

What is left of Labour? - page 4



Will Saudi Arabia collapse? - page 13



The founding of The Fourth International - pages 14&15



workers power 5

July / August 2004 ★ Price 50p / €1 www.workerspower.com Issue 288

British section of the League for the Fifth International

Labour vote collapses FBU leaves Labour Time to fight for a new workers party

The SWP and the fight to build an alternative to Labour The slide to the right

In the aftermath of the June elections, John Rees of the Socialist Workers Party declared that Respect was "the beginning of a mass, left alternative to New Labour". Despite the SWP leadership's attempts to spin the results as a great triumph, nothing can hide the fact that this new coalition received a paltry 1.7% of the national vote.

More important than this electoral flop is the fact that the Respect tactic represented a major shift to the right by the SWP leadership, one that has harmed the

struggle against Blair. During this turn

- they have despatched the Socialist Alliance because its 'socialism' was considered a block to winning the votes of millions of anti war activists;
- they have dumped their principles, abandoning open support for abortion and lesbian and gay rights so as not to offend the Mosques, community elders and organisations like MAB;
- they have delivered a blow to the prospect of rallying the forces disgusted with Blair's

warmongering, privatisation policies, attacks on trade unionists, students and education to a real left alternative - to a new workers party committed to anti-capitalism.

Inside in a special four page supplement, Mark Hoskisson examines the history of this slide to the right, through the Socialist Alliance and into Respect. Jeremy Dewar, former executive member of Globalise Resistance, explains how the right turn by the SWP leadership, destroyed GR and dealt a blow to the building of the anti-capitalist movement in Britain.



SPECIAL FOUR PAGE MARXISM SUPPLEMENT

FBU conference votes to disaffiliate from Labour and for further strike action

Last month the firefighters' union, the FBU, took two momentous decisions. Both could play a big role in shaping trade union politics in Britain in the next year.

The conference voted to end its 86 year-old affiliation to the Labour Party. Most of the left inside the union had supported a resolution to democratise the political fund. But at the conference the executive said that even though they would support such a motion they would block its implementation.

They made clear that such a policy would be a purely paper policy. In practice they would prevent any branch or region from supporting a party other than Labour on the grounds that it would risk getting the union expelled from the party, as happened to the RMT. Faced with this the left blocked with those calling for outright disaffiliation. And this was carried on a card vote by 35,105 votes to 14, 611.

This is a decision of enormous significance. It demonstrates the hatred of thousands of rank and file firefighters for New Labour. After over two years in a dispute with the government firefighters are fed up with betrayals. The bosses have reneged on the pay deal. Labour has repeatedly backed the bosses. And in countless fire stations jobs are being cut, workers are being treated like dirt and pay has effectively been cut by the bosses refusing to cough up the agreed rises.

Andy Gilchrist, Labour loyalist and saboteur-in-chief of the recent pay strikes and now on leave for stress, had tried to stop his members' anger boiling over. He even promised a strike ballot in order to get the original conference and debate over affiliation adjourned prior to the 10 June elections. But while he succeeded in this he could not stop the inevitable. While on holiday in Portugal, just like David Beckham during the penalty shoot out, Gilchrist felt



the ground moving beneath him.

At the Southport conference in mid June the members told Labour to get stuffed. Why should they hand over their money to the government when it was backing bosses who were refusing to hand over pay rises due to the firefighters?

The conference also agreed that it would ballot for strike action on 30 July if the bosses continued to refuse to pay up. The workers are owed a 3.5 per cent rise, back dated to November, and a further 4.2 per cent from 1 July.

Nobody disputes that the FBU have fulfilled their part of the pay deal. The bosses are quite simply engaged on an old fashioned offensive, on the back of Gilchrist's sell-out of the dispute, to try and break the power of the union in every station. Their long-term goal is to break the unity of the FBU and its role in national pay bargaining and undermine the working conditions of all FBU members.

Conference recognised what was going on and took the decision that it was time to resume the action. This was in no small measure due to the work of rank and file militants in the newly formed Grassroots

FBU organisation. Over 100 people, almost half the delegates, attended its fringe meeting at the conference. The majority took its message - that the executive had misled the union during the last strike and must not be allowed to do so again - to heart. And the vote for a strike ballot reflected this.

But both decisions - to disaffiliate and to call a strike ballot - pose major tasks for every militant in the union if the opportunity created by this conference is not to be lost. On disaffiliation it is vital that militants commit the union to an immediate and positive campaign to organise a new working class party.

If this is not done the danger of non-political trade unionism, support for which was all too evident in many of the contributions to the debate and is known to be strong at a watch, branch and regional level, will grow. Furthermore the failure to put the union at the forefront of an active campaign for a new workers' party now could see Gilchrist's faction regroup - as they have done so many times in the past - and overturn this decision next year.

On the strike ballot, it is vital that Grassroots FBU organise a rank and file campaign for a yes vote, and a campaign to secure control of any strike that follows. We have seen how the existing leaders will play it. They will use the strikes as a bargaining ploy and sell out when they feel ready. We cannot let that happen again.

The leadership are already using the by now familiar tactics of suspending militant elected officials in order to undermine the rank and file. A left member on the leadership, Paul Woolstenholmes, has been suspended on vague charges. In the run up to the last dispute Steve Godward and other militants also found themselves suspended on trumped up charges by the union leadership so that they would not stand in the way of a sell out once the strike was underway. This is already happening and a fight to stop it, to call the leaders to account and reinstate Paul and other militants must be part of the fight for a yes vote.

We have another chance to take the union into battle with New Labour and hurl back Blair's whole offensive on the public sector. This would not only benefit every firefighter. It will benefit every public sector worker facing cuts and privatisation. It will rally thousands more to struggle against Labour and it will give an enormous impetus to the fight to create a new, real working class alternative to Labour. Every militant in the FBU must seize this opportunity.

Unison leadership: all talk no action

More than 2,500 delegates and observers attended the annual conference of Britain's biggest union, Unison, in late June. The conference effectively marked the start of general secretary Dave Prentis' re-election campaign, with outgoing union president, Dave Anderson, declaring in his opening address that "Dave Prentis isn't simply the best choice but the only choice" for general secretary.

As a result Prentis was talking "left". He attacked the Government over the Iraq war, foundation hospitals and the drive to turn over ever larger chunks of public services over to the privateers. He declared, "We will not keep our heads down, or our gobs shut for Labour if this government continues to put forward right wing policies". He went on to threaten industrial action if pension schemes were threatened.

Once the election speechifying was over things took a very different turn. When a motion from Lambeth local government branch came up calling for Tony Blair's resignation as prime minister, Prentis led the attack from the top table. The leadership and its supporters denounced the resolution as "playground politics, a sixth-form stunt" and turned the argument around the motion into a debate about the union's continued link to the Labour Party, trying to paint the motion as part of moves to break from Labour. This was especially ironic as it was moved by a long time Labour Party

member This resolution was lost with only some 20% of the conference voting for it.

Leaders like Prentis are quite happy to be seen as left critics of Blairism but when it comes to doing anything to stop Blair they quickly dive for cover preferring to attack those who are trying to take steps against the new Labour leadership.

The conference went on to adopt several progressive policies, opposing the media scapegoating of asylum seekers and resoundingly backing a composite resolution calling for an end to the occupation of Iraq and the withdrawal of British troops. Even the Executive had to drop its opposition to the demand for 'immediate' withdrawal. Delegates gave a rapturous ovation to Subhi Ali Hussein, the general secretary of the Iraqi Federation of Trade

Unions, when he addressed them on the conference's closing day.

The final day saw the conference adopt a motion that opens up the possibility of the union organising official strike action in response to the current attacks on the local government and other public sector pension schemes.

The four-day national conference proved, however, remarkably low-key affair after an

earlier gathering of the union's largest service group, local government. This had witnessed stormy debates over a three-year national pay offer and the so-called "school remodelling deal". This agreement has underpinned New Labour's attempts to restructure the classroom workforce by piling new responsibilities on to teaching assistants organised by Unison with little or no rise in pay.

In the event the Service Group Executive (SGE) suffered a clear defeat as delegates voted by a margin of more than three-to-two for several motions that condemned the union's continued participation in a framework agreement with the Government, which has effectively pitted teachers and support staff against each other, and has dramatically eroded the earnings of support workers in many schools. The largest teaching union, the NUT, has thus far consistently refused to be party to the agreement.

A debate on the offer recommended by the SGE, a paltry 8.9% spread over 3 years (see box), was maneuvered to the end of conference. In opposing an emergency motion from the Bromley branch that attacked the SGE's role and called for rejection of the offer, SGE chair, Jean Geldart, admitted that it was indeed a "lousy" package on the table from the employers. The motion, however, never went to the vote as the chair declared the conference closed to impotent howls of derision.

Reject the local government pay offer

Workers Power strongly urges local government trade unionists in England and Wales to reject the paltry and potentially dangerous pay offer from the local authority employers. If members ratify this deal, it will buy Tony Blair three years of industrial peace while doing nothing to alleviate low pay or address the equal pay grievances of women workers.

An offer that adds up to 8.9 per cent over three years, 2.95% a year, already stands in sharp contrast to the woefully inadequate joint union claim of 4%, plus a one-off payment of £200. But a three-year deal could well translate into a real pay cut.

There are credible forecasts that the rise in the official Retail Price Index could surpass the three per cent mark next year.

While the bosses have apparently retreated from their attempt to claw-back basic terms and conditions, particularly around sick pay and premium pay for anti-social hours, there is good reason to fear that their real objective is the introduction of a seven-day week with a sharp reduction in overtime and premium rates.

Time is extremely tight, with most branches closing their consultative ballots no later than 8 July, and the left has been caught on the hop in

many branches. Even so, there is still the chance to ring the alarm bells and secure a rejection of the deal. If this happens, we will be well placed to force the hand of the Service Group Executive to move swiftly for a strike ballot.

In the meantime, activists need to be recruiting to Unison, as union density in many branches has fallen to dangerously low levels, and we should be preparing workmates for the prospect of a prolonged and bitter dispute that the rank and file membership must control through elected and accountable strike committees across branches and regions.

Vote Pat Kennedy in the Leicester South by-election

Workers across Britain showed last month that they are prepared to use the ballot box to protest against Labour's neoliberal and imperialist military policies. After two years of mounting mass demonstrations, which made not a blind bit of difference to Tony Blair's war plans, and stage-managed inquiries, which used more whitewash than a cricket grounds man, voting is one of the few political rights people have to show their disgust.

However, with Labour attacking the universal right to decent health and education - even pinching the Tories' slogan 'the right to choose' - the question posed in the two by-elections coming up is, who to vote for?

The by-election in Leicester South offers an example of how to answer this question. For years Leicester has suffered from cuts in education. The previously Labour-run council, under the leadership of Sir Peter Soulsby, closed six secondary schools, the replacement 'superschool', New College, replete with corporate sponsors, has been widely condemned as a failure. Soulsby became so unpopular that he lost his council seat to a liberal democrat.

Now that control has passed to a Tory-Lib Dem coalition (the result of the collapse of Labour's vote in this solidly working class city) a further wave of cuts has come crashing down. All six of the city's special needs schools, Parkfields Nursery, the only special needs nursery school in Leicester, voluntary groups, adventure playgrounds, community services, day centres ... have been closed or are threatened with closure.

The attack on special needs facilities was

particularly harsh. "Choice", it appears, is only meant for the middle classes and "gifted" children. If you're judged to be destined for casual jobs and life on the minimum wage, then no further "choices" are necessary.

In February, a mass campaign bombarded the council with demos and petitions, Unison threatened strike action, and the college lecturers walked out for four weeks; the youth themselves were heavily involved in the protests.

Faced with a by-election, where Tories, Lib Dems and Labour stand for the same neoliberal agenda, the local social forum, set up by the NUT, Natfhe and the Indian Workers Association, among others, agreed to support the candidacy of Pat Kennedy of the Save Our Schools campaign. The SWP however had other ideas - it went off to organise a Respect candidate and adopted Yvonne Ridley (see our letters page).

Ms Ridley has a history. She was a Tory journalist for the Daily Express who was held by the Taliban when she entered Afghanistan to do a story for the paper. She is a recent convert to Islam and has expressed admiration for the young fighters who rallied to the Taliban. She passed briefly through the Labour Party before finding a spiritual home in Respect. Respect proudly proclaims that they hope she will become the first 'Muslim woman MP'. Her daughter attends a private school in Cumbria, so is unlikely to be effected by local school closures. Neither Respect nor their candidates in Leicester South deserve the support of working people in this election or any other.

Workers Power is calling for a vote for Patrick Kennedy and the Save our Schools campaign. In Leicester after just one week of canvassing, Save Our Schools has collected 6,000 signatures against the closures. If this support can be converted into demonstrations, strikes, occupations - and votes - then an important victory for the children and parents of Leicester can be won.

But the campaign must also build with an eye to the future and the wider context of these attacks. Already Pat has linked the lack of funds for schools to the billions wasted on occupying Iraq, and pledged to fight all the council cuts. The election should be seen as just one part of the struggle to defend public services. It should be used to mobilise for mass lobbies, direct action and occupations in defence of threatened schools and to encourage workers across the city to organise strike action in their defence.

Most importantly, the campaign can and should see itself as part of a national fight back. Save Our Schools has already made links in Gloucester and Nottingham. But the by-election raises the need to take such struggles a stage further. Only a party - a new mass party of the working class - can take the struggle against cuts and closures further. Fighting for the resources the working class and its children need, providing a revolutionary socialist alternative to Blair's New Labour.

We urge Save Our Schools and the Leicester social forum to link their campaign to the goal of founding such a party. Vote Pat Kennedy - candidate of struggle!

Defend abortion rights!

The recent pictures of fetuses in the womb apparently yawning, crossing their hands and making walking movements has been seized on by anti-abortion groups to demand a review of the abortion laws.

The pictures were taken by Professor Stuart Campbell, an obstetrician, using 3D-4D photos in three-dimension with video animation. This enabled study of foetus movements in real time. Campbell himself has now called for a debate on the abortion laws. He can only hazard a guess at exactly what the foetus is doing, "What's behind the smile, of course, I can't say, but the corners turn up and the cheeks bulge." Campbell told the BBC last year: "I think it must be some indication of contentment in a stress-free environment."

The anti-abortion lobby, meanwhile, has decided to interpret the pictures as evidence of the "humanity" of the foetus. Of course none of these photos prove anything new. Allan Templeton, secretary of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology argued that the images themselves did not alter the question of the stages of foetal development. He commented, "The fact that he's observing these developments and physiological movements is not changing anything about the time of viability."

Instead the religious bigots of the Pro-Life Alliance have cynically used them to make people think that the movements of the foetus are the same as the conscious actions of a baby or small child.

For years these anti-abortionists have been attempting to roll back the gains that women

have won around abortion rights. We must be clear that not only should we defend the legal abortion rights won so far but we must fight to extend this by winning both the legal right for a woman to free abortion on demand up to the full term if necessary and the complete right to have access to NHS abortion clinic facilities.

Our principle is the democratic right of a woman to control her own body and therefore decide whether to go ahead with a termination or not. We do not advocate abortion as the best method of birth control, nor do we advocate 'late' abortions. These in any case are normally the result of the lamentable advice and abortion services available to women in many parts of the country. We must also fight for the right to free contraception and unbiased sex education in schools.

Of course it is the very same people in the ProLife Alliance who also do everything in their power to restrict sex education for young people or who want to make such education nothing more than religious propaganda for their reactionary morals. And of course they are the same people who howl every time that it is suggested that young women be given contraception without informing or gaining the consent of their parents. We must remember these so-called pro lifers would only be too happy for us to go back to the days when thousands of women forced to have back street abortions died from infection or by bleeding to death.

'Not the church, not the state, women must decide their fate'.

Defend a woman's right to choose!

Civil servants set to fight

At the PCS union national conference in June, the debates were dominated by issues of pay, job cuts and pensions. This is not surprising - civil servants face an unprecedented attack from Gordon Brown and the Treasury who are determined to cut tens of thousands of jobs. The PCS is a left led union, Left Unity (whose biggest component is the Socialist Party) and their allies in PCS Democrats had retained control of the NEC and the senior full time posts in the recent election strengthening the position of Mark Serwotka the general secretary.

Conference passed motions to reject the Government's Gershon Review (job cuts) and Lyons Review (a forcible relocation out of London which will impact disproportionately on ethnic minority staff). There will also be a campaign against the Ministry of Defence's aggressive privatisation plans.

One important motion called for PCS to step up its national pay campaign by taking on the Treasury over its cap on pay remits, balloting members on a national strike if the Treasury refuses to lift it. It is likely that Treasury will refuse such a demand and strike action could be early 2005 just ahead of the next General Election. The union decided to set up a national levy and a hardship fund to help members taking part in industrial action or those suspended.

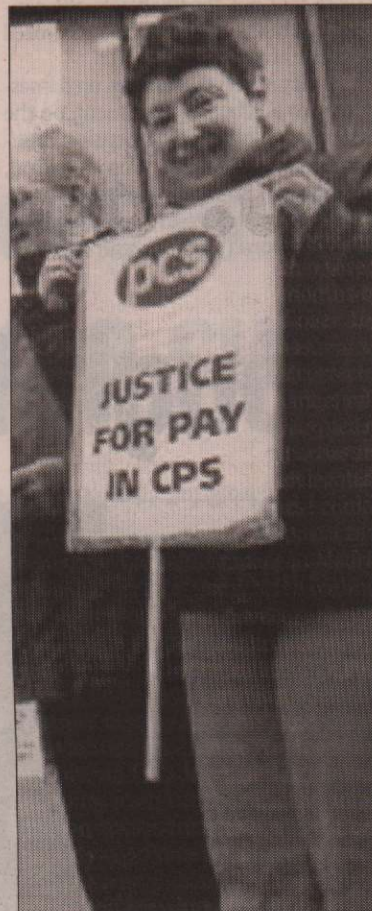
The union is also set to ballot over establishing a political fund but with the express condition that the fund will not affiliate to any political parties. The rationale for this was that ordinary members would not

vote "yes" if they thought their money would go to the mainstream political parties they are so disillusioned with. The disillusion and hatred of Labour and Blair was marked and the debate with remarks like "I don't want a penny of my subs going to a party that's going to put me out a job".

But this is a big mistake, gone along with by most of the left which runs the PCS leadership. Union members need political parties to fight for the interests of working people both inside and outside parliament. What is clearly absent is a working class political alternative to Blair's LP - a new workers party - one that can rally workers under attack, like the civil servants, to a socialist alternative to Labour. To plump instead for 'a plague on all your houses' position plays to the ideas of apolitical trade unionism, where workers get on with their industrial struggles while leaving 'politics' to someone else.

Then conference passed resolutions committing PCS to form links with burgeoning Iraqi trade unions, condemning the occupation of Iraq and supporting a Palestinian state.

The PCS has shown considerable growth in the last period, to 310,000 members (up 18,000 in one year), undoubtedly because it has been willing to mobilise industrial action against government cuts. It faces huge challenges in the period ahead. The Government will announce its Spending Review plans on 12 July which will signify further Civil Service job cuts as Treasury seeks to cut departmental budgets. DWP has



already announced it is closing 550 benefit sites across the UK and 10 pension centres. The NEC so far has been found wanting in its strategy over the pay disputes, delegating responsibility to the various bargaining units. Any national campaign will have to be run democratically on the basis that no-one settles unless we all settle.

Programme of the League for the Fifth International - £1.50 € 2.50



All history proves that the capitalists will never relinquish their property peacefully - to claim otherwise in the age of 'Shock and Awe' is either hopeless naivety or wilful deception. There is only one way: their apparatus of state repression must be overthrown by force. The capitalists' monopoly of military power - armies, police and security forces, prison systems, civil servants, judiciaries - must be smashed to pieces and replaced with the rule of the working people themselves.

This can be done - the majority of humanity can cast off the tiny minority of parasites. It will take mass organisation, an unambiguous strategy and, when the hour strikes, courageous and ruthless action.

Some may balk at this, but the alternative to revolution is not decades of undisturbed peace. Basing a global civilisation on the empowerment of a few thousand and the impoverishment of six billion is like lodging depth charges in the planetary core. If the logic of capitalism is left to unfold, our world will be torn apart by starvation, disease, poverty, environmental catastrophe, and war.

In the struggle against capitalism, greater energy is equivalent to greater humanity. For with the suppression of our exploiters and an end to the tyranny of profit, human history can truly begin.

British section of The League for the Fifth International **workers power**

Home 2004/04/26

FOR A MASS NEW WORKERS' PARTY

The desire for a new mass working class and socialist party has grown in each of the seven years that Labour has been in office. And it is no wonder.

The most right wing leadership of Labour ever, the clique around Blair, has betrayed the hopes of millions who thought that the election of a Labour government in 1997 would see an end to the decades of attacks on the working class and the beginning of a more equal society.

Instead Britain has become more unequal than ever. And attacks have rained down on workers here and abroad. Privatisation has been extended to sectors that even the Tories left in public hands. Higher education is being turned into a

- Go online to our newly designed website
- Sign up to our call for a new workers party
- All the latest articles from Workers Power newspaper
- Articles on struggles around the world and links

www.workerspower.com

After the June elections: what is left of Labour?

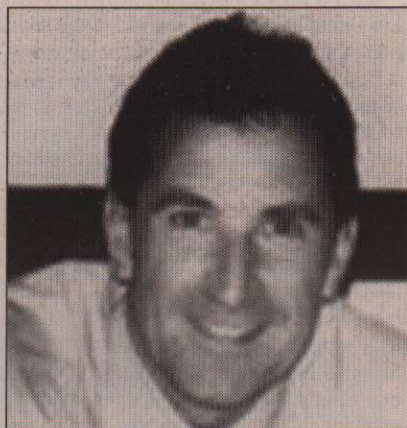
By Stuart King

The reverberations of the dramatic defeat for Labour in the June European and local elections will be felt for some time. Rarely has a ruling party done so badly in a set of elections, coming third in the share of the popular vote – 26 per cent in the local elections and 23 per cent in the Euro's, losing more than 450 councillors and major Labour heartland municipalities like Newcastle, Leeds Trafford and Doncaster.

With hundreds of displaced councillors and many Labour MPs wondering if they can save their seats it is not surprising that there is a round of soul searching going on within Labour and its affiliated trade unions. The reasons for the mass defections from Labour were obvious to even the most thick-skulled Labour loyalist – “it was the war stupid” – came the cry from Labour's councillors and canvassers. Blair had dragged a reluctant country to war on the coat-tails of George Bush; his “reasons” and “intelligence” revealed as a pack of lies within weeks of the conflict.

Former Labour voters turned out to show their disgust – voting for anyone but Labour, or stayed at home in disgust. Only in some areas, where there was a real threat from the fascist BNP, or in Scotland and Wales where the Labour parties have spent their time distancing themselves from the worst policies of Blairism, did the party do less badly (in Wales its vote even went up).

Blair, the great vote winner for the party, the darling of middle England is damaged goods. For Labour voters and trade unionists the war has become the lightning rod for all their disgust with New Labour. Its deeply unpopular policies of privatisation in the public services, its elitist approach to



Hayes, Rix and Simpson. Little agreement on the way forward for the Labour left

education, its attacks on trade unionists like the firefighters, its student fees, its support for deregulation and neo-liberal globalisation, its legion of anti-working class policies – will no longer be tolerated. The questions being asked in the party and by its trade union supporters are “How can Blair be got rid of? Who will replace him? And can it be done without splitting the party and letting the Tories in?”

Some answers to these questions might have been expected to come out of the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee that met at Congress House in early July, but they didn't.

The LRC aims to “give socialists within the Labour Party an organised, consistent and coherent voice within the party.” At its founding conference, Socialist Campaign group luminaries like Alan Simpson, John McDonnell and Christine Shawcroft joined hands with Mick Rix, ex-general secretary of Aslef, and Billy Hayes, general secretary of the CWU, to rally the faithful to the perspective of a third term Labour government “committed to radical policies”. Unfortunately “the faithful” were few in number –

300 turned up to a conference a year in the planning.

Mick Rix set the tone with his opening remarks. The aim was not to reclaim the party but to “rebuild the party as a socialist party”. He wanted to bring “all strands” of opposition to Blair under one umbrella and “debate policy”. The aim should be to “reach out to those on the left who felt disenfranchised” including those who had left the Labour Party.

The conference then proceeded to do everything but debate policy. Worthy speeches, from Jim Mortimer, Tony Benn, Michael Meacher, Jeremy Corbyn on the crimes of Blairism came and went. They were supposedly directed to 46 pages of policy papers that were sent out shortly before the conference but nothing, of course, was voted on let alone amended.

The policy papers themselves, on domestic policy for a Labour government, on the environment, globalisation, pensions public services, health, education, housing, transport, civil liberties, war and so on – were the sort of left reformist policies to be expected from the Campaign Group of

MPs. They called for the end to privatisation, taking of some major utilities like the railways back into public ownership, more housebuilding, better pensions and public services, the abolition of Foundation Hospitals, restoration of grants, withdrawal from Iraq and so on.

Completely missing of course was any idea of what working class action would be needed to win these demands. Nor was there any mention of workers control. The proposed policies remained at the level of “good ideas” for a radical Labour government without any thought as to how they would be paid for; let alone any consideration of what the capitalists would do in reply if they were asked to foot the bill through massive taxation and expropriation of their wealth. These things are left unsaid because they raise awkward questions about the capitalists power to sabotage and even remove “left governments”, a power that needs the armed masses to prevent and perspective of smashing the capitalists state machine itself.

Alan Simpson replying to the home policy debate declared of the new Labour government that “The only trains that ran on

time are the gravy trains”. Something he should know about as he was still wearing the tan he gained in Portugal courtesy of an all expenses paid McDonald's sponsored trip to the Euro 2004 football championships! He “was comfortable” with the documents, which he saw “as a process” rather than going into too many details.

But it was quite clear that the purpose of the day was not to discuss policy but rather to discuss how to rally the left in the face of the debacle of the June elections. In this the LRC faces real problems. Not only are its forces in the party pitifully small but the big four unions, Amicus, TGWU, Unison and GMB, have made clear they won't be joining – preferring to put their efforts and criticisms of Labour policy through the Trade Union Labour Organisation (a top down organisation for full-time bureaucrats only).

Even Mick Rix's umbrella idea did not go down well with Billy Hayes of the CWU. Fresh from his victory over his Scottish branches, who wanted the right to support the Scottish Socialist Party, he declared the LRC had to be tough with those like the FBU who had disaffiliated from the LP and argue against them. There would be no break to the left from Labour, he said pointing to the 1.8 per cent vote for Respect to back up his argument.

This led an RMT delegate to point out that far from disaffiliating the RMT had been disaffiliated from Labour against party rules without right of appeal. Indeed the RMT, he said, was the only union that actually voted to support the LRC formally at its conference the week before.

Whether the LRC will amount to anything in the Labour Party remains to be seen but it offers no way forward to workers fighting Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's New Labourism – inside or outside the Labour Party.

BNP – no breakthrough but a real threat

By Christine West

The BNP failed to win its hoped for breakthrough in the Euro and council elections. It did not win a single MEP and only slightly increased its overall number of council seats from 16 to 21. However, it did get the highest ever vote for a fascist party in Britain with 808,200 votes in the European election, just under 5 per cent of the national poll. It also won 4 council seats in Bradford and 3 in Epping Forest.

These results underline the need for a militant antifascist trade union and community campaign to smash the BNP, to campaign against racism and to raise socialist solutions to poverty and cutbacks on rundown estates that provide fertile ground for the fascists to grow.

A major reason for the BNP's failure to make a breakthrough was that UKIP stole much of its thunder by picking up some of the racist vote. However, campaigning by Unite Against Fascism and local groups has clearly made a difference as well, as can be seen from increased turnouts where active leafleting campaigns were pursued. For

example, the BNP's percentage share of the vote fell 22.9 per cent to 16.6 per cent in the North West council elections and there were slight swings to Labour where the fear of BNP was highest. In Oldham, targeted by the BNP over the last few years, turnout was up from 38 per cent to 44 per cent and the BNP failed to win any seats (however they still polled a very worrying 18.6 per cent of votes) and they lost a seat in Burnley, a former stronghold.

Despite the undoubted effect of the antifascist campaign, relying on the passive ‘vote anything but BNP’ electoral tactics of Unite Against Fascism is woefully inadequate. The hundreds of thousands of votes for the BNP and the UKIP and the high levels of abstention show the dangers of disillusion with the betrayals of New Labour being channelled into ‘anti-establishment’ right wing and populist parties. With over half the votes in the Euro elections cast for the right wing in the form of the Tories, UKIP or the BNP the need for a new working class party couldn't be more sharply posed.

Where the BNP have won seats it is essential to fight for a campaign of non-cooperation with the BNP councillors.



BNP picket National Union of Journalists' headquarters earlier this year

We need the labour movement to unite with Black and Asian communities to organise self-defence to stop the BNP in their tracks. We need to drive them out the council chambers and to stop them from mobilising in meetings and on the street to win new recruits for their campaigns of fascist intimidation against minorities. It is because of this street fascism of violent racism that we must deny the BNP any platform. This

means:

- Mobilising all antifascists, antiracists, workers and youth on the streets against the BNP.
- Trade unionists working for the council refusing to co-operate with them.
- Disrupting their attempts to use the council chamber to spread their poison.
- Refusing them the use of any council facilities – and imposing this by direct action.

- Breaking up their meetings, rallies, paper sales and demos – no platform for fascists.
- Organising self-defence through democratically elected community defence patrols in areas targeted by fascists.
- Demanding the TUC and national trade unions organise huge antiracist demonstrations and carnivals where the fascists are strongest, and defying any police bans on such events.

The protests in Manchester, which gained national TV coverage, and scuppered Le Pen's attempt at an orderly launch the BNP's North West campaign show the way forward.

It is essential that up and down the country meetings be convened to start a grassroots campaign for a workers' action programme to tackle racism and poverty. Such a campaign can help lay the basis of a new party of the working class. Now is a time of urgency. The thousands of tireless antifascist campaigners and the tens of millions who didn't vote for the BNP must come forward in one voice to say:

- Smash the BNP!
- Against racism!
- For working class unity in the face of fascism!



Respect: working class party or opportunist lash up?

Is Respect the working class alternative to Blair ...

Comrades,

There has not been a moment in this century or most of the last one when the call for a new workers' party could not have been raised. It is an eternal propaganda demand. It is also a convenient way of closing yourself off from the real world as the Socialist Party so well demonstrates.

We also can agree on some of the things that would be a requirement for it to come into being. First among these would be a mass movement. Next would be large numbers of youth and workers radicalising to the left of Labour. A rejection of imperialism would be welcome. Having a real base of support among sections of the working class is also necessary.

Respect meets all these criteria. Without the anti-war movement it would not exist. From every one of its platforms you hear an uncompromising rejection of British imperialism. This is a new thing in the British working class movement. The votes that it received in east London (in Tower Hamlets it beat Labour and in Newham it came second), parts of Birmingham and Preston show that in some areas it became a mass force in less than six months.

The vast majority of its voters are working class. Many of them are Muslims. Large numbers of Muslims continued to vote for

Labour and the Liberals. It was evident at polling stations that Respect was the party of choice for the majority of Muslim youth in these areas. They chose an explicitly secular organisation with local leaderships and activists who have long-established records as socialists.

There was no sleight of hand either. The Respect newspaper in east London had originally been commissioned for the Socialist Alliance. The only changes to it were the addition of some new text and photos. It openly supported the rights of gays and lesbians, women's rights and defended asylum seekers. Publicity from Respect's national office was unambiguous in its support of asylum seekers. How many Labour candidates could make the same statement truthfully?

Respect's electoral success means that the momentum towards becoming a functioning party with a mass membership is almost unstoppable. Several supporters of Workers Power have an opportunity to see this first hand. If readers of this paper want to help create a new anticapitalist, anti-imperialist workers, party they should join Respect.

Liam Mac Uaid
London

...No it's not. Respect is on its way to becoming a cult

Dear Comrades

Despite Respect having won around 20 per cent of the vote in Leicester South during the European elections, fewer than 20 people turned up for the meeting to select a candidate for the forthcoming by-election in the constituency. Among them were John Rees, George Galloway, Lindsey German, a *Socialist Worker* reporter and members from as far afield as Chesterfield and Milton Keynes. Although it was reported as a "constituency party" meeting a show of hands revealed that I was the only member who actually lived in the constituency! And a very recent member at that!

I joined Respect at the beginning of the meeting in the hope that progressive forces in the city could unite around a single "candidate of struggle". There had been a meeting of trade union and political activists the previous night where there had been general agreement (excluding the Respect/SWP representative) to back the campaign of Patrick Kennedy from the Save Our Schools campaign. The Respect/SWP member had said that Respect was unlikely to stand down but agreed, however, with Pat's suggestion that he should address

the following night's Respect selection meeting and seek support.

At the Respect meeting George Galloway commended the candidacy of former *Daily Express* journalist Yvonne Ridley saying it was important to have a "media-savvy" candidate and pointing out that she had converted to Islam following her imprisonment by the Taliban. Unfortunately, Yvonne was out of the country and was unable to attend the meeting. I proposed Pat as the Respect candidate and he addressed the meeting. There was a short discussion. A vote was taken. Pat got one vote and Yvonne was selected. All very civilised. So far.

It was at that point that some SWP members lost self-control. One shouted at me "Are you a member of Respect?" My reply of "yes" was countered by Lindsey German's "We'll see about that!" She then repeatedly shouted in my face "Did you vote for Respect? You didn't, did you?" I expect the one non-member present was even more shocked by this behaviour than I was.

The meeting eventually continued with the practicalities of premises, leaflets, bussing in supporters, finding local activists to do the canvassing and (George's sug-

gestion) getting a Christian cleric to nominate Yvonne.

Sadly, the SWP's seething sectarianism burst forth again at the end of the meeting. "Wrecker!" shouted one in my face, presumably for having dared to suggest a candidate other than the one anointed by guru Galloway. Others demanded an immediate commitment from me to canvass for Ridley and one SWPer told me that this was "a minimum requirement for membership of Respect".

What is Respect? It certainly appears to have little in the way of internal democratic structures such as branches, and the infantile response to alternative ideas belies its claim to be a "unity coalition". In fact it gives every appearance of developing into a cult.

SWP members need to think long and hard about what they are doing in this project. The crying need of the moment is to build a new Workers Party. I sincerely hope that SWP comrades will give serious consideration to how they can work with others on the left to achieve that.

Yours in comradeship,
Bernard Harper,
Leicester

Livingstone: 'I would rather be a scab...'

Dear comrades

The recent tube strike in London resulted in one of the more disgusting episodes of Ken Livingstone's political career. He declared on the eve of the strike that the management pay offer was so good that there was no need for the strike and that if he was a member of the RMT he would cross the picket lines and go to work.

Fortunately, the RMT tube workers have a better idea of class solidarity and union principles than "left" leader Livingstone and the strike was virtually solid in closing down the tubes that day.

Now Livingstone knows a thing or two about good pay. For his coterie of advisers at City Hall he has just insisted of upping their pay to £111,000 a year because they have "so much work to do". Bob Kiley his transport supremo is on hundreds of thousands a year and has a million plus house thrown in.

His actions are a kick in the teeth, particularly for Bob Crow, the leader of the RMT.

Crow has been a long time supporter of Livingstone and a fortnight before the mayoral elections sent out a circular reminding RMT members in London to vote for Livingstone. Crow even went so far as to personally sabotage a planned strike for 10 June election day in London because it might have threatened Livingstone's electoral chances!

RMT members should learn the lessons from this. Labour leaders, even so called "left" ones cannot be trusted once they are put in power. Without control and a democratic system whereby workers representatives are recallable by those who put them in office, left fakers like Livingstone will continue to sell out their supporters.

I suggest that every time Livingstone appears on a Labour movement platform in future trade unionists and socialists should deliver a hearty rendition of the old labour movement song "I'd rather be a picket than a scab" and drown him out.

Jane Connor
London

Revolution youth in Leicester

Dear Workers Power,

I'm writing as part of Revolution, the socialist youth group. I am part of the Leicester branch and I'm writing to let the members of Workers Power and its supporters know what we are up to.

Leicester is a mid-sized, industrial, Midlands town, with a huge diversity in ethnicity. It is predicted within the next few years that white British people will become an ethnic minority in the city. That's great for the left, as it means that we can build up support and class-consciousness within these greatly oppressed communities.

For Revo specifically, it means that we can build up a base among the increasingly-politicised youth that are popping up in Leicester, angry at the imperialist wars and the general carnage that capitalism creates. Within these circles of urban, ethnic youth, we've been able to give clear solution to these problems - global socialist revolution.

Revo in Leicester first started off with me and a friend finding out about the group through browsing the internet. Soon, being disheartened by the politics and structure of the SWP, I decided to sever ties with them and join a vibrant and independent youth organisation. This was the first step, of many, that has left Leicester as it is now.

Walking through the town centre, one cannot fail to spot the abundance of Revolution stickers stuck on tactical locations, such as telephone boxes and lamp-posts. One also, on a Saturday or during the school

holidays, cannot miss the congregation of youth around the city's central area, the Clock Tower. These are not youth "hanging about" as the media portrays them. This is something different. What is witnessed now are youths handing out fliers for upcoming rallies and demonstrations. Youths with clipboards in their hands, collecting signatures to release our comrade, Mario Bango, from imprisonment in Slovakia. One sees politicised youth, deeply aggravated at the current system, engaging in political discussions with members of the public and their friends.

The link between Workers Power and Revolution is very important. In Leicester, without the generous help, answering-of-questions and the financial support of Workers Power members and supports, I feel that our local group would have a very different character. Without the use of Worker's Power's facilities to produce our leaflets and magazine, we would be hard-pressed to find cheap and practical printers.

I write, therefore, to extend my thanks and solidarity with the Workers Power membership and its readers. Revolution, in Leicester, has physically shown support, with the NATFHE strike in the city's colleges during the early part of the year, to joining Workers Power on demonstrations and rallies to stop further spending-cuts by our Tory/Lib-Dem council.

Comradely greetings,
Rajjie,
Leicester Revolution

European Social Forum: turn to action

The ESF website says: "The ESF is a unique opportunity where social movements, trade unions, NGOs, refugees, peace and anti-imperialist groups, anti-racist movements, environmental movements, networks of the excluded and community campaigns from Europe and the world can come together to discuss how to achieve global social justice for all and debate ways of making 'another world possible'." Dave Stockton explains why the ESF must be more than this and must seize the opportunity to co-ordinate action across Europe.

The European Social Forum will meet in London from the 14 to 17 October at a challenging time for the trade union, antiwar and anticapitalist movements. The recent European Elections have delivered a massive rebuff to most of the governing parties of Europe. In Britain, Labour suffered a pasting principally because of Blair's intransigent support for the war and occupation of Iraq. In Germany, the SPD lost a large number of its traditional voters because of Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010 policy. In France millions said no to the right-wing Chirac/Raffarin government and in Italy Berlusconi saw his vote plummet as a result both of his enthusiastic support for Bush and Blair as well as its attack on pensions.

A number of left, anticapitalist and socialist organisations attempted to provide an alternative to the bosses parties in the elections. Yet few made any serious gains. Indeed in France the list of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and Lutte Ouvrière saw its vote halved since the regional elections in March. In Britain Respect, a creation of the SWP, gained only 1.5 per cent of the vote. The anticapitalist movement was born out of mass action – on the streets in the City of London (J18), in Prague, in Genoa. Unfortunately 2003-4 saw a powerful tendency to sacrifice mobilisation against war and the neoliberal offensive to the pursuit of votes amongst large sections of the anti capitalist movement.

What the movement needs now is a return to mass action on the streets of Europe. By giving no support to the governments of the capitalists with their armies, judiciary and police. Our movement has brought the summits of the capitalist leaders to a stand still, besieging them as they carved up a world that was not theirs



The ESF called out millions onto the street to protest against the war

to carve up. Last year, we brought millions onto the streets across the world on 15 February in protest against the drive to war by America and Britain. In Italy, Germany and France a "hot June" of mass strikes challenged the social cuts offensive by Europe's governments

At the ESF and the World Social Forum tens of thousands have gathered to debate the way forward and create continental networks of activists. Our movement's status as "the second superpower" has been acknowledged by our enemies. But we must not rest on our laurels. The antiwar mobilisations this year have been weak. Except in Germany, the day of action against the EU's attack on our social rights was feeble.

Yet events across Europe are moving

quickly. The attacks on public services, pensions and workers rights is speeding up and the imperialist ambitions of Europe's powers in their various forms all mean that we must step up the action NOW. The social movements – above all the trade unions – must not react passively to these attacks but lead mass action against them on the streets and in the workplaces to defeat them. But to do this a new political force is needed armed with a new programme for action.

At the ESF it is the Assembly of Social Movements which holds the key to action. In 2002, in Florence, it was this Assembly that called the millions onto the streets against war and it is vital that in London in October this same Assembly produces a declaration that ignites mass action on

the streets of Europe against neo-liberalism, war and racism.

It is vital too that it gives a call to build social forums, assemblies or action councils – the name does not matter – in every town and city to organise and coordinate our struggles. Delegates from the trade unions and workplaces, the immigrant communities, women's and youth organisations can thrash out policy and plan mass action.

We need a real plan of action to take this struggle forward. This means a return to the mass besieging of the meetings of the leaders of the capitalist world. In particular, the G8 will meet in 2005 in Europe's home of neo-liberalism – Britain. We must aim to shut down this meeting of the world's biggest thieves. We must fight hard against the imposition of a pro-capitalist European Constitution and relaunch movement based on action to end the occupation of Iraq.

The League for the Fifth International proposed to the ESF preparatory gathering that met in Berlin in June that we need a campaign to get young people and trade union militants and other activists of all sorts to the ESF in London and to the Assembly of the Social Movements. One enormous step forward would be if the ESF provides the space and facilities (venue at the Alexandra Palace and with simultaneous translation) for a Youth Assembly. This should enable young people, who overwhelmingly make up the mass of demonstrators or the audience at the Social Forums, to speak out and offer a revolutionary lead to the whole movement.

To give the entire event a focus and an outcome the Assembly of the Social Movements urgently needs to develop a method for making decisions. Throughout the ESF itself an ASM co-ordination, open to representatives of all participating organisa-

tions, should meet daily at the central venue, Alexandra Palace, just as one did every day in Florence at the Fortezza da Basso.

The aim of this co-ordination should be to enable the assemblies of women and youth, the big plenaries, the seminars, workshops and even fringe events, to submit proposals to include in a final draft resolution and calendar of mobilisations for 2005. If the co-ordination is not able to come to a consensus then different proposals should be debated openly at the Assembly of Social Movements on the Sunday morning where a decision should be made democratically, i.e. by voting.

We believe that if the ESF and the Assembly does not take such steps now the anti-capitalist movement that has achieved so much in such a short space of time will degenerate into a mere talking shop. The London ESF preparation has already been subject to far too much bureaucratic domination by the GLA and TUC who want a policy forum for the British Trade Union bureaucracy and a nice "event" that will make Ken Livingstone – London Mayor – look a bit radical.

This is certainly not what we want. We want a fighting movement. A movement that seeks to launch a new political force – a party; a party we want to be the Fifth International – a new world party of social revolution.

ESF websites

To get more information about the coming ESF in London visit the websites below:
www.fse-esf.org
www.esf-democracy.org

A lesson in how history repeats itself

Marshall Somerset reviews the film: *The Fog of War: 11 lessons from the life of Robert S MacNamara*

"Military commanders may make mistakes. 10, 100, 100,000 people may die because of the mistakes. But the key is to learn from them: make two, three, even four, but don't make five or six. But with nuclear weapons there is only one mistake. Make that and civilisation destroys itself."

Robert S MacNamara was US defence secretary from 1961 to 1968. He served under two Presidents, Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Thus he was in power during the Cuban missile crisis and during the slide into fullscale war in Vietnam. Errol Morris's film is part documentary, part validation of his life; MacNamara, now in his eighties, looks to the camera and gives his side of the story of some of the major events of the post war period.

As with most people looking back on their lives there are embellishments, backsliding and blame shifting. The difference is that most people have not been responsible in part for the deaths of hundreds of thousands, if not millions.

MacNamara tells Errol Morris that he was central to formulating the strategy of fire bombing the timber-built Japanese cities. On film we see pictures of destroyed cities overlaid by the numbers killed in each of the 20 or more cities bombed. The raids destroyed on average more than 50 per cent of each city bombed.

There is some debate about the role of MacNamara in this. The plan is likely to have

been the work of its enthusiastic enforcer airforce General Curtis LeMay, a man even MacNamara considers to be a psychotic killer. But irrespective of the doubts, we can agree with MacNamara when he says that if the allies had lost the war then undoubtedly he and LeMay "would have been tried for war crimes".

After the war, MacNamara went into business for the Ford Motor Company where, by his own modest account, he rose to be the most highly paid executive in the world by the early 1960s. In 1962 he was lured to Washington, to be part of Kennedy's fabled Camelot as defence secretary.

His baptism of fire was the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is here that MacNamara supposedly learned one of his 11 lessons: the skill of empathising with his enemy. A lesson he was to completely forget during the Vietnam war.

In October 1963, there were already 16,000 US military "advisers" in Vietnam. MacNamara claims that both he and Kennedy wanted to get them out within two years. But in the very same month the South Vietnamese leader and Kennedy himself were assassinated. It is the only time on film where we see MacNamara genuinely sorrowful for a death, not that of thousands of US soldiers in Vietnam, not the hundreds of thousands Japanese bombed nor the 3.4 million Vietnamese killed but one US President.

By 1964, policy is drifting and more advisers were going in to shore up the South Vietnamese puppet regime. In February,

MacNamara was to make an important foreign policy statement that would have not mentioned Vietnam, which was still being kept out of the newspapers. President Johnson called him to make amendments, specifically to talk about the domino theory: the idea that if South Vietnam fell then the whole of south east Asia would also fall to the Communists. MacNamara protested but still made the "domino" speech and so in the minds of the US people Vietnam was part of the Cold War. At the beginning of the next year 25,000 marines went in, in MacNamara's words, "to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people" and to "keep South Vietnamese secure". An antiwar movement began to take shape but MacNamara in the film still defends the policy: "The United States of America fought in Vietnam for eight years for what it believed to be good and honest reasons: to protect our security, prevent the spread of totalitarian communism, and promote individual freedom and political democracy."

But in the film he begins to distance himself from the war and even goes into self critical mode where he identifies his own failure in stopping it. He and other supposedly pro-peace advisers failed "through ignorance, inattention,

flawed thinking, political expediency, and lack of courage."

However, the real reason is not his or anyone else's lack of courage. Rather it is clear that he lacked "empathy", a trait with which he claims to have prevented a nuclear war over the Cuban Missile crisis. Perhaps the fact that Soviet missiles could have destroyed Baltimore, Los Angeles and Washington aided this empathy. Because the Vietnamese could not he simply could not understand what they were fighting for.

In the 1980s he actually met his Vietnamese political opposite from the 1960s who told him: "You thought we were in league with the Chinese and the Russians. But we had fought the Chinese for hundreds of years. We were fighting for our independence." The Vietnamese saw the war as a war against a colonial power – it was this that MacNamara and the US government could not afford to empathise with even if they had wanted to.

There is a twelfth lesson, one that MacNamara doesn't dare to mention but it is the most relevant one for today. How the US, as a global superpower overstretched itself, militarily and economically against a far weaker opponent: how it got bogged down in Vietnam and had eventually had to cut and run in the most humiliating defeat a superpower ever suffered. Who says history never repeats itself?

The Socialist Workers Party and the fight to build an alternative to Labour

The slide to the right

For five years, discontent with the Labour Party of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown has grown. In those same five years, the opportunity to rally thousands of workers and militant youth to a political alternative to Labour has grown, too.

The scale of the movement against Bush and Blair's war on Iraq is the clearest example of this. Millions marched against this war. Blair is now one of the most widely distrusted political leaders in the world.

Opposition to him grew on other fronts too. His daily sermons on the bountiful nature of free-market capitalism have been matched by policies designed to eradicate hard-won gains of the working class. From the destruction of free higher education through tuition fees to the creation of a marketised NHS via foundation hospitals, Blair's "reforms" have outraged countless working-class Labour supporters.

This outrage manifested itself in the recent local elections when many Labour voters and activists went on strike and the party suffered its worst election defeat for decades. Hatred of war and privatisation prompted this spectacular collapse.

Even more significantly, the very foundations of Labour's base in the unions have started to crumble. The rail union - the RMT - was expelled from the party because it defied the decision of several of its Scottish branches to give money and support to the Scottish Socialist Party instead of Labour.

Other unions have slashed their donations to the party under the pressure of angry members. And last month the firefighters' union - the FBU - the butt of Labour's anti-union offensive during its long-running dispute with the fire bosses, voted overwhelmingly to disaffiliate from the party.

Even Amicus leader - Derek Simpson - loyal to the party if not to Blair, when he circulated his union's 1.1 million members urging them to back Labour in local and European elections, received a nasty shock. According to the *Guardian* "he received a flood of vituperative telephone calls, letters and emails from his members, swamping the union's central London headquarters". So even loyal Derek felt obliged to say publicly: "If Tony Blair's not for turning, then we'll have to turn him out."

Each of these developments - if they are to be turned into political advances for the working class - need to be seized upon by revolutionary socialists in order to take forward the building of a political alternative to Labour. With so many workers and anti-capitalist youth openly breaking from Labour,

the most effective way to achieve this is to create a new mass working-class party. Such a party could rally many thousands to its banner.

Such a party could be won to a revolutionary programme, providing that revolutionaries fight for one and seek to demonstrate in practice to those who do not yet agree with them that it provides the best and most effective means of fighting capitalism. Even if a new workers party did not embrace such a programme from the outset, providing it was open, democratic, inclusive, and solidly working class, it would represent a big step forward and provide the opportunity for the serious development of revolutionary forces.

Yet, in the course of the past four years the largest organisation on the British left, the Socialist Workers Party, has thwarted every attempt to develop this fight. It appeared to have agreed on it when the SWP joined the Socialist Alliance in late 1999 and threw itself into the subsequent London (2000) and general (2001) elections. In both cases, however, it then acted as the main brake on the development of the Socialist Alliance towards an alternative party and towards a revolutionary programme.

By 2003 the SWP decided to impose a bureaucratic stranglehold on the Socialist Alliance. This was aimed at silencing those voices in the alliance (such as Workers Power) who fought to win it to revolutionary politics or who disagreed with the SWP's cynical treatment of the organisation as an exclusively electoral front.

The goal of this bureaucratism was to clear the way for the dissolution of the Socialist Alliance and the creation of a new non-class based electoral front. At the start of 2004, the SWP got its way. Respect was founded in alliance with George Galloway, the anti-war Labour MP expelled from the party by Blair, and a handful of union and "socialist" celebrities.

The SWP, in four years, had gone from blocking the Socialist Alliance from adopting revolutionary policies to liquidating it in favour of an explicitly non-class, populist electoral machine.

In doing this the SWP - along with their allies in the International Socialist Group (ISG) - have seriously set back the possibility of forging a new workers party. They have spread distrust and disillusion amongst countless activists who had rallied to the fight for a socialist alternative. They have misled many more from the anti-war movement by putting that movement on a back burner at the point where it needed to become a mass anti-occupation movement.

Over the next four pages, Mark Hoskisson asks how did this happen?



How it began: the SWP and the Socialist Alliance

At the turn of the century the Socialist Workers Party made a turn to electoral work. It didn't dare risk standing in its own name on a revolutionary programme for fear of pathetic results. It was convinced that success could only come if it stood on a left reformist platform. For this it needed an excuse.

To resolve this dilemma it joined the London Socialist Alliance. Here was a ready-made organisation that could be used as an electoral front. The Socialist Party and a number of other groups and individuals had already founded the organisation on a left reformist programme and it had long experience of contesting elections, something the SWP totally lacked.

When Ken Livingstone was kicked out of the Labour Party for announcing he would stand as an independent in the election for London mayor, things seemed just right for a left-of-Labour challenge in the London Assembly elections.

The SWP piled in, mobilising full-timers and their print shop to boost the campaign. They were obliged to pay some respect to the democratic traditions of the Socialist Alliance - tolerance of different points of view, open debate, resolutions and conferences. But this was a price worth paying for their eventual takeover of the organisation.

From very early on the SWP was determined to make sure the alliance served them as an electoral front. It would not be allowed to develop towards becoming a vibrant, growing party formation, still less one that could be won to a revolutionary programme. It was, to use their term, "a united front of a special kind".

A reasonable showing in the London elections convinced the SWP's key leaders, especially John Rees, that the Socialist Alliance should go national for the general election. The campaign began to make some headway. Liz Davies, a former Labour NEC member, joined the alliance along with some prominent rank and file trade union militants, notably in the FBU.

Workers Power was fully engaged with the Socialist Alliance in this period, joining and building branches across the country and serving on the alliance's leading committees. A Workers Power member was the Socialist Alliance's national trade union officer for two years and played a leading role in organising the biggest Socialist Alliance event ever - the 2002 trade union conference to organise a campaign to democratise the unions' political funds. Another member was a candidate in the London Assembly elections and yet another a candidate in the 2001 general election. Everywhere our members served as organisers in the push to ensure that voters had an opportunity to vote for something other than New Labour.

Workers Power said openly from the outset that the Alliance should rally wider forces to a revolutionary alternative to Blair. When the organisation debated its policies, we advanced clear revolutionary demands to take to the electorate. We also emphasised that it was vital to take the alliance beyond electioneering. We argued that to sink deep roots in working class communities the Alliance needed to move towards becoming a party. Failure to do this would result in workers distrusting an organisation that was here today, to grab your vote, and gone tomorrow

when the polling booths closed.

On these two issues we clashed with the SWP. Their goal was to keep the alliance as a left reformist halfway house and to stop it becoming any sort of party, which might rival their own party status. In other words they combined a deeply opportunist policy with a sectarian one.

In "Anti-capitalism, reformism and socialism" (*International Socialism* No.90), John Rees justified the SWP's decision to limit the programme of the Socialist Alliance to left reformism.

Rees argued that, when using the tactic of the united front, it was "through joint struggle that the differences between revolutionaries and reformists become apparent to reformist workers". True! But, he added this should not be "because revolutionaries differentiate themselves or counterpose themselves to the reformists inside the united front." False! The principles of the united front require both unity in action and counterposition of fundamental principles and programmes. In Trotsky's words, "no confusion of banners: march separately but strike together". This whole approach is a sealed book to Rees - though the addition of the phrase "of a special type" to the united front indicates at least a bad conscience.

Far from counterposing anything to reformists, the SWP became the main advocates of a reformist programme in the alliance in the belief that only this could attract workers breaking from Labour. Of course, revolutionaries strive to be the best and most consistent fighters in a united front however limited and partial the goal.

Continued overleaf...

The SWP and the fight to build an alternative to Labour

Continued from page 7...

But such joint struggle is not an end in itself. It can win revolutionaries a hearing among masses of workers, but this begs the question – a hearing for what? For us, it is a hearing for relevant, practical revolutionary politics – demands, terms of organisation and goals of struggle that go beyond the united front aims. We are to convince people that we are right we need to argue for and explain such further demands and goals.

Moreover, it means that we openly criticise the limitations of those we are uniting with when – as always happens – reformists try to put a brake on the struggle. All of this gets junked by Rees.

Our revolutionary stance does not mean we counterpose revolutionary goals to limited agreements for struggle. If all we can agree on is a minimum basis for immediate action, so be it. But especially when we are talking about forming a new political organisation that stands at national and local elections, then what at issue is a major strategy, what can solve all the major problems facing the working class?

Here revolutionaries simply have different answers to reformists. We cannot split the difference, let alone simply accept their solutions. Real revolutionaries can only debate out the alternatives in an honest and comradely manner and leave the workers themselves to decide freely and democratically what they want. If we do not even try to convince them, then we are saying in advance that it is impossible to win reformist workers to bolder and more revolutionary goals here and now. In which case, revolutionary socialism is not a practical political objective: it is a utopia.

And there's the nub of the question. The SWP leaders, socialism is not actually on the agenda. Reforms are. So the SWP decided that the only way to construct an electoral alliance with those coming from Labour was to restrict the focus for consistent socialist (revolutionary) positions. At the Socialist Alliance's policy conference in 2001, the SWP majority voted down revolutionary policies on the police and workers' government advocated by Workers Power, and the armed forces and workers' defence advocated by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

In advance of any attempt to win support for such policies among wide layers of workers, without testing whether or not they were a real barrier to unity, the SWP yielded to the demands of a very small number of individuals who had broken from Labour, to exclude such policies.

This schematic opportunism has nothing in common with the united front. It blurs the banners of revolution and reform within an electoral alliance. It does it give revolutionaries the opportunity to prove in practice to our reformist friends the relevance and potential popularity of revolutionary politics.

The confusion that such an adaptation of the cause was demonstrated at the 2001 conference very clearly. The SWP firmly and correctly – opposed attempts by the Socialist Party to delete demands for opposition to all immigration controls and to compare this with their opposite behaviour at the Respect founding conference and for British troops out of Ireland in the manifesto. They insisted on the inclusion of these demands as a matter of principle.

Let surely it is equally a matter of principle for revolutionaries that we want to end the police. We are not alone in this. There are thousands of black people, trade unionists and others who know that the police exist as an institution to oppress us. That is their main function. Solving crime comes a poor second. As said the SWP. The call to disband the police would put off reformists. What is the call to open the borders? There are countless reformists who would freak out completely at such a demand. What is the difference? In the context of the

Socialist Alliance the difference was that, for most of the ex-Labour individuals in the alliance, immigration controls and Ireland were easier issues to agree on. The police, because of the years of campaigning for police accountability by such people, was not so easy to agree upon.

Thus, by running scared of a fight for revolutionary policies but at the same time fetishising its own existence as "the party", the SWP blocked the positive dynamic of the Socialist Alliance towards the formation of a new working-class party.

In *Socialist Worker* (5/5/01), Lindsey German considered three options for the Socialist Alliance – short-term tactic, vehicle for building a new mass workers party, permanent alliance. She dismissed the first two options (even though the short-term tactic is what it turned out to be for the SWP) and argued the case for the third as the way forward. The best we can hope for, she said, is a halfway house, a permanent alliance based purely on election pledges. This, she argued, is "obviously something short of a full party, but is considerably more than the alliance has been."

She described this halfway house as having a national leadership, delegate meetings and AGMs, regular local branches, newsletters "and other forms of propaganda to raise the profile of the alliance". But what type of organisation does all these things and is based on a political programme, albeit a "minimum" one? Any ordinary worker will reply – a party! The only question then is what sort of party.

German countered this objection by claiming:

- without a mass movement in the class itself, such a party would be dominated by the SWP and this in turn would lead to "a party full of factional arguments with relatively few independent forces on the ground".

- a party, unlike the alliance, should be based on "a full revolutionary programme" so that it does not fall apart faced with a war or "a controversial strike or a real racist backlash".

The first argument is a diversion. The Socialist Alliance was – numerically – already dominated by the SWP. Its votes at the Birmingham policy conference determined what went in and what stayed out of the manifesto. So, the argument applied to the alliance as much as it would to a party.

But it is also profoundly pessimistic. It assumes that the push to form a party would simply involve the existing left groups plus a few independents. It won't. The positive espousal of a new party could attract hundreds, even thousands of independents. It could attract wide layers of militant youth and trade unionists; the SWP's dominance would then entirely depend on what influence it could exert on those new forces drawn into it.

It is precisely because, both in 2001 and today, we see the real possibility of attracting those forces, that posing the question of a new party was vital for the future development of the Socialist Alliance then and as the means of building an alternative to Blair today.

Lindsey German's second argument – warning against the danger of a party based on a minimal reformist programme – is more pertinent. It posed the question of what sort of party the Socialist Alliance should have become.

They have created a schema – not dissimilar to the old Militant/Socialist Party schema – that workers will break from reformism but cannot be won to revolutionary communism straight away. Therefore we need something short of the revolutionary programme – half-way between reform and revolution – for the transitional period. At least the ISG dares to give this formation its correct name – a centrist party. That is their goal.

The question all these schemas fail to answer is, why? Why do we need to go through this stage? The answer can only be a lack of conviction, on the part of the SWP, in their own politics. They

believe the revolutionary programme is a set of principles to be carried in a "Where we stand column" not a manual for action. If you cannot convince workers of these principles you cannot win them to the revolutionary programme.

This is not proven. In any strike, workers begin with illusions in the police and the courts, the union bureaucracy, the Labour Party. When the strike's picket lines are broken up by riot cops, the union's funds sequestered by courts, the strike shafted by the bureaucrats and Labour politicians, these illusions can be broken. But a positive alternative also has to be espoused. Only by pointing to the need for an alternative to the capitalist state – put in language comprehensible to the workers in struggle – can we win workers to a revolutionary alternative. The best way to consolidate this transformation is to recruit such workers to a party – a revolutionary party.

The Socialist Alliance could have gone to the working class with a revolutionary programme and said, "Look, we know you don't agree with all of this right now, but we will convince you in the course of the campaign that we are right." It chose not to because the SWP were worried about frightening away reformist workers.

But reformist workers are not easily frightened by discussion, debate and argument that is relevant to their real lives, their daily struggles. They are prepared to listen and be convinced. Revolutionaries need to combine struggle alongside them with argument in favour of the next step – and link that step directly to the struggle against capitalism.

This is the meaning of a transitional programme – a bridge from today's struggles to the revolutionary struggle for power. If you insist that we can only fight for what we think millions already agree with then you end up abandoning not just revolutionary policies, but any fight for even the most elementary class policies.

Unfortunately this is exactly what happened. From June 2001 to July 2003 the Socialist Alliance fell apart. Membership dwindled. Splits occurred. Branches disappeared as the SWP switched its attention to one or another of its many fronts. Lost members meant lost impetus. Factional struggles erupted with the SWP turning viciously on former allies like Liz Davies.

In the anti-war campaigns – both Afghanistan and Iraq – the Socialist Alliance might as well have not existed. The SWP even blocked a discussion on the Afghan war – proposed by Workers Power – at the December 2001 conference. And the one success of this period – the trade union conference on the political fund – was on the initiative of Workers Power and others, not the SWP. When they finally embraced the idea they made sure that the development of Socialist Alliance trade union work did not impinge on their own sectarian "rank and file" front union organisations.

To remedy this situation the SWP leadership decided that the real problem was that the Socialist Alliance was too socialist. It had to junk even its existing manifesto because the reforms proposed were too left wing to guarantee an electoral breakthrough. It had to make way for a new formation, one that would openly embrace populism and alliances with bourgeois forces in the Muslim community.

When opponents fought this they were witch-hunted and bureaucratically removed, as happened with FBU militant Steve Godward in Birmingham. And when it became clear, in July 2003, that the SWP were openly proposing a new popular front, Workers Power fought to stop them. We were defeated at a national council in July 2003 and drew the logical conclusion – we broke from the Socialist Alliance. In the hands of the SWP it had become an obstacle to building a workers' party and an obstacle to winning a hearing for revolutionary policies in the class. What followed – Respect – showed just how right we were.

No steps back: the

The founding Declaration of Respect hailed the anti-war movement, attacked the democratic deficit that now exists at the heart of British politics and pledged itself to 11 policies ranging from opposition to the occupation of Iraq through to a call for the restoration of trade union rights.

What are these elastic phrases and what do they really mean?

"We want a world in which the democratic demands of the people are carried out; a world based on need not profit; a world where solidarity rather than self-interest is the spirit of the age."

Or, to put it another way, we want a world in which the words socialism, revolution, capitalism, class struggle, and the working class are not mentioned. We want a world in which we can get away with presenting the electorate with vague policies combined with nice values in the hope that we can win quite a few protest votes and get someone elected.

Every one of the 11 pledges begged a series of questions. This vagueness is quite deliberate. The less clear you are, the fewer people who are put off, goes the argument. Keep it as broad as possible and you will get



more votes. "What you want: baby we've got it," as George Galloway put it in *The Guardian*.

It is designed to keep the door open to

Respect:

Respect the Unity Coalition – founded earlier this year by George Galloway and the SWP as the political (by which they mean electoral) wing of the anti-war movement – got 250,000 votes in the European elections. It averaged 1.75 per cent. In the London Assembly elections Respect failed to win a seat. It got just over 87,000 votes, averaging just under 5 per cent.

In a couple of areas – London and Birmingham – Respect's vote rose to between 10 and 20 per cent. These were areas with a high concentration of Muslim voters, reflecting Respect's specific appeal to the Muslim community.

In local elections in Preston, where the Socialist Alliance councillor and SWP member Michael Lavalette transformed himself into a Respect councillor, the organisation polled just short of 30 per cent in three inner city wards; a sitting Labour councillor who had defected to Respect lost her seat.

The founders of Respect have transformed themselves into the sultans of spin following these results. The election has been hailed as a victory. As a Respect circular put it: "In less than five months

Respect has established itself on the political map with a tremendous result in the European and Greater London Assembly elections. In the elections for the European Parliament Respect polled 252,216 votes, a remarkable achievement for a party that did not exist just 20 weeks ago."

What Respect doesn't say is that, compared to the xenophobic UKIP which chalked up millions of votes, and the fascist BNP which won over 800,000 votes, Respect's tally in the Euro elections was appalling. The two parties of the far right in Britain did much better than the party that had proclaimed itself the official anti-war party.

The most important yardstick by which we can measure Respect's real performance is the one it created itself. We were told by Galloway when Respect was founded back in January: "If only half the protesters who marched on February 15 take a shorter walk on June 10 to vote for us, they will be talking of nothing else on TV or radio the next day but the new force which has been born. I was the first to predict a million marchers on the anti-war demonstration, and some comrades raised their eyebrows: but we

Forward, two steps back, road to Respect



the middle classes, the disaffected "conservatives, liberals" as George Galloway forthrightly put it, and, especially, the Muslim community as a whole – rich and poor,

worker and boss, political and secular. Respect will be everything to everyone.

This brand of catch-all radicalism has a name – it is called populism and it is a total

retreat from socialism and class-based politics. It is a huge stride to the right as compared even with the left reformist programme of the Socialist Alliance.

An alternative to this populist declaration was proposed at Respect's founding conference in January 2004 by Workers Power. It called for an anti-capitalist electoral challenge to Labour, placing the struggle against capitalism and its state at the centre of the declaration.

Workers Power argued the need for a socialist perspective and programme to rally workers against Labour. We fought for a platform that linked the struggles – against privatisation, against poverty, for decent pensions and housing, against war – to their root cause, capitalism, and the need to overthrow it.

Unity on this basis was rejected. But Lindsey German of the SWP made it clear that even if anyone had copied the SWP's method from 2001 and suggested a reformist declaration this would get the thumbs down. In her defence of the draft she made it clear that the organisers did not want a "repeat of the Socialist Alliance programme". People were looking for something "broader, wider, less explicitly socialist".

Only by throwing such a programme overboard, along with all class demands and pretensions to socialism, could we break out of "the small room mentality" and into "the big time". This was, from the outset, the defining feature of Respect – populism not socialism. Other socialist amendments to the declaration – such as for open borders and for all Respect MPs to be paid the average wage of a skilled worker – were voted against by the SWP.

What an irony that the SWP had warned Arthur Scargill at the time of his launch of the Socialist Labour Party: "The search for votes pushes a party towards a softening of its message, towards a search for accommodation with the union leaders in order to secure backing and finance." (*Socialist Worker* 25/11/95).

Workers Power said this was a confession of political bankruptcy by the SWP at the time. It could only hang onto its principles as long as it did not seek to win for votes for them. They proved us right! Four years later, when the SWP could resist the lure of the elections no longer, it immediately started adapting its message so as to garner more votes. And with each election the failure to get more votes led to a bout of more frenzied opportunism. If the

Why didn't they do well?

doubled this. Getting a million votes is not beyond us, and will knock them off their chairs."

This, Galloway insisted again and again, was the target – one million votes. This, he told *The Observer*, would see himself elected as an MEP and SWP leader Lindsey German elected to the London Assembly. And in one sense Galloway was right. The only measure of success for Respect would be whether or not it was able to reflect the scale of the anti-war movement it was wooing. It didn't.

Likewise John Rees of the SWP spoke in terms of reaching millions. He told the founding conference of Respect: "Whatever went before was not as strong as this... while the people here are important, they are not as important as the millions out there. We are reaching to the people locked out of politics."

Clearly he didn't find the right key, because there is a big gap between the millions that Respect reached out to and the 250,000 who backed it.

In an election, where voters clearly went for protest candidates, where proportional representation offered smaller parties greater scope for mopping up such protest

votes, Respect failed to break out of the 1 to 2 per cent total typical of previous "left" challenges. Indeed, Respect's tally was no better, in percentage terms, than the 1.7 per cent that the Socialist Alliance scored in the 90-odd constituencies it contested in the general election.

This comparison underlines the scale of Respect's failure. Rees and the SWP liquidated the Socialist Alliance and then set up Respect as a vote-catching manoeuvre. They thought that even the left-reformist socialism of the Socialist Alliance had too narrow an appeal. Playing on the single issue of the war, plus a bit of populist rhetoric, was the formula for a big electoral breakthrough. But it didn't happen.

As the campaign unfolded, Respect became ever more communalist in its appeal – differentially appealing to one religion, Islam, and one community, the Muslim community. Socialism (supposedly what the S stands for in Respect) didn't get a look in. George Galloway paraded his anti-women, anti-abortion views in the press. This was acclaimed by the Muslim Association of Britain, who doubtless took this to be Respect's position. Not one public rebuttal came from

the Socialist Workers Party.

Alliances were built with Muslim clerics, regardless of their politics, in a cynical attempt to pull in the Muslim vote. No attempt was made to differentiate between the needs of working-class Muslims and those of businessmen and reactionary clerics within this community. Respect made a straightforward pitch to all Muslims because all it wanted was their votes.

They sold their souls, and fronted a campaign that took on an openly religious character in many areas. They were rewarded with a sizeable Muslim vote in some areas of London, Birmingham and Preston, but that was it. Everywhere else they failed to build on the work – and results – already achieved by the Socialist Alliance in 2001.

And the Socialist Alliance did not have the ramp of a mass anti-war movement like Respect to take off from.

The future seems equally grim. Respect cannot prosper as a Muslim-only organisation. Nevertheless its communalist drift is continuing and its democratic deficit is growing.

In the by election in Leicester South, at a selection meeting packed

by SWP members who do not live in the constituency, Yvonne Ridley, a recent convert to Islam, was selected as the candidate by Respect, while a local potential candidate with a record of fighting the privatisation and closure of schools was effectively told to get lost (see letter page 5). Ridley's enthusiasms for the Muslim fighters who rallied to the Taliban and private schools (her child goes to one in Cumbria) were brushed aside because this curious character stands a chance of becoming the first "Muslim woman MP".

Her religion could be considered a private matter, unless it influenced how she would vote on issues like abortion rights or religious schools. If she was willing to defend the programme on which she was elected, and if that programme was free of all items dictated by religious bigotry, then fine. But Respect does not have such a programme nor does it have a record of holding its representatives to the sorry excuse for one that it has. Under these circumstances it is Ridley's own politics that count and it is plain that these have nothing whatsoever to do with the working class or socialism.

electoral hot air balloon just would not rise the SWP threw more and more programmatic ballast over the side. Respect is the end point. Could anything else be jettisoned?

The SWP turned the election campaign into a George Galloway one-man show. Ballot papers in every region read, Respect the Unity Coalition (George Galloway).

Specifically, the SWP draped the campaign in semi-religious, specifically Islamic garb. They hoped that it would give them an electoral breakthrough. They hoped that Galloway's high profile and support from the Muslim community – alienated, quite understandably from Labour by that party's racism and warmongering – would give them an MEP and a London Assembly member.

The SWP jettisoned the fight for socialism at the polls and embraced a populist, that is, capitalist programme that was not adequate for the immediate attacks facing workers and youth let alone capable of advancing society towards a socialist future. The national leaflet and national TV broadcast did not even dare to mention the word socialism. In her programme for London, her "vision" as she called it, Lindsey German rambles on for hundreds of words without once mentioning socialism.

The problem with all of this is that if you give up on the socialist programme you let the de facto leaders of your movement – and George Galloway is a bit more than that – set the political agenda. So it was Galloway's admiration for Fidel Castro that captured the headlines not German's plan for more trams in London!

It was Galloway's anti-abortion stance, enthusiastically backed in press releases by the Muslim Association of Britain, that seemed to define the line of the organisation. MAB has implied that this is one reason it is supporting Respect; the SWP remained silent. Where was Lindsey German or John Rees' press release explaining why a woman's right to choose is a principle? Why did they not explain that this principle is part of their campaign to win support from working-class women across Europe?

They were silent because they did not want to offend their "vote winner" Galloway and their hoped-for voters in the Muslim community.

In fact, Galloway lost and Respect did badly. The official reason for this was lack of time. The actual reason was lack of politics. Respect made little headway in the working class. It tied itself so closely to slam and to the Mosques that it did not appeal to the overwhelming majority of Muslim and Asian communities. Countless secular-minded Asian youth in the Muslim community are not at all enamoured of an organisation that explicitly favours the views of the Mosque.

Likewise, there are countless workers in the black and white communities who know that churches play a reactionary role in society and find Respect's obsession with "faith communities" sickening. The democratic right to religious freedom is something socialists have always defended. But the SWP's elevation of the "faith communities" to the political front row and the relegation of class politics and socialism to the back marks a new stage in the political degeneration of the SWP leadership.

Their increasing obsession with "maximising the vote" – as though that is an end in itself – and their shameful bureaucratic methods have earned them huge distrust throughout the British left and labour movement. This distrust extends to their Respect project and was reflected in the electoral failure of Respect on 10 June.

But the failure of Respect does not mean that the need for a workers party has gone away. The SWP leadership's antics have made the fight for such a party more difficult, but it is one that goes on. And it is high time that SWP members demand a democratic and representative conference of their party, junk Respect, and retire the leaders who have led them into this failed and fatal dead end. Then, and only then, could the SWP play a positive role in the real crisis of working-class leadership which has not gone away but is indeed deeper now than when the Socialist Alliance was formed.

The SWP and the fight to build an alternative to Labour

The SWP and anti-capitalism

By Jeremy Dewar

The Socialist Workers Party, to its credit, recognised the importance of the developing anticapitalist movement. Following Seattle the SWP decided that this militant movement of mainly young people was going to play an important role in the new century.

Workers Power had recognised its potential several years earlier when we launched Revolution, the socialist youth organisation, and collaborated with Reclaim the Streets during the Liverpool dockers' strike and in the Coalition against BP in Colombia. Revolution was virtually the only left organisation present at the June 18 1999, (J18) Stop The City protest.

We worked with the SWP in the S26 Committee, building for the first international anti-capitalist blockade against the IMF and the World Bank summit in Prague in September 2000.

Following the success of Prague, the SWP launched Globalise Resistance in January 2001 at a series of huge conferences: Hammersmith attracted more than 1,000; Glasgow claimed to be the biggest left gathering in decades. This starting point was also the highpoint of GR: this year's April 2004 conference was attended by little over 100 people.

Why did GR fail so miserably? After a reasonable start as an organiser of "teach-ins" on Globalisation and transport to mobilisations from Prague to Genoa, it went into a sharp decline. As with the Socialist Alliance, the reason for GR's withering must be found in the SWP's inept political leadership, rather than the hostility or disruption of a handful of egotistical anarchists.

Workers Power did not stand on the sidelines. We actively involved ourselves in GR, serving, often as lone critics, on its steering committee right up until the end of 2003. We argued throughout for an approach that could build a mass anticapitalist movement, drawing workers as well as youth, and help new life flood into and over the stagnant pond of the British left.

A movement of movements

The later 1990s was a hard time for socialists. The collapse of the Stalinist states and parties, the rightward drift of reformism, new realism in the unions, had all apparently disproved the potential of working-class organisations to change society and turned "party" into a dirty word.

The anticapitalist movement came as a breath of fresh air in these circumstances. But the courageous and militant youth also carried with them these anti-party and anti-political prejudices.

We therefore urged GR to build itself as a loose network of local organisations



Globalise Resistance at May Day 2004, London

with a large degree of autonomy. Rather than relying on a diet of mini-conferences and set-piece mobilisations for international counter-summits, we called on GR to launch real campaigns against polluting incinerators, multinational sweatshop exploiters, privatisation. These campaigns, we argued, could develop the DIY spirit of direct action and make the movement relevant to the daily lives of local youth and workers.

Instead, GR became ever more centralised. A full-time officer from the SWP was employed from membership subscriptions without even the formality of a steering committee discussion. Platform speakers, press statements and media interviews were all organised by the SWP, not GR. The hand of the SWP was barely concealed by the GR glove puppet. No wonder it came to be scorned by the very people it wanted to recruit.

Workers Power set out to learn from the anticapitalist movement. When the Italian social forum movement kicked off, before and after Genoa 2001, we called on GR to build social forums. We were told, not yet, there is no social movement in Britain. True – and GR was an obstacle to its creation, not an instrument for achieving it.

Then came 9/11. To its eternal credit the SWP did take the initiative in building a mass social single-issue movement: Stop the War. But as the decisive moment arrived to turn mass demonstrations into mass

direct action, the SWP funk'd it again.

With the ESF coming to London, we have again called for local social forums to be built as organising centres for the movement, linking it with the fight against cuts and privatisation, drawing in the trade unions, especially at a rank-and-file level, drawing in the radicalised youth who were the backbone of the antiwar mobilisations and actions.

At every juncture, the SWP has refused to relax its grip, even tightening it in alliance with the Socialist Action sect that dominates the GLA bureaucracy. Result: there is no organised anticapitalist movement in Britain.

Turn to the workers and the youth

The SWP continues to give prominence to the more right-wing forces in the movement, feting George Monbiot at Marxism 2003. Alex Callinicos even wrote *An anti-capitalist Manifesto* that obscured the goal of revolution and promoted dead-end liberal schemas like the Tobin Tax.

Today, they support every demand of the TUC leaders and Blair's mayor, Ken Livingstone, in organising the London ESF. The supposedly sovereign Organising Committee is sidelined, the far left are excluded from meetings, the Assembly of the Social Movements – the only body in the ESF that can take decisions – is to lose its stand-alone prominence. If they get their way, the London ESF will be the smallest and most con-

servative ever. Gone will be the opportunity to forge a new world party of social revolution from the crucible of the global anticapitalist movement. What a criminal waste!

Callinicos and Nineham scoff at this perspective. They claim that any programmatic victory in the movement will be Pyrrhic, leading immediately to the right wing splitting away, leaving a left-wing rump unable to carry out its revolutionary policies. Thus, the movement must accommodate its policies to those held by the Livingstones and Monbiots. It is a total abandonment of what is progressive in the SWP's motto, "Socialism from Below".

What about turning to and organising the unions' rank and file, warning them of the inevitable betrayals of their reformist bureaucratic leaders? Only real social forums, drawing in workers in every town and city, can provide a counterweight to the general secretaries and full-time officials who are seeking to mute the voices of dissent within the movement.

Similarly with the youth: the SWP leadership has refused to build an independent revolutionary youth movement. The success of Revolution, launched with our far more limited resources, proves that such a movement can be built in the heart of the ESF process.

The SWP has repeatedly opposed Revolution's proposals for a youth space and a youth assembly at the ESF, even denying

that youth suffer oppression or need any room for self-organisation, in flat contradiction to all that the classical Marxists ever wrote or did on the question. The SWP's control-freakery and patronising attitude to young people puts them on the side of the liberal academics and union bureaucrats in banning their right to self-organisation.

Leadership or tailism?

These are strange traits for a revolutionary organisation. Leninism is based on the understanding that the revolutionary class has many and varied world views, often imported from the ideology of the ruling class. Workers' consciousness necessarily lags behind material reality as it tries to make sense of capitalism's barbarity and exploitation.

But at key moments – typically during wars, economic and political crises – this political awareness can develop by leaps and bounds. That is why we need a party, composed of the most far-sighted workers and their allies, to lead the working class and turn revolutionary situations into successful revolutions.

Lenin castigated his opponents (the Economists) who wanted to water down the party's policies and ideology in order to accommodate to workers' existing consciousness and leaders as tailists. In *What is To Be Done?* he drew an analogy with a compact group who have chosen a narrow and difficult path along the edge of a marsh. He replies to those among them who advocate going into this swamp: "Oh, yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us, but to go wherever you will, even into the marsh... Only let go of our hands, don't clutch at us and don't besmirch the grand word freedom, for we too are 'free' to go where we please, free to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh!"

The SWP leaders used to refer to the Labour and trade union left as the "swamp". Now they are leading the SWP into the reformist swamp. It is time for those who do not wish to follow into the swamp to let go of those who are leading them there and find their way to genuine Bolshevism. We in Workers Power are only too willing to help them.

If you're interested in the ideas of Workers Power, phone us on 020 7820 1363 or visit our web site www.workerspower.com

The way forward: join us in the fight for a new workers party

In 1997 a Labour Government was elected by millions of voters who wanted to see an end to decades of attacks on the working class and the introduction of a more equal society.

Instead Tony Blair's government has continued where the Tories left off, retaining the anti-union laws, extending privatisation and attacking unions, cutting services, and hiking taxes and tuition fees. Blair has repeatedly sent troops abroad or gone to war, most

recently invading Iraq hand-in-hand with George Bush to seize its oil. His government has scapegoated asylum seekers and the Black and Asian communities.

Whether under Tony Blair or under Gordon Brown, this Labour government will never submit to the policies that the working class demands. There is no democracy in the Labour Party, and no opposition has developed that can mount a fight to reverse these policies. Tens of thousands of workers and youth are looking for a new party that can

represent them.

We believe that such a party needs to be a Workers Party, founded on socialist principles and rooted in the workers movement, to unite all those on the left who have fought against Blair's policies.

We will take the struggle for a break with Blair and his policies into the unions and workplaces, the working class and multi-racial communities, the universities and schools, the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. We will work alongside those who want to

"reclaim Labour" in these struggles as the best way to convince them of our aim.

We will champion the fullest democracy in our campaign for a new Workers Party and in the debate of its policies and structure. Discussing and working together in the course of the class struggle will build the strongest movement for such a party, and lay the best basis for creating one when the time is right.

We call on every militant to join us in this campaign. To put their

name, to win their trade union, party or group, to this call. Let us go forward together to build a new workers party and a socialist future.

You can sign our call online and download sign up sheets at: www.workerspower.com

No to the EU Constitution! For a Socialist United States of Europe!

By Michael Pröbsting

We live in a world of social insecurity and political instability. Our rulers know this and so do we. For them this is simply part of life: cut-throat competition between one other at both the corporate level and the level of the state and integrally related to fighting to keep up the rate at which they exploit "their" workers and the masses in less developed countries. It's a matter of stay on top or go under.

To achieve this they are driven both to create bigger and bigger capital blocs, new free trade zones, and certainly in the case of Europe and East Asia, to try to create an embryonic superstate which can protect its constituent powers against the world hyperpower, the United States. On the other side, they have to slash labour costs, whether in terms of wages or the costs of social welfare, to weaken the workers movement and to defeat and demoralise radical political opposition.

Before we can develop a strategy to defend the interests of working people and the oppressed worldwide against the ruthless enemy that is Capital it is necessary to understand the driving force behind the political strategy of the ruling class in Europe. The system we are living in - capitalism in its final stage imperialism - is losing its dynamism and therefore threatens the capitalists with great danger, from one another and from the working class. It is no accident that the relative harmony which marked inter-imperialist relations in the last decade of the twentieth century has given way to mounting tensions. Of course, given the immense inequality between the power of the USA and all of its allies and rivals put together there is no immediate prospect of this tension breaking into open conflict. But with every decade since the end of the long boom the capitalist world economy moves more and more towards stagnation (see Table 1).

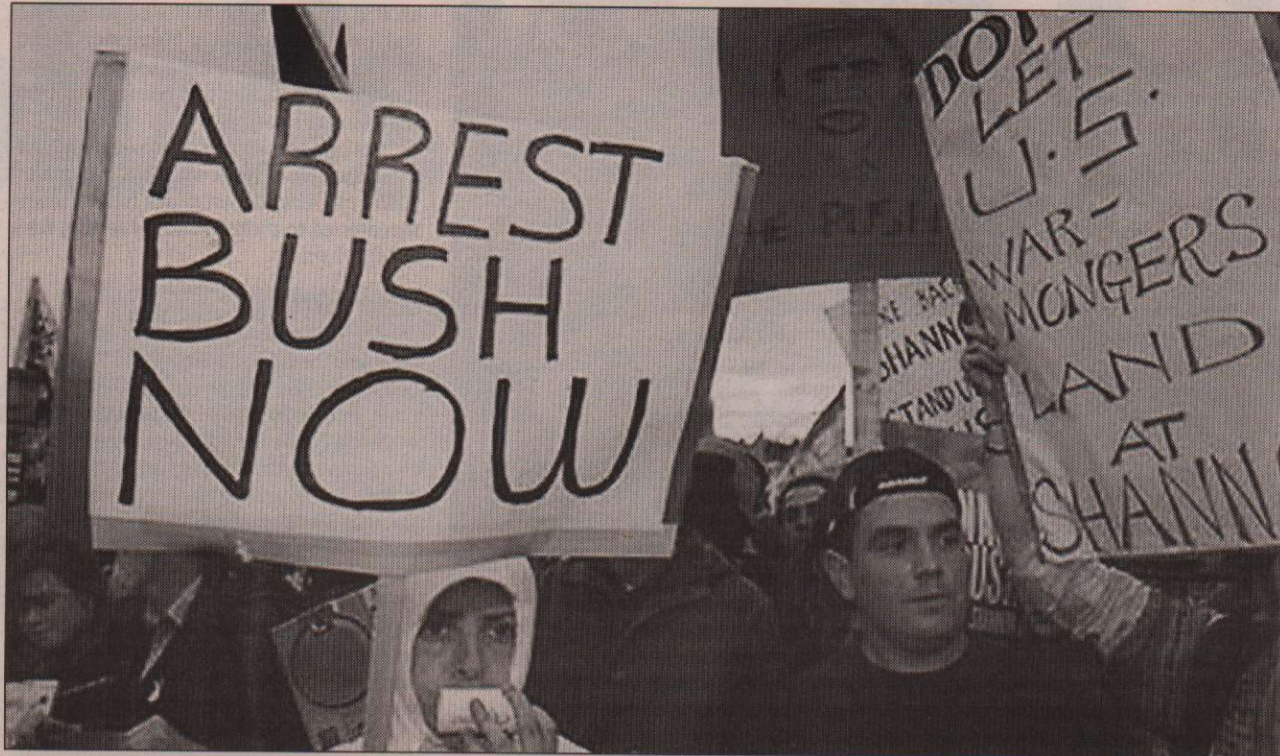
Table 1 Average annual GDP Growth per capita (in %)

1960-1969:	+3.7%
1970-1979:	+2.1%
1980-1989:	+1.3%
1990-1999:	+1.1%
2000-2003:	+1.0%

Source: ILO: A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities For All (2004)

This is what really drives the ruling class on both sides of the Atlantic to constant pressure and sharp attacks against labour costs and the welfare state, all justified by the neo-liberal ideology of "the inescapable laws of globalisation". It is this which drives our rulers to globalisation by violent means, with military interventions in the oil rich zones of central Asia, the Middle East, and to a lesser degree Africa and Latin America. The "war on terror" is a splendid pretext for creating or expanding their spheres of influence.

The USA is by far the hegemonic power of the planet. Despite having a smaller population than the enlarged EU (282 million compared with 455 million) its economy is bigger. The superiority of US to EU imperialism is even greater if one takes their political and military power into account. US military spending is 3 to 4 times as much as the combined EU-15 defence budget.



Demonstrators protest at the arrival of U.S. President George Bush's visit to Ireland for a US - European Union Summit

Pan-European State apparatus

To close the gap with the transatlantic colossus the main European imperialist powers - led by France and Germany - have to take drastic measures. They have to smash a series of surviving social gains of the European working class, to sharply raise labour productivity and therefore profit rates. They have to build up their state apparatuses to quell resistance to this process and to intervene politically and militarily to expand their influence around the globe. To be able to compete against US imperialism Europe has to "Americanise" its economic and political order at home.

The ruling class problem is that there is no unified pan-European bourgeoisie but a series of capitalist classes based on national states. The imperialist European Union is therefore a compromise, a bloc or coalition of the strongest national ruling classes. The majority of Europe's rulers have concluded that their main problem is the lack of a unified European state apparatus. This is why they need the new constitution.

But the position of Germany, France and their smaller allies is not shared by all the other EU states and certainly not by Britain. This is the reason why there has been so much tug-of-war and diplomatic battles between Berlin and Paris on the one hand and London and its allies on the continent on the other. While the German and French rulers pushed for an EU with a strong pan-European state apparatus (which of course they intend to dominate) their British counterparts tried to avoid this and to build in as many veto rights for national states as possible. If Germany and France want a federal superstate able to stand up to the USA, Britain wants a "Europe of Nations", i.e. a free trade zone.

The reason for this can be found in the structure of Britain's global assets. British capital is one of the world's leading foreign investors. In addition a lot of its investments goes to regions which are not in the traditional EU spheres of influence, such as Eastern Europe or North Africa, but rather to those under US tutelage. Since the EU is an emerging rival, US imperialism has a direct interest in preventing it from becoming too strong. This is why Washington supports and encourages London to slow, and when needed, block the EU unification process.

The new Constitution - towards a superstate?

The final draft constitution seems to be a step forward for the section of the European ruling class which wants to create a strong imperialist EU. But there is little to rejoice about for the working class in the draft constitution. It makes clear that neo-liberal doctrines are the economic policy framework of the EU: "Member States and the Union shall act in accordance with the principle of an open market economy with free competition."

All national legislation and constitutions, all national labour codes, collective bargaining agreements etc. can be subordinated to EU directives if a sufficient number of the larger states are agreed on it. In addition every member state will be bound by international agreements signed by the European Union with the international financial bodies such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation. The new power centre of the EU state apparatus will be the European Commission whose president is chosen by the gov-

ernments of the EU but who then chooses all the other members of the Commission. The Commission alone has the power to initiate European legislation. The European Parliament has the right to agree or disagree with proposed legislation but only within the constitutional framework of a neo-liberal policy.

Fight together

The mass strikes and demonstration of workers in Austria, France, Italy and Germany last year showed the will of ordinary workers and their families to fight back. The resistance to Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010 has been unique in its scale, especially for a Social Democratic government to face such a mass revolt by its own "natural supporters." But it also showed the weakness of the leadership of the workers' movement. The struggles of 2003 have also shown once again the rotten decayed character of the mass reformist workers' parties and the incompetence, cowardice or outright treachery of the union leaders.

To be effective, the workers' movement must renew its leadership from the bottom to the top. It must start to play a leading role in mass social movements and it must do so at a European level. That is why the European Social Forum in London in October presents such an opportunity. The struggles ahead need to be coordinated at a continental level. This is what the Assembly of the Social Movements, which will meet at the end of the ESF, must set out to do. Yet, in the ESF, too, there is a crisis of leadership - reformist forces like Attac want to paralyse it and eventually pull it in behind the French and German governments.

The only way for the British working class and oppressed to fight the creation of a new more powerful and imperialist EU is to ally with its class brothers and sisters across the Channel. The European workers movement, the millions of youth and immigrants who come out on the streets to fight against war and social injustice - this is the force to stop the bosses offensive.

This is why we must not fight against the EU constitution in alliance with the right wing populists like UKIP, the Tories, or the traditional Little Englanders in the Labour Party. Any attempt by the Left today - impressed by UKIP's rise - to play the anti-European card will prove disastrous, just as it was in the 1970s. Then it poisoned militant workers with chauvinism, tied them in a common campaign with vile racist Europhobes like Enoch Powell and diverted them from the class struggle.

The British constitution with its monarchy, royal prerogative, unelected judiciary and Privy Council is just as undemocratic and in the service of rapacious capitalism as the new European one will ever be. We need to fight against the continuing social onslaught on public services, jobs and pensions and fight hand in hand to defend them together with the European working class. If we don't, if each national working class worse rallies behind the populist patriots of Right or Left then we are headed for disaster. United we can win, isolated we are bound to lose.

Our Europe

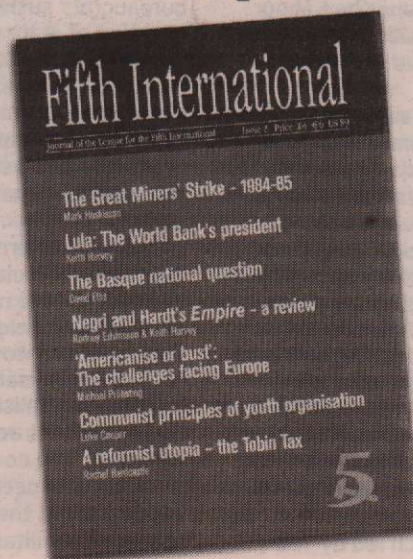
There is not one major challenge we face today which can be solved on a national scale. This is why Workers Power and the League for the 5th International is fighting for a Socialist United States of Europe. Unlike the Eurosceptics we ardently want Europe to be united but not under the command of a tiny class of bosses and bankers. We want to unite our continent and our world in the interests and under the control of the vast majority of its people - the workers, the immigrants, the youth, the poor farmers, the unemployed and racially oppressed.

We want to unite the workers of Europe, not to foment jealous competition one with another. We want the workers of all countries to unite on the basis of a common plan and social ownership of the means of production to eradicate poverty and unemployment and to create jobs and a decent living standard for everyone.

We want Europe to be united but not to create a European superstate as a rival to US imperialism, fighting it for world domination. This could end in only one way - world economic chaos and a Third World War of unbelievable destructiveness. The alternative is to reach out our hands to our American brothers and sisters and to those fighting imperialism on all continents. That is why we are fighting for a United Socialist States of Europe and for world revolution. If you are not already part of that fight, join us in it!

Journal of the League for the Fifth International No. 2 out now

£4 €6 \$9



The Great Miners' Strike: 1984-85

Lula: The World Bank's president

The Basque national question

Negri and Hardt's Empire: a review

'Americanise or bust': The challenges facing Europe

Communist principles of youth organisation

A reformist utopia: the Tobin Tax

General strike sold short

On 9 June, workers in Nigeria launched a three day general strike in protest against the government's 20 per cent hike in the price of oil to the equivalent of more than 20 pence a litre. The average income the equivalent of about 50p a day. Nigeria is the eighth biggest oil producer in the world and cheap fuel and kerosene for heating is the only benefit the mass of ordinary Nigerians receive from their natural wealth.

The strike saw a courageous display of militancy by the workers of Nigeria, led by the union federation Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). All the major industrial and commercial centres were closed including banks, central and local government, markets, schools and colleges. The commercial centre, Lagos, and the capital Abuja both ground to a halt.

The workers on strike showed bravery against Government and police intimidation and used a variety of ingenious tactics to enforce the strike.

The strike took place despite the federal High Court asking the NLC not to strike while directing the Government to revert to the old price. This time however, unlike in January this year, the strike leaders said they would not wait for any court action.

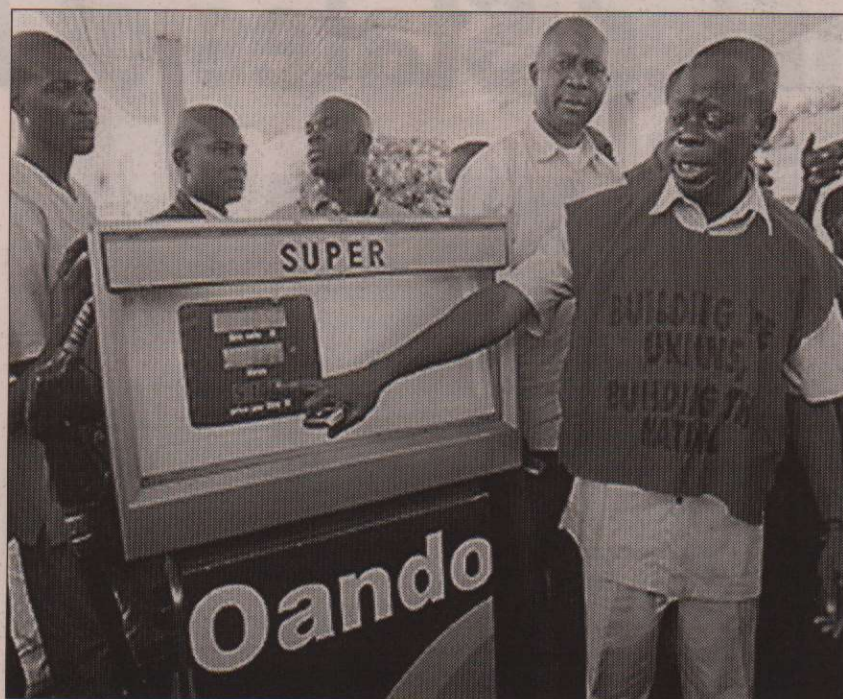
Strikers rejected government attempts at intimidation such as the "no work, no pay" order put out to frighten civil servants back to their offices.

Members of the Commercial Motorcyclists Association were used to travel around to inspect petrol stations to ensure that they were adhering to the strike.

Convoys of cars and vans filled with strikers were used as flying pickets to descend on stations that was breaking the strike.

Strikers also defended the NLC headquarters from 100 police who attacked killing two strikers and arresting six union leaders.

The widespread support for and compliance with the strike among the workers even led to the oil sellers' organisation and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation calling on the Government not to go



Nigerian Labour Congress President Adams Oshiomhole at a filling station, suspended a three-day-old general strike after filling stations slashed petrol prices.

ahead with the price rise.

The strike was called off after just 3 days by the NLC leadership, and other organisations, which argued that the price had lowered sufficiently.

Union leaders sell out

Throughout the strike the union leaders of the NLC did their best to get the workers to return to work.

On day one of the dispute, leader of the NLC, Adams Oshiomhole, said that unless the price went back to the old level there would be no deal and no return to work. By the second day of the strike he said that although the price was falling in places the decrease was not widespread enough, "We went round Abuja area today and yesterday and we saw some evidence of compliance. But in other parts of the country

the evidence is still not there. And so given the fact that we all started the strike at the same time, while we have all noticed a substantial attempt in Abuja to comply, unfortunately this is not the case in most parts, the overwhelming parts. That compliance goes round the whole nation."

And by the third day, the NLC met the other striking organisations and ordered the return to work because, in the words of Oshiomhole, "We've seen substantial evidence that many petrol stations have adjusted their prices to reflect the court order. Therefore, the labour unions and the civil society groups have agreed that we hereby suspend the strike."

But the price in some areas had not fallen to that Oshiomhole was holding out for on the first day.

Some groups who supported the strike

criticised the NLC for calling it off. Citizens Rights Watch attacked the NLC and called for the strike to continue until the full demands were met, called for the resignation of President Obasanjo and called for a sovereign national conference to decide on the government of the country. The National Democratic Movement also attacked the ending of the strike saying that it could have pushed the government into wider social reforms.

The price of oil is now, in law... supposed to be back to where it was. NLC unions in Delta and Akwa Ibom states have already threatened to picket stations selling fuel at higher prices.

What next?

The widespread support for the strike, its strength and its ability to shutdown the economy show the power of the working class. It also put the NLC, despite its leadership, at the head of the movement against the government. The industrial workers pulled in behind them a range of other unions and other ethnic and cultural organisations some of which such as the Ijaw have fought terrible and vicious battles with the government.

However, the Nigerian workers have been let down by their leaders yet again. The strike could have achieved so much more than a partial climbdown by the government. That there are organisations now criticising the NLC for refusing to continue the strike indicates that there are forces aware that the workers and their allies must offer and struggle for an alternative to the current pro-IMF government.

Since his re-election Obasanjo has set himself the goal of reducing the \$2 billion of subsidies that keep fuel prices low and privatising wide sections of the economy to please his IMF backers. There is every indication that the government will try to raise the price again.

The next attack must be faced with a leadership far more resolute than the existing one and for that the workers need their own revolutionary workers party.

Proposed amendments to Nigerian Trade Union Act

As a result of the strike, President Olesugen Obasanjo put to the National Assembly an amendment to the Trades Union Act that if passed will seriously curtail the power of the NLC. The amendment attempts to break up the NLC, introduce tougher laws on votes for strike action and write in a no strike clause where union dues are paid directly out of wages. Here are the relevant clauses of the bill.

"16A. Upon the registration and recognition of any of the trade Unions specified in the Third Schedule to this Act, An employer may-

(b) Pay any sum so deducted directly [for trade union dues] to the registered office of the trade union, provided that compliance with the provisions of this section of this Act shall be subject to the insertion of "A No Strike" clause in the relevant Collective Bargaining Agreements between the workers and their employers".

"(6) No trade union or registered federation of trade unions, by whatever name called shall embark on a strike action unless upon a resolution passed by at least two thirds majority of the members of the trade union or registered federation of trade union, as the case may be approving the strike action"

6.(1) Part III of the Principal Act is hereby deleted.

(2) Accordingly- (a) wherever the words "Central Labour Organisation" appears in the Principal Act, they shall be deleted forthwith;

(b) the Registrar shall remove from the register the Nigeria Labour Congress as the only Central Labour Organisation in Nigeria."

Nigerian workers need a revolutionary party

The continuing crisis in Nigeria, expressed in four general strikes in four years, has led the Nigeria Labour Congress to launch a Labour Party. This is an important organisational step as it gives the workers their own alternative to the ruling class parties such as Obasanjo's People's Democratic Party.

Last year, there was an attempt to set up a social democratic party by a section of the NLC. The party did badly at the polls because the leadership of the NLC stuck with Obasanjo in last year's elections and even gave him a platform at a May Day rally.

So the launch of a Labour Party is to be welcomed, representing as it does a break by the workers from capitalist parties.

In its programme on politics, the leadership of the NLC is critical of past attempts to ally the workers movement with bourgeois forces in order to secure democracy: "This type of approach [allying with bourgeois parties] collapsed as soon as parties began to implement the dominant perception of democracy, which is to sustain existing economic relations."

The NLC programme also states that the Labour Party should be "unambiguously socialist" but then goes on to say little about what it should stand for apart from basic human and workers rights and a mixed economy. For example, the NLC would "take into account the growing need to adopt a more participatory approach, which will involve identification of specific policies that should be pushed by representatives of the NLC in dealing

with government, employers and other social, economic and political actors. Participatory strategies mean processes of consultation that involve convening appropriate organs where specific discussions of policy matters are identified and decided."

But the Labour Party has already been criticised for supporting the ending of the general strike after three days. Members of the People's Redemption Party, which has one seat in the lower house of the National Assembly, attacked the Labour Party and also accused the NLC leadership of conspiring with Obasanjo. However, most of these organisations while critical of the NLC leadership and the Labour Party still believe that the grinding poverty and despair in Nigeria can be solved within the capitalist system.

Two organisations in Nigeria however argue for a socialist solution. The Committee for a Workers International (the Socialist Party in the UK) have an organisation called the Democratic Socialist Movement in Nigeria. The DSM is involved in the National Consciousness Party (NCP), a radical organisation that started life as an anti-corruption party and is led by human rights and union lawyer Gani Fawehinmi. The DSM has its own platform in the NCP and leads it in Lagos. It is now calling for conferences of unions, the Labour Party, NCP and other groups around the Labour and Civil Society Coalition to start organising at a state level to decide what the next step and the programme of the new party of the working masses.

Its former co-thinkers, which led by Ted

Grant left the CWI in the early 1990s and are now grouped around Socialist Appeal in the UK, have an organisation around the journal Workers Alternative in Nigeria. To its credit, Workers Alternative has consistently called for a Labour Party in Nigeria based upon the unions and supports the building of the NLC backed Labour Party.

However, what unites these organisations is their inadequate conception of the programme the Labour Party needs to be founded on. Both call for democratic and social reforms, and measures for the working class to take control of the unions against the misleaders and bureaucrats such as Oshiomhole. On the question of state power, the DSM calls for the "removal of the capitalists from power and their replacement by a workers and peasants socialist government." It also calls for the "public ownership of the country's vast resources and wealth under the democratic management and control of the working people."

Workers Alternative calls for a mass Labour Party with a socialist programme with the key demand of "the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under the control of the workers and peasants".

Both organisations, however, fail to mention that the capitalist state will have to be smashed by the militant action of Nigerian workers and peasants. In a country where state violence is an every day occurrence, where "kill and go" squads patrol the oil fields, and where the threat of a military coup is an ever present

factor of political life, failure to clearly state that socialism will involve a physical struggle with the capitalist government and their multinational backers means both organisations are providing opposition forces within the NLC with only half a solution.

They both adopt a "stagiest" argument: first let us build a mass reformist party and then get it to adopt more and more revolutionary policies. However to do this they believe it is necessary to hide basic fundamentals of Marxism such as the necessity to smash the capitalist state, its army and police.

Rather than becoming a UK-style Labour Party, ie a reformist one, or a more radical centrist party, the Nigerian workers and their allies such as the fighting youth of the Ijaws and other ethnic groups need a party that is revolutionary in policy and in deed.

Revolutionary socialists should work alongside workers and unions and build the Labour Party as a mass organisation. But at every opportunity revolutionaries must put forward clear class answers to the attacks of the government and to the betrayals and misleadership of the union and ethnic leaders. In effect, the organisational break taken by the formation of the Labour Party must be completed by a political break from the bosses and capitalism by the adoption of a revolutionary socialist programme. Then, there is the possibility of building a mass revolutionary party that can save Nigeria from the multinationals, the poverty, despair and inter-ethnic strife and build a socialist future.

There is a regime in the Middle East that is ruled by one family which allows neither democratic rights nor political opposition. It counts as it friends those defenders of democracy the US and UK. *Marcus Chamoun* reports

Saudi Arabia: the last absolutist monarchy

Saudi Arabia is one of the world's last surviving absolutist monarchies. A measure of this is its very name; it is a country named after a ruling dynasty that, unsurprisingly, treats it like a piece of family real estate.

It is a country without elections, political parties or trade unions. The "rule of law" and the "separation of powers", so beloved of bourgeois jurists, is completely absent. While there is a written constitution with a quasi-parliamentary-appointed Consultative Council, Saudi's rulers claim the Islamic Sharia code, created in the seventh century by the ultra-puritanical Wahhabi minority sect, is a sufficient basis for a contemporary legal system. The reality is a highly arbitrary and personal system of justice enforced by members of the 7,000 strong royal family.

For every conceivable human rights' abuse committed by Saddam Hussein, the US-backed Saudi monarchy has a counterpart. Dissent is ruthlessly suppressed, dissidents tortured and hounded into exile. The state persecutes the Shia minority in the south and east of the country, and non-Muslim religious believers from foreign countries.

Public executions and amputations for criminal offences are common. Adultery is a punishable offence. A special religious police enforces the five-times-a-day call to prayer on recalcitrant Saudis, as well as a host of other petty edicts on personal behaviour. Women have no rights over property, still less over their bodies or with regard to their status in society, and are even forbidden to drive cars.

Saudi Arabia is a country with less democracy than Saddam's Iraq and fewer personal freedoms than Khomeini's Iran. No wonder it was one of the few countries to enjoy good relations with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan!

How did it happen that one of the world's largest oil producers has managed to produce and sustain such an archaic and backward system? Racist Western commentators invariably attribute it to some defect of Arab or Muslim culture, as though Arabs or Muslims are uniquely incapable of adapting to modernity or of granting rights to their own people.

More sympathetic, but equally racist, explanations romanticise the Saudi system as an expression of the nomadic desert-dwelling Bedouin. But this ignores the fact that the Al Sauds were seen as a backward clan by the urbanised and sedentary populations of the more developed western part of the country (the Hijaz) when the former took power. It also fails to acknowledge the effects of several decades of capitalist industrial development fuelled by the energy industry. Crucially, both explanations gloss over the key role of first British, and then US imperialism in maintaining the Al Sauds in power.

Until the Anglo-French division of the Arab Middle East following the First World War, the Al Sauds were a relatively unimportant clan driven into exile in Kuwait by their pro-Ottoman rivals, the Rashids. They rose in importance only in so far as they were able to play a useful role in British imperialism's plans for the region, in this case by helping to keep the Arab lands fragmented, weak and ruled by regimes dependent on British support.



King Fahd (inset) with a few members of his family

Britain encouraged and aided Abdul Aziz al-Saud's reconquest of his family's traditional seat in the Nejd (the eastern part of the Arabian peninsula) partly for this reason.

Britain had promised the then rulers of the Hijaz, the Hashemite dynasty, that they would support the creation of an independent Arab state if they rebelled against the Ottoman Turks. Following the subsequent Arab Revolt, the Hashemite prince Faisal established a short-lived provisional government in Damascus from which he hoped to rule a united Arab Greater Syria, before being expelled from Syria by the French, with British connivance.

While Faisal received the British-created monarchy of Iraq as compensation, and his brother Abdallah handed the emirate of Transjordan, their father Hussein bin Ali's denunciations of British treachery turned Britain against him, with the result that the Al Sauds were allowed to conquer the Hashemite-ruled region of the Hijaz, including the port city of Jiddah and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

The Kingdoms of Nejd and the Hijaz were united into the present-day kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. The discovery of oil in the 1930s saw the growing involvement of US oil companies backed by their government, and the emergence of a semi-permanent alliance between the Al Saud dynasty and the US government aimed at protecting the flow of cheap oil to North America, Europe and Japan.

This alliance came into its own after the Second World War, with the decline of Britain's imperial influence and the rise of radical Arab nationalism. Saudi Arabia acted as a pro-West bulwark against Nasser's Egypt and the secular pan-Arab Ba'athist and Palestinian nationalist movements. It promoted its version of Islam as an alternative ideology to both secular nationalism and communism. With its oil revenues, Saudi Arabia bought influence over the Arabic-language press outside its own borders, Arab opposition movements in exile, and could act as a "restraining influence" over radical regimes, like Syria, that were dependent upon it for development aid.

Following the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, Saudi Arabia was left as the only "traditional"

Along with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia was happy to bankroll Saddam's eight-year war against Iran to stave off the threat of revolution, and so must bear some responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Iranian dead

Arab regime capable of applying pressure in the region on behalf of Anglo-American imperialism. This was confirmed following the CIA-inspired jihad against the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan, during which Saudis, like Osama Bin Laden, freely used the country to finance and recruit Islamist volunteers with the full blessings of their government.

Along with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia was happy to bankroll Saddam's eight-year war against Iran to stave off the threat of revolution, and so must bear some responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Iranian dead.

This alliance came at a cost to the Saudi people as well. The maintenance of a deeply reactionary system in a country being flooded with the effects of oil wealth at a time when the surrounding region was in revolutionary turmoil was bound to have an effect. Just one example is that Saudi Arabia famously spent more on the upkeep of its first king's royal fleet of cars than it did on education until Abdul Aziz's death in 1953. The real benefit of the oil boom passed to the royal family and their hangers-on, who enmeshed themselves in a web of corruption and cosy business relationships.

Very little of this wealth was invested in improving the infrastructure of the country. Most of it went to finance the disproportionately huge security forces needed to keep the regime in power, on expensive military purchases that were often beyond the armed forces ability to use, and on showcase construction projects.

Much of it was wasted on the idle luxuries of the parasitic caste running the country, turning Saudi Arabia into a country where obscene wealth exists alongside grinding poverty. Despite the expansion of education, the country is still dependent upon skilled migrants from Europe, North America, from other Arab countries, and from poor Muslim countries like Pakistan and Indonesia to keep the oil industry going.

Saudi Arabia's population of 23 million includes about 6.5 million foreign workers. While most manual and semi-skilled jobs are performed by migrants, the Western workers dominate the professional jobs, live in separate districts or compounds, and often earn more

than equally qualified Saudis - and certainly much more than ordinary Saudis. This is the background to the al-Qaeda attacks on Western expatriates in the kingdom: they are the visible symbol of Western domination of the country's government and its economy.

For a while, the system could be kept stable. The constant repression and fear of deportation was effectively used to smash any moves towards workers' self-organisation, thus preventing the emergence of class politics or a working-class movement among the immigrant workers. A long period of rising oil revenues meant that the state could ensure a job to every Saudi graduate, thus keeping the level of discontent at the dynasty's economic abuses to a minimum.

However, it was not sustainable. Since the 1980s, the country has been mired in a serious economic crisis and is in serious debt. The government's response has been a policy of "Saudiisation" - trying to stave off mass discontent by filling all available jobs with native-born workers. The dashed social aspirations of a generation of educated Saudis have simply added fuel to the flames.

The turning-point was Saudi Arabia's response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The Saudi regime openly allied itself with the US government against another Arab and Muslim country, inviting US troops onto its territory from which they conducted one of the most ferocious bombing campaigns against Iraq's densely populated cities in the history of modern warfare. While the regime could, albeit only just, justify the stationing of foreign troops by the threat posed to the country's security, the fact that the US forces have remained long after Saddam Hussein was no longer perceived as a threat (at least by the Saudi people) has increased the perception that they are there to prevent the overthrow of the Al Saud dynasty - or even any attempt to reform their system of rule or press for democratic rights.

The spark that has lit the fuse has been the Palestinian intifada - and the failure of any of the Arab regimes to aid it - followed by the so-called "war on terror" and the occupation of Iraq. The impotence, corruption and complicity with the West of all the Arab regimes has been a recruiting sergeant for Islamists across the Middle East, but has been especially pronounced in Saudi Arabia. The fact that anyone is capable of bombing Saudi or Western targets in a country regarded as a police state should be taken as a sign of the intensity of the unrest lurking beneath the surface in the kingdom.

However, the apparent leaders of the unrest - the Islamist clerics and petit bourgeois - cannot take Saudi Arabia out of the semi-feudal pit in which it is mired. Saudi Arabia's problems are a function of capitalism and imperialism, not just of a parasitic royal dynasty, and will require the overthrow of capitalism to solve.

The only force capable of achieving this task will be the multi-national working class - in Saudi Arabia and in the region as a whole. And the first step in this direction will have to be the creation of a working class movement and revolutionary party uniting all workers regardless of creed, nationality, or sex. Only this will assure victory over the forces of both Al Saud pro-imperialist reaction and Al-Qaeda reaction.

The foundation of the

Faced with two more revolutions betrayed by the Stalinists and the approach of a second world imperialist war, Trotsky moved to found the Fourth International. By *Dave Stocton*

In the years 1933-35 Trotsky advised his supporters to use various tactics to get as close as possible to the workers radicalised by the impact of Hitler's victory in Germany in 1933.

First the Trotskyists of the International Communist League tried to unite with the left centrist parties that had emerged in the political space between the Stalinist Communist International (Comintern) and the old Second International of socialist parties. The "Declaration of the Four", signed with three of these parties had limited results, succeeding only in Holland and the United States.

In France the struggle for a new International urgently required entry into the French Socialist Party the SFIO. In the USA it led to a fusion by the Communist League of America (the ICL section) with the American Workers Party, led by A J Muste. The resultant Workers Party of the USA that year played a magnificent role in the Minneapolis teamsters' strikes, giving the US Trotskyists a solid base in the working class. In Britain it led to an entry into the Independent Labour Party.

Trotsky endorsed the variety of all these attempts but at the same time he stressed the underlying unity of principle and purpose – the founding of new revolutionary parties and a new International:

"...on whatever arena, and whatever the methods of functioning, [the Trotskyists] are bound to speak in the name of unqualified principles and clear revolutionary slogans. They do not play hide-and-seek with the working class; they do not conceal their aims; they do not substitute diplomacy and combinations for a principled struggle. Marxists at all times and under all conditions openly say what is."

During 1935-38 the adoption by the Comintern of the strategy of the Popular Front, first in France and then in Spain drew the Trotskyists into a new field of battle. It was a highly dangerous one too since the new tactic was realised as a bloc between the two mass Internationals which necessarily pitted them against the movement for a new Fourth International. The Stalinists and social democrats systematically channelled the last pre-war upsurge of the class struggle, which in France and Spain at least reached objectively revolutionary proportions, into compromise with the bourgeoisie and ultimately betrayal.

France

The roots of the Popular Front strategy lay in Stalin's desperate search for an alliance with French imperialism against a re-arming Nazi Germany. In the sphere of diplomacy this led, in 1934 to the Franco-Soviet Pact.

Maurice Thorez, the Communist Party leader, claimed that it was neglect of the "middle-class" which had enabled Hitler to come to power. This meant that the Radical Party – the largest bourgeois party in France – had to be drawn into Popular Front committees.

The enormous impact of the Franco-Soviet Pact for working class strategy soon became clear. Stalin announced that he had "complete understanding and approval of the national defence policy pursued by France with the object of maintaining its armed forces at a level consistent with its security requirements".

L'Humanité hailed this with the headline "Stalin is right!" Out went the Leninist policy of revolutionary defeatism in an imperialist country – a policy on which the party and the Communist International had been founded. All that

was needed was for a state to be an ally of the USSR for social patriotism to be the correct policy for communists there. In France the CP dropped its campaign against conscription and its call for independence for the colonies was replaced by calls for "colonial reform".

Trotsky characterised Stalin's and the French CP's support of Laval's rearmament programme as a critical moment in post war working class history: "Stalin has signed the death certificate of the Third International. For the first time Stalin has openly said what is: i.e. in full view of the entire world, he has repudiated revolutionary internationalism and passed over to the platform of social patriotism."

In August 1935 the 7th Congress of the Comintern endorsed and generalised the "broad anti-fascist Popular Front". The programme of the French Popular Front appeared in January 1936. It made no promise to nationalise anything except the war industries, promised no legal rights for workers who suffered a veritable tyranny within the workplace. Even the loudly touted disarmament of the fascist bands took the form of a dissolution of all para-military organisations and thus of workers defence guards and thus renounced the arming of the proletariat.

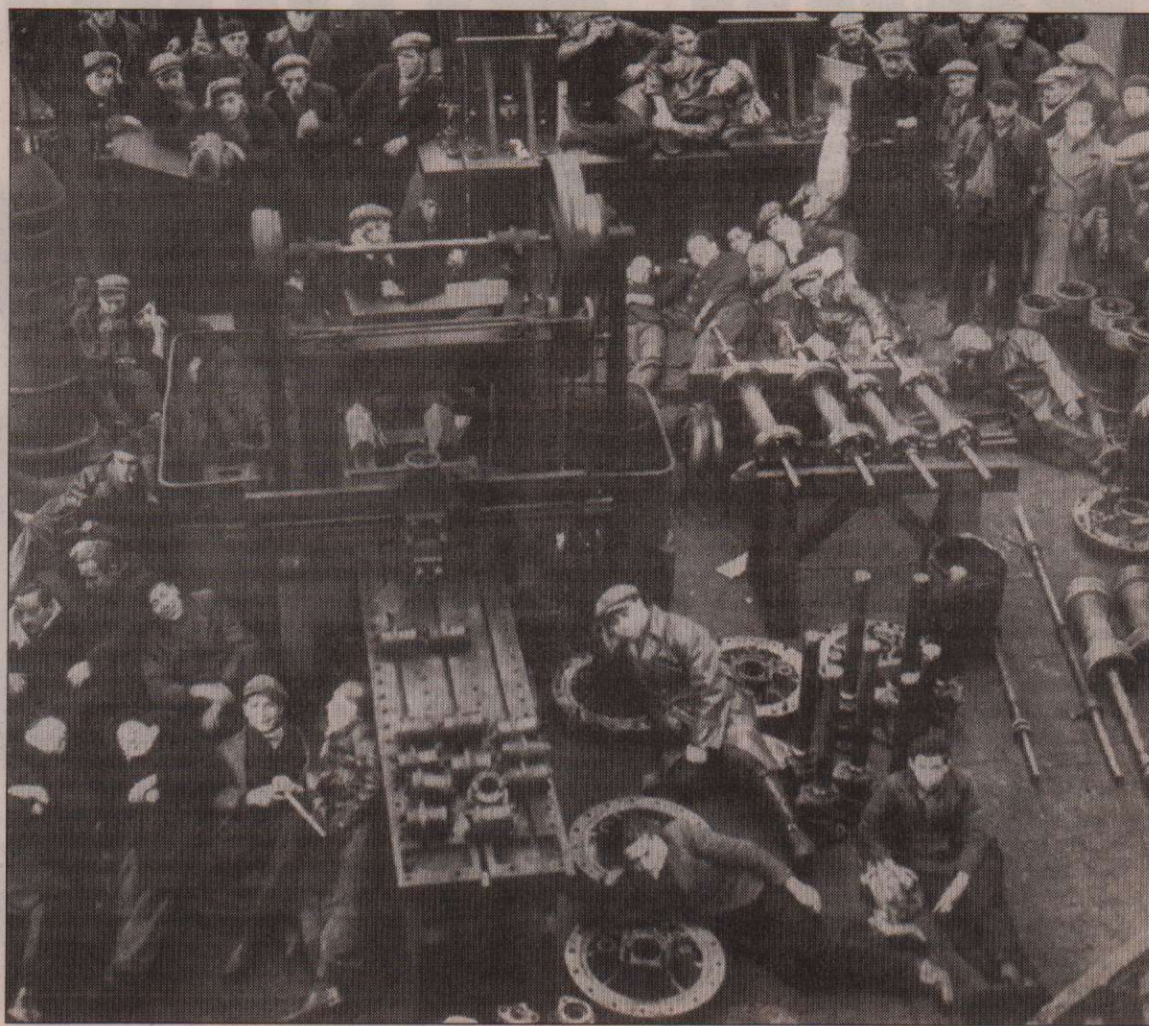
The elections were completed on 3 May 1936. The results were a stunning victory for the Popular Front. A wave of strikes broke out. By 10 June over two million workers were on strike, many of them using the new tactic of the sit-in. Blum did all he could to settle the strikes and get the workers back to work. He conceded trade union recognition, collective agreements, freely elected workers committees in the factories, paid holidays, a 10-15 per cent hike in wages, compulsory arbitration. This wave of major reforms never before seen in France – passed through the parliament with the speed of an express train.

The CP, the SFIO and the trade union federation, the CGT, now threw all their weight on the brakes to bring the movement to an end. Thorez exclaimed: "To seize power now is out of the question!". The strike movement must be limited to the "satisfaction of demands of an economic character." He uttered the immortal words: "It is necessary to know how to end a strike".

The immediate result, as well as the wage increases, the paid holidays etc. was a massive increase in the membership of the unions. The CGT with around one million members before the strikes, saw its membership rise to 2,500,000 by mid-June 1936. It was to double again within six to eight months.

Only one small grouping offered a revolutionary perspective for the French working class. The Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste, the section of the International Communist League. Its weekly paper Lutte Ouvnere contained an article by Trotsky headlined, "The French Revolution Has Begun!" Trotsky scathingly attacked the CP and the CGT line that only economic and sectional strikes were needed. Trotsky's estimation was that: "This is the open rallying of the oppressed against the oppressors. This is the classic beginning of revolution."

A further wave of struggles came in 1938. But this time it was to end in defeat for the workers. For two years the bourgeoisie shifted the Popular Front ever more to the right, embroiling it in attacking those sections of workers who demanded "too much". Through the mechanism of the Radical Party's manoeuvrings in parliament, they eventually ousted Blum as premier and put Daladier back in power, finally dumping the Popular Front altogether. At every



step the combined policies of the Communists and Socialists paralysed any fightback by the workers.

What had been gained by breaking the great upsurges of the working class in 1936 and in 1938? What became of the "immediate and palpable gains" to which the possibility of revolution had been sacrificed? Peace? But war was to come nine or 10 months after the workers' defeat.

The defence of the Republic and democracy? After the French military disaster of 1940 Marshall Petain installed a bonapartist dictatorship in the southern part of the country while the Gestapo controlled the north.

The defence of the Soviet Union? In 1941 Hitler was to launch an onslaught that caught Stalin and his gang totally by surprise and resulted in the deaths of 20 million Soviet workers and peasants.

The Spanish Republic? Franco smashed it in March 1939. The wheel had come full circle since June 1936. Everything was lost.

Yet in the name of these objectives and via the Popular Front strategy the workers were poisoned with chauvinism. The way was prepared for the "democratic imperialisms", France and Britain, to lead the masses into another barbarous world war.

Spain

The leading figure in the Spanish Left Opposition had been Andreu Nin. One of the founders of the Communist party, Nin had fully backed Trotsky in his struggle with Stalin in the 1920s. With great authority in the international and Spanish working class movement, a name known to millions, Nin could have played a crucial role in the Spanish revolution.

Yet before the outbreak of the civil war in 1936, Trotsky had already broken with Nin after he led the small forces of Spanish Trotskyism into a fusion with a party called the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, led by Maurin. This was a centrist party, which had supported the pro-Bukharin Right Opposition in Russia and internationally.

The fusion created a new party, the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). The POUM was certainly hostile to Stalinism, and

French workers occupy the Crespin steel works during the strike wave of June 1936

declared that the war against Franco and the social revolution were inseparable.

Yet the POUM did not have a clear revolutionary programme for the Spanish working class. It confusingly talked of a "democratic socialist revolution". It was totally unclear as to whether it was necessary to fight for a workers' and peasants' government and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore its attitude to the Spanish Popular Front government installed in 1936 was equivocal in the extreme.

In the first weeks of the civil war the POUM showed great bravery, taking a lead in the land and factory seizures, and playing an important role in the arming of the working class. Their membership rose from 8,000 to over 35,000 in the first months of the civil war, and the party recruited over 10,000 members of the workers' militias.

With a correct policy, the POUM could have used this mass influence to fight for the spontaneously formed revolutionary committees and workers' parties and unions to build councils of workers' delegates – like the soviets in Russia in 1917. These could have become an alternative centre of power to that of the Popular Front government in Madrid. Providing a revolutionary party acted within these councils, the civil war in defence of the workers democratic rights could have grown over into a socialist revolution.

But the POUM's confused politics – typical of centrism – left them unable to take advantage of this exceptional situation. On 7 September 1936 Nin made a speech to thousands of workers in Barcelona. When he correctly called for the capitalist ministers to resign from the Popular Front the crowd went wild with enthusiasm.

But then Nin himself joined the government of Catalonia. The POUM changed their tune, and declared that they would "leave the question open" as to whether capitalist parties should be allowed in the government (i.e. they would not oppose this). They in practice endorsed the local version of the Popular Front. Worse still, instead of using the POUM's influence in the revolutionary committee in the district of Lerida to build workers' councils, the POUM went on to call for "an authentic government of the Popular Front", and actually helped the government to demobilise the committee.

Fourth International



This confusion on the real nature of the Popular Front was built in to the POUM's ideas at the time of the fusion with Maurin. Trotsky's handful of supporters in Spain warned that taking part in the government and failing to fight for workers' councils would mean that the POUM would miss the opportunities that existed for leading the revolution to victory.

Small forces committed to a revolutionary policy did emerge from expulsions and splits from the POUM – the Bolshevik-Leninists of Spain. But they were to have little time to put the programme of Lenin and Trotsky into practice. For events were moving to a decisive showdown between the working class and the Popular Front government.

In Barcelona the anarchist trade union CNT, together with the POUM and many rank and file supporters of the socialists, occupied and ran many key industries and buildings. When the Communist Party organised a counter-attack to remove workers from the telephone exchange socialists called on their union members to stop fighting and to take down their barricades. Then the anarchist CNT leaders did the same.

Anarchist workers, outraged, tore up their CNT cards and newspapers in disgust. But the POUM leaders, still clinging to the popular front, refused to criticise the CNT leaders and appeal to them to form a common front against the government. Then the POUM itself abandoned the barricades under instruction from its leaders, even whilst the fighting was still going on.

Although the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists fought for a revolutionary response to the government's attack on the workers of Barcelona the revolutionary forces were too small and isolated to turn the tide.

The price was the crushing of the left. Stalinist police, trained and led by agents of the Soviet secret police, hunted down, tortured and killed hundreds of revolutionary fighters. The CNT and the POUM were banned. Nin himself was arrested and taken away to a Stalinist prison. Despite torture, he refused to sign a forced confession that would have led hundreds more to the cells and an early grave. Instead he died a hero's death. But his tragic end could have been different. With a correct strategy he could have led the POUM and the Spanish working class to power.

The programme and perspectives of Trotsky and his supporters had been proven not to be "sectarian" at all but rather the distillation of the vital lessons of the Russian revolution. Trotsky had been proved right once again to insist on building the Fourth International only on the basis of real agreement on programme.

The Moscow trials

In August 1936 first of three waves of show trials and mass purges took place in Moscow. The principal defendants were absent – Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov. In the USSR mass arrests of former oppositionists began. The conditions of those who had not capitulated and who were in the state labour camps and "isolators" (the Gulag), worsened, provoking them to heroic hunger strikes (132 days in Vorkuta) Thousands of Trotskyists were shot in the prison camps of the USSR towards the end of 1937 and in 1938.

In the three Moscow trials between 1936-38 Stalin's aim was quite simply the liquidation of anyone who might act as an alternative leadership in the event of a major crisis caused by the war which was already looming on the horizon. Trotsky responded by encouraging the setting up of a Commission, made up largely of left liberal and socialist intellectuals. It was headed by John Dewey, the bourgeois philosopher and educationalist in the United States. They visited Mexico, where Trotsky was now exiled, and meticulously investigated the charges against Trotsky made in the Moscow trials of 1936-37. It delivered a not-guilty verdict for Trotsky and Sedov as well as the other victims.

The founding of the Fourth International

Events in France and Spain had shown beyond doubt the counter-revolutionary consequences of the Popular Front strategy. In each successive crisis the bankruptcy of the Second and Third Internationals had been revealed. A new world war was approaching, made possible by the defeats suffered by the workers in France, Spain and other countries and above all by the fact that both the Internationals had proclaimed in advance of the fighting that they would support the "democratic" imperialist powers. It was urgent not only to continue to rally the small forces of revolutionaries but to found a Fourth International as a banner of resistance in the coming war.

In discussions between Trotsky and the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party of the USA agreement was reached that the forthcoming world conference of the Bolshevik-Leninists in 1938 should actually found the Fourth International. In the view of James P Cannon – leader of the SWP (US), "the main elements of the Fourth International are by now crystallised."

Trotsky at one of the hearings of the Dewey Commission which exposed the fraud of the Moscow show trials

Trotsky agreed: "This International will become strong by our own action, not by manoeuvres with other groups. Naturally we can attract other intermediary groups, but that would be incidental. The general line is our own development. We had a test in Spain for all these intermediary organisations – the POUM was the most important part of the London Bureau and the same POUM proved to be most disastrous for the Spanish revolution."

These intermediate groups were, in Trotsky's words, "only an obstacle – a petrified centrism without masses." In the approaching war revolutionaries needed to be bound together by a common programme and discipline in order to survive the enormous political pressures and proclaim their revolutionary message to the whole world.

Critics of Trotsky, from his first biographer Isaac Deutscher to Tony Cliff, founder of the British SWP, have argued that the founding of the Fourth International was a big mistake, a step too far. They pointed to the foundation of Second and Third Internationals, as mass organisations, and claim that the small forces of Trotskyism were simply too weak to set up a real world party of social revolution. Instead, they argued that strong national parties should be built first: only then could an international be founded.

This argument ignores the most important lessons of the 1930s. A party that grows up only on one national terrain will inevitably adapt to the pressures and prejudices that are most widespread in that country. The POUM, for example, thought that there was something special about Spain that made the fight for workers' councils unnecessary. The French Trotskyists had first resisted any idea of entering the SFIO, then wanted to stay in it long term. Only the existence of an international organisation, presided over by Trotsky, kept these small group of revolutionaries on course.

The best possible way to resist these pressures is for each party to conduct its work not in isolation, but as an integral part of a democratic centralist international movement, one in which every national section is bound by the same discipline as a local branch would be within a national organisation.

So on 3 September 1938, 30 delegates from 11 countries gathered in the home of the veteran revolutionary Alfred Rosmer, just outside Paris, to adopt a new international programme and to formally found the Fourth International. Only the US section had a membership of around two thousand. A handful of others France,

Belgium, Indochina, Poland, etc. a few hundred and most of the others in dozens. Security considerations necessitated that the conference lasted only one day. At the same time, delegates from nine different countries founded a Youth International in sympathy with the Fourth International.

But the key achievement of the foundation conference was undoubtedly the Death Agony of Capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International – what became known as the Transitional Programme. It did not claim to be the complete and final programme of the International, dealing with the entire epoch through to the establishment of a world classless society. It did not describe in detail the concrete tactics and tasks of the social revolution itself. Other documents of the FI and its predecessors the International Left Opposition, the International Communist League and the Movement for the Fourth International, had dealt with some of these issues. It was in a sense a world action programme for the years of war and revolution which lay immediately ahead.

Its central axis was presenting the immediacy of the social revolution in every partial and immediate struggle and attempting by posing the key demands, the correct tactics, the best forms of organisation so that the masses could pass on to an assault on the power of the capitalists. Thus workers' councils, the workers' militia, were presented not simply as the political and military forms of a future workers' state, but as objectives to aid and take forward existing struggles. Likewise the "sliding scale of wages and hours" addressed the problem of mass unemployment and suggested the division of the total work needed by society by those available to do it. This demand was the only really reasonable response to millions on the dole. At the same time it was the basic principle of a socialist society, of a planned economy. This is what the concept of transitional demands, and a programme dominated by such demands, meant. Thus the programme stated:

"The strategic task of the next period – a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

It went on to point out that this was not a question of abandoning the struggle for "minimum" demands – i.e., reforms, ones that in themselves do not require the overthrow of capitalist private property or the bourgeois state, such as wage rises, social welfare, democratic rights. The programme makes it clear that the Fourth International "indefatigably defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers."

But it does not restrict itself to such demands because in the present epoch every serious mass struggle, if it is not sold out before it gets underway, poses the question: who rules the economy and the state? This programme is thus aimed at an enabling workers still under the influence of reformism, either in its old social democratic form or its new Stalinist variant, to find the road to revolution and to a new leadership. In short, it exists to help resolve what the programme calls the crisis of leadership in the world workers' movement.

But the mighty machine of murder Stalin had forged and was closing in on Trotsky. In March 1939 Stalin is reported as ordering Beria the new head of the Stalinist secret police, the NKVD, "Trotsky should be eliminated within a year". On 20 August 1940 this was finally done.

The handover of power in Iraq is meant to herald the rebirth of Iraqi democracy, but....

Iraq is still under US dictatorship

The way in which the "handover of sovereignty" was announced to the world had all the elements of bad theatre which George W Bush has brought to every stage of his "war on terrorism". Condoleezza Rice passed a note to Bush saying "Iraq is sovereign." He scribbled on it the words "Let freedom reign," and then whispered the good news in Tony Blair's ear whose face broke into his rictus grin of triumph. What cynics!

You could hardly have a less sovereign government. The "special bodies of armed men" in Iraq are the 140,000 US troops and the nearly 80,000 security contractors, i.e. mercenaries, all under the command of the US and its allies. The Iraqi army and police force are a beleaguered and unreliable force. The government's only real powers remain the civil administration with the task of preparing for the elections in 2005. The UN resolution that precipitated the handover was clear on where the military power would lie in Iraq; the US army can "take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq."

The UN Security Council has the right to review this situation in a year's time, but the US has a veto on it, so effectively the UN can do nothing the White House does not want.

The new Iraqi government was hand-picked by the occupation forces. The prime minister Dr Iyad Alawi, who has worked for both MI6 and the CIA, has already said he will impose bans, martial law and outlaw demonstrations in hotspots of resistance like Baghdad's majority Shi'a Sadr City, and in Sunni dominated Fallujah. He also said that the insurgents were "mercenaries that come into Iraq from different countries to attack the Iraqi people."

Maybe he has forgotten the history of his own organisation, the Iraqi National Accord (INA). Operating from abroad, it used car bombs to try to destabilise the Saddam regime in the 1990s. The INA blew up a school bus full of children and a cinema, killing many civilians. It was the INA that sold the "45 minute" lie to British intelligence in 2002, even though prominent CIA agents rated the INA intelligence gathering abilities as "close to zero".

President Ghazi al-Yawer, who participated in the G8, discussions in Georgia has been a critic of some of the excesses of the occupation (like the brutal rape, murder and torture of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison), but he is a powerless figurehead in the government. It is probably in the interests of the US to have a toothless President who is mildly outspoken about the occupation. They could hope that it creates an impression of democracy amid troubled times.

The Interim Government is quite simply a front for military occupation. It has to be "consulted, before major military operations take place" but these US appointees have already made it clear that they will support any and all measures that are taken to wage war on the resistance but also curtail the democratic rights of ordinary Iraqis.

Basically Bush is getting what he wanted: a pliant, pro western regime in the Middle East that is controlled totally by the US. Paul Bremer has merely been replaced as proconsul by John Negroponte, ruling from the US embassy, a former palace of Saddam Hussein. The embassy will be the largest in the world, with a "diplomatic staff" of over 3,000 personnel.

Negroponte has an excellent CV for the job. He organised support for CIA-trained death squads in Nicaragua during the Iran-Contra affair. As US ambassador during the brutal Honduran military dic-

tatorship of General Gustavo Alvarez Martínez he oversaw the "disappearing" of local human rights and socialist activists. That an imperialist hawk like Negroponte has been assigned to the US operations in Iraq should leave us in no doubt that the US is prepared to maintain its rule "by any means necessary."

To aid this occupation forces have been granted total immunity from prosecution by Iraqi courts. Whether on or off duty: soldiers can do anything they want and will only be liable to their own military courts. All this is reminiscent of the "extraterritoriality" which applied to British colonialist forces in formally independent countries like Egypt or China before the Second World War.

This will reinforce the brutal and murderous nature of the occupation Geoffrey Miller, the general sent to Iraq from the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, told the ill-fated Brigadier Janis Karpinsky "at Guantanamo Bay we've learned that the prisoners have to earn every single thing they have - they are like dogs, and if you allow them to believe at any point they are more than a dog then you've lost control of them." General Miller has gone on record to say that he is a devout Christian and that he is doing God's work in Iraq, that he is waging a Christian war there. No "gentle Jesus meek and mild" he.

The occupation forces have responded with a new policy called "terminal force". If a sniper shoots at you, you destroy the building. If someone takes a shot at your plane you fire rockets into the apartment block that it came from. This is why wedding parties and whole families are annihilated by the occupation forces, in turn fuelling the hostility of the Iraqi people.

The plans on which US action is based were drawn up by the Project for the New

American Century, the shadowy forces of the US "neo cons" who still hold decisive power in the White House. They believe that they have formulated an exit strategy which will leave a permanent puppet regime and allow for a continued, indeed indefinite US military presence in Iraq so that they can continue with their oil grab in the region. They will attempt to use the interim government, to localise the conflict so that Iraqi lives are being lost, not American.

But things do not look good for this plan. The Americans' first victory in the recolonisation of the Middle East has turned into a military quagmire. It has put thousands of US troops and civilian auxiliaries in the line of fire of an increasingly powerful, ad hoc alliance comprising Ba'athists, al-Qaeda and thousands of Iraqi youth not motivated by any ideology more coherent than the desire for national self-determination, i.e. real sovereignty. The International Institute for Strategic Studies estimates al-Qaeda's fighters in Iraq to number around 1,000.

The situation in Iraq does not yet equal the ferocity of Vietnam in the 1960s - yet. But the US generals know that such a bloody war ending in defeat is possible for them too.

What is at stake on the cratered streets of Fallujah, Baghdad and Najaf is the whole future of US imperialism as a the global superpower. The US strategy was to re-occupy Iraq, thus terrifying into subservience the recalcitrant Arab regimes. A US-friendly regime in Iraq, aligned with Israel and Turkey, would provide not only a staging post for military power in the region but a centrepiece for a diplomatic alliance aimed against Syria, Iran and the Palestinians.

Quite simply this has not been achieved, nor is it likely to be. Iraq is highly unstable. As a "victory" in the War on Terror it has

proved a Pyrrhic one. There have also been 98 suicide attacks around the world in 2003, the most in any one year in recent history. There is terror too on the streets of Iraq, terror on the streets of Saudi Arabia, and on a scale unknown before last year's invasion. If the US project fails in the Middle East then the whole economic and military forecast for the imperialists is in doubt.

In Iraq workers, anti-imperialists and all progressive people must carry on a mass struggle to drive the Alawi government out of office and back to London's Mayfair. Only a radical and progressive force, committed to a secular Iraq, tolerance of all minorities and religions can provide an alternative to the siren calls of the Islamic radicals in the south and the Ba'athist die-hards in the north. And only the forces of Iraq's impoverished working class, poor peasantry and urban intelligentsia can put such a force together. Critically, a revolutionary workers party must be built in Iraq to fight for working class power.

Workers and youth all over the world must redouble up their efforts to get the imperialists out of the region. They must support the Iraqi resistance in its brave efforts to expel the war criminals from their country. They must support the rebirth of a revolutionary workers movement, capable of challenging the imperialist and home grown reaction, whether Ba'athist or Islamist.

What we need in Europe and North America, across the Middle East too, is a renewed anti-occupation movement, using some of the methods of the anti-Vietnam War movement. We must use occupations, strikes, direct action and mass militant protests. We must wage war against pro occupation governments and help the Iraqis and the Palestinians rip the whole imperialist project to shreds.

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

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 and Paris, in Asia at Hyderabad and Mumbai, 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 - the Fifth 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 workerspower@btopenworld.com

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
- Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____
Address: _____

Postcode: _____
Email: _____
Tel no: _____

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month.

I enclose:

- £9.00 UK
- £12.00 Europe
- £18.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____
Address: _____

Postcode: _____
Tel no: _____

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

Mail to: Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 020 7820 1363

Email: workerspower@btopenworld.com

Print: East End Offset, London E3
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)
ISSN 0263-1121