the militants of the Bolivarian committees and the shanty town mass organisations could face the "dirty war", the "disappearances" which their Chilean and Argentinian brothers and sisters suffered in the 1970s.

To avoid this grim fate the widest mass mobilisation and the organisation of a workers and popular militia is needed. But the masses also need to be won from Chavez's brand of neo-populism, from reliance on him as a "people's president", to the goal of making a revolution themselves to install workers' power.

Brazil: Lula opts for market friendly Cabinet

The overwhelming vote Lula won to become President of Brazil could be the base for radical socialist measures. But his ministerial appointments has sent out another message: more pro-market reforms, writes *Keith Harvey*

Lula was sworn in as President of Brazil on 1 January in a festival atmosphere as more than 100,000 took to the streets of the capital Brasilia. Expectations are high among the tens of millions of workers who voted for Lula in October. They want him to use his victory to radically improve their lives.

His mandate is overwhelming. He gained 61 per cent of the valid votes in the second round on an 80 per cent turnout. The working class of the big cities turned out for Lula in numbers not seen in his past two attempts to get elected.

In Bahia, home to the country's biggest petrochemical industry, Lula got 66 per cent of the poll in the first round. The cities that surround Sao Paulo – the birthplace of the PT, in which it used to lose every single mayoral election – also backed Lula in huge numbers.

There is no doubting the scale of the problems waiting for Lula in his in-tray. Brazil is one of the most

unequal societies on the planet. The poorest 20 per cent of the population own 2 per cent of its wealth while the richest 20 per cent suck up two-thirds of national income. One per cent of the country's population owns more than 50 per cent of arable land.

Some 44 million people, a quarter of the country's population, are living below the poverty line. Officially, national unemployment stands at 7.5 per cent, and is as high as 9.3 per cent in Sao Paulo state; informal employment and underemployment are massive however. So the official figures underestimate the crisis.

Inflation – once thought to have been conquered by neo-liberal policies such as the Plano Real, which pegged the Brazilian currency to the U.S. dollar – has reared its head. In October Brazil's inflation rate reached its highest point since 1994. Prices rose 14.8 per cent last year alone, including prices of food and basic commodities like gas, cooking fuel and electricity.

Despite the dire plight faced by millions of his sup-

porters Lula's capacity and willingness to effect fundamental change is minimal. Politically Lula long ago committed the PT to an alliance with conservative parties and embraced their priorities. His vice-presidential running mate was José Alencar, a textile magnate. The PT-led alliance was bound together only by "opposition" to the worst excesses of outgoing President Cardoso's neo-liberal policies – the "free-trade" policies of the past eight years have hurt certain sectors of Brazilian business too.

Lula has bowed to business interests in appointing international bankers and pillars of the business community to key posts. The financial markets signaled their approval of Lula's choice of Henrique Meirelles – who happens to be a member of the PSDB (outgoing President Cardoso's party) and former head of global banking at FleetBoston – to take charge of Brazil's Central Bank.

His appointments to the key economic and finance

posts confirm that Lula is committed to maintaining fiscal austerity and he has vowed to honour all financial obligations entered into by the outgoing government.

Brazil's currency lost 38 per cent of its value against the dollar last year because the financial institutions doubted Lula's commitment to paying the interest payments on the country's net public debt of more than \$250 billion, worth 60 per cent of Brazil's GDP.

As one analyst put it: "the problem of international debt will keep the government on the edge of bankruptcy for the whole of its first term." To reassure the financial markets Lula aims to run a primary budget surplus (before interest payments) from 4.5 per cent of GDP. This will severely curtail the resources that the PT government has to spend on social programmes.

And it is these programmes that other sectors of the PT-led government will be pressing for – including from within his Cabinet.

Make Lula break from the bosses

Among Lula's cross-class coalition of 29 ministers are to be found a former presidential rival as well as a recently reformed pop star. The cabinet includes four women, two black people and seven former trade unionists.

In parliament, the PT's left wing can count on 30 per cent of the deputies elected on the PT's ticket. They have as many as 27 MPs, and have threatened to build a bloc to press their demands on Lula.

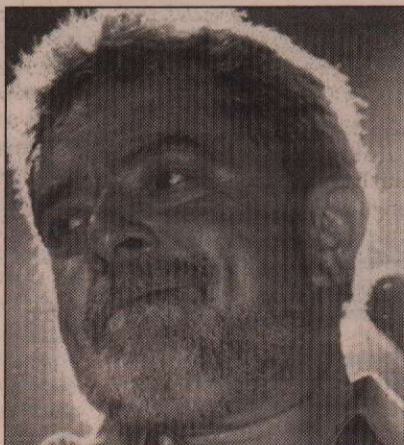
But Lula can rely upon the fact that the PT-led coalition lacks a parliamentary majority in the lower house and Senate to thwart the ambitions of the more radical sections of his party.

The PT holds fewer than 20 per cent of seats in both houses of the Brazilian Congress, while the passing of most laws in the country requires the consent of at least 257 of 513 deputies. Changing the constitution – necessary for most radical social reforms – requires a three-fifths majority.

Alliances with other left-leaning parties alone will not provide the required numbers, and centre and centre-right parties will not join with the PT to vote for radical social reform. Congress has already passed legislation limiting the future government's power to issue decrees.

Outside of the federal parliament the PT's position is even weaker. Lula may have won a landslide victory in the federal election, but the Workers' Party won the post of governor in only three of Brazil's 27 states.

This poor result, compared to the vote for Lula, is explained by the working class's experience of PT administrations where they have governed for more than 12 years. Rio Grande do Sul has been a PT



Lula: must be forced to implement policies in support of the working class

stronghold for the past 10 years and they have held back on social programmes while cutting public sector wages.

Tassio Genro – the PT governor candidate – was defeated partly because Rio Grande do Sul is the only state that managed to push through a tax on pensioners that not even the neo-liberals could manage.

Hemmed in by his decision to appease the financial markets, Lula's progressive policies will be limited to issuing emergency aid to the poorest rather than undertake radical reform.

Lula has already signaled that his first priority will be fighting hunger. All other manifesto promises will lay dormant. Since winning the election the promise to increase the minimum wage to \$100 a month, something the PT demanded for many years while in the opposition, has been renounced.

The workers who voted for Lula with such high hopes will find that their jobs, wages and labour rights will not improve, even if the very poor find that they have a bit more to eat.

Moreover, an Argentina-style economic collapse is not excluded in which case further attacks on the working class can be expected.

There is no room for complacency. The last years in Brazil have not been ones of significant mass struggles in industry or the public sector. The trade union bureaucrats of the CUT federation succeeded in policing a number of "social accords" with President Cardoso that have left ordinary members worse off and disillusioned.

Now several of the main CUT leaders find themselves in parliament and even in Lula's cabinet. The close ties between the CUT bureaucracy and PT party leadership will lead to attempts to stifle all militant action.

But the election of Lula itself has inspired millions, increased their self-confidence and raised expectations of substantial improvement in their lives.

For now they will give Lula a chance to deliver change without major inroads into capitalist wealth and power. But they must demand that Lula breaks the pact he has made with Brazil's bosses and international financiers.

He must be forced to table progressive legislation on the minimum wage, social welfare, land reform and labour rights. The workers must call on the CUT to organise mass strikes and protests to stop the right wing in parliament from voting such measures down.

Out of such a movement a powerful force for revolution can be assembled, one fighting for the expropriation of the banks and big businesses and the repudiation of the foreign debt – and for the overthrow of the capitalist state machine that is committed to the preservation of both.

The Zero Hunger programme

During the election Lula made one promise by which he wanted to be judged: "If every Brazilian can have three meals a day when my mandate expires, I will have carried out the mandate of my life."

Beginning the day of Lula's inauguration, the Zero Hunger programme will set up federally licensed food distribution centres. The project will cost US\$1.6 billion. Its goal is to wipe out hunger for some 10 million Brazilians over five years.

The programme aims to encourage spending on food to create an internal market that will support a revitalised agricultural sector of small and medium-sized family farms. For the new government food stamps for the poor is an alternative to the direct action promoted by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST).

In May and June last year, when MST members occupied the estate owned by the son of president Cardoso, Lula went on record saying that such things would not happen under his administration, that all property should be respected in line with the Constitution, and that he would resort to "the full weight of the law" against all those trying to occupy lands.

The MST agreed to hold back on land occupations while the election campaign was on but they have restarted them again, ignoring Lula's threats. Late last year 180 families occupied two ranches in Sao Paulo State.

The Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement has organised hundreds of thousands of landless peasants to begin to occupy the 60 per cent of Brazil's farmland that lies idle. By their action more than 250,000 families have won land titles to over 15 million acres.

In 1999 alone, 25,099 families occupied unproductive land. There are currently 71,472 families in encampments throughout Brazil awaiting government recognition.

The success of the MST lies in its ability to organise. Its members have not only managed to secure land, thereby guaranteeing food security for their families, but have come up with an alternative socio-economic development model that puts people before profits.

These gains have not come without a cost, however. Violent clashes between the MST and police, as well as landowners, have become commonplace, claiming the lives of many peasants and their leaders.

In the past 10 years, more than 1,000 people have been killed as a result of land conflicts in Brazil. Prior to August 1999, only 53 of the suspected murderers had been brought to trial.

The PT's influence over the MST is far weaker than it is over the trade unions of the CUT. The MST's continued independence will be vital if land hunger is to be seriously addressed during Lula's term of office.

His only promise to date is that those activists who have been involved in land seizures in the past and who are forbidden from gaining title to land will be allowed to do so.

Genuine, far-reaching and long-lasting alleviation of poverty and land hunger in rural areas will not come from trickle-down emergency aid programmes, released as and when the financial markets deem it prudent.

Land needs to be expropriated forcibly by the landless peasants and the government needs to nationalise the big agrarian estates, and put them under ownership by or lease them to those who work them. Interest free credits need to be extended to the poor farmers for machinery, seeds, livestock and irrigation schemes.

Then the Brazilian poor will be able to feed themselves and their brothers and sisters of the towns, and not need to rely on state vouchers to fend off starvation.

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15 FEBRUARY: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION March against Bush and Blair's war drive

Ten million people are expected to hit the streets on 15 February in a worldwide protest against US and British war plans against Iraq. Across Europe, the Americas and the Middle East, it will be the biggest anti-war mobilisation ever.

The call for the day of action was first raised at the meeting of the European Social Movements in Florence last November. That meeting of 10,000 activists was held the day after a million-strong demo against the war and against capitalist globalisation. Indeed, it is the direct linking of imperialist aggression against Iraq and the exploitation, oppression and poverty that US-led globalisation means for billions of people that characterises this movement.

This was confirmed at a conference of 400 activists in Cairo on 18-19 December. They issued a Declara-

tion against globalisation and war which stated: "We reaffirm our resolve to stand in solidarity with the people of Iraq and Palestine, recognising that war and aggression against them is but part of a US project of global domination and subjugation." The meeting and the Palestine Social Forum which followed went on to endorse the 15 February as an international day of action.

If any further incentive to build the Stop the War movement and the February demo was needed, this is it. Workers Power encourages all activists to raise the importance of this demo - and action leading up to it, most notably action on the day war begins - among workers and youth.

Workers will be directly affected by this war. A victory for Bush and Blair will accelerate privatisations, flexible working and cuts as the bosses grow embold-

those unions in Italy that have taken the brave step of pledging political strike action in the event of war (COBAS and some representatives of the CGIL).

● Campaign for British unions to take direct action against the war. We recognise the difficulties posed by the British anti-union laws, but we should nevertheless seek to win trade unions - and of course rank and file trade union members - to pledge action against the war, from participation in street blockades and other forms of general direct action through to refusal to handle goods and services dedicated to the war effort, protest actions in work time (workplace meetings against the war, banner drops from workplaces etc.) and, wherever possible, protest strikes against the war.

The incoming steering committee should ensure that a team is assigned the task of co-ordinating such work, producing the necessary propaganda, organising a team of speakers and publicising any successes in this endeavour.

Resolution to the Stop the War Coalition Conference From REVOLUTION, the socialist youth movement

YOUTH AGAINST THE WAR
Conference recognises that it is the youth that feels the effects of war more acutely than other layers in society.



They are the ones that pay the highest price during war because they and their peers are the first to be drafted or sent off to fight. Even the effects of the 10 years of sanctions in Iraq had more serious repercussions on the youth of that country in terms of death rates.

In the past anti-war movements, such as the anti-Vietnam war movement, the youth have been at the forefront of the struggle. The universities were the centres of resistance and opposition to the warmongers.

The Stop the War Coalition has made great strides in focusing energy on involving university students. The launch of the Student Stop the War was a great initiative and to be commended. We need to maintain, develop and extend the student movement to FE colleges and schools.

ened. A defeat for them, on the other hand, would severely set back the neo-liberal offensive. Workers, too, have the capacity to stop the war machine in its tracks by boycotting work related to the war effort and political strike action.

Youth are already in the front ranks of the movement. Why? Because it is always the young who suffer the most from war - whether they are soldiers acting as the invading army's cannon-fodder, or Iraqi youth suffering from sanctions and the terrible effects of weapons of mass destruction, like depleted uranium.

That's why Workers Power and the socialist youth movement Revolution have brought resolutions on these issues to the Stop the War national conference (see below). We urge all readers and activists to support and help implement them.

Therefore conference agrees over the next period to make campaigning in FE colleges and schools a priority to strengthen and extend the Student Stop the War network into these areas.

We propose to do this by:

- Building a huge youth presence on the Feb 15th anti-war demonstration and draw in youth from around the country under a common banner of "youth to stop the war" or "student stop the war".
- Turning every school, college and university into a nerve centre of anti-war activity. through the huge mobilisation of youth, we can lay the basis for the STW Coalition to organise in every school, college and university.
- Putting together an education pack to send out to unis/colleges/schools with lots of information, ideas and posters.
- Arguing for teach-ins, walkouts and occupations.
- Developing a movement that is democratic and determined.
- Organising delegations of university students and workers to go to every FE college and school to discuss and debate the issues of the war.
- Encouraging and developing specific ideas for mobilising youth, whether it is their own bulletin, chatroom or links on the website.
- Ensuring there is at least one youth representative on the Stop the War steering committee.

Resolution to the Stop the War Coalition Conference From Workers Power

BUILDING THE COALITION IN THE TRADE UNIONS
Conference recognises that a crucial component of the coalition is the trade union movement in Britain. In the run up to and the execution of a war by the USA/UK against Iraq trade unionists are well placed to undertake action that can hamper and undermine the war effort, strengthen the movement to stop the war and bring direct pressure to bear - through direct action in the workplaces - on the UK government.

Conference therefore agrees over the next period to make campaigning to strengthen support for the coalition inside the unions a priority and to campaign within the unions for direct action against the war.

We propose to do this by:

- Ensuring that all national unions affiliated to the coalition have an official representative on the steering committee elected today.

- Producing a new model resolution and leaflet aimed specifically at trade unionists both to get new affiliates (local, regional and national) and to win commitments for large delegations to attend the national demonstration on 15 February.

- Facilitate - insofar as we are able - direct links between British unions involved in the coalition and

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