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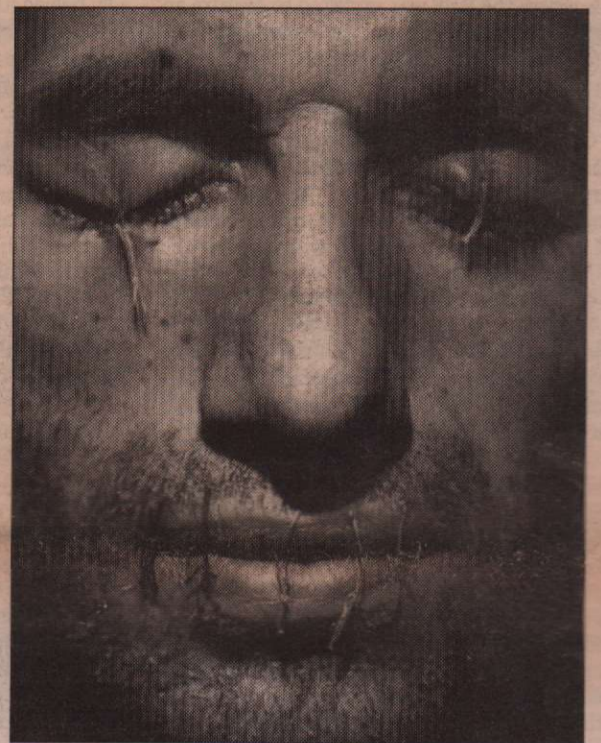
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Refugees flee war, terror and global poverty

Don't
believe
anti-
asylum
lies

Refugees are
welcome here!



Thread drawn taut through a man's ear lobes, eyelids and lips: this startling and disturbing image featured on television screens and in the pages of national newspapers in the last week of May. A 33-year-old Kurdish poet, Abas Amini, who had fled imprisonment in Iran in 2001, had, through his shocking yet heroic action, briefly shifted the focus of the media's coverage of the so-called "asylum debate".

Suddenly, as Abas Amini lay unfed and dehydrated in a Nottingham flat, a BBC television anchor felt obliged to allow a representative of the International Federation of Iranian Refugees the opportunity to explain the circumstances that had driven Abas from Iran.

In the same week that Britain and the US claimed Iran was a centre for international terrorism and in need of "regime change" David Blunkett's Home Office declared it to be a country safe for Abas to return to.

Samir Azed spoke too of the reality of his experience at the hands of a merciless Home Office bureaucracy that has sought to force him out of the country despite well-documented evidence of beatings and torture.

Of course, this brief respite from the media's relentless offensive against asylum seekers has not led the hacks of the *Sun*, *Express* and *Mail* to question what desperate circumstances could drive thousands of human beings to undertake long journeys secreted in the back of lorries or clinging to the undercarriages of trains.

Every socialist, democrat and anti-capitalist must now redouble our efforts to ensure that Abas' courageous protest is followed up. The racist filth spewed daily by tabloid hacks and politicians alike must be countered.

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Stop Blunkett's war on asylum rights

New Labour's offensive on asylum seekers goes hand in hand with its wars on countries, says *George Binette*, secretary, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

Abas Amini's hunger strike came four weeks after the violent deportation of 23 Afghans to a country where the government's survival relies on the protection of the US military. Meanwhile, shootings, grenade attacks and bombings remain part of everyday life throughout much of Afghanistan.

Campaigners for refugee rights suggested that the timing of the highly publicised deportation was a cynical ploy to demonstrate how tough New Labour could really be on refugees, just days before local elections where the BNP was expected to capture an unprecedented number of council seats. Iraqi refugee groups fear a similar fate in the wake of the supposed "liberation" of their native land.

A political show trial has also opened at Harrow Crown Court, where detainees at the Yarl's Wood facility in Bedfordshire face arson and violent disorder charges after the February 2002 disturbance. The presiding judge gave the green light to the trial proceeding despite the fact that many witnesses for the defence had already been deported.

The operator of Yarl's Wood was none other than Group 4, the same corporation responsible for the Campsfield facility where employees effectively perjured themselves in the witness box following a large-scale disturbance there. Though Group 4 had ignored a fire authority recommendation to install a sprinkler system at Yarl's Wood, it has never faced a public inquiry of any sort. Shortly before the start of the trial it also emerged that at least one of the guards it had employed at the Yarl's Wood centre was a BNP candidate in May's council elections.

While the government announced a decline in applications in the first quarter of 2003, a parliamentary select committee argued that further restrictions on asylum and immigration were essential to defusing a racist backlash.

Further evidence is mounting that home secretary David Blunkett, with the full backing of Tony Blair, is

preparing to push ahead with proposals for Britain and European Union states generally to dump asylum applicants in so-called "regional protection areas" – latter-day concentration camps outside the EU. The policy paper that first broached the idea of such dumping grounds last winter also hinted at the possibility of military action to stem "refugee flows". At the same time Blunkett has revived moves towards a national identity card with bio-metric data.

The constant demonising of refugees has undoubtedly helped fuel the rise of the BNP. No real proximity to asylum seekers is needed, given the media hysteria. Indeed some of the fascists' highest votes have been in areas where there are few if any – as in the case of Broxbourne. The stoking of racism and xenophobia by the media and mainstream politicians around the asylum issue has increased street-level racist violence in many areas.

So how has New Labour come to ape and go further than the policies of its Tory predecessors? Even the Blairite think-tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), acknowledges that most refugees "come from countries hit by conflict, violence and human rights abuses" and that the "overall weight of the 'refugee burden' is borne overwhelmingly by the poorest countries of the world".

Labour Party-controlled bodies such as Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Executive plead for work permits for asylum seekers in order to address acute labour shortages in the NHS and building industry. And *The Financial Times* recently ran an editorial pointing out that large-scale immigration is the only feasible answer to Britain's worsening demographic trend which will otherwise see too few people of working-age to support a growing number of pensioners.

But the government has aggressively pursued policies that give rise to refugee migration, including the licensing of arms sales to repressive regimes in global "hotspots" and the pursuit of "free trade" policies that



Afghan refugees demonstrate outside the iron gates of Downing Street

drive already impoverished communities deeper into economic despair. Last but not least is their enthusiastic support for George Bush's "endless war". Perhaps Tony Blair will even have the gall to seize on Abas Amini's case in a few months time to justify a military assault on Iran on "humanitarian grounds".

With typical hypocrisy a government that preaches the virtue of the "market" refuses to extend freedom of movement to labour and so reinforces what was already one of the most draconian immigration control regimes in the western world. For all its vague claptrap about "valuing diversity", the unmistakable message from New Labour is that new immigrants are not welcome here.

While several trade unions have adopted policies

which look good on paper, opposing many aspects of the offensive against asylum seekers, conference decisions rarely result in action. There is a pressing need for unions to launch education campaigns within their own memberships to counter the media lies and to organise among immigrant workers, whatever their "official" status in Britain. The labour movement must also assist refugees and their supporters in developing a serious and sustained campaign to reverse the racist offensive, not only in Britain but also across Fortress Europe.

● **National Refugee Week starts 16 June. Demonstrate: Defend Iraqi Refugees, Tuesday 17 June, 11.00am Parliament Square. More information at www.defend-asylum.org**

How the bosses are robbing our pensions

Rachel Hardcastle explains how stock market losses are behind the drive to cut pensions in Europe

There is a worldwide crisis in pension provision. It is, in particular, a crisis of the developed world, where over the generations and particularly since the World War II, strong and confident workers' organisations have used their power to extract a greater share of the surplus generated by their labour in the form of social benefits.

The primary social benefits lie in the provision of education, healthcare, housing, unemployment benefit and pensions. All of these are now under attack, but pensions in particular grab the headlines regularly.

Where do pensions come from? The three basic sources are: the state, the workplace (occupational pensions), and yourself. For those fortunate enough to work in a sector with good pay and conditions, the workplace pension – funded by both employee and, to a greater extent, the employer – has provided the bulk of retirement income.

Over the past 20 years or so, the burden of pension provision has been steadily shifted from the state to workplace – the single person's Basic State Pension is currently less than 17 per cent of National Average Earnings, compared to over 25 per cent in the 1970s. What we are now seeing is the concerted attempt by business and government to further shift the burden from the state to workplace.

From a social point of view, the poverty in retirement that already affects those

primarily dependent on the state pension is set, in the future, to also affect those dependent on workplace provision. In the UK and Europe, this is a real crisis of social democracy, proposing the return of millions of ordinary people to an economic environment more akin to the 1930s than to the thirty years of post-war prosperity.

If you read the news and listen to the politicians and business leaders the problem is not that of mass poverty in old age, but the problem they have in paying for the level of pension necessary to prevent it. This crisis is, apparently, our fault for living too long, spending too much or our wages today instead of saving, and expecting far too much in retirement anyway.

The sharpness of the present crisis is in part the fault of current investment condition: the stock market bulls of the 1990s gave way to the bears of the 2000s. The prospect of pension funds getting ever wealthier, of elderly shareholders coupon-clipping in prosperous retirement, popped with the dotcom bubble.

The precipitous drop in the value of equities (in which most pension funds are invested) and historically low interest and annuity rates (which mean that the same pension costs more and more to buy each year) are transmuted in the media into forces of nature, outside all human control, cutting a swathe through global and national economies with an amoral impersonality.

The various reports into the crisis have summed up their findings accordingly.

Thus Alan Pickering: "If there is a crisis, it is a crisis of expectations, in that [workers] are expecting the system to deliver more than it can," he said, joking that he was not sure whether pensions brochures should show "a picture of a Caribbean island or a picture of a workhouse", to change the public's mind.

Another report author was NatWest's Ron Sandler who made recommendations to the government on reforming long-term savings products: "In my judgement there is a savings gap – and it is a problem which is most acute among the less affluent. We have a situation in this country where the lower end of the market is removed from the savings process."

So what does this emphasis on lowering expectations and relying on savings imply? Final salary pension schemes are the most generous but fewer than 20 per cent of private sector companies offering these now permit new employees to join and some have been closed even to existing employees. The usual alternative is a "defined contribution" scheme, with smaller employer contributions and the level of provision left to the mercies of the investment markets.

With the acceleration of privatisation, this two-tier pension system will enter the public sector on top of the existing two-tier salary system, thus doubly disadvantaging those employed by private contractors. The only exception to this savage attack on salary-linked pension provision

is in the field of executives' benefit. A Final Salary pension is, it seems, necessary to attract the calibre of senior executives. But if you are not a fat cat you will have to start saving a minimum of 10 per cent of your income on entering the workforce, in order to pay for a pension of even half your working salary at age 65.

In the UK, since 1979, social provision has been subjected to more vicious and prolonged attacks than in other EU countries. But the offensive is now being stepped up on the continent. Still undefeated, the working classes of Germany, Italy and France are mounting a collective defence of their pensions.

The French pensions system is centralised, with employees and employers paying into a central fund at rates of 10 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively. Prior to 1993, both public and private sector pensions increased in line with earnings; reforms pushed through by the Edouard Balladur severed the earnings link for the private sector and replaced it with a link to prices. With a full lifetime of contributions – 37.5 years for civil servants and 40 for private sector workers – the pension in retirement is as high as 78 per cent of final salary, far in excess of even the maximum 66.67 per cent permissible under the UK tax regime.

The proposals for reform in France are firstly to increase the public sector contribution period to 40 years as a prelude to privatisation, and then to increase the peri-

od for all still further to 42 years.

Throughout the EU, attacks on pensions are being made by governments pursuing neo-liberal agendas, their propaganda being disseminated by "serious" journalists peddling Thatcherite morals: "A long and healthy retirement" Jackie Ashley tells us in the *Guardian*, "is not, regrettably, a human right", before exhorting us to abandon our flighty consumerist ways.

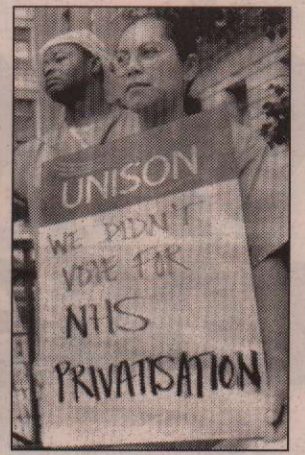
The example of France, (see page 6) and before that of Italy, shows that workers are ready to resist. But there are many forces conspiring to mislead them in this resistance, not least those of their own union bureaucracies.

Although the TUC has been vocal in highlighting the threat to pensions and some unions, such as MSF, have threatened or taken industrial action to protect pension rights, opposition in the UK is still largely at the level of rhetoric, with practical proposals limited to forcing employers to contribute more.

France, Germany and Austria shows another way. With the increase in globalisation and global communication, the international working class now has the power to bring the world to a standstill. The generations since 1945 have enjoyed pension rights because the wartime generation fought for them.

If we don't fight now, the whole of the developed world will see pension provision rolled back for the next half century and beyond.

The awkward squad keeps winning union elections. Why can't they win a fight with Tony Blair?



Mobilise for action

ACROSS THE Labour and trade union movement everybody's asking: what do we do about Tony Blair? It was bad enough when he was a Clinton-style Third Way merchant but now he's turned into an American-style neo-conservative, even many of his allies in the movement have finally lost patience.

The victory of Tony Woodley in the T&GWU elections could signal the beginning of the end for Blair - but only if the leaders of the trade union movement and the left stop bottling out of every fight with him at the last minute. In his campaign Woodley said: "If elected I will call for a summit of affiliated unions to discuss how to get Labour back representing working people."

Woodley is representative of a whole stream of people within Labour whose strategy, they say, is to "stay in and fight". From centre-left allies of Gordon Brown like Kevin Curran, newly elected leader of the GMB, right through to "awkward squad" leaders like Mick Rix (Aslef) and Billy Hayes (CWU) their strategy is to "reclaim" the party.

The problem is that Blair's Armani-suited young zealots for "the project" retain an iron grip on policy making while, within the parliamentary party, no one is really prepared to challenge Blair. The Socialist Campaign Group's talk before the war about a leadership

challenge fizzled out the minute the leadership turned on them.

Gordon Brown, the misplaced hope of many of these "lefts", still wants to inherit the leadership in a retirement deal with Blair rather than fight him for it. Meanwhile, Blair shows no sign of tiring yet. Buoyed up by victory abroad he has set about the enemy within, health workers and teachers. He is still determined to force through Foundation hospitals and expel George Galloway.

The "stay in and fight" brigade has to answer this question: how to mount a credible bid to take control of the party from the Blair clique. They need a candidate, a set of policies and a means to win: the Labour Party structure at present is set up to prevent that. While left union leaders talk in private of "flooding the constituencies with union activists" little or nothing has been done.

We say: Labour cannot be reformed. There are urgent tasks - organising young people radicalised by anti-capitalist and anti-war movements; building an alternative to the BNP in areas where they are growing; co-ordinating industrial action in defence of the NHS and public services. These cannot wait for the Labour Party conference in 2004, 05 or 06. That's why we argue for the creation of a New Workers Party now.

The RMT is set next month to democratise its political fund. TSSA and Bectu have voted this year to do likewise. Only the cancellation of the FBU conference stopped disaffiliation this year. Other unions are reconsidering the Labour link, or voting for alternative candidates.

We need to bring these unions, the left MPs, local constituency campaigners together with the anti-war and anti-capitalist youth to form a new party. Inside that party, from the outset, Workers Power would fight for revolutionary answers to the problems of capitalism - not the half-baked reforms and failed Old Labour policies of people like Woodley, George Galloway and co. The campaign to build such a party with the support of those unions with the most militant rank and file could unblock the present paralysing submission to Blair in the workers' movement and the Labour Party, too, by giving millions of workers an alternative to rally to.

We do not ignore those who continue to fight within the Labour Party. But an alliance with broken reeds such as Claire Short and Robin Cook will not take them far. They do not talk like people who plan to be off the front bench for long. It is known that Cook has been assiduously, sounding out the "awkward squad" union leaders. Even Brown will not be averse - if he has to fight Alan Milburn for the Blair succession - to seeking an alliance with the left.

But the outcome would be New Labour without Blair, not any sort of step forward for the working class.

A spring and summer of discontent in the union conferences poses the left union leaders with a stark alternative: fight or leave. The union awkward squad calls itself, jokingly, the "Fed Up With Losing" Group. It's one thing to be fed up on £70,000 and a secure office job - another kind of fed up entirely if your hospital is being PFI'd, your conditions attacked and your community overrun with closet fascists.

Woodley's idea of a conference of left union is a good one - if it is not a secret cabal of union bureaucrats. How about summoning hundreds of lay delegates from of these key unions, Tony and let's hear your plans to get Labour to fight for worker's interests.

But nothing important will come out of plotting in the House of Commons tea room or the bars of seaside hotels during the union conference season. We, the rank and file, have to drag the left pretenders out of these watering holes and on to the battlefield. We need to speak to Blair and co. in French, in German, in Italian, the rough, militant language of strikes and mass mobilisations on the streets.

The whole working class is fed up with losing. Let's do something about it.

Complacency won't beat BNP

The election of 15 BNP councillors in the May elections should have come as a shock to the system for the labour movement. But by and large the leaders of unions and local Labour Parties have shrugged their shoulders and moved on. "Thank God it was only 15" is the common refrain.

Even if you count the 220 wards the BNP stood in, the truth is most people in the movement have no experience of what the BNP electoral phenomenon is doing to working class communities: racist terror campaigns against immigrant and black and Asian communities, attacks on left and anti-capitalist campaigners, and pollution of the streets with low-level racism.

If it were not for the ANL and local Searchlight groups, who have mounted noisy pickets and consistent counter-propaganda in local papers and media, little else would have been done. Despite the fact that last year's TUC spent a whole afternoon bemoaning the rise of the BNP.

There are two main challenges: to stop the BNP gaining a mass base and effectively setting the agenda in local politics; and providing a political alternative to the dissatisfaction with New Labour over housing,

crime and poverty. The Labour Party leaders are content to govern for and through "Middle England". It has been an unstated tenet of Blairism that the "heartlands" can go to hell as long as the middle class loves Tony. Fifteen BNP councillors is one direct result of that.

The main challenge for anti-fascists is how to cope with the BNP's "turn" to respectability. This has, in places like Burnley, allowed them to distance themselves from overtly violent fascist activity and build a small layer of active mass support that makes it harder to stick to "No Platform" - the policy of physically preventing the Nazis from spreading their filthy, anti-democratic message.

Yet anti-fascists must stick to this principle. The ANL's present campaign is to mobilise for a series of "Unity" demonstrations on 28th June in towns where the British National Party has won councillors - Broomfield, Tipton, Halifax, Burnley.

Both the Searchlight-linked local groupings and the ANL do good work. But they also share weaknesses in their strategy to beat fascism: pacifism and restricting their arguments to "Don't vote Nazi" propaganda.

By Andy Yorke

What we really need is united fronts that go beyond campaigns of anti-racist individuals and draw in union branches, community organisations including black and Asian groups, tenants' and residents' associations, socialist parties and youth movements. In other words, we need a real workers' united front. But how and on what basis should it be built?

NO PLATFORM FOR FASCISTS

The National Front, BNP and other fascist organisations consciously use force and terror as a tactic in their strategy to build themselves. The racist attacks will continue to mount, houses and cars will be petrol bombed, and more activists will be attacked, until we organise to meet this threat. If we don't defend ourselves, our movement and our communities, the fascists will only get bolder and nastier.

The ANL does a good job of organising counter-demonstrations against the fascists

to deny them an uncritical space to act. However, it will not even organise the most elementary self-defence of its activities, such as pickets or leafleting on white estates where fascists are present and attack is a possibility. The ANL tactic means noisy, in-your-face counter-demonstrations that deny the fascists a space to march or meet by occupying the space first or by putting pressure on the local council or government to ban the fascist event.

Where these actions are effective in directly confronting the fascists, active self-defence needs to become central to them. Leading unprepared people against hardened BNP thugs runs the risk of people getting hurt and the fascists getting an easy victory. It is not a matter of time - it is already happening.

Community self-defence organisations to keep out fascists and to break up their meetings and canvassing are a necessity. The 2001 uprisings in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford show that the anger and will to struggle is there. Anti-fascists should actively argue for such initiatives wherever the fascists are locally active.

But the BNP is consciously distancing

itself from its "fists and boots" fascist core in order to gain a mass racist base. We not only have to expose them for the Nazis they are, to make it shameful - not respectable - to identify with the BNP. We not only have to nail the lies about asylum seekers put out by the Express, the Sun and the BNP. We need to point the finger at the real enemy - destroying our communities and jobs - the government and the bosses.

We need a real workers' united front that can take on and smash the BNP. But this united front cannot limit itself to negative campaigning. We must launch mass action to fight the unemployment, bad housing and social deprivation that drives some white workers into the arms of the BNP. The only real and lasting answer to the fascist threat, therefore, is to build a mass, radical socialist party which can explain the deteriorating services, poverty wages and unemployment are caused by capitalism. Such a party will call for unity with black and Asian workers and immigrants in the struggle for the resources needed to rebuild our communities. Such a party must show how to get rid of capitalism and racism for good - by socialist revolution.

Foundation Trusts will erode basis of the NHS

The British Medical Association is against it, the health unions are against it, there is no mention of it in the NHS 10 Year Plan or the Wanless Report on health services to 2020: but we're getting it regardless. It's the move to Foundation Hospitals, and it is nothing less than the start of NHS privatisation.

Under the Health and Social Care Bill going through Parliament, 29 hospitals will get financial independence: they will be treated as being "owned by the community" and will be able to borrow money from the banks.

The revolt against Foundation Hospitals (FHs) fizzled out in parliament, because MPs were assured that Gordon Brown had done enough to sabotage the real intent of health secretary Alan Milburn: namely, to cut the Foundation Trusts loose from public ownership and control, creating a top tier of private-sector oriented Trusts. But the day after the parliamentary vote, the *Health Service Journal* reported that FHs will be able to borrow up to a third of their turnover: £60 million a year for an average NHS hospital.

Who wants Foundation Hospitals? Obviously, the layer of senior NHS managers that has been created by successive Labour and Tory reforms: they think like capitalists, dress like capitalists and some of them have wages way in excess of equivalent capitalist managers. Their greatest wish is to become capitalists. And this largely talentless pool of corporate climbers see getting their hands on NHS budgets as a golden opportunity to do just that. Mark Britnell, chief executive of Birmingham NHS Trust told the *Financial Times* he wanted to create "incubator companies" to commercialise the research going on in the NHS to "deliver profit back to the NHS".

The capitalists want Foundation Hospitals. A full year before the proposals were brought forward, Ruth Lea, of the Institute of Directors said: "On grounds of efficiency and good governance alone, serious consideration should be given to publicly funded NHS bodies such as hospital and primary care trusts becoming truly locally self-governing bodies." (IoD, 23 October 2001.)

Civitas, the right-wing think-tank, wants Foundation Hospitals and sees them the first step to denationalising the NHS: "All hospitals should be transferred to the ownership of non-profit community trusts." Once all hospitals are removed from state ownership, continues Civitas, "There should be no restrictions on the establishment of new hospitals, whether they are for-profit or not (as at present)". (*Final Report of the Health Policy Consensus Group*, 2 May 2003).

Whatever assurances and compromises have been given for now, it is clear that the thinking of the neo-conservative right wing who run Labour's health policy is along the same lines. Alan Milburn spelled it out in a speech to the pro-privatisation Social Market Foundation: "Just as there are limits to the role of free markets in health care, there have to be limits to the role of the centralised state." (30 April 2003)

The arguments in favour of FHs are couched in terms of "patient choice" and "local autonomy". But patient choice is an empty concept. When you find yourself in hospital with a hi-tech TV screen hanging over your bed, which nurses can use to input data and you can use to watch *Coronation Street*... great. But what choice do you have when it costs £5 a day for the privilege of using it? None. All the ordinary TVs will have



Pay disparities across the NHS will increase with the introduction of Foundation Hospitals

been taken off the ward.

There is nothing to stop local managers or workers setting their own local priorities within hospitals fully owned and funded by the state. Nothing except the rigid regime of NHS targets imposed by Labour. The move to local ownership is a fig-leaf for private ownership. You can bet local managers are right now lining up the same kind of dupes that stuff "New Labour" constituency parties for election to the new Boards of Governors. There they will rubber-stamp deals with the big drug companies. In fact the government has made it clear that "matters of day to day importance like budgets and pay" will not be part of the remit of the elected boards: the unelected existing fat cats will remain in control.

POACHING

In the first few years of Foundation Hospitals there will be a major problem of two-tier provision. FHs will poach staff in a situation of chronic staff shortage by offering all kinds of perks and freebies funded by the £60 million borrowing facility. "Providing they can undertake extra work and make improvements in productivity they will also be able to offer staff extra rewards," says the Department of Health. Hospitals will be paid by results, so for all non-complex treatment you can expect factory-line production – but with pay-per-view bedside TV.

But ultimately Labour has an answer to the two-tier argument. They will turn all hospitals into FHs, at which point a virtual market will be created for them to compete in, with patients and GPs free to "choose" where to be treated. The concept of "earned autonomy" which originally drove the FH idea – rewarding excellence with more money and more freedom from targets – has been scrapped in the undignified

rush to get the new Health Bill through: now even failing hospital managers will get the chance to get rich quick.

The economic logic of the Foundation Hospitals plan is crazy. Banks only lend money against two things – existing assets (like land and buildings) or a future income stream that is earmarked for paying off the debt. Since no NHS Trust could be seen to sell off existing assets to pay a bank loan, the "future income stream" is the key to understanding the Blairite alchemy.

Hospitals have two sources of income: the Treasury and private medicine (increasingly also private pharmaceutical company research). One way to secure a big private sector loan would be to do more private medicine. But that would not be flavour of the month with a Labour government desperate to rein in private work to meet public health targets, so private work has been capped for the FHs. The other way to maximise income would be for the hospital to become more "efficient" with its existing budget, turning the saved money into a kind of quasi-profit and also stealing work from other hospitals. The hospital managements could also earn fees by managing other hospitals (yes, in the crazy Milburn world there are several bids in to do this).

Hospitals will for the first time be able to keep profits. As the DoH said on 2 December 2002: "They will be able to retain any surpluses and any proceeds from the more efficient use of their assets where this is for the benefit of NHS patients."

Even if a bank were prepared to lend against this "NHS profit", there is a problem. Hospitals often go into the red. Indeed some potential FHs like St Mary's, London, had to be bailed out of debt in order to become trusts. If a hospital goes into the red and can't pay its debts to the bank you could

in theory close. Not easily spun into good news even by New Labour. So effectively a FH would have its debts underwritten by the Treasury: it would always be bailed out.

There are strict rules about this kind of thing, rules that even New Labour can't get round. It means that all the borrowed money – up to a third more than the NHS gets from the Treasury today – will have to count as public borrowing. But the FH borrowing plan will mean hospitals paying higher interest on money borrowed from banks than the government would pay on money borrowed from the capital markets: in the name of "choice and local autonomy" it is literally money down the drain.

Gordon Brown put all kinds of Whitehall controls on future borrowing but both he and Milburn know there could be a bonfire of such controls once the FHs are up and running.

The Foundation Hospitals row has become the cause celebre in the fight between the Brownites and Blairites in government. Brown is quite happy for the NHS to be £110 billion in hock to the Private Finance Initiative companies, but he has strong capitalist reasons for saying FH borrowing doesn't make sense. In fact the FH plan could at some stage conflict with PFI as both banks and construction companies make claims on the same income.

If, as looks likely, the Foundation Hospitals plan goes through, there will be up to 29 in the first tranche. The union movement and the Labour Party grass-roots can and must organise a campaign to stop them. There should be a united, national trade union campaign to stand union-backed candidates for the new management boards: not just health unions but all unions, so that the local working class is represented on the

boards. The first action of any labour-movement elected board should be to instruct the managers to apply for the termination of Foundation Status, to forbid any borrowing in the meantime, to ban private medicine and to pay in full wage claims of the workforce.

Since Milburn is rushing through the first wave, the managers of all 29 Trusts have to "submit governance proposals including on the composition of Boards of Governors" by autumn this year – so there is no time to lose. Local campaigns should begin by writing to the manager of the NHS trust asking them to set out what "governance arrangements" they are proposing. (See below for where to find the full list)

To organise such a campaign – and to ensure it does not fall into the hands of unaccountable union bureaucrats – we need to organise action councils or social forums in every town and city threatened with FHs. There, delegates from the estates and workplaces, as well as NHS workers can thrash out detailed plans and hold their "workers' board" to account. Crucially, they can back up the tactic with demos, occupations and strikes – which will serve as useful warnings and preparation for the kind of action needed if the new board force through cuts.

More than this, local campaigns organised on this basis can provide the answer to the real and serious need for "patient choice" and "local autonomy" by running the hospitals on the basis of an alliance of health service workers and users.

● For more on Foundation Hospitals see Unison's report on the web: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B799.pdf
 ● For a list of NHS Trusts in the first wave of Foundation Hospitals go to www.info.doh.gov.uk/doh/intpress.nst/page/2003-0191?OpenDocument

On becoming Prime Minister, Tony Blair said his priority was "education, education, education". But teachers, school students and parents have been battered by testing, staff shortages and underfunding, says *Kate Foster*

New Labour fails education test

The schools funding crisis will result in 1,400 teachers being made redundant. One in 15 schools are affected and half of local education authorities will be losing staff.

Charles Clarke, the education secretary often described as a "bruiser", is looking a bit bruised himself. The education hotseat proved to be too much for his predecessor Estelle Morris. Now Clarke is spinning while schools sack teachers. After spending weeks denying there was any crisis, he then turned to blaming the local education authorities. When it was finally established beyond doubt that schools were facing a severe budget crisis, he told schools to spend their capital budgets on salaries and ignore leaking roofs, collapsing ceilings and dangerous stairways.

Why is New Labour, despite its much vaunted commitment to education, finding it so difficult to deliver in this area?

The Blairite view of education has not changed since they took office in 1997. They argue for a meritocracy. Some children are born gifted and talented, some are not. If you are gifted, then education should help you to become even better; if you're not, then another (cheaper) sort of education should train you for menial work or at least keep you out of trouble.

The endless testing, starting at seven years old, and league tables are there to enable the middle class parents to chose the of both high achieving schools and avoid the failing ones. By freeing the middle classes from the lottery of having to send their children to a local school New Labour hopes to keep the votes of the grateful professionals. Meanwhile, working class kids whose parents can't freely migrate to the better school catchment areas are stuck, no matter how talented they may be.

Long gone is the old Labour vision of education as the promoter of social equality. The comprehensive ideal was never a complete solution, but the attempt to raise conditions for all at least benefited the working class. Roy Hattersley, once a key figure of the Labour right, now seems pos-

itively radical by continuing to defend an education system based on promoting social equality.

The Blairites also want an education system more closely tied to the needs of private enterprise. First, to ensure young workers are trained in the new technologies conditioned to the culture of constant flexibility. Second, to ensure that education, alongside the rest of the public sector, is opened up for profit through public private partnership.

It is within this context that policies such as specialist schools and increased selection come. City academies, the most recent of New Labour quick-fix solutions, fit neatly into this model. These schools would be run by private business and specialise in particular areas, such as business or sport. There is no mention of extra money to address the real needs of London's inner city schools, no commitment to extra teachers for children with special needs or those learning English as a second language.

Despite research on specialist schools showing that they are not working the whole strategy for inner London is now based upon them.

New Labour's reactionary education project is running into big problems in four key areas.

TESTING

Research is clear that Britain's fanatical testing regime is actually damaging education. English kids are now among the most tested in the world. Between starting and finishing school some children will do 105 formal tests. This testing regime has not only created misery for pupils, parents and teachers but masses of bureaucracy and statistics.

But New Labour needs tests and statistics not only to inform selection but to ration

funding as well. They are facing a significant backlash, however. At this year's NUT conference delegates voted unanimously to boycott tests at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 – for children aged 7, 11 and 14. Professional organisations such as the London Association of Teachers of English, who initiated a previous boycott, are gearing up for a hard hitting campaign against the tests. Successful children's authors

such as Mike Rosen and Phillip Pullman are joining the campaign. At a fringe meeting of the NUT conference, author Pat Thompson explained how she had failed one of the tests despite it being based on an extract from one of her own stories!

And, of course, the tests have already been abolished in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

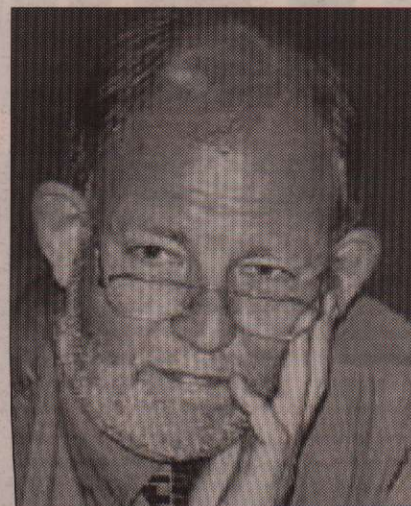
TEACHERS' PAY

Last year saw two very effective all London teachers' strikes. The strikers were calling for an increase in the London Allowance to £6,000, as it becomes increasingly difficult to afford to live in London. The strikes took place against the background of a serious teacher shortage in the capital. Some areas reported turnover rates of 25 per cent as teachers left London in droves, unable to afford average house prices of £250,000.

Many teachers were shocked when it was announced in April that some teachers would get £6,000. Why? Because instead of being given to those who really needed it, the lowest paid, the rise went to the highest paid. It went to head teachers and deputies rather than young teachers beginning work and paying off student loans.

FINANCE

It is true that New Labour has put more money into education. So why are we



Clarke: problems implementing policies

facing a funding crisis? Redistribution of funding largely from the south to the north, the scrapping of standards funds (money allocated to schools for specific projects but often used by schools to make up their staffing budget) and a serious miscalculation of the combined effect of increases in pay and pension contributions are the key factors. The incompetent miscalculations may yet lead to ministerial resignations or even sackings.

Potentially more damaging to the New Labour project is that the cuts in budgets will threaten two key policies. Head teachers are likely to refuse to implement the government's workload agreement, which paves the way for unqualified teachers and larger class sizes. And in schools with no money for staff development, the performance management system used to discipline teachers and silence opposition will be under threat.

PRIVATISATION

The government is facing strong opposition to privatisation in schools. Who wants their child to go to the McDonald's Academy for the Obese? More seriously, who wants their child to go to a school run by a company with a health and safety record like

that of Jarvis? Parental opposition may mean that New Labour's options for privatisation continue to be limited.

An increasing downturn in the economy also means that fewer businesses are looking for investment opportunities, especially in such turbulent terrain as education. However, there is still plenty of profit to be made from the massive testing system – provided the boycotts don't succeed – and supply teaching agencies continue to bleed the system charging schools for almost double the amount that they actually pay to supply teachers.

But above all the problem of Labour's various schemes, like its reforms in the health service, lies in the shift of the tax burden away from corporate taxation and the rich. New Labour neither wishes to nor dare tax these sources of wealth. Pleading globalisation – businesses and the super rich might flee to cheaper tax regimes – the turn to offloading as much of the burden of social provision from the state as possible. And "Bruiser Clarke" is certainly not going to bruise them.

But we – teachers, parents and pupils – can bruise him – and put him out on his ear. The boycott of the tests is a good place to start. Teachers should take indicative votes now and send them into their union. We also need to fight every redundancy and every cut – exposing the government's underfunding and incompetence.

TEACHERS RANK AND FILE CONFERENCE

11.30 - 3.30

Saturday 28 June

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1

Called by Hertfordshire NUT

E-mail Jon Berry, secretary Hertfordshire NUT, for more details: nutjon@aol.com

Labour link to be debated at conference

Unison members need a political fund – one that is democratic and under their control, *explains Alison Hudson*

We've had wars, privatisation, the preservation of the Tories' anti-union laws and now Foundation Hospitals. But Unison's leadership will be fighting tooth and nail to maintain the union's affiliation to the Labour Party at this month's National Delegate Conference in Brighton.

One of the key debates at this year's conference will be on the long-awaited report, *Review of the Unison Political Funds*, with its recommendation to maintain the status quo. The review was first delayed by the leadership for a year, then conducted in the most undemocratic way they could get away with. Local and regional meetings were not publicised to ordinary members and branches were even discouraged from holding local meetings to discuss the issues.

The report to be put to conference, with a recommendation for approval by the National Executive Committee, supports keeping the existing two-fund structure: one general, one political (affiliated to Labour), with a bit of additional transparency and accountability

proposed here and there.

Unison's bureaucracy and indeed some on the left too have characterised the debate as a straightforward battle between affiliation to Labour and disaffiliation.

Workers Power strongly opposes any attempt to take politics out of trade unionism. Workers' interests do not stop at the workplace door, especially not public sector workers'. We have always argued for democratising the funds and having only one fund, a political fund, with support for and affiliation to workers' parties divided proportionally according to the membership votes.

Specifically, we also argue for the right of branches to offer financial and other support to election candidates fighting for Unison's policies on privatisation, racism, war. Unfortunately, this option, although partially considered by the review, is not on the table for debate. At this stage it appears that the delegates' best options are to vote down the recommendation to accept the report from the NEC and vote for the amendment from

Darlington Local Government branch to a motion from East Midlands Region, that calls for one fund and a continuation of the review process.

Thanks to the bureaucratic nature of Unison's political fund structures with only individual Labour Party members allowed to intervene in the Affiliated Political Fund (APF) the left has found itself unable to bring Unison's representatives within the Labour Party's structure to account for failing to back long agreed union policies, much less reverse the Blairites' rightward march. Most of the motions from left branches were ruled out of order illustrating the centre-right's continued dominance of the union's structures.

Unison United Left (UL), officially launched in October 2001 and supported by Workers Power, has played an important role in several disputes but has failed so far to realise its potential in the current climate of increasing disillusionment with Labour and anger with public sector bosses. The past year has seen growing anger at privatisation and a rising

numbers of strikes – notably offensive action such as the north Glasgow hospital strike, the long-running London Weighting dispute and the historic local government pay strike across England last July, which saw around a million workers, many low-paid women, take action, often for the first time. Unison's leadership sold short this dispute, swiftly suspending the action after only one day and pushing through a meagre two-year deal.

Internal tensions between the UL's constituent parts have not helped, but more importantly the perspective for building a real rank and file organisation in Unison capable of mobilising members to take action and fight the bureaucracy has not really developed. We have been reminded this year just how crucial that fight against the bureaucracy is with the outrageous expulsion of long-time activists and SWP members Dave Carr and Candy Udwin for producing a militant leaflet during a dispute over PFI at London's University College Hospital – the campaign to reinstate them must be central to this year's conference.

FRANCE

Everything is possible

As we go to press France is faced with its biggest strike wave since the insurrection of May 1968. Prime minister Raffarin could be forced into ignominious retreat and resignation.

At the beginning of June, all-out strikes were scheduled in both the schools and on the railways, as the culmination of resistance by public sector workers to a two pronged government attack, on the education system and on pension rights. The potential for a general strike against the government's policies is very real.

The sheer scale of the fightback – unprecedented in over 30 years of oftentumultuous class struggles – shows the depth and the importance of the current government offensive.

This is nothing more nor less than an attempt to repeat the decisive attacks on the working class and its post-war social gains that took place in Britain and the United States in the 1980s. The aim is to defeat key sections of workers and savage the state sector in order to aid flagging capitalists.

At the heart of the movement are the teachers. Since the beginning of the year they have been taking action against the government's proposal to 'decentralise' the national education system. In particular, hundreds of thousands of classroom assistants, nurses, security and cleaning staff would be transferred to regional local authorities, where they will inevitably be subjected to job cuts and dramatic worsening of their working conditions.

Under the guise of greater autonomy for the regions, this is in fact the first step towards the break-up of the massive national education system – the biggest single component of France's huge state sector.

The inevitable result of this "reform" will be increased inequality between regions, and the disappearance of high schools from many working class areas, to be replaced by vocational and technical schools.

Training future workers in technical skills is more important to the bosses than teaching them Descartes or Zola. Worse still, the pupils in these areas will quite simply have no choice. There will be no courses in philosophy or literature, only information technology, accounting and engineering.

Since Easter, the scale of the resistance has been stepped up. Hundreds of high schools around the country, particularly in the Paris region, have been on all-out strike to protest against this policy of closures and creeping privatisation (see box).

After several national one-day strikes, which mobilised up to 60 per cent of teachers and have met with a blank refusal from the government to negotiate, the situation is now heading for a head-on clash.

On June 12, the baccalaureat ("Bac") exams are due to begin – the equivalent of A-levels. The teachers are threatening to boycott the exams, which will have a massive effect on a generation of youth. Already, a whole series of technical exams have been indefinitely postponed.

Up to now, the teachers have enjoyed overwhelming public support. The government and the more servile sections of the media are hoping that this support will melt away as 12 June draws closer.

It's a facedown, with both sides waiting for the other to blink first.



The importance of disrupting the Bac is both real – it is the teachers' only remaining weapon – and one charged with symbolism. The last time these key exams were cancelled was in May 1968.

In this situation the government's secret weapon is the trade union leadership. They are desperate to avoid having to lead a general strike and want any excuse to open negotiations with Raffarin. At the end of May, the leader of the key teachers' union, the FSU, went on TV to state that they no longer wanted the government to withdraw its whole plan, but simply the title of one of the sections!

INTRANSIGENCE

The blue funk of these union leaders is what convinces the government that it can beat the teachers and at the same time humiliate and tame all the unions. That explains their intransigence.

However, decentralisation is not the only attack facing teachers. Like all public sector workers, they are the victims of an unprecedented attack on their pension rights. If the government's plan goes through, all public sector workers will have to work an extra two and a half years before they can retire!

This issue lay at the heart of France's last major wave of class struggle – November-December 1995. Then attacks on the railway workers' pension rights, coupled with a "reform" of the health system, led to millions of people on the streets and a rail and transport strike which paralysed

the country for nearly two weeks. Severely bruised, the government backed off from the retirement "reforms" but maintained the attack on the health service.

This time round, with the French economy struggling to avoid recession, and increasingly hampered by the high value of the Euro, Chirac is being urged by his capitalist paymasters to press home the attack over pensions.

On 25 May, over 700,000 workers protested against this attack, as the culmination of a series of days of action. Demonstrations took place all over the country, with the biggest in Paris where more than 600,000 workers marched. Private sector workers – who accepted a similar attack without a fight over a decade ago – joined in the protests.

The spark that could transform this movement into a general strike against the Chirac-Raffarin government will come from the transport workers – still the militant vanguard of the French working class.

At the beginning of June, railway workers and Paris metro workers will begin all-out strikes against the pension reforms, in a powerful echo of the strikes of 1995. These strikes are all the more important because the transport workers have special pensions which enable them to retire at 55, and which are not affected by the current attacks. However, the rail workers are no fools – they know that they will be next in the firing line.

Again, the union leaders are at the heart

By Mathieu Roux

of the matter. Despite the fact that they represent less than 15% of the workforce, they are the only representatives that French workers have, and they alone can negotiate with government.

The initial union united front against the pension "reforms" – unprecedented in recent years – was soon broken when one of the key unions, the CFDT, decided to accept the government's plan. This provoked strong protests amongst its members, many refusing to go along with the national leadership's shameful pro-government policies.

COWARDLY

The other unions would love to do the same, if only the government would give them even the slightest concession. As with the teachers, this display of "reasonableness" on the part of the union leaders in fact only encourages the government to be more unreasonable.

The cowardly antics of the union leaders underlines the importance for workers to organise alternative forms of representation, uniting public and private sector workers.

In the key railway town of Rouen, heart of the 1995 movement, workers have set up a joint "Inter-professional Assembly" – in fact an Action Council – with delegates from the schools, railways, the chemical industry and the local massive Renault factory. The Assembly has organised a series of protests, forcing the local union bureaucrats to take action. This is the kind of initiative French workers must take in the coming days if they are to win this decisive fight.

The key tasks of the moment in France are:

- Launch an all-out general strike against the Raffarin-Chirac government.
- Build action councils in all the localities, grouping public and private sector workers around a programme of action that can defend public services and work-

ing conditions for all workers.

- Fight to replace the union bureaucrats – both left and right – with a leadership directly accountable to the members.
- Unite the unions under a programme of workers' democracy and workers' action.
- Build a new mass workers' party, based on a revolutionary programme.

The tragic irony is that most of the workers who are today the victims of Chirac's attacks voted for him a year ago! In the second round of the presidential election there was a surprise run-off between Chirac and fascist Front National candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Virtually the whole of the French left called for a vote for Chirac as a "bulwark against fascism". Virtually alone, the League for the Fifth International opposed the call for a vote for Chirac in the second round of the election, predicting he would use his victory as a mandate to press home vicious anti-working class policies.

Many organisations – including the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire – defended their support for Chirac the racist crook by arguing that he would be "weakened" by such massive support! Who was right?

Never must workers entrust their fate to the parties of the ruling class.

Those who helped lead the working class into the current situation are morally and programmatically incapable of charting a way to victory.

The stakes are high. If Chirac and Raffarin win, French workers will be subject to a whole series of remorseless attacks against their living standards, their services and their ability to mobilise, similar in scale to those of Thatcher, Major and Blair combined.

If the workers win, then not only will the construction of a bosses' Europe be severely undermined, the prospect of a real alternative, a workers' Europe, will be reinforced. France could become a beacon to workers and youth all over the world, just as it was in May 1968.

● For more go to www.pouvoir-ouvrier.org

'The coming days are crucial'

Emma, a teacher in a high school in the Seine-Saint-Denis, to the north of Paris, who has been on all-out strike for over a month, spoke to Workers Power:

"The demo on 25 May was fantastic, with three separate routes and enormous creativity in the banners, slogans and placards. That evening, the Education Minister went on TV saying the time for negotiation was over and that public sector workers had a bit of a nerve in defending their overblown privileges – in fact all we want is to share these famous 'privileges' with everyone else.

"I'm overwhelmed by the level of the mobilisation and by the determination of the demonstrators. I'm sure the teachers aren't ready to give up. And we're not alone – street cleaners, farmers, postal workers, transport workers are all taking action with their own demands. Already, exams are being postponed, which is quite simply an historic event. We're all discussing what form the teachers' boycott of the Bac is going to take – and you've got to remember, that for teachers, the Bac is sacred!

"A general strike? I think we're heading for one. But the government is capable of anything. They'll try to split the movement by minor concessions, they'll use the law and disciplinary action against striking teachers and they'll use lies and propaganda over the pensions issue.

"According to a spokesman for the ruling UMP party, the whole thing is run by Trotskyists, and the strikers like me are hapless fools manipulated by the far left! The Socialist Party are beginning to get involved, but on both decentralisation and pensions they don't have a leg to stand on because these are policies that they began! The coming days will be crucial!"

During May Austria experienced its first mass strike action since 1950. On the 6 May 500,000 workers participated in strikes, demonstrations and street blockades. This is nearly one in five workers. Most enterprises with more than 500 employees were hit by the strike, as were many public services: schools, transport and the health service.

On 13 May, the Austrian trade union federation (ÖGB) called a national mobilisation. In fact it was also a day of strikes: not only did 70,000 teachers hold a one-day strike but tens of thousands of workers from the provinces went to the capital, thereby also going on strike for the day. The response was beyond the expectations even of the organisers: 200,000 workers and youth marched through the streets of Vienna.

This was not only the biggest workers' demonstration for decades. It was even more impressive given the circumstances in which it took place. Before and during the demonstrations Vienna and Eastern Austria experienced one of the worst storms for decades. Streets white with hailstones could not stop the protest.

This demonstration reflected the determination of the working class and youth to fight back against the government offensive. The strike action was provoked by an unprecedented attack by the right wing government on the pension system. In effect the ruling class wants to cut the state pensions of workers by 40-50 per cent.

This struggle is also a historic break with the passive traditions of the Austrian workers' movement since World War Two. The ÖGB has a history of avoiding strikes at all costs and to stick to the traditional "Austrian way" of working within the framework of social partnership.

Social partnership is an institutionalised form of extremely close class collaboration in which concessions are given to the working class in return for renouncing strikes. But this system has become too costly for the capitalists, so it was called to a halt in the 1990s. The union leadership under Fritz Verzetnitsch hoped to continue doing back-door deals without going on strike but the bosses – surprise, surprise! – didn't take up the offer.

The policies of the union leadership could not be sustained any longer. Many workers and youth are so enraged about the government's attacks that the leadership had to act and organise strikes.

Despite the reactionary media propa-

AUSTRIA

Biggest strike for fifty years



Half a million workers took part in strikes, demonstrations and street blockades. That's nearly one in five workers

ganda that the Austrian population would hate the strikes, the opposite happened. Support among the population for the strikes is huge and rising. According to a poll published in late May 53 per cent of those polled support a continuation of the protests while 40 per cent call for it to end. The highest level of support is among the 18 to 29-year-olds.

The main danger at the moment is that the union leadership calls an end to the struggle, since some sectors of the capitalist class are calling for negotiations. As a result the Austrian president initiated the formation of a "round table" in which all parties represented in parliament, the bosses and the unions should take part. Verzetnitsch and his friends might be ready

By Michael Gatter

to drop the strikes to show the capitalists that they are "reliable partners".

ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt, the Austrian section of the LFI, and the youth organisation Revolution intervened in force both in the strike on 6 May and the mass mobilisation on 13 May. We mobilised for it in many schools and workplaces. At a central demonstration our contingent played a leading role. Noah – a 13-year-old school student and Revolution supporter – called for a general strike at the rally before the march began. Similarly Axel Magnus, chief shop steward of a Viennese social-service enterprise and a militant of ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt – spoke at the final rally, which was also addressed by the leaders of the biggest union and the university students. Axel's call for a general strike was met with an enthusiastic response by the crowds.

We have also initiated a model resolution opposing all cuts in the pensions system and calling for the formation of action

committees to organise strikes until the government plans are withdrawn. This resolution has already been taken up by workers in the social services, postal office and the teachers' unions.

Our main slogans for the movement are: "For a general strike until the attacks are withdrawn!" and "For the formation of strike committees in the enterprises!". It is crucial that rank and file workers organise themselves independently to put more pressure on the leadership and to organise resistance themselves if the leaders refuse. For the same reason we are seeking to get a national conference of shop stewards off the ground to decide on the next steps. We also demand that the union leaders do not participate in the "round table".

While it is too early to say how the struggle will end, one thing is clear: Austria is no longer a "strike-free" country. Compared to the traditional militant heartlands of Europe, Austria has not just caught up, it has overtaken!

● Go to www.arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.org

Unions let Schröder off the hook

On 1 June, the extraordinary party conference of the SPD endorsed Schröder's programme of attacks on social welfare, healthcare, pension rights and protection against redundancies. It is part of a general onslaught on the German working class in order to shift the balance of class forces in the capitalists favour.

Schröder and his government are determined to carry out the bosses' plans against the background of recession, growing budget deficits and German imperialism's ambitions to lead a strong Europe in order to challenge the US in the coming decade.

Schröder's programme includes:

- Cuts in unemployment benefits and the dole limited to 12 months instead of 36
- More private health provision
- Freeing up bosses' obligations to introduce a low-wage low-skill economy
- Further attacks on pension levels and rights as well as on education are on the way.

But while Schröder was able to gain a majority for his programme at the SPD conference, he has met with discontent, anger and the will to fight in the unions, among students and the unemployed and also from a number of SPD rank and file members.

On 17 May about 30,000 demonstrat-



GERMANY

By Martin Suchanek

ed against Schröder's plan, in a protest called by the public sector and service workers' union.

On 25 May 10,000 trade union members, including many SPD-members, marched against the attacks again. Major demonstrations have been held in Leipzig, Nuremberg, Kassel, Hanover and Hamburg.

In some towns, like Schweinfurt (an industrial town in northern Bavaria) "warning strikes" of several thousand workers and demonstrations against the government attacks took place.

The trade union left and the Berlin Social Forum demonstrated outside the party conference. On 4 June a regional trade union action conference, called by convenors and shop stewards, will take place in Oberhausen, in the Ruhr. Similar conferences are planned in other towns.

These action conferences, organised from below, are urgent, because the "left"

reformist opposition to Schröder is about to give in already, before the fight back actually started.

Schröder has the support of a section of the SPD membership, but also the trade union bureaucracy and some Works Council leaders in the large multi-national companies. Opposed to Schröder, at least verbally, are the leaders of IG Metall and the huge Verdi union. The DGB – Germany's TUC also opposes the plans and has organised some demonstrations.

But now the left union leaders are in retreat. Schröder won a majority at the SPD conference – not just through of the careful selection and intimidation of delegates, but also because the left backed down.

The SPD left has developed an alternative, Keynesian programme. But it did not put it to the conference, limiting their protest to a series of amendments.

The leaders of IG Metall, Verdi and the DGB supported the "left" and its motions at the congress. They opposed Schröder's

plan and threatened action – but only if it did not "damage" the government. They want higher taxes for the rich and the withdrawal of the attacks on the unemployed – but they insist that Schröder must stay in office at all cost.

Schröder only needed to threaten the left union leaders with his resignation and the danger of a conservative-led government and they were disarmed.

Before the conference, DGB leader Sommer announced a "break in the series of protests" till the autumn, since "workers want to go on holiday."

Arbeitermacht supporters in the German unions are fighting to stop this retreat. Only mass political strike action will bring down the government's plans. We need a broad united front in the factories and communities to defeat the attacks.

In order to do so, workplace meetings, councils of actions and regional and national action conferences of shop stewards and delegates from the workplaces and the unemployed organisations are needed. We need independent organisation at a rank and file level not only in order to put pressure on the leaders to call strike action, but also to organise it from below, against the will of the official leaderships where necessary.

● For more go to www.arbeitermacht.de

Stop the bloody assault on Aceh

The Indonesian army's invasion should be opposed and support given to the independence movement, writes *Stuart King*

The end of May saw the Indonesian military launch an all-out offensive on Aceh. In a land, sea and air assault 40,000 troops and military police stormed into villages throughout the province. It was Indonesia's largest military operation since the invasion of East Timor in 1975. The aim is to wipe out the estimated 5,000 guerrillas of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) who are fighting for independence.

Aceh is a province rich in oil. It has been fighting for independence from Indonesia since the 1950s. Before that it fought the Dutch who declared war on the independent state of Aceh in 1873 and later integrated it forcibly into their empire. During the dictatorship of Suharto in the 1970s and 1980s a new independence movement – the GAM – entered into struggle. The people of Aceh were heavily repressed and thousands slaughtered.

With the overthrow of Suharto and the establishment of a limited democracy, various attempts have been made to solve the Aceh "problem". In 1999 following East Timor's vote for independence, and despite military repression, half a million people

demonstrated in Aceh demanding their own referendum. The previous President Abdurrahman Wahid conceded a referendum and then withdrew it.

The current President Megawati Sukarnoputri entered into peace negotiations with the GAM last December. Megawati has never concealed her determination to prevent any more areas of Indonesia breaking away and has offered only autonomy within the Indonesian state. She has increasingly allied herself with the powerful military who are determined to crush the GAM. And in May an ultimatum was issued to the GAM – accept autonomy, disband and disarm. When the GAM negotiators declined the peace talks were abandoned and the assault begun.

Aceh is now under martial law. Within the first week of fighting more than 100 people were killed, mostly civilians. Three hundred schools have been torched while the army has raided villages, rounding up men and boys and marching them off for interrogation. At the end of May, the government ordered all foreign aid workers and non-governmental organisations out of the province.

Taking a leaf out of the Israeli's book they want to remove witnesses to the reign of terror being inflicted on the Aceh people.

The repression has spread outside of Aceh itself. Many students and workers from Aceh living in Jakarta are viewed as potential "terrorists" and subject to arbitrary arrest. The Commission for Disappearances and the Victims of Violence, which campaigns against the ongoing abuses by the military, had its offices attacked by pro-government militias after it denounced the imposition of martial law.

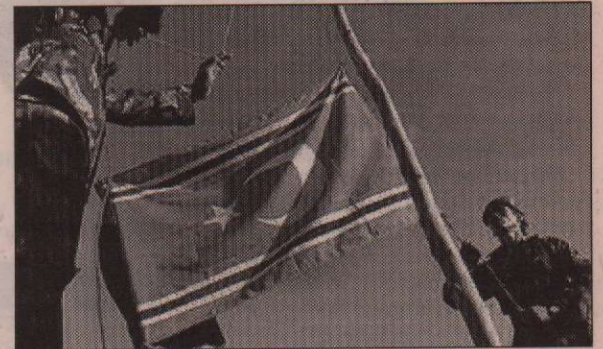
The western powers who went to war "to liberate the Iraqis from tyranny" have made clear that this is an "internal affair". The Australian government declared that the Indonesian government was "right to protect their internal interests" and said they would continue to co-operate with the Indonesian army against "terrorism".

The democratic movement in Indonesia, with honourable exceptions, has been shamefully silent on the attack on Aceh. All the parties in parliament have lent their support to Megawati's policy, which can only strengthen the military that views parlia-

ment with ill-concealed contempt.

One exception is the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD). It has issued a statement criticising the democratic movement for failing to condemn the assault and imposition of martial law. The PRD defends the right to self-determination and says "The PRD is of the view that a referendum is the best means to resolve the Aceh question, peacefully and without bloodshed."

But the PRD fails to support the GAM against the Indonesian military and government. It couches the whole question in terms of achieving a peaceful solution through a referendum just at the point when the Indonesian state has just launched a bloody offensive to crush the independence movement. Worse still, the statement eulogises Indonesia's founding President Sukarno (Megawati's father) as someone who struggled for the unity of Indonesia in a "truly democratic" fashion. In fact Megawati is following in the footsteps of her father who sent the military to crush the



Indonesian troops patrol Aceh (top); while Aceh rebels fly the flag of independence (bottom)

Aceh independence movement in the 1960s.

The only "unity of the Indonesian peoples" worth having is one based on a voluntary federation. The Indonesian state is currently a "prison house of nations" where Aceh, West Papua and other areas are held within the state only by force and terror. It is no accident that the "great" powers favour this arrangement since it provides for a local gendarme to enforce imperialism's rape of Indonesia's natural resources.

As Marx said, any nation which oppresses another can never itself be free. If the Indonesian army gets away with crushing Aceh it is the limited democratic rights in Java and Sumatra that will be next in the firing line. That is why the people of Aceh must link their struggle not only to that of the other oppressed nations of Indonesia, but also to the struggle to liberate the region from imperialism and its agents through a federation of socialist republics.

How Lula serves Brazil's bosses

Paolo Rodriguez reviews *Politics Transformed: Lula and the Workers Party in Brazil* by Sue Branford and Bernardo Kocinski, Verso

When Luiz Ignacio Lula Da Silva won the Brazilian presidential elections at the fourth attempt last October, the country was transformed into a sea of red Partido do Trabalhadores flags, crowds chanted, people danced, screamed and wept as they all celebrated the arrival of their leader and, as they saw it, the ending of "500 years of rule by the elite."

The traditional left and the anti-capitalist movement leaders hailed a new era of progressive change. Interestingly, George W. Bush was simultaneously calling Lula a "pragmatic leader" and Tony Blair praised him as a true "man of state." This appeal to both left and right was aptly symbolised in January when Lula addressed both the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum – and received standing ovations from both!

Had Lula done the impossible and bridged the gap between left and right? Can he solve Brazil's enormous social problems while also appeasing the bankers and industrialists?

In the 25 years since its formation, the PT has evolved from a party strongly rooted in the trade unions and the social movements into a party that is implementing neo-liberalism.

The party grew rapidly through participation in social struggles and local elections. Typical of the PT's rise was its use of municipal "participatory budgets". Once elected to office, the PT would draw workers into

a debate over where limited funds should be allocated – on social housing, education, or healthcare, for example. What was never debated was the size of the budget, or whether it should be increased by taxing the rich. Like workers' participation through works' councils in the EU, the participatory budgets are a means to ensure workers and the poor accept a capitalist budget.

With these initial successes the party shifted away from its traditional base, calling on them only during elections. Open assemblies to debate programmes were replaced by closed meetings involving middle class functionaries, business leaders and Liberals.

Lula has surrounded himself with a gang of profit-hungry vultures who decide and implement policies without the slightest consultation of party members. For example, Lula formed an electoral pact with the Liberal Party which undermined the PT's own candidates in certain states; he signed a pact with the IMF late in 2002, despite widespread opposition within the PT; he supported the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas despite 95 per cent of Brazilians voting against it in a referendum with a 10 million turnout; he failed to lift a finger to stop the mass closure of Corus' steel plants.

Who are these "vultures"? Antonio Palocci, finance minister, is the man behind the agreement with the IMF to impose a \$1.4 billion cut in public spending to ensure debt repayments are increased by 14 per cent



to \$19.4 billion. Jose 'Ze' Dirceu, head of the cabinet, is the party disciplinarian, who advocated the hiring of Henrique Meirelles (former chief of the Bank of Boston) as director of the central bank and Jose Sarney, notorious right-winger, as leader of the Senate. Jose Alencar, the vice-president, is an ex-Liberal Party stalwart and Brazil's biggest textile capitalist. Roberto Rodriguez, the agriculture minister is a staunch supporter of genetically modified crops and Monsanto.

Against these heavyweights, the appointment of seven trade unionists, four women and two ethnic minority ministers to the cabinet is almost laughable. These appointees are hand-picked bureaucrats who

head meaningless departments and who are only there to sell the image of Lula having a "balanced" government.

Lula says that he must introduce the austerity measures to get new loans and foreign investment that will lift Brazil out of poverty. Incentives must be given to the bosses in order to encourage this investment, such as the lowering of business taxes, the abolition of workers rights and the introduction of free trade programmes. According to Lula and Palocci dealing with social problems now will only further destabilise the economy.

Hence the privatisation of pensions, the erosion of the minimum wage to \$67 a month and raising the prices of basic medicines. The funding of Lula's famed Zero Hunger project has been slashed by \$10 million. He has designated just \$492 million to help out some 40 million people in abject poverty. That works out to be an income of about 3.5 cents a day!

Similarly, the agrarian reform that was key to the alliance with the landless rural workers' movement (MST) has designated just 220,000 hectares of land to be carved up between 5,500 families. At that rate it will take more than 800 years to satisfy the estimated 4.5 million land-hungry families. Meanwhile, Lula is ordering a crack-down on new land occupations.

This isn't a programme designed to leave the social problems to another day – this is the opening up of a new war against the poor!

Brazil is facing a time of major upheaval. Lula's arrival is like Blair's election in 1997. After decades of right-wing presidents and military dictators, the masses are prepared to give Lula the benefit of the doubt. A growing number of workers and peasant activists are, however, beginning to see through their "worker president". To turn this minority into a majority, they need to place demands on Lula and the PT leadership.

Against the phoney participatory budgets, they should demand workers' budgets, drawn up by representatives of the unions and the poor on the basis of what they need for a decent standard of living. Then a campaign of action to force the rich to pay through steeply progressive taxation must be launched.

● Not a penny to pay off the debt! Instead, divert the money into a programme of public works to eradicate poverty and soak up unemployment.

● Expropriate the giant capitalist estates and distribute the land to the landless families. Legalise all squatted farms.

● Stop and reverse the privatisation programme. Place the giant corporations like Petrobras under the control of the workers and use them to develop the economy.

These and other demands can mobilise the rank and file of the PT, the CUT and the MST, forcing Lula and co. onto the back foot and paving the way for a new – revolutionary – workers' party in Brazil.

Peace plan shatters Palestinian hopes

George Bush's plan for peace promises to create a divided and split Palestinian state, one at the mercy of its bigger and more powerful Israeli neighbour, writes *Keith Harvey*

One year ago this month George W Bush stated that the US administration wanted to see a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict – the underlying and unending cause of Arab resentment to imperialism in the Middle East. There were no details offered then; the announcement was cynically designed to win Arab rulers' support for the invasion of Iraq.

Bush was not concerned with finding a just settlement of the conflict. Rather, the US administration was aware that, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, a settlement had to be imposed on this conflict, or there would be continued instability in a region so vital to US corporate and political interests.

Without some settlement generations of Palestinian youth in the refugee camps would sign up to join the legion of suicide bombers; around the muslim world many more would continue to be attracted to the ranks of al-Qa'ida.

Last month, with Saddam overthrown and Yasser Arafat sidelined by the appointment of Abu Mazen as prime minister, Bush added detail to last year's rhetoric.

Washington finally published the so-called "road map" which sets out the phases and steps towards "a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005". It envisages "an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours".

Despite the rhetoric of a "balanced approach" the road map is a reactionary pro-Israeli document that aims at ending the resistance to the Zionist occupation in return for a limited amount of sovereignty over a small and fragmented portion of Palestinian land presently occupied by Israel.

At the centre of the road map is the idea that Israelis' "right" to live within secure borders free from the threat of terrorism has the same weight as Palestinians' right to an independent homeland.

The whole plan demands prior action by the Palestinian authority to demobilise and, if need be, crush all resistance to Israel before the latter takes any meaningful steps towards withdrawal.

So the Palestinian National Authority must "undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere". The plan demands the PNA's "security apparatus begins sustained, targeted and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure."

This completely inverts cause and effect, victimiser and victim, in the conflict. The resistance is a function of Israel's denial of the democratic national rights of the Palestinians. A just settlement can only be based on the recognition that Israel is the problem, and its unilateral and unconditional withdrawal from Palestinian land is the precondition for progress.

Israel is a reactionary and oppressive state. It came into existence over the crushed bodies and homes of Palestinians in 1947-48. Many of those Palestinians and their descendents form the population of refugee camps in Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan.



The road map will do nothing to reverse the destruction of Palestinian homes



Many demand the right to return to their stolen land. But with each passing year Israel colonises and annexes more and more Palestinian land, and so provokes more and more outrage and resistance.

The whole road map will founder on this issue. At the time of the September 1993 Oslo agreement there were about 115,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. By the time of the second intifada in 2000 there were more than 200,000 of them. During 2001 a further 1,500 families (17,000 people) were added to this total.

About 145 settlements now cover large

Israel (while Palestinians expelled to make room for them have no such right).

But Israel itself offers only limited opportunities to satisfy the aspirations of the immigrants. In order to prevent the break-up of the Zionist bloc into fractious classes and warring ethnic groups, the state gives privileges to Jewish settlers at the expense of the Palestinians.

So central are settlements to Zionism that the Sharon government lobbied hard and with some success in the USA to set the security preconditions that Abu Mazen has to achieve so high that Israel will

never have to get around to serious dismantling of settlements.

As a result Sharon said in his 17 May meeting with Abu Mazen that removing the settlements as required in Phase 1 of the road map "is not on the agenda". On 22 May Sharon's spokesman Ranaan Gissin said: "Jewish settlements already authorised by the government would not be dismantled, only those set up illegally." This is in direct contradiction with the road plan.

Furthermore, Sharon's government is dependent on the support of the pro-settlement parties in his cabinet. Many of them want to build more settlements and even expel Palestinians from the occupied territories altogether in an act of massive ethnic cleansing. Their strategy is as follows.

Without a fundamental reversal of the settlement activity there can be no end to Palestinian resistance to Israel and its occu-

ation. An end to resistance is a pre-condition for Israel dismantling any of its settlements. Hence there is no future for the road map; the road is a cul-de-sac.

Will George Bush stand up to Sharon and demand the removal of all settlements that have sprung up since September 2000? This is Abu Mazen's forlorn hope.

But it is the most unlikely outcome if only because of the civil war it would unleash inside Zionism and Israel. But even if achieved it would still leave the Palestinians with a "state" on less than 40 per cent of the land they were left with after the 1967 war.

It would be a "state" without contiguous territory, criss-crossed by Israeli security roads and garrisoned by armed settlements. It would be a "state" with no sovereignty over its borders or its airspace and one whose military forces will be sufficiently armed to repress its own civilian population but totally incapable of defending itself against Israeli incursions. It would be a state detached from its own civil society in the sense that its economy will be utterly dependent on the needs of the Israeli business cycle, a labour force drafted or excluded at whim from its dominant neighbour.

Finally, because of all these features it will be a repressive state, constantly at war with its own population. Their legitimate national aspirations will be repeatedly betrayed by its pro-imperialist leadership, which will have to suppress civil rights in order to hang on to power.

In short, the promised entity will be neither "independent, democratic" nor a "viable Palestinian state" as promised in the road map. Not in any sense whatsoever.

The answer is not to embark upon a road that leads to the final surrender of the Palestinian people. Rather it is to reinforce the intifada, in the first instance by a massive show of solidarity inside Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon; an intifada which undermines their governments' support for this process. In the USA and Europe the labour movements and reformist parties must lend solidarity to the Palestinians and isolate Israel, forcing it to back down.

This is the only map that can lead to stability and justice in Palestine.

● See Intifada pamphlet (2002) on our website at: www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/intifada.pdf

Israel is a reactionary and oppressive state. It came into existence over the crushed bodies and homes of Palestinians in 1947-8

parts of the West Bank. Currently 59 per cent of the West Bank is officially under Israeli civil and security control. Another 23 per cent of it is under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control. A Palestinian "state" drawn around these settlements will be an archipelago of disconnected cantons, economically unviable and totally at the mercy of Israeli "defence" forces.

Gaza is home to 1,178,000 Palestinians and 6,900 Jewish settlers. Yet the Israeli-controlled areas and settlements take up about 40 per cent of Gaza's land. Israel controls all external borders, crossing points and major roads in Gaza.

Constantly expanding settlements has been central to the Zionist project. Israel has only ever been able to sustain its colonial project by drawing in a constant supply of Jews from around the world; hence the right of all Jews to become citizens of

Who controls Palestine?

- September 1993: 115,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza.
- In 2000 there were more than 200,000.
- During 2001 a further 1,500 families (17,000 people) were added to this total.
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- Another 23 per cent of it is under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control.
- Gaza is home to 1,178,000 Palestinians and 6,900 Jewish settlers. Yet the Israeli-controlled areas and settlements take up about 40 per cent of Gaza's land. Israel controls all external borders, crossing points and major roads in Gaza.

ISM under fire - where next for the solidarity movement?

The International Solidarity Movement has, since its formation in August 2000, been like a breath of fresh air in the Palestinian solidarity movement.

International activists from Europe, North America and Japan have used the relative privilege that the racist Zionist authorities are obliged to grant them because of their nationality to promote resistance to the occupation. Utilising the fact that soldiers will think twice before shooting a citizen of the US or EU activists have shielded Palestinian civilians with actions as diverse as blocking bulldozer demolitions, clearing roadblocks, escorting kids to school.

The one condition for this tactic was that the ISM itself is committed to unarmed and non-violent resistance. If ever the ISM got involved in the fighting the Israeli Defence Force would start targeting the activists.

Events over the past three months have exposed the severe limits to this tactic. First US activist Rachel Corrie was deliberately crushed to death by an army bulldozer despite her full visibility. Then professional cameraman James Miller was shot dead while wearing a helmet with "TV" written on it in fluorescent letters and waving a large white flag. A few days later Tom Hurndal was shot in the head while shielding a young girl from an unprovoked Israeli incursion.

Against the evidence of eye-witnesses and video footage - some of which was shown last month on Channel 4's excellent Dispatches documentary, *The Killing Zone* - the IDF insists that Rachel was crushed by a falling slab of concrete and the other two were caught in cross-fire.

With their habitual insolence, they have used the fact that British suicide bombers laid flowers during a memorial service for Rachel to declare the ISM an organisation that supports terrorism, and to deport its activists. By a savage irony Palestinian families are now offering ISM "internationals" shelter!

Two tasks arise from this recent turn of events.

First, we must demand that the British and US governments fight for justice for their citizens. They may despise ISM activists and meddling journalists but they have a constitutional duty to defend them from attack. The Foreign Office has so far simply demanded that the Israelis carry out a thorough investigation. But, as the Dispatches programme revealed, the Israelis have refused to interview Palestinian or ISM witnesses, or to view video and audio recorded evidence.

The British government must demand complete and immediate access for an independent inquiry into the deaths. The ISM, the victims' families and local Palestinians must control the inquiry.

Secondly, we need to find new tactics - if not to replace the ISM tactic, at least to supplement it.

The Israeli regime is an apartheid regime. It deserves the same badge of shame that was so successfully pinned on South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s.

And we should demand the same kind of pressure be applied to it.

- Break off all diplomatic ties and trade links! Isolate the racist Zionist state!
- Boycott Israeli products!
- Expose and punish all companies profiting from the occupation (Caterpillar, Lockheed Martin) or supporting the settlements (Marks & Spencer, Starbucks)

The anti-war movement has brought the plight of the Palestinians to the attention of millions. Now let's turn that awareness into effective action.



Protesters gather at the end of May for the anti-G8 summit in Geneva

Build social forums in every city and every country

Over the past three years gatherings of activists known as "social forums" have sprung up around the globe. The World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in early 2001, encouraged its imitation on all continents. In Italy in particular local social forums were set up – in small and medium sized towns as well as the larger cities. They spread like wildfire around the mobilisation for anti-G8 demonstrations in Genoa and in the aftermath of the repression there.

They helped mobilise hundreds of thousands onto the streets in protest against the murder of Carlo Giuliani and the brutalisation of dozens of activists. They linked up with the wave of strikes by metalworkers. They have helped mobilised huge demonstrations in Rome against Berlusconi's attack on social benefits and workplace rights. In Florence last year they helped mobilise one million on the city's streets against the war threat.

Since then they have also appeared in several European countries, most notably in Spain. After the first European Social Forum in Florence the idea spread to other countries: Germany, Austria, Hungary. In Britain to smaller groups of activists have tried to set up social forums. Unfortunately they have met opposition from the leaders of Globalise Resistance.

The types of organisation that have built social forums have been varied. They include the more radical non-governmental organisations (NGOs), mass workers parties such as the PT of Brazil and Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, trade unions, movements of peasants in Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, militant youth organisations, as well as libertarian and revolutionary groups.

In Italy and Spain they have already shown some potential for mobilising a wide spectrum of organisations in a variety of struggles: support for trade union action over wages and defence of social services, opposition to racism, imperialism and war.

The mass anti-war mobilisation of 15 February was a response to the call issued by the meeting of the social movements in Florence. In Europe Italy has so far remained the centre of this development and shows its best potential. Why? Because they have some real roots in the working class and in the youthful anti-capitalist movement. They are not just talking shops for academics and journalists. They provide a democratic structure for the co-ordination of action. They are also a forum for debate on a practical strategy.

Social Forums are attractive to a wide spectrum of different activists because they respond to real needs. The need to unite in

Dave Stockton argues that the anti-globalisation movement needs to build democratic and accountable social forums to unite anti-capitalist activists with the labour movement



Social Forums will combine discussion, as at Florence 2002, where 60,000 people attended debates (left); and action such as Genoa where hundreds of thousands took to the streets (right)



action against an international offensive of the ruling class on the political and economic terrain. The need to build a strong, lasting international unity of the exploited and oppressed classes. They respond also to a need to debate the elements of a new strategy to replace the collapsed ideologies of social democracy, Stalinism, and "third world" nationalism.

Of course there is the danger that the social forums will become academic talking shops or that they could even give rise to a "neo-reformism". This is no imaginary danger. Indeed powerful forces are active within them seeking to do just this. These forces are strongest in the behind-the-scenes leadership of the European Social Forum. Attac, the union leaderships that support the ESF, and the NGOs constitute a disguised bureaucracy. It is disguised behind the large assemblies that are not allowed to debate or amend resolutions, not allowed to decide anything by majority vote. In other words these assemblies are not democratic.

The principles of the World Social Forum – agreed at a cabal of the Brazilian and French "organisers" at Porto Alegre – impose a ban on resolutions, a ban on political parties. This leads directly to the domination of the WSF by a self-selected clique of parliamentarians, academics, journalists, NGO officers and union bureaucrats. Expenditure on the reformist strategy of Attac, Juan Guaido and Bernard

Casson, or that of president Lula of Brazil, over the ideas of revolutionary youth who have taken to the streets since 1999.

The answer to this is not to exclude parties – certainly not those militantly oppose the war on terrorism or the assault on our social gains. If they do this not only in parliament but on the streets they should be welcomed. Parties which pledge themselves not to enter coalitions with capital-

Social forums must not only organise conferences, debates etc. – if that is all they do they will remain mere talking shops – they also need to become real councils of action at local, national and international level

ist parties should be allowed to participate, with no special privileges but with no restrictions either.

So too should opposition forces and individuals within the mass reformist parties in the workers movement. It would be stupid to try to keep them or trade unions and NGOs out. We need to involve these mass organisations if we are to mount actions like the Florence ESF and 15th February.

But the surest way to ensure that all these forces actually involve their memberships and do so democratically is to build local social forums, in which their local branch-activists are involved. Social forums

must not only organise conferences, debates etc. – if that is all they do they will remain mere talking shops – they also need to become real councils of action at local, national and international level.

This is the way to create a mass anti-capitalist movement in each country. Whether this happens will depend on a political struggle inside the movement as well as taking the opportunity offered by every strug-

gle to unite them in co-ordinating bodies. The present wave of mass strikes over pensions across Europe offers a prime opportunity to do this.

In the rest of 2003 – from Evian to the Paris/St Denis European Social Forum – the movement needs urgently to build a base in every country, every city. Each needs a social forum based on mobilising for action and debating the key issues facing us today: the "endless" war launched by Bush; solidarity with the Palestinians and all those fighting IMF austerity; support for trade unionists striking against cuts in pensions or privatisation; resisting attacks on

immigrants both by the state and by racist parties and fascist thugs; the defence of class war prisoners.

This also means that we fight for the ESF to become a political forum, one that can take vital decisions by majority, not seek the lowest common denominator, what no one objects to. This is what being bound by consensus means. The ESF must lift the reactionary ban on parties and abolish the artificial separations between the ESF and the meeting of the "European Social Movements". Any one who wants to turn the ESF into an international campaigning, militantly anti-capitalist body, ought to actively support the proposals which the League for the Fifth International has raised and will continue to raise right up to the ESF itself.

As a step to make this possible we must fight for the ESF this year to have at least one full day for political decision-making on the major campaigns and to consider political resolutions. Proposals should be submitted and circulated well in advance so that they can be debated nationally and locally. As soon as possible this assembly must be made roughly representative of existing forums and national organisations.

The ultimate goal of the "movement of movements" must be to give birth to a new international party of the working class and its allies. For the Fifth International is what we need to destroy global capitalism.

SWP's new alliance is an old popular front

Last month at the Socialist Alliance conference, SWP leader John Rees proposed a new alliance with the leaders of Britain's mosques. Mark Hoskisson explains why a new workers party is a better way to unite with Muslim workers

The Socialist Workers Party is proposing a new alliance to fight next year's European and local elections. Its basic pillars, besides the SWP, are the "Muslim community" led by its imams and the Communist Party of Britain. Workers unity – including the unity between workers of the immigrant and host communities – strengthens us all. Unity with businessmen and clerics weakens and divides us.

SWP central committee member John Rees spelt out this major right turn in a speech delivered to the Socialist Alliance Conference.

"The new alliance that can make a difference to the politics of this country is there when Michael Lavalette [the recently elected Preston SA councillor] stands up alongside Maulana Said Ahmed [the imam who called on Muslims to vote SA] and says 'We worked together to get the alliance elected in Preston'. That's what the new alliance looks like... In a week's time when I go to see the Communist Party of Britain, people we have worked closely with in the Stop the War Coalition, to discuss whether or not we can form a common platform with them for the 2004 Euro elections; or two days ago when I met the chairperson of the Birmingham Stop the War Coalition and an important figure in the central mosque and they said, 'We think we have a great deal in common with you; we want to form a joint platform with you. Can we discuss it with you?' – that's what the new alliance means."

This came hard on the heels of an article Rees wrote for *Socialist Review* arguing for a new alliance with George Galloway, Bob Crow and "many in the Muslim community". While Rees said this should be based on the model of the Socialist Alliance it becomes clearer by the week that this alliance will in fact be very different. Once in place it cannot be long before the SWP pulls the plug on the Socialist Alliance altogether, either by getting it to endorse the "new" alliance or by walking away from it.

The problem isn't the idea of a "new alliance" in itself. The Socialist Alliance, despite the Preston result, has been a failure in terms of winning large numbers of Labour supporters in the unions to the idea of a radical socialist alternative to New Labour.

A new alliance with serious organised sections of the unions, with large numbers of rank and file militants to build a new workers' party would certainly be a step forward. But that is not at all what John Rees has in mind. Indeed the SWP explicitly rejected such a call submitted by Workers Power. There is no need for a new revolutionary party – presumably because it is it. Unfortunately, it is a "revolutionary party" that does not dare enter the electoral arena under its own colours, that is with its own programme. Instead, an electoral alliance and a limited platform of reforms is deemed sufficient.

Though the SWP does not say this, its implicit position is that the Socialist Alliance



Young Muslims need to be won away from religious leaders and forge unity with the working class in the fight for socialism

was too narrow in its politics, indeed too "socialist", to attract the large number of votes needed to be a real success, to rival the Scottish Socialist Party or match the BNP.

In his speech to the SA conference, John Rees boasted about his negotiations with both the CPB and an important figure in the Birmingham Central Mosque – Dr Siddiqi. Rumours are circulating in Birmingham of the formation of a Peace and Justice Platform to field a candidate for the European elections.

The success of the Stop the War Coalition has obviously convinced the SWP that it can create a successful electoral alliance with the self-same forces: the mosques, the left trade union bureaucrats and the CPB. Thus, though he does not yet dare say so openly, John Rees is not proposing a socialist alliance at all. In the *Socialist Review* he talks of a "broad left" alliance that would be welcoming to the Muslim community.

Rees is wilfully mixing up two things when he suggests that such an electoral bloc can simply grow out of the Stop the War campaign. A temporary agreement for united action (mass demonstrations, strikes, direct action, road blockades) in any progressive cause is legitimate if it creates a mass force to do this. A bloc with leaders of the Muslim community to stop the imperialist attack on Iraq was both necessary and completely principled, whatever the Islamophobes of the Alliance for Workers Liberty say.

But to attempt to build a new political organisation with a non-working class force whose ideology is, by definition, not only opposed to socialism but to many democratic rights as well (secular education, abortion rights, gay rights) is totally unprincipled.

On what conceivable programme could this alliance be based. At best opposition to wars on Muslim countries attacked by imperialism, on justice for immigrant communities faced with discrimination and

harassment. To this there would be a lot of vague waffle about social justice. The fearfully limited progressive parts in this platform do not require an electoral platform.

Such a programme represents no global social alternative, no "other possible world" to rally the working class and the oppressed immigrant communities. It is not a united working class alternative to pit against the hate mongers of the BNP. It is not even a basis for rallying the most progressive sections of the youth, women and workers of the "Muslim community".

Anyone who goes to the SWP's Marxism 2003 in July will probably hear about the popular front, in the abstract. But abstract it will remain, because the SWP just cannot put its principles into practice

Of course socialists do need to address this community – above all its working class majority – and indeed win thousands of them to the ranks of those fighting for an end to exploitation. Of course we are not frightened if many retain their religious beliefs on a private basis. But forming a political bloc with their social and religious exploiters is not the way to do it. Quite the opposite.

What we cannot do is form a generalised political bloc, offering ourselves to the electorate as (at least potentially) an alternative to Blair, with leaders and elders who are representatives of the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie within the Muslim community and whose policies must of necessity be politically counterposed to socialism.

The method behind this "new alliance" is not new at all. If Rees has forgotten his history he should ask Andrew Murray, national chairperson of Stop the War and a leading light of the CPB. Murray has recently written an internal memo saying that the present political situation is creating the best opportunity since the 1930s to realise the cherished dream of the British Stalinists, a popular front.

The CPB are desperate to set it up as soon as possible, and not only with Muslim elders and businessmen but also with Liberal Democrats, Greens and anyone who fits the bill. It is a class-collaborationist electoral alliance that obliges the working class to renounce "for a whole stage" the struggle for state power and socialism.

When this brilliant idea (of Comrade Stalin) for an electoral bloc between the workers' organisations and bourgeois ones, even if they were only shadows of the bourgeoisie, was applied in both France and Spain in the 1930s it led to betrayal and defeat. Likewise in Chile in the 1970s. Anyone who goes to the SWP's Marxism 2003 in July will probably hear these lessons, in the abstract. But abstract they will remain, because the SWP just cannot put its principles into practice.

Its practical policy comes from another source altogether. Seize any opportunity for short-term "success", no matter what you have to sacrifice in terms of your strategy or principles. Among Marxists this is called opportunism. In this case, the SWP, impressed by its own success in mobilising the Stop the War Coalition and the success of their rivals in Scottish Socialist Party in the Scottish parliamentary ballot, has fallen for electoral cretinism.

When standing in elections Marxists start out from an action programme that links the goal of working class power to the immediate burning needs of the working class by struggles for control in the workplace, expro-

priation of the rich, building up the fighting strength of workers and disintegrating the power of the capitalist state. Success measured not simply in votes, but by the extent to which the campaign has mobilised workers in the struggle for socialism.

Instead of this, the SWP negotiates the lowest common denominator they can find with union bureaucrats and progressive Muslim clerics and inevitably end up asking, "What will win us the most votes?"

In contrast to this turn to the right the SWP Worker's Power raised a resolution at the Socialist Alliance Conference, arguing for putting the idea of a new workers party firmly on the political agenda. It argued that the political character of the party should be decided democratically, at a thorough debate in every major town and city and ultimately by a democratic national conference.

This should be one not only with resolutions but with alternative draft programmes, put forward by the forces involved in creating it. We do not believe it should be set up on the model of the old Labour Party as George Galloway has proposed. It should be a revolutionary workers party – a Leninist party.

An extended debate, provided it accompanied by waging the class struggle shoulder to shoulder, would give all the forces involved the chance to test out a decision between the fundamental alternatives. We have the confidence to believe that thousands upon thousands would be the test of action as well judging the arguments, to demand a break from reformism altogether.

Thus, we did not lay down any preconditions that a new workers party should be revolutionary – merely that this is the way to come that we, as revolutionaries, fight today. The only real precondition, therefore, is that the new workers party in formation should be fully democratic, so that revolutionary voices can be heard as well those of the reformist union leaders and MPs.

We don't want another 100 years of betrayal. We want a party that can overthrow capitalism. But we recognise that we need to convince the thousands of workers breaking from Labour but not yet from reformism that this was a viable option.

Whether the SWP's popular front strategy is actually realised or not it could damage the fight for a rebirth of mass revolutionary socialism in this country, squander the opportunity of a mass break from Labour to real class politics, hamper the fight for workers' party and inevitably spread confusion and demoralisation in the ranks of those workers caught up in such a project.

To put it bluntly we have to fight this project wherever it shows its head: in the Socialist Alliance and in every forum of the Labour and anti-capitalist movement. Indeed suggest that in every militant trade union every Socialist Alliance group, every Socialist Workers Party branch this policy, which abandons working class political independence, be condemned.

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As carpetbagging corporations flood in

Bush cronies take control of Iraq Inc.

"Decisions will favour market systems, not Stalinist command systems... the coalition will encourage moves to privatise state-owned enterprises. Interference in Iraq by its neighbours or their proxies including those whose objective is to make Iraq in Iran's image will not be accepted or permitted."

This is how Donald Rumsfeld, US Defence Secretary and architect of the Pentagon's strategy of pre-emptive strikes, outlined his "core principles for a free Iraq" to the *Wall Street Journal*.

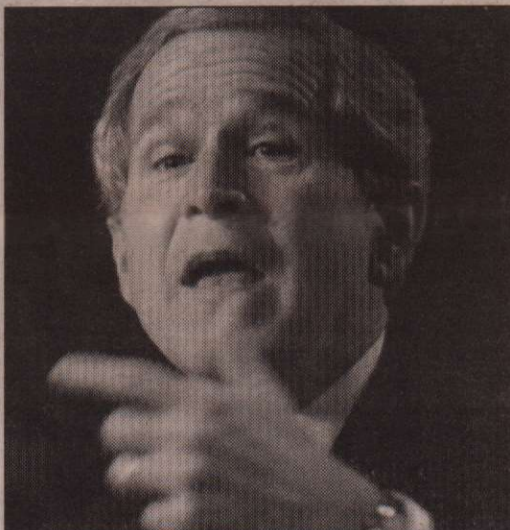
The Iraqi population can decide on their society's future - so long as all state and socially owned property becomes private property. Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen, Shi'as and Sunnis, will have "democracy" but thus will not stretch to the right to self-determination. "Sovereign" Iraq will not be permitted to forge alliances with its neighbours, especially Iran; the US and Britain will have a veto over its foreign policy. No Islamist parties will be allowed to win any future elections.

For the present the UK and US have full authority over every aspect of Iraqi society.

L Paul Bremer, the new head of the provisional authority in Iraq, has promised to move swiftly in a "clear direction towards a liberal, market-run economy... eliminating artificiality" and letting food prices rip. This is tantamount to murder in a country where 60 per cent of the people cannot even afford enough subsidised food and where there is a growing crisis of infant malnutrition.

Meanwhile, the carpetbaggers are arriving in droves. Every face in the rogues' gallery of globalisation has turned up to claim a slice of the pie. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank's representatives sit on the Development Fund for Iraq. Bechtel made its fortune buying up third world countries' water systems on the cheap, courtesy of the World Trade Organisation's rules, and selling the elements back to the people at hugely inflated prices. It has now been put in charge of rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure, shattered by US and UK bombing.

As for the big prize, Iraq's vast oil reserves, US Vice-President Dick Cheney's Halliburton Oil and Deputy



Iraq? Sold to the highest bidder

Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's Fluor have won the contracts to repair and maintain the oil field infrastructure. Meanwhile former Fluor CEO, Philip J Carroll, is to head up Iraq's oil ministry.

Predictably, with all these riches to be grabbed, yesterday's pacifists, Russia, France and Germany, have put in a claim for "their" share the victors' spoils. Jacques Chirac offered his country's vote on the United Nations Security Council, asking the US to forget his opposition to the war. Colin Powell duly pocketed the UN's legitimisation of the US/UK occupation - but still warned that France would be "punished" for its late conversion to the American Empire.

So what does liberation feel like on the ground for ordinary Iraqi people? What have seven weeks of liberation brought?

Electricity and water supplies have still not returned to normal, even in Baghdad, resulting in outbreaks of cholera and diarrhoea. Rubbish and waste have also gone uncollected, leading to the spread of disease to the

malnourished population. Criminal gangs have ransacked hospitals rendering them useless during a humanitarian crisis, while those that remain open are subject to armed Islamists coming in and demanding segregation in the wards and the dismissal of female doctors. Even the unearthing of Saddam's mass graves has led to chaos and the spread of disease.

Ignoring the Geneva Convention and expressing their contempt for the conquered, British soldiers have been caught on their own cameras torturing and making Iraqi prisoners of war pose in sexual acts.

US and UK troops, far from protecting a "liberated" Iraqi people, have continued to kill and injure them. The *Times* reports on a soldier throwing a smoke grenade into a crowd of pensioners queuing up for benefits, causing one to drop dead. Almost daily, reports come in of women and children being shot dead at checkpoints, of workers not being paid by the occupation authority or being paid only in useless banknotes, of suspected looters being stripped naked at gunpoint.

Two important developments have emerged from this chaos. Firstly, the Iraqis have taken the first steps to resist the occupation. A recent demonstration in Baghdad saw 100,000 people chanting, "Death to America! Shi'a and Sunni unite!" - while ambushes of occupation forces with rocket-propelled grenades and Kalashnikovs are now almost daily occurrences. "Liberated" Iraqis will soon have killed more Western soldiers than Saddam's troops managed to do.

Secondly, despite all their assurances about a quick transition to Iraqi home rule, the Americans and British have secured themselves an indefinite mandate to remain and have continued to increase their military presence. The Pentagon poured 100,000 new troops to Iraq just days after the Security Council resolution was passed. The resolution does not contain a word about weapons of mass destruction, the pseudo-legal pretext for war. Indeed Rumsfeld now gaily admits they may have been destroyed "prior to the conflict" - in which case, Iraq had fully complied with resolution 1448 and the war was illegal.

The UN resolution legitimises the US and UK-led

provisional authority over Iraq for the next 12 months. Not only that, it states that this authority will be renewed automatically unless the Security Council rules otherwise. And guess whose veto can stop the Security Council rescinding the provisional authority's mandate?

Rumsfeld and Bush have also begun beating the war drums in the build up for another adventure: Tehran is "running a clandestine nuclear weapons programme"; the Riyadh bombers "came from Iran"; here is another example of the need for "regime change".

The worldwide anti-war movement cannot afford to relax its vigilance. A new campaign of mass demonstrations must demand that the UK and US remove their troops from Iraq and get out of the Gulf immediately. We must support the Iraqi people's sovereign right to run their economy and decide freely how the oil wealth should be controlled.

They must have the right to reject enslavement to US and UK Big Oil or the privatisation of social services. They must be free to opt for democratic public ownership and a plan of production to meet the needs of the people. The Iraqi people alone should decide what relations they want with their neighbours, Iran and Syria included, and what weapons and army they need to defend themselves from foreign aggression.

George W Bush and Tony Blair are war criminals. We should also demand that they are brought to account for their war against Iraq. Of course, this will not be achieved through the Hague which, like the UN, will always be a court for the victors, not an arena of justice for the victims.

Justice can only be achieved from below, by the millions who actively opposed this imperialist war and accurately foretold of the calamities that would follow. Bush and Blair's "peace" will over the next weeks and months be exposed for what it is - occupation. Whoever they decide is next in their endless "war on terror", we must ensure that their victory garlands become nooses around their necks, that the next regimes to change are theirs.

■ Palestine roadmap sell-out. Page 9

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International (LFI)

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Even the onset of war did not stop the global revolt against it.

Across the world the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence, in Asia at Hyderabad and in South America at Porto Alegre.

Together with the LFI, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New

World Party of Socialist Revolution (a New International).

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against war and capitalism, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or e mail us at paper@workerspower.com.

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