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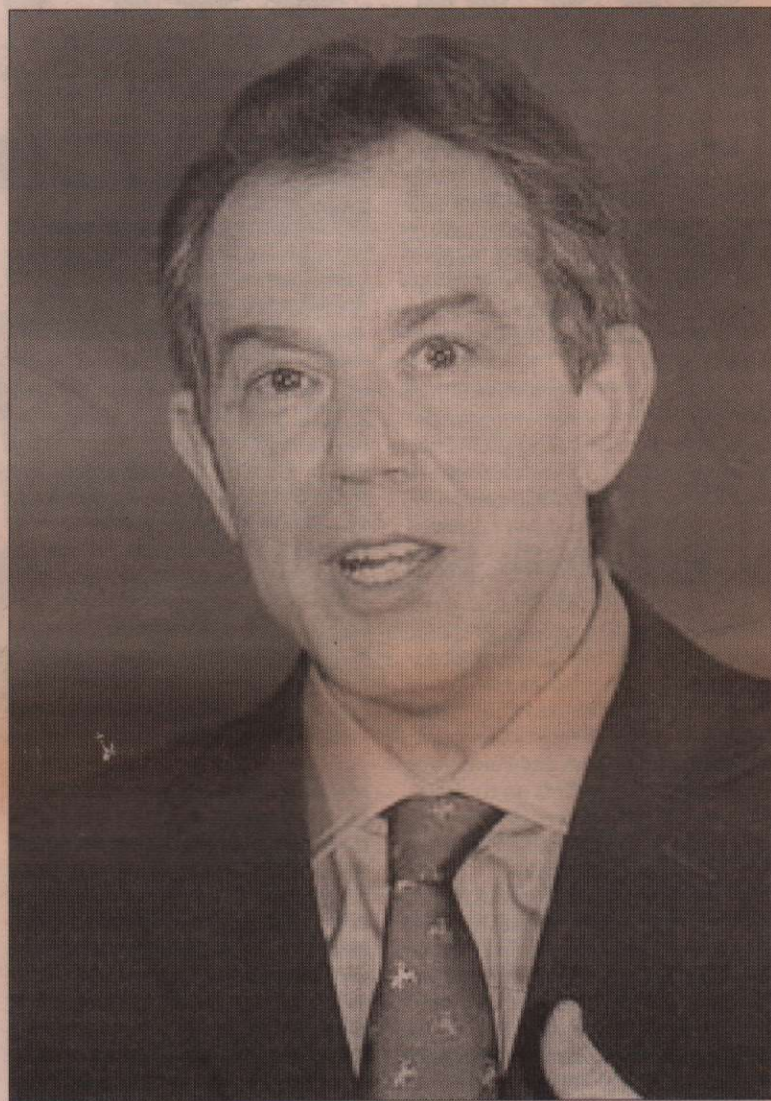
# workers power 5

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British section of the League for the Fifth International

# Union leaders make peace with Labour. At the ESF we must...

# Declare war on Blair



**T**hey're queuing up to make peace with Tony Blair. The big four union leaders have signed away their right to criticise him for a paltry set of promises in the manifesto. Gordon Brown, the great nowhere man of Labour politics, was too busy plotting the attack on civil service jobs to seize the chance to topple Blair. As for the political correspondents of the press and TV, if they made a film about their performance towards the Blairites it would be called Carry on Crawling.

Blair runs Britain through a system of private meetings with the global corporations, and secret treaties with George Bush. He does not need parliament; nor does he need the Labour Party. His new friends are Bush and Berlusconi.

Only the desire to keep things decent before the election prevented Blair from engineering a formal invite to Iyad Allawi to the Labour Party Conference.

With British soldiers dying in the heat and dust of Basra, Blair should be in trouble. But the press does its patriotic duty: it chides the mother of Gordon Gentle for allowing her grief to be "manipulated" by the anti-war movement - the same papers who elevate grief-manipulation to an art form in support of "Our Boys".

But Blair is not in trouble. The reason why is simple. The leadership of the unions, the Labour left and many of

the protest movements have no alternative to Blair. Like peasants with a Russian Tsar the dear leader seems immortal: the only way forward being to petition him to be more clement and merciful. That's the attitude the unions will adopt at the TUC and Labour conferences.

It does not have to be like this. Across the globe there are mass movements of resistance to the policies of Blair, Bush and Berlusconi: effective movements, new parties, grassroots upheavals. In October the representatives of those movements will converge on London for the third European Social Forum.

The London ESF is set to be the biggest international anticapitalist gathering Britain has ever seen.

The ESF has the potential to wipe the smile off Blair's smug mug. By mobilising for it and making it a massive success, we can:

- Spell out a political alternative to Blair
- Launch a new workers party to challenge him on the streets and at the polls
- Win the unions to a concrete action programme of resistance
- Mobilise to pull the troops out of Iraq
- Make another - socialist - world possible.

Come to the ESF, London 14-17 October, and help us turn the anti-Blair resistance into a movement and a party that can bring the Blair years to a speedy end.

Mobilise now for the ESF 2004 - London 14-17 October



# Brown massacres civil service jobs

A PCS branch secretary argues for a new strategy to beat the cuts

**G**ordon Brown justifies his decision to slash 104,000 civil service job cuts and forcibly relocate offices out of London, by claiming it will concentrate investment in the front-line, delivering better services to the public and better value for money for taxpayers.

He is a liar. The proposed switch of resources from the back-room to the front-line is unworkable, as effective service delivery relies on a whole team of staff. The cuts will result in a poorer service and at greater distance from homes and communities. Anyone who's spent half a day on the phone, only to be told, "Sorry, but we don't seem to have any record of your claim" knows that job cuts plus computerisation invariably equal chaos.

The planned closure of 550 Benefit Offices and 10 Pension Centres in Department for Work and Pensions is an example of this. Cuts on this scale will not only hit services to the public but lead to an intolerable workload for those staff who remain.

Relocation will lead to thousands of low-paid workers, especially women and ethnic minorities, having to leave the service and join the dole queue. Yet Brown had the audacity to tell General Secretary Mark Serwotka that sacked Jobs Advisers could use their skills finding work for other civil servants made redundant by his plans!

The real reasons behind the jobs massacre are far less noble than Brown will admit.

Firstly, Europe's privatiser-in-chief hopes they will lead to more outsourcing of key public services. As departments are forced to meet stringent efficiency targets, the fear is that, once they have cut jobs, they will look to offload what's left to the private sector to get the costs off their books.

The government is also keen to free up funds for public service jobs that can grab the headlines and attract voters, like nurses and teachers.

Next up, New Labour hopes to steal the Tories' thunder in the run-up to the next General Election, by being tough on alleged "waste and bureaucracy".

Last, but by no means least, they want to break the back of an increasingly militant union led by a member of the awkward squad, who has open-



ly supported Respect against Labour candidates. However, the PCS response to this head-on attack is woefully inadequate. The central demands in the campaign are:

- Defend jobs and job opportunities
- Defend public services
- No compulsory redundancies
- No privatisation
- No casualisation
- No compulsory relocation

The campaign will include the following elements:

- A one day national strike in late October
- Taking the campaign to Parliament and to the public
- Approaching other unions to seek maximum public sector unity
- Keeping PCS members informed on the cuts and relocations
- Tabling motions at the TUC Congress
- Lobbying the Labour Party Conference

Mark Serwotka has shown that he is willing to stand up for his members' interests but is this strategy, decided by him and the Left Unity dominated National Executive, one that can bring victory? Will it be enough to win what could turn out to be a bitter and protracted dispute?

As a national fightback, it has little to recommend it. Before and after the one-day strike, each department will be left to fight alone, as they did in last

year's pay disputes.

The best organised section, the DWP, is still locked into an unsuccessful strategy of two-day strikes every two months, over a year into their 2003 pay dispute. Many militants will ask, if the vanguard section cannot lead a successful departmental campaign, what chance have smaller, less heavily unionised departments?

Further, the DWP is being provoked into a fight long before other departments. It is facing the bulk of its 40,000 job cuts in a vicious programme of office closures and automation. The DWP will certainly be handing out compulsory redundancies, while many other departments will project job cuts by other, voluntary means. If the union makes a distinction between compulsory and voluntary job losses it could end up sanctioning cuts in some departments, with those in the DWP and a few other badly hit areas left out in the cold.

No doubt the PCS leadership believes members would not support the call for an all-out indefinite national strike, or not yet. But now is the best time to have the arguments with members and to win such a vote, not further down the line when the DWP has been picked off and divisions set in. This is another reason why the union needs to make the case for no job cuts, not just opposition to compulsory redundancies.

Instead of just informing members of the strategy, it should be the members themselves who control the battle. Cross-departmental strike committees need to be set up locally, regionally and nationally to control the dispute, and deepen solidarity between the departments.

Our slogan should be: No one goes back till all cuts are withdrawn.

We also need to argue for an expansion of public services. If the government is so keen to boost employment in deprived northern parts of the country, then it should create new useful public sector jobs rather than cutting jobs in the South East.

But workers should not defend all civil service jobs. Certain posts should be abolished. As well as providing essential public services, parts of the service represent the capitalist state-implementing reactionary policies.

Immigration officers enforce the government's racist policies: from harassing black people at airports to hunting down and deporting vulnerable migrant workers; DWP fraud officers victimise the unemployed and force them into dead-end McJobs; the Export Credit Guarantee Department subsidises huge private companies selling arms overseas.

Yet there are so many areas of the public services, which need additional workers, providing improved health, education and social services, or helping integrate immigrants.

And who is better placed to decide which public services to cut, relocate or expand? Politicians and their masters in the City? Or workers and service users themselves? Any relocation of jobs from London should only happen under workers' control and with the reallocation of workers to comparable jobs within London if they do not wish to relocate.

The PCS, like the FBU and the RMT, is led by a left General Secretary and NEC, brought to office because of rank and file discontent with New Labour. But these left leaders are at best hesitating in the face of serious attacks.

The urgent needs of the current dispute must provide the momentum to build a rank and file movement in the PCS and across the public sector unions.

**Editorial: transform the Labour movement - see page 3**

## FBU deal is no victory

The Fire Brigades Union's 2002 pay dispute seems finally to have been settled. It is, unfortunately, a defeat for the firefighters, from which Labour and the union leadership emerge, tainted with betrayal.

The FBU's original claim was for a basic rate of £30,000 a year, a significant rise to compensate for years of falling behind as firefighters' jobs became more and more skilled. After the 9/11 tragedy in New York brought the risks of modern firefighting to the attention of millions, their campaign of strikes in 2002-03 drew widespread public support.

However, "left" general secretary Andy Gilchrist called off those strikes so as not to embarrass Tony Blair at the outbreak of the Iraq war. The new deal involved phased in "modernisation reforms" - i.e. cuts - linked to pay increases, to be paid in tranches.

However, the rises, due in November 2003 (3.5 per cent) and June 2004 (4.2 per cent) never came. Finally, last month, the FBU thought they had a deal when the union proposed a form of words over bank holiday working that 10 out of 16 local authority management negotiators accepted. The deal would pave the way for the increases to be paid.

Suddenly seven new negotiators and two new non-voting advisers suddenly appeared. All of them fierce Blairites who proceeded to vote the deal down. Two of them came from Newham council, which had recently tried to derecognise Unison, and enjoyed expense accounts bigger than firefighters' basic wage! The vote on the new deal was subsequently lost by 10 votes to 13.

So unprecedented was this coup that the employers split. Some denounced the breakdown as a spiteful attack on the FBU for breaking from Labour, others declared they would pay the firefighters anyway.

And the FBU leadership? While balloting its members for strike action, it clearly had no stomach for a real fight. John Prescott claimed to have recruited 11,000 soldiers and 7,000 more scabs from Group 4 to drive the modern red fire engines. Meanwhile, chief negotiator Mike Fordham played by the old rules.

He needed to call for an all out indefinite strike to establish workers' control over their working times and conditions and the full £30K and build on workers' indignation at Labour's shenanigans. Instead he crawled back to the negotiating table and recommended a slightly re-worded formulation, which gave local management the green light to demand whatever they wanted from firefighters on a bank holiday, and gave firefighters, in return, just £25,000 a year.

As sacked Birmingham FBU militant Steve Godward told Workers Power, "We got the highest postal vote ever to strike for 30k, and we settled for a pay formula which stopped at 25k. For 'modernisation' read 'decimation of the fire service and members conditions of service'."

The lesson of the FBU dispute is clear. New "left" leaders are not enough: build a rank and file movement. And neither is breaking from Labour enough: build a new workers party now!

## Across the tracks...

The summer has seen the RMT's membership overtake the 70,000 mark as more transport workers see it as a union willing to take on the bosses.

One example of this is Eurostar, where 160 workers at the customer and terminal services teams at Waterloo and Ashford struck on the August - over pay and grading.

At the heart of the dispute is a £13,000 starting salary that has stood still for over ten years for multi-functional staff with language skills. In

By an RMT activist

addition the disparity between workers doing the same jobs for unequal pay has seen morale plummet.

Eurostar management have dug their heels in for a fight, fearing a spread of RMT organisation at the company. It is vital that the union draws in the support of the other 375 RMT members on Eurostar, including engineers, who face the same pay.

The Eurostar branch are considering

this as we go to press; they will need to press for a ballot of all members for indefinite action to resolve low and unequal pay across the grades at Eurostar.

Meanwhile, Wessex Trains guards and station staff have angrily rejected derisory pay offers from management. Wessex station staff are among the lowest paid rail workers in the country, on less than £11,000 a year, while the

guards have seen the gap between themselves and drivers increase massively. Guards' conditions have also worsened as their rosters have reflected the drivers' restructuring package.

RMT will be balloting for joint action. Rank and file activists in the company are pressing for an indefinite strike as the most effective action for victory as against the morale-sapping, protracted one and two day actions which management are more likely to ride out.



## Asylum lies

On 19 July the detainees of Harmondsworth immigration removal centre rebelled against the terrible conditions there. Prisons inspector Anne Owers described conditions as "unsafe". Resentment had built up among the inmates, but the final straw was the discovery of a Ukrainian refugee, who had apparently committed suicide.

He was not the first asylum seeker to have committed suicide this year. Another, a detainee at Haslar, near Portsmouth, killed himself in April. And following the Harmondsworth riot one of the detainees, transferred to Dungavel detention centre in Ayrshire, also committed suicide. This government is determined to visit the worst punishment on the most vulnerable people in Britain. And it is backed up by a constant campaign of hatred against refugees in the press and media.

It is urgent that we defend refugees and fight against the divisive campaign of hatred visited upon them. It is this campaign - led by the *Sun*, the *Mail*, the *Express* and the *Star* - that allows the conditions rife in the detention centres to go unchallenged, that creates such despair that asylum seekers take their own lives.

**By blaming refugees for the lack of social housing, school shortages, NHS waiting lists, these tax-dodging press barons also hope to deflect the attention of the poor and working class away from the real causes for society's ills.**

That is why we produced a leaflet, "You are being lied to about asylum seekers" to dispel the myths around immigration and to provide campaigners with the facts and arguments to tackle the hate campaign.

Already the journalists' union, the NUJ, has decided to use the leaflet in its own campaign. Merseyside TUC will be leafleting football grounds at Tranmere Rovers, Liverpool and Everton. In Bristol, the local RMT branch will use the leaflet to launch its own campaign against anti-refugee racism.

We urge all our readers, whatever organisations they may be in, to order copies of the leaflet and use it to kick-start local, regional or national campaigns in defence of refugees and against the racist lies (see box on the right).

## Transform the labour movement

New Labour continues to show it is an anti-union government. The decision by Gordon Brown to make more than 100,000 civil servants redundant is designed to make workers pay for Labour's election sweetener, through worsening pay and conditions. It was also aimed to strike a blow at one of the most militant unions, the Public and Commercial Services union. In fact the PCS is the kind of trade union Blair and Brown hate: it organises action against low pay and poor working conditions. That's why it's been recruiting new members.

The FBU is another union Labour hates. Even in the recent talks, when there looked likely to be an early resolution to the

dispute, minister Nick Raynsford intervened to prevent it, packing the negotiations with his Blairite cronies. Christina Jebb, chair of the bosses' negotiators, openly said Labour councillors were punishing the FBU for disaffiliating from Labour; and was duly sacked.

But there is another lesson to be learned from the FBU dispute. The FBU leaders, in particular Andy Gilchrist, demonstrated that, no matter how "left" the leaders may appear, the rank and file need to fight to transform the unions from top to bottom. Gilchrist simply used the strikes as bargaining chips to bring Labour to the negotiating table. And when Labour called his bluff, Gilchrist folded, rather than play the FBU's trump card: an all-out indefinite strike.

**There are two very important, and inter-related tasks for working class militants.**

We need to transform the unions into democratic, militant bodies where the grassroots members control all disputes and the leaders. For this we need an organisation of the rank and file, a movement that is prepared to fight against the leaders and replace them when they sell us short. Our aim must be unions based on an active membership, schooled in the fight for socialist solutions to the crises of capitalism, where the bloated bureaucracy is completely dissolved.

But the trade unions also need to fight for political solutions and this means fighting against New Labour. The FBU and RMT have already come to the right conclusion that the Labour Party does not represent the interests of the working class. They must link up with the PCS and others who come into conflict with New Labour and launch a campaign for a new workers party, which can set out to fight for power in a revolutionary way: the power to change society from one based on market "values" to one based on human values.

## Build for the ESF

Over the next month, from all over Europe, anti-capitalists will be planning how to get to London for mid-October.

Britain will be hosting the European Social Forum from 14 to 17 October.

**It will be an opportunity for all of us to discuss and debate the way forward in all of our struggles.**

It is vitally important that here too we begin to advertise this event and ensure that the attendance at the ESF from Britain is not just from those that are already active and know about the social forum movement but that still wider sections of the population actively participate.

The decision to hold the ESF in London was largely agreed by the preparatory assemblies of the ESF as an act of solidarity with the anti-war movement in Britain. Blair in particular is also the key proponent for neoliberalism in Europe.

Everyone wants to take the fight into the heart of the beast. The ESF can indeed be a launchpad to co-ordinate and mobilise the forces in Britain who want to fight against the New Labour government. The wider the participation from Britain the greater will be the movement of resistance.

## Victory on the buses: First of many!

By Andy Smith

Following three weeks of an indefinite strike, 1,500 TGWU bus drivers in South Yorkshire have won a significant victory. Their bosses, First Bus Company, were forced to back down as the strike stayed solid and solidarity from drivers at other garages around the country proved decisive.

First Bus, a multinational that made £150 million profits last year, tried to finance a pay offer by attacking terms and conditions. In particular, they wanted to remove sick pay for the first day's absence, and come back again to take the second day's pay in another year's time. This was never going to be accepted by the workforce.

Despite a media campaign and threats to run a scab bus service, the management, in the end, withdrew the attacks and conceded the pay award without strings. After a strike, which saw picket lines upwards of 100-strong, and which cost the company an estimated £5 million as all services ground to a halt, the drivers won their claim in full: 30p an hour increase this year, backdated to 1st April, and another 30p an hour top-up next year.

Success in Sheffield should act as an example of how to fight to other garages and to other workers around the country. First doesn't have national terms and conditions: an attempt to divide up the workforce. Similar actions in other parts of the country could pave the way for establishing a national pay fight that could level up conditions nationally.

First is a multinational, with operations in the USA, where it doesn't recognise the relevant trade union. In the coming weeks and months, we can expect their bosses to try and take on the union and claw back gains that have been won. Solidarity will again be necessary to resist any new attacks.

In addition, the situation demonstrates why privatisation of bus services, carried out under New Labour, should be reversed, and instead the industry should be nationalised under workers' and passengers' control, with no compensation to the private companies who were gifted the industry.

## "As long as you're fighting, you're winning" (They won)

James Thorne spoke to Steve Acheson, shop steward of the locked-out Manchester electricians

The dispute at No 1 Piccadilly has made Manchester city centre the backdrop for one of the longest pickets in recent years. In May 2003, the contractor DAF sacked four electricians for the crime of membership of the TGWU (DAF claimed they were made redundant). They protested, along with fellow workers, outside DAF's sites for 56 consecutive weeks.

In July 2004, an employment tribunal upheld their complaint. It ruled that they were entitled to compensation "over and above an ordinary unfair dismissal award".

Steve Acheson, the sparks' shop steward was his usual, unperturbed self, when I met him to discuss their victory. In fact, he said much the same as he always did when the case seemed in doubt: "Obviously we're glad to formally win the case, but there's always much more to a dispute than that. Even if we'd 'lost', we would have won, because as long as you're fighting, you're winning."

The pickets certainly achieved a lot - over 40,000 people signed their petition.

The experience gained from past disputes is a valuable outcome of any fight: "The bosses hate that, because a lot of workers don't know their rights, or the tactics needed to win."

I asked Steve if that means managers are also relatively unschooled in struggle. "Definitely, and that's an advantage which many workers don't even realise they've got on their side." This certainly chimed with what I had seen at the tribunal, where bully-boy managers did not have a leg to stand on.

Steve also pointed out the psychological effect of having thousands of supporters. "The solidarity from all the unions kept us going, especially from the FBU. The bosses always think they can starve you out, that you'll give up and go away eventually. It was like having an army behind us, pushing us on. We said, 'How can we walk away from that?'"

## ANSWERING THE ASYLUM LIES

Workers Power has produced a leaflet that is aimed at answering some of the racist lies that Blair, Blunkett, the media and the BNP use to try and divide us. If you believed what you read in the press then asylum seekers would be to blame for pretty much everything that is going wrong in the UK today! This is to divert attention from the real causes of underfunded services, sky high council tax and a lack of council housing - government policies and the capitalist system.

We believe it is important to arm anti-racist militants with the facts they need to answer some of the lies.

This leaflet is for the use of the movement. If you want to order some copies then get in touch with us. You can order leaflets to distribute from:

You Are Being Lied to..., BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX  
200 leaflets (£13), 500 leaflets (£30), 1000 leaflets (£60)

Make Cheques payable to:  
You Are Being Lied To

**YOU  
ARE  
BEING  
LIED  
TO  
ABOUT  
ASYLUM  
SEEKERS**



# Animal rights activists get it wrong

“Auschwitz for guinea-pigs” reads the banner. A handful of animal rights protestors are gathered outside a Staffordshire farm, which breeds guinea pigs for scientific experiments. Their banner is designed to shock: it equates the programmed genocide of six million Jews with the use of animals in research.

For years animal rights activists have been picketing and protesting outside research facilities. Through their pressure, the systematic testing of new cosmetics on animals has declined and legislation covering the use of vertebrates in experiments has been substantially tightened. Even the undergraduate practical classes of 20 years ago are now forbidden or abandoned.

However, tens of thousands of experiments do take place every year in the UK under Home Office licences, exploring subjects as varied as vision, strokes and behavioural rhythms. Some are designed to develop new drugs or treatments, but many have no immediate practical application, and are carried out simply to develop our understanding of behaviour, brain function and physiology.

But many are performed by pharmaceutical companies, which use hundreds of thousands of rodents every year in their competition for new products and higher profits.

Recently, activists forced plans to build a new animal science laboratory in Oxford University to be abandoned, following a campaign of intimidation, including trashing the offices of the con-

By Jack Tully

struction company. Workers' homes have been targeted and families have been subject to long-term hate campaigns.

The government's reaction has been to strengthen repressive legislation. Police will soon have the right to arrest anyone demonstrating outside a house in such a way that causes “harassment, alarm or distress to residents”. This blanket offence would apply equally to animal rights activists outside a scientist's home or to anti-fascists demonstrating outside a BNP member's house.

Many young activists sympathise with the animal rights campaigners, arguing that exploitation of animals is an expression of corporate greed or of untrustworthy science. Blunkett's attempt to criminalise the protestors will only reinforce this feeling.

However, animals do not have the same rights as humans, and while we vigorously oppose the new legislation as a further limit on democratic rights, we should not support the philosophy and politics of animal rights campaigners.

Socialists defend the use of animals in experiments because they are essential to tackle human illness and disease. Humans need to understand themselves and the natural world as fully as possible. That includes “pure” research, which may lay the basis for a breakthrough in the future.

At the moment, no amount of computer modelling or use of cell lines can replace the study of an animal. If we

## Do animals have rights?

Like any political tendency, the animal rights movement contains a wide spectrum of positions. The most extreme wing is represented by US surgeon Jarry Vlasak, recently banned from Britain by the Home Secretary. Vlasak effectively calls on militants to start killing scientific researchers in order to save the lives of animals: “I don't think you'd have to kill too many [researchers]. I think for five lives, 10 lives, 15 human lives, we could save a million, two million, ten million non-human lives... The grassroots are tired of writing letters. The polite approach has not worked.”

Vlasak's view is a minority, but many animal rights activists agree that more violent actions are necessary. Tellingly, the “actions” they propose are never those of mass demonstrations, huge and democratic public campaigns and the pressure of the working class. Instead, they organise small groups, accountable to no one but themselves, to carry out guerrilla actions aimed at individuals.

One of the calmest – and certainly the most influential – defenders of animal rights is Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University in the USA. Singer states that when society allows experimentation on higher apes, but defends and protects the rights of humans whose mental abilities are similar or lower (e.g. someone in a vegetative coma, or a severely handicapped person), we are guilty of “speciesism”.

Instead of “speciesism”, says Singer, we should accord equal rights to all organisms that can suffer. That would mean an end to all animal farming and all animal experimentation, in order to be sure that we are not inflicting suffering on any animals.

The ideology of the animal rights activists is fundamentally idealistic. “Rights” are not immaterial forces governing the whole of nature. They come from society, from human activity and thought. Humans can accord and claim rights – animals cannot.

Whether Singer and the animal rights protestors like it or not, there are qualitative differences between humans and all other animals, and one of those differences is that we can create the idea of rights, fight for them, defend them. Animals do not have the ability to do anything like that.

want to understand how genes and environment interact to produce the fantastic variety of life on the planet, how things can go wrong to produce disease and disability, and how we can intervene to put things right there is no alter-

native to animal experiments.

However, we are not indifferent to the potential harm to animals either in farming or science. Socialists should do everything possible to reduce the numbers of animals involved in experi-

mentation, e.g. where alternatives methods can achieve the same results, and to reduce pain and suffering in essential experiments. But we do not believe that animals have rights.

Leading animal rights theoretician Peter Singer predicts that in future centuries current attitudes to animals will appear as barbaric as slavery does to us now. This seems quite likely: attitudes to nature and to animals are not fixed. But if attitudes to animals change further, it will not be because it becomes accepted that animals have “rights” – it will be because we have made sufficient advances in science to do without animal experimentation.

We are quite aware that multinational companies will always plump for the cheapest and most profitable techniques to get their drugs to market. It was these multinationals threatening to withdraw investment that made Blair and Blunkett threaten new repressive measures. We argue for the nationalisation of all drug companies so that science, drug development and health research can be placed under mass, democratic control. By removing the profit motive we will remove one of the major pressures for unnecessary animal experimentation.

Under socialism, decisions about the kind of experiments we will permit and the degree of potential distress we are prepared to accept will be taken by the whole of society. Planning production and controlling potential suffering will show that we can fully realise our human potential in all our dealings with nature – including in our use and exploitation of animals.

# Drive out the fascist infiltrators

In August, the British National Party (BNP) proudly proclaimed that it had infiltrated Manchester Unite Against Fascism, the Socialist Workers Party and Respect for over a year.

Diane Stoker and Joe Finnon, two students in Manchester, have declared themselves to be fascist spies. They have posted photos of themselves smiling with Nick Griffin, the BNP's leader, on their website.

The decision to “break cover” was obviously influenced by an embarrassing BBC undercover operation, which revealed how hollow the BNP's bid for electoral respectability by downplaying its Nazi street thug tactics was. It showed leading members whipping up race hatred against asylum seekers, organising provocations and physically attacking and harassing Asian and black people.

It is alarming that these two fascists were able to gain influential positions in the left so easily. A year ago, Finnon and Stoker joined Manchester SWSS (the SWP's student organisation) to undermine the work of Manchester anti-fascists. Within days of entering, the SWP local leadership promoted them to responsible positions. Over the next year they took:

- Important positions within Manchester Against Racism.
- Leadership of SWP student work at Manchester Metropolitan

By Manchester Workers Power



Nazi scum: Joe Finnon, Nick Griffin, Diane Stoker and Tony Wentworth

University and Manchester University.

- Delegate positions to the national SWP conference which agreed the Respect turn.
- Leadership of Respect in the North West.
- Charge of Globalise Resistance recruitment at Marxism 2004.

Throughout this time there was no inkling that they were BNP spies. The SWP allowed them unlimited access to membership lists, petitions, email groups and other internal information of all these organisations at quite a high level.

If you have signed a petition, participated in an action or joined Manchester Against Racism, Unite Against Fascism, SWSS, Globalise Resistance or Manchester SWP in the last 12 months be aware the BNP could have your contact details, address, phone and email.

The ease with which these fascists gained access to these positions should raise alarm bells. It seems they were promoted over the existing leaderships because they fulfilled the essential test of SWP membership – a willingness to do exactly what

they were told.

Neither was their entry limited to information gathering. They were genuine agent provocateurs who encouraged the arrest of leading Manchester anti-fascists, disrupted and undermined our work.

They were a part of the Manchester Against Racism organising committee, which arranged the stewarding of the launch rally, which was then targeted by 20 or so Nazis; the first public presence of the fascists in Manchester for nearly 20 years. The following week, Diane Stoker rang Workers Power comrades in Manchester to inform them that Tony Wentworth, the BNP youth organiser, was drinking in the main left pub in town. When he was confronted, he was immediately violent. And sure enough, outside the pub, two police officers appeared. With the benefit of hindsight, this was a clear attempt to have our comrades attacked or arrested.

For revolutionary socialist organisations the best defence against fascist and state infiltration lies in spending time with new activists, working with them, making sure they understand and can apply revolutionary Marxist politics. Few fascists can or will be willing to do this for any length of time. In contrast, it appears that Finnon and Stoker were rapidly promoted

by the SWP because they were “yes” people.

The SWP leadership has yet to even acknowledge these events in their paper – doing no service to readers of Socialist Worker who might be targeted as a result of this infiltration. We have yet to hear what campaign the SWP proposes to launch against the infiltrators, or an honest account of what went wrong and the extent of the damage.

In the meantime, Manchester Workers Power has already leafleted Finnon's workplace in a local supermarket, where black and white workers alike were disgusted that they'd been working alongside a fascist.

We have also submitted an emergency resolution to Unite Against Fascism to join us in the fight to get Finnon and Stoker expelled from the NUS and driven off campus. Resolutions should be put through the AUT and Unison branches at the universities, whose members have also been placed at risk. Finnon and Stoker have also contravened the anti-racist and equal opportunities policies of the universities, secretly aiding an organisation dedicated to race hate and violent attacks.

- Kick the fascists out of the students' unions and off campus!
- Boycott classes if Finnon and Stoker are allowed to attend!
- No platform for fascists to spread their racist filth!





## Asylum seekers detained in jails

When activists from Cardiff Social Forum heard that asylum seekers were being held in Cardiff prison they acted quickly. At only a few days' notice, a crowd of over a hundred gathered at the prison gates in a loud and militant show of protest.

The asylum seekers had been dispersed from the notorious Harmondsworth detention centre, where the suicide of an inmate had led to riots and the closure of the centre. It was the second time Cardiff jail had been used to lock up the innocent: the presence there of handcuffed asylum seekers in 2002 had led to widespread condemnation and a promise to the Welsh Assembly that the prison would never be used for this purpose again.

So much for the Home Office's promises.

Part of the aim of the Cardiff demonstration was to reassure the asylum seekers they had support: the sheer volume of the drums, tambourines, saucepans and whistles meant that this aim was realised. However, the most important aim - to get the asylum seekers out - has not yet been achieved. With this in mind, Workers Power supporters passed round the Asylum Lies leaflet - now we need to get it into workplaces, colleges and estates.

We also need to build active social forums, like Cardiff's - militant united fronts against racism, imperialist war, privatisation and attacks on workers.

JON BLAKE

## ESF meeting in Bristol

### Comrades

As part of the build up to ESF London 2004, my union branch Bristol Rail RMT are organising an open public meeting on 6 September at the Bristol Centre for the Deaf, 6-18 Kings Square. The meeting is primarily to appeal to trade unionists, reflected in the speakers' list that includes the Trades Council president and an FBU speaker who was to speak on the dispute but can now tell us about the sell out!

But it's not totally trade union-centric, George Binette will be speaking for the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers and Dave Chapple will relate the experience of the Somerset Anti-Racist

Movement. In addition Alex Gordon, from the branch, will be reporting back from the ESF Preparatory Assembly in Brussels.

We are hoping for a well attended meeting and a lively debate. As well as explaining what the ESF is, the meeting is an opportunity to ask "where is the ESF going and what should it become?" and "what can be done locally?", drawing on the experience of local Social Forums, as have been set up in Italy and closer to home in places like Cardiff and Leicester.

Yours in comradeship  
PAT SPACKMAN, BRISTOL RAIL RMT

# Hunger strike threatens to re-ignite flames of first intifada

This is the first of a series of letters we hope to print from Salaam Max in occupied Palestine

The indefinite hunger strike of Palestinian political prisoners is the focus of the intifada at present. Solidarity has been overwhelming, tension is building, and unrest threatens to boil across Palestine, echoing the popular mass movement of the first intifada.

The co-ordinated strike over inhumane and humiliating conditions, including demands for the ending of beatings and strip searches, began on 14 August, and has the support of the Arab League and all political factions of the Palestinian resistance.

The Israeli government has refused to meet any of the demands or even to discuss them. "For all I care, they can starve to death," said Tzahi Hanegbi, the Israeli Internal Security Minister. Hanegbi, the son of a Stern Gang terrorist, was a far right student activist, and once photographed wielding a bicycle chain whilst hunting Palestinian students in Israel.

His words are reminiscent of Thatcher's response to the hunger strike of Irish prisoners. And the effect on the Palestinian uprising is similar to the effect on the national liberation movement in Ireland after Thatcher let Bobby Sands and the nine others die.

The Palestinian resistance - wracked by internecine strife throughout June and July - is already being transformed by the strike. There have been demonstrations, tents have been set up in solidarity action with the 7,000-plus prisoners.

Abuse of political prisoners is widespread and well documented. Palestinians were not in the least surprised by the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal, nor by the emulation of Israeli detention centers in Guantanamo Bay.

Inhumane conditions were documented in a report by Addameer Prisoners Support and Human Rights Asso-



Palestinian youth fly the flag in support of the hunger strikers

ciation (Palestine) and Sumoud Political Prisoner Solidarity Group (Canada). In the notorious Facility 1391, a secret detention center reportedly in the North of Israel, prisoners report being raped and sodomised by interrogators.

"Inside Israeli prisons," the report states, "Palestinian prisoners frequently report attacks by prison guards including the firing of tear gas inside prisoners' cells, beatings, denial of food and medical treatment and long periods of solitary confinement. Women prisoners report that they have been stripped naked by prison guards and shackled spread-eagled to prison beds in solitary confinement. Prisoners report that provision of medical treatment is often used as another form of coercion against them by the prison authorities."

Those held in administrative detention - without charge or trial, held for up to six months at a time - are often held in the Negev desert, outside of international law or Geneva conventions, and denied the status of POWs. One day on hunger strike in the desert is like a week in an ordinary prison, an ex-prisoner explained.

In preparation for the hunger strike,

prisoners gathered fruit juices, water and salt for minerals to help slow the process of dehydration. The Director of Prisons ordered the confiscation of these, along with sugar, cigarettes, pens and newspapers.

Israeli security services also tried to discredit Marwan Barghouti by showing photographs of him eating in his cell, claiming the pictures were taken during the hunger strike. This transparent ploy reflects the Israeli government's fear of support for Barghouti, which remains strong.

Attempts to break the strike by cooking barbecues, and eating in front of prisoners, have been deployed by the Government. Ali Jaraar, of Adameer, dismissed this as "silly" and likely to harden their determination.

More dangerous is the threat of force-feeding. In 1980, two Palestinian prisoners died because of the tubes going into their lungs. Jamal Ali, an ex-prisoner, noted: "If any of these prisoners die, it will cause an explosion on the Palestinian street."

Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi, is currently visiting Palestine to "kick off" a mass, non-violent, popular struggle against the occupation. Gandhi himself repeatedly fasted as a political statement against British Colonial rule.

Palestinian workers, students, women and youth, the social forces that led the first intifada, are uniting around this hunger strike, and participating in widespread solidarity actions.

This strike could be the spark that re-ignites the spirit of the first intifada; a mass civil disobedience campaign, using non-violent direct action, demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins, across Palestine and Israel.

A mass movement using revolutionary tactics, coupled with international solidarity and pressure, can bring an end to the occupation. The intifada has moved a step in the right direction, and it is vital that internationalists give it full support.

# Revocamp 2004: A great success

At the beginning of August over 90 Revolution Youth activists and visitors from Europe and beyond met to discuss and debate out the big political questions facing our movement - plus have a good time. Revocamp 2004 will live long in our memories.

Participants came from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Sweden, England, Wales, Austria, Germany, and Indonesia. Most came from Revolution groups, but there were also representatives from the Hungarian Left Front and Attac Hungary. It was an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and initiatives for campaigning across borders.

Lisi, from Austrian Revo, opened the camp with a short introduction about World Revolution, the anti-war work, the Freedom for Mario Bango campaign and the struggle to build a Youth International. Lisi stressed the importance of the international co-ordination that we developed at the Global Gathering in 2003.

The Revocamp programme



had practical workshops - public speaking, first aid and street agitation - and ones that highlighted our activity. There were also theoretical sessions, such as "Why is reformism so powerful?" "What is Marxism?" and "How do we fight racism and the far right?" There were debates and workshops and amendments to our manifesto *The Road to Revolution*.

Meistra gave a workshop on the student movement in Indonesia, which promoted discussion on the situation among the students and the workers' movement since the last elections. The Slovaks and Hungarians got together for a dis-

ussion on nationalism and the plight of minorities within their borders.

We also held a women's caucus to discuss sexism within society and the movement, how to combat it and draw more women into the fight against capitalism. At the same time, the men held an anti-sexist meeting, for the struggle for women's liberation cannot be left to women alone; even if women will be the ones to lead it, men must take an active role in combating sexism. An important step forward at this year's camp was the first gay, lesbian and bisexual caucus.

The ESF in London (14-17

October) will be a major focus for the coming year. We have been pushing for a youth assembly at the ESF, where we could get together with other anti-capitalist youth organisations and take concrete steps forward to forming a Youth International.

The closing plenary read out solidarity statements from the Australian Revo group and the League for the Fifth International.

Revocamp 2004 sent greetings of solidarity to political prisoners, Mario Bango in Slovakia and Martin Ogando and Sergio Salgado in Argentina (see box).

## Solidarity with Argentinian student activists

We, the revolutionary youth from across Europe and the world assembled in Prague for REVOCAMP, express our solidarity with the Argentinian students Martin Ogando and Sergio Salgado. These two student leaders from the Universidad de Buenos Aires are being prosecuted for participating in mobilisations in 1999 against electoral fraud in the student ballots. They are threatened with up to six years in prison.

We demand the immediate cessation of all persecutions of fighters - students, workers, unemployed, and youth - in Argentina. Freedom for Martin and Sergio! Stop persecutions of political activists! For world revolution!

REVOLUTION Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Britain, Sweden, Indonesia; Hungarian Left Front  
Prague, 6th August 2004



# Labour's law and order summer

While crime is falling, Blair and Blunkett are locking up more adults and young people, *Stuart King reports*

New Labour gave us a taste of its general election priorities over the summer. Blair and Blunkett competed to outdo each other on who was toughest on law and order questions.

1960s liberals, animal rights activists, youngsters on school holidays hanging around, all found themselves targets of New Labour's wrath. As if the raft of anti-terrorism and antisocial behaviour legislation were not enough, Blunkett promised Middle England that more was on its way.

Blair kicked it all off in July with his attack on the 1960s rebellion, accusing a decade that broke the crushing conservatism of the 1950s as being responsible for today's antisocial behaviour. Labour's new five-year plan on crime, Blair said, would signal the "end of the 1960s liberal consensus on law and order".

But the 1960s have nothing to do with it. Thatcher, with her attacks on working class communities, was responsible for many of the social problems that still exist in many poor areas. Mass unemployment, poverty wages, the destruction of swathes of industry and the jobs that went with them, the end of council house building, neglect of estates, the closure of youth clubs and projects, the cuts in local authority spending – these were the hallmarks of 1980s and 90s.

There is also the strange fact that according to the Home Office's own figures crime rates in Britain have been falling consistently. *The British Crime Survey* shows that the risk of becoming a victim of crime has fallen from 40 per cent in 1995 to 25 per cent in 2004. Meanwhile, in the same decade the number of under-15s in custody has gone up by 800 per cent! Britain remains top of the league in Europe for locking people up – the prisons bulge at the seams and suicides in prison rocket.

This is clearly not enough for Blunkett and Blair. For every new threat, real or imagined, they want new repressive legislation. Each time they put new legislation on the statute book they tell

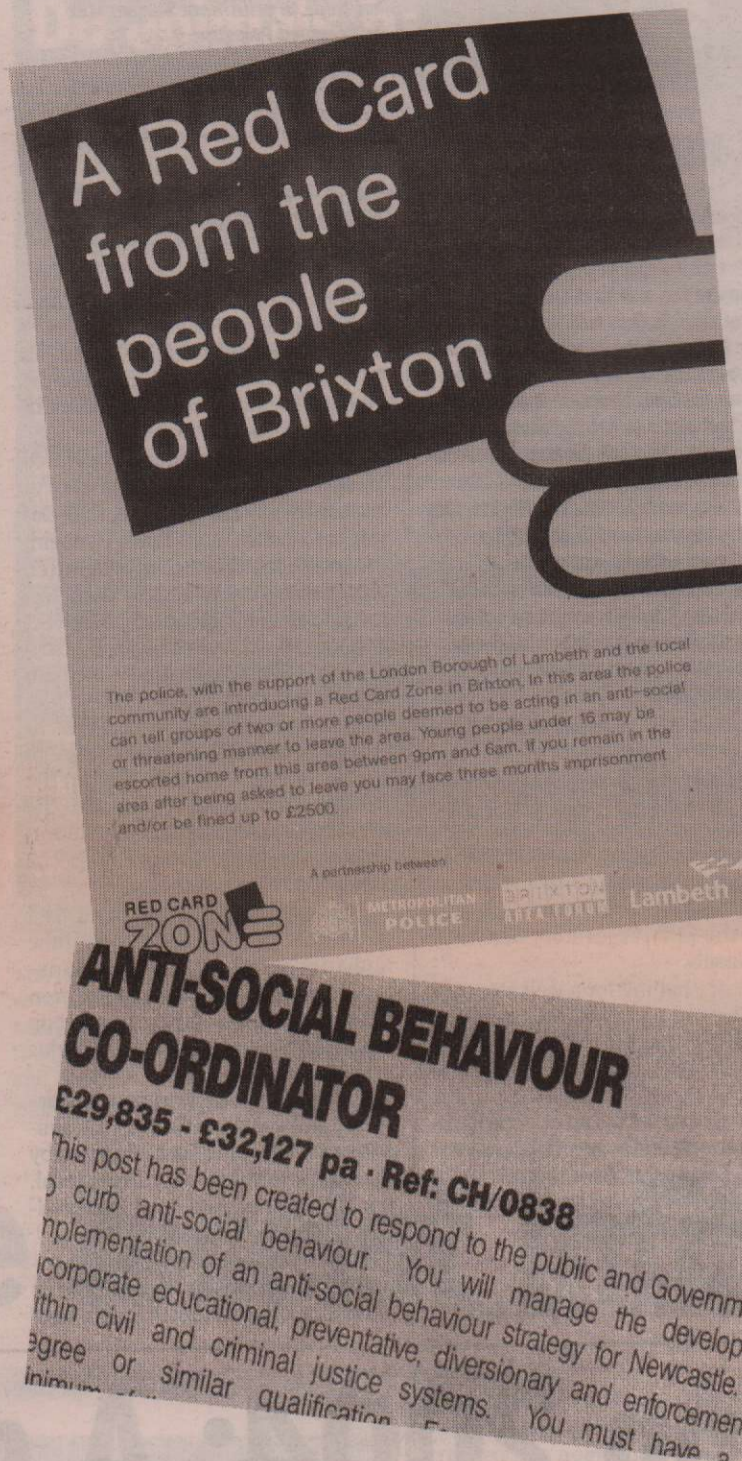
their Labour MPs that they will only be used in very specific circumstances – then they use them in a blanket way to erode civil liberties and the right to protest.

Thus the Terrorism Act 2000 is now used regularly by police to disrupt peaceful protests – as anti-war protesters found out. Whole areas of London are designated stop and search areas under these powers that are then used to harass protesters. Coaches on the way to a demonstration at US Fairford airforce base were turned back on the supposition that the "law might be broken" when they got there.

The anti-stalking laws introduced to protect women against men harassing them are now regularly used more widely. So useful are they that Blunkett now intends to extend them, under the guise of dealing with animal rights. Demonstrations outside politicians' homes, campaigns against oil companies like Shell and BP, student protests and occupations of administration blocks, strikes that protest outside their bosses HQs, could all become illegal, and targets for arrest under these laws.

Perhaps the most startling erosion of civil liberties under Labour has come from the widespread use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) which Blunkett considers one of his great success stories. Introduced to deal with the "Neighbour From Hell", they are now used by police and local councils in a huge range of circumstances. ASBOs can be made against anyone over the age of 10 years, and once issued, continuing with the behaviour defined as antisocial can result in a prison sentence of up to five years.

Labour's Manchester Council has led the way in the imaginative use of ASBOs, banning someone from riding a bicycle in the city centre, someone else from meeting more than three non-family members in public, and a 14 year old was banned from saying the word "grass" anywhere in England and Wales until 2010! In Camden, a prostitute was served with an ASBO banning her from a red light district after the police had CCTVed her – "taking



potential clients' money without performing a sex act in return" in the words of the police inspector in charge of the case. Ticket touts, flyposters, alcoholics drinking in public, beggars, drug sellers and many others have been subject to these orders because they have a lower standard of proof than is necessary for a criminal charge.

But it is young people who have felt the brunt of these orders. Police and councils, groups of elderly villagers, outraged residents have suddenly discovered a new weapon to use against youth. Sometimes they are used against real thugs that the communities need to be protected against but increasingly they are used as a method of social control, introducing curfews for youth and no-go areas in town centres and parks.

In Brixton, for example, police issued a leaflet called "A Red Card from the People of Brixton" which declared an area around the Ritz Cinema an exclusion zone for under-16s after 9pm. A similar zone was declared in Leicester Square over the summer giving the right to the police to remove anyone under 16 back to their home.

Increasingly local councils proudly proclaim on their websites how they are dealing with the "antisocial youth" via ASBOs. Caradon District Council in Cornwall leads with the fact that in the *British Crime Survey* one in three people cited "teenagers hanging around on the streets as a big problem". Clearly antisocial behaviour then. And Bristol proudly boasts how in one case "a gang was stopped from playing football and drinking on a green near shops". Home Office minister Hazel Blears is quoted as saying "What has been achieved in Bristol is just about the best example of the new antisocial behaviour powers."

Blair and Blunkett are engaged in a war on civil liberty: from the right to smoke a spliff in the privacy of a deserted recreation ground, to the right to protest against oil and arms companies, to the right simply to be a Muslim and walk near a government building. We are all under attack from New Labour.

# Big four unions duck fight with Blair

Labour's National Policy Forum in late July was meant to be a confirmation of the strategy of the "big four" trade unions in the Labour Party. Unison, the T&G, Amicus and the GMB leaders had been increasingly critical of new Labour's policies and were demanding changes. Labour had to deliver for "working people", not just for the bosses and the multi nationals.

Unison General Secretary, Dave Prentice, hailed the agreements coming out of the Warwick meeting as the most "comprehensive and far-reaching ever agreed between trade unions and the party of government." According to Derek Simpson, leader of Amicus, the policies coming out of the meeting were "sure to win the hearts and minds of working people and Amicus will campaign on this platform for a historic third term for Labour."

So what were these "victories" all about?

The Policy Forum agreed to tighten up statutory holiday regulations so that employers could not count bank holidays as part of 20 days annual paid holiday. The ability to sack workers for

going on strike was changed slightly. Now employers have to wait 12 weeks to legally sack you rather than eight weeks. There was an agreement to extend the (weak) two-tier workforce protection to the whole of the public sector (this is where a service is privatised and workers re-employed or taken on on worse conditions). The government also "agreed to negotiate" on allowing agency workers in the UK the same rights as in the rest of Europe, and agreed to setting up a "Women at Work Commission".

The bosses had a more accurate view of these agreements. "Symbolic concessions" said the *Financial Times*. "These are minor concessions that are unlikely to upset the majority of good employers" was the verdict of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

No concessions were made on Labour's continued drive for privatisation in education, transport, health and so on. No change was made to what Tony Blair has described as "the toughest labour laws in Europe", Thatcher's vicious anti-union laws that new Labour

has embraced. No extension of the trade union recognition law to small workplaces was agreed. No removal of the block Blair has imposed on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights becoming law in Britain.

The concessions hailed by Prentice were, in other words, minuscule – and as he warned the press – it will still take a lot of negotiation to turn them into policy and then a manifesto commitment. It is worth remembering that the Employment Relations Act 2000, which gave trade unions some statutory recognition rights, was a manifesto commitment – but it took three years of watering down before it became law.

For these minuscule concessions what have the big four given? They have declared "peace in our time" with the Blair leadership in the party. As Tony Woodley of the T&G put it in the *Morning Star*: "The argument between new Labour, with its pro-business and warlike tendencies, and the left will continue. But it will be in the context of a united front to win the next election... The only realistic alternative – a Tory victory – would be far

worse. That requirement must impose a measure of self-discipline." In other words, militants and antiwar activists should forget about Iraq, forget about the ongoing privatizations, forget about the threat to cut 100,000 civil servant jobs, and get on with electing Tony Blair once again. They should leave the struggle against Blair's anti-working class policies till some future date after the election.

Every militant worker, every antiwar activist and every anti-capitalist should reject these craven bureaucrats' retreat in front of Blair and bin their advice about burying differences for the duration.

What is clear is that this "Save the Labour Party Crew" have no stomach for a fight. These are the same leaders who ensured that discussion on the Iraq war was sidelined at the last Labour Party conference. In a period when the individual membership in the Labour Party has shrunk to all time lows, the unions have enormous power if they were willing to use it.

If the major unions had confronted Blair at his weakest over Iraq and

declared their intention to trigger a leadership election they would have taken 90 per cent of the party with them and Blair and his coterie would have been history.

But for all their left talk to their members and splenetic criticism of Blair in the bars at union conferences, when it comes to the crunch these union bureaucrats will always settle for a few pathetic concessions and call on the members to support the Blairites in the cause of anti-Tory unity. They are part of the problem not part of the solution.

For activists, however, Warwick Policy Forum makes one thing very clear: Labour will go to the polls on yet another right wing manifesto. Blair will not be challenged this side of the election. The much vaunted policy process – which CWU leader Billy Hayes has been extolling as the way to recapture the party – delivered peanuts. We need a new workers party.

We need it before the election. It needs to stand with the backing of union branches from the big four and other unions. And we have to start fighting for it now.





On average, 2,500 late abortions – after 20 to 24 weeks' gestation – are carried out each year in England and Wales, just 1.5 per cent of the total. Many of these women did not realise they were pregnant, were in denial, afraid to tell their partners or parents, or needed time to make their decision. Why, asks *Claire Smith*, do senior politicians want to deny these vulnerable women the right to choose?

# Free abortion on demand

## Fight for the right to choose

**D**avid Steel, architect of the 1967 Abortion Act and for years leader of the Liberal Party, has declared that the abortion law should be changed, posing a serious threat to women's already restricted abortion rights. He suggests that abortion should be provided "on request" in the first three months of pregnancy, but that the upper time limit on abortion, currently 24 weeks, should be brought down to around 22 weeks.

Scientific and technological developments, he argues, mean that fetuses are now viable – can be delivered and live – at earlier stages of pregnancy, raising questions about the ethics of late abortion. Tony Blair was brought into the discussion when he was asked about Steel's proposals during Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons on 7 July. Anti-abortion campaigners welcomed Blair's suggestion that: "If the situation does change then it would be advisable for us to have another look at the whole question," said Blair.

If this change is successful, then most women requesting late abortions would go on to have an unwanted child.

Despite the emotional fever whipped up by the press over the 14-year-old girl from Nottinghamshire who had a "secret" abortion, and the images of 4D ultra scans of a foetus, showing how much like a baby it is – the real issue in the debate is, who controls a woman's body. Who decides whether she should have a baby or not? The state, the medical profession or the woman herself? If we conclude, as we must, that only the woman concerned can make this choice then we must fight for abortion on demand.

### LAW AT PRESENT

It is a myth that the 1967 Act enshrines in law a woman's right to abortion. In fact, it gives two doctors the right to grant a woman access to abortion, and only on the grounds that pregnancy represents a threat in some way to the physical or mental health of the woman. The right is the doctors', not the woman's.

This is not just a legal nicety; some Health Authorities and doctors are particularly hostile and put barriers in the way. Although doctors have generally taken a pragmatic attitude, tending to allow an abortion where it is seriously sought, the 1967 Act in fact removes choice from the woman and gives it to the doctor. The right to an abortion is not a right that women have enshrined in the law. It is a gift, or a privilege, conferred by the doctor.

### MYTHS ABOUT ABORTION

It is often argued that contraception is available widely enough to avoid having an unwanted pregnancy.

Not true. While contraception is the first defence against unwanted pregnancy, no contraception is absolutely effective and those methods that are deemed safest in health terms tend to have a higher failure rate. The tens of thousands of women who seek abortion in the UK each year are not ignorant of contraception – most have tried to use it and, indeed, may have used it and become pregnant regardless. Contraception fails; so, for the foreseeable future, for many women, abortion will continue to be an key part of a comprehensive birth control service, necessary to enable them to regulate their fertility and plan their families.

After all, we plan everything else in social life from holidays to global commodity production. Family planning is now part of our lives and abortion has played a significant role in it.

Steel makes two assumptions in his suggestion to rethink abortion law. The first is that abortion needs to be provided "as early as possible". This doesn't always happen, he says, because of the "two doctors" requirement. A change in the law to remove this requirement, would make early abortion easier to access, thus preventing later ones.

While such a change would be welcome, there is little evidence that easy access to early abortion will reduce the proportion of later procedures. But, even if it did, what would Steel have to say about those terminations that could only, for a whole host of reasons, be performed after the three month period?

His second assumption is that the abortion law must be shaped by changes in technology, in particular changes that affect foetal viability. Since the Abortion Act 1967 was passed, he notes, "medical science has continued to advance, recording survivals at 22 weeks of pregnancy, and lurid publicity has been given to 'botched' abortions... Abortions should be carried out as early as possible".

In 1990, the time limit on abortion was lowered from 28 to 24 weeks for these reasons. Now the same protagonists argue for a 22 or 20 week limit, referring to a profound "ethical dilemma".

Doctors can now save the lives of very premature babies – born, for example, at 22 weeks. In a very small number of cases, abortions at 20 weeks or later are "botched" – that is, the foetus is not properly killed before the procedure and emerges showing signs of life. Should it be left to die, or should it be resuscitated? How can a doctor allow it to die, when in the next ward s/he might struggle to save the life of a baby born at the same stage?

This "dilemma" can be resolved if the starting point becomes the woman, rather than the foetus. Taking such an approach can help us to understand why medical practice should both fight as hard as it can to save prematurely born babies, and also help women seeking to terminate late pregnancies. It makes sense if the aim, in both cases, is to assist the woman to achieve what she wants and needs.

The development of technology is not the issue. Rather, the claim that new technologies should be decisive in shaping access to abortion suggests that we do not take women's autonomy and responsibility seriously.

The technical and biological vision of personhood implied by this proposal should be contested. Some claim that the new 4-D ultrasound images of foetuses show that the foetus is a little person, who walks, cries, smiles and laughs. Other, more sophisticated commentators denounce this idea, but argue that personhood starts at around 22 weeks, because a foetus can be born alive at that stage.

Both miss the point about what is going on for women who request abortions at this stage. Very few women make such requests. They do so, because their circumstances led them to conclude that it would be better if their pregnancy did not result in a child. Neither foetal physiology – what a foetus looks like – nor the development of foetal medicine will affect these circumstances.

### SUPPORT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

For Marxists, personhood – an individual's personality – is the result of a person's social relations. A foetus is part of the mother's body, totally dependent on her and incapable of entering into social relations. Of course, a 22 week foetus has a potential of becoming a human being, but so does every fertilised embryo in a woman's womb. However, the potential to become something is not the same as the thing itself.

We must respect and support the right of every woman to make a private, personal choice regarding pregnancy, childbearing and abortion. Being pro-choice is not only about abortion, but about broadening the range of women's options regarding fertility: increased access to family planning and contraceptives, comprehensive sex education, freedom from discrimination, an end to child poverty.

Although abortion is always presented as a moral issue, it is not. It is a class issue. Women with money have greater access to abortion from private doctors. But if abortions are further restricted, it is working class women who will be most affected. Already the lack of facilities means that women in low income groups cannot resort to the private sector to be seen quicker or have access to better facilities.

Britain has one of the highest cases of teenage pregnancy in Europe. In the year 2000, approximately 3,700 abortions (2 per cent of the total) were performed on girls under 16 and 33,000 (18 per cent) on women between 16 and 19. This is why we must also uphold the need for teenagers to have confidential access to abortion and family planning advice and care.

In capitalist society women suffer a double burden. The opening up of the workplace to women has increased their economic independence, but the role of child-carer and home-maker are still very much the responsibility of women. Despite recent improvements to maternity and paternity entitlements, the labour market is still structured around stereotypes of women as carers and men as breadwinners.

The choice to have or not have a child remains for many working class women an economic issue. There is still a 20 per cent pay gap between women and men working full time. Women make up most part-time workers, with nearly half of all female employees working part-time. For many this is a necessity because they must balance their work with family responsibilities due to a lack of affordable, quality child care.

Part-time work becomes a poverty trap, as it limits the choice of jobs available; few well paid and skilled jobs can be taken on a part-time basis. So, although the pay gap overall has declined over the past few decades, the gap between the pay of women working part-time and men working full-time has remained static, at 40 per cent. In addition, an average of three women per day register claims of unfair dismissal related to issues of pregnancy. Under these circumstances, the decision to go forward with a pregnancy or not can often be governed by practical circumstances rather than a desire to have or not have a child.

With regard to the arguments surrounding "viability", it is only when people like Blair start seriously to take the lives of the 3.6 million children (28 per cent of British children) living in poverty, that we can talk about bringing unwanted children into a world.

Women need abortion, in law and in practice, as early as possible and as late as necessary. The working class needs these rights in order to free women to take their rightful place in the fight for a socialist future for generations to come. Free abortion on demand!



## Youth say no to a talk-shop

**F**or five years and more our movement has besieged the summits of the rich and the powerful. From Seattle to Genoa, from Cochabamba to Buenos Aires, we were clubbed, gassed and shot by the forces of order. When George Bush and the neo-conservatives plotted the invasion and occupation of Iraq we launched a huge anti-war movement with global demonstrations, millions strong. Young people, burning with the intent to reclaim their own future too, took direct action, coming out of the schools and the workplaces blocking the streets.

From the activists who fought to shut down the meetings of the G8, the IMF, the WTO, to the school students who took strike action against the war; it is above all young people that risked punishment, injury and even their lives in conflict with the state forces that will always defend this brutal system.

We have our martyrs now. Victor Hugo Daza, 17, gunned down on the streets of Cochabamba protesting at the takeover of his city's water supplies by Bechtel in 2000. Carlo Giuliani, 23 years old, gunned down on the streets of Genoa, protesting against the G8 in 2001. Dario Santillán, 21, and Maximiliano Kosteki, 25, Argentine *piqueteros*, gunned down for protesting against the country's mass unemployment. And young Palestinians and Iraqis too numerous to list.

Not one of this kind of young activist and fighter from the streets, the schools and the workplaces is allowed onto the platform at the plenaries and the big seminars of the World or the European Social Forums.

We are there in our thousands of course, but only as the audience. We are welcome to provide the water-cannon fodder of the movement, to listen to the long series of speeches, and empty platitudes served up by the leadership of this movement - whom we did not elect or select.

The World Social Forum (WSF) was initiated by the academics, dignitaries and officers of third world NGOs with the support of the Lula's Brazilian PT - now the Brazilian government. They do not really believe that another world - from that based on the market, private ownership or the capitalist state - is possible.

They have dictated "principles" which ban the participation of political parties and the taking of effective decisions - by votes. These principles are anti-democratic and inhibit the development of our movement as a fighting movement, that can decide on effective action and strategy to go forward. They are about controlling the movement and preventing it from new political parties, that can challenge the power of the capitalists, by fighting for a new power - the power of the working class and oppressed.

Why do the organisers of the ESF and WSF stifle the voice and, even more, the self-organisation of the youth? Because they fear our militancy; because they fear our criticism of them.

What do the "great and good" of the movement want?

They want to reform the IMF, the WTO and other similar bodies - which are bleeding three quarters of humanity white with their debt repayments and austerity programmes. We want to abolish them. We are fighting not just neoliberal policies or war; we are fighting the entire system which spawns them - capitalism and imperialism.

They want an international agency to lobby governments and corporations, to impose and inspect regulations on them.

We want a new working class International to lead the struggles of the exploited and oppressed to final victory.

We are anticapitalist and revolutionary. We believe that another world is possible: a socialist world. We believe we can get there only along the road of global revolution. A revolution that must be led by the world's working class alongside the urban and rural poor and the racially and

nationally oppressed. We will be fighting in the front ranks of this revolution.

*There are important steps to take now.*

We cannot wait for the WSF and ESF bigwigs to lead us into new battles. We would be waiting a very long time for that!

We ourselves should set about forming a revolutionary Youth International, an international political organisation that can unite the struggles of young people throughout the world. All kind of young people's organisations should be asked to take part: youth leagues of workers parties, school and students unions, young workers groups or youth sections of the trade unions, as well as groups of anticapitalist activists.

We can take the first step at the ESF in London, if we create a co-ordination of representatives of the youth organisations to promote the actions we decide upon and to convene an international conference of youth some time in the year ahead.

Obviously we must take this struggle outside of Europe too - firstly, to Porto Alegre in 2005. We must link up with young people on all the continents. This is the path that the "official" leadership do not want us to go down. They do not want either debates on action or decisions as this would mean their reformism, their betrayals would be called into question. But if they succeed in this fatal course of inaction they will kill the movement.

We will not let them do it. We face new and important struggles in the year ahead. In Europe, a co-ordinated neoliberal offensive is taking place against the workers, small farmers, and youth - we need to fight it now.

This project of an imperialist Europe, as a rival to the USA, must be rejected. We do not support it, even in the reformed way that Bernard Cassen and Susan George of Attac want. Yes we want to see Europe united - to overcome the divisions between its petty states that have shed so much young blood, so many times. But the creation of a second imperialist hyperpower will not do this; on the contrary, it will lay the basis for a third world war.

The "other Europe" we want is not a "fortress" whose inhabitants need be frightened of immigration. Immigrants, refugees are not the problem. Super-exploitation by the European corporate giants which makes the countries from which they come into a wasteland is the problem.

We must open Europe to the workers and peasants of the world. But we must help them in their struggles to take back their own countries and end exploitation for good.

The movement has been at a crossroads before. After 11 September 2001, we rose to that challenge and created a mass movement against the war. Now, we will not let the movement stagnate. We will rise again.

The Assembly of Social Movements (ASM) in Florence showed what the effect of a clear and bold call to action could be on 15 February 2003. The ASM in Paris missed the opportunity to do the same, by not making a clear call for a "social 15 February" to launch a campaign of mass direct action against the neoliberal onslaught on state industries, social services, pensions and education.

The ASM must now make that call, in London. The ASM must mobilise huge demonstrations to confront the leaders who are conducting these attacks at their European Council summits in 2004 and 2005.

At the same time we must relaunch the anti-war movement, calling for the withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Iraq. When the G8 meet in Gleneagles in Scotland next June, we must be there in our thousands to besiege them and get them on the run. This will encourage the forces of resistance worldwide.

At the London ESF, our movement will be at a crossroads - the young people present there must make it clear that we are taking the revolutionary road.

[www.worldrevolution.org.uk](http://www.worldrevolution.org.uk)

# ESF: W

The third European Social Forum will take place in London between 14 and 17 October. It could be an enormously important, even historic event, with tens of thousands of international activists attending. But it is also part of a process, a living part of the history of the anticapitalist movement.

*Luke Cooper*, from the socialist youth organisation, Revolution, explains the role of youth in the movement, while *Dave Stockton* of the League for the Fifth International explores the crisis of leadership that is gripping the movement

**T**he anticapitalist movement is suffering from a tremendous problem: it does not know where it is going. To make matters worse many of the most influential people who organise its gatherings and demonstrations hardly see this as a problem. In fact this represents what revolutionary Marxists call a crisis of leadership. It is directly related to the leadership crisis within the working class movement, the antiwar movement and all the movements of the oppressed.

This crisis is demonstrated in Brazil today. Lula came to power thanks to a mass workers party, the PT, and supported by the trade unions, the organisations of the unemployed and the landless peasants. But now he is doing the work of the IMF, ruling together with the liberal bourgeoisie and attacking the pensions and social rights of the working class which elected him.

This crisis can be seen in the antiwar movement, whose potential to stop the war from taking place was squandered by the trade union and reformist leaders who used their influence to make the 15 February not a starting point to stop the war, but rather its endpoint.

This crisis of leadership can be seen in the resistance to the co-ordinated onslaught by the European bosses on workers' social gains - healthcare, education, pensions. Last year huge strike waves which could have smashed this attack were reined in by the same union leaders, who continue to support the social democratic and Labour parties that are conducting these attacks.

It is not true, as many claim, that the anticapitalist movement has no leadership. It simply does not have a recognised, democratically chosen and accountable one. In fact different forces have led it during the various stages

of its development. The leadership has changed as the movement has developed. The Zapatistas and the solidarity movements that arose in the West were an important early inspiration. They acted as midwives of what was to become anticapitalism.

People's Global Action, an environmental initiative that turned towards anarchism, called a series of global days of action. In Britain, its major affiliate was Reclaim the Streets, while in Italy, the white overalls of Ya Basta! brought the PGA into public consciousness. The hugely successful actions held on 18 June 1999 brought financial districts across the world to a standstill. This phase of the movement - the summit sieges - would reach its zenith at Genoa in June 2001.

The question of capitalism, in its new aggressive, neoliberal, globalisation phase, was now on the mainstream political agenda. The struggles of workers and poor against its offensive was shifting and challenging the traditional forms of political representation. New forces were rapidly turning towards a movement reacting to these changing political landscapes.

In Genoa we saw Attac (a lobby group founded by the intellectual mandarins of Le Monde Diplomatique campaigning for a 0.01% tax on financial speculation), Rifondazione Comunista (a mass Italian former Stalinist party), the SWP (Britain's largest far left organisation), radical NGOs working in the global south, campaigns against Third World Debt (notably Jubilee 2000), not to mention a whole series of European trade unions and others besides.

Inevitably, most brought with them their pre-existing reformist prejudices and programmes. This left the anarchists, radical ecologists and populists in a quandary. How could the movement maintain its radicalism?

Their own prejudices - their utopi-

## Ten years that shook capitalism

1995

Liverpool dockers sacking sparks solidarity movements across globe. Links up with Reclaim the Streets to launch Justice Movement. Mass strikes by French transport workers

1996

Three thousand activists assemble in Chiapas, Mexico. Zapatistas spell out the main idea: "We are the network, all of us who resist!"

1998

People's Global Action founded, Geneva. Begins mobilising for global days of action

1999: J18

Anti-globalisation protests in a dozen cities across the world. London LIFFE exchange besieged. Riot in Eugene, Oregon. First co-ordinated mass actions set the movement growing



# Where next?



an local "solutions", their anti-hierarchical organising fetishes (affinity groups, consensus models), their tactics (non-violent direct action or symbolic trashing) - did not provide a political answer to reformism.

Instead of welcoming the participation of the mass organisations of the working class, that have the potential to mobilise millions into decisive action against the system, the anarchists withdrew in a sectarian huff.

Ideologically we have seen a similar move from left to right. At first the movement was very radical but with a post-modern aversion to "the grand narratives" of Marxism, communism, social democracy. Under the influence of the Zapatistas, the PGA claimed it was a movement of "many yesses but one no". Nor did the PGA want to bring any political unity to this. After all politics is about struggling for power.

The Zapatistas wanted to "empower" the diverse "people" and thus "disempower" the centralised capitalist state: but without smashing it or replacing it with a radically different form of state. They showed the typical anarchist fear of authority, believing that it cannot be made accountable.

But politics, like nature abhors a vacuum. The reformists disguising themselves as social movements, simply occupied the vacated space. They took over the movement in 2001-2002, by focussing it on huge global and continental Social Forums. Attac is a prime example: most of its leaders come from the French Socialist and Communist parties. In Brazil the PT similarly advanced its social front, the Brazilian NGOs, plus the non-political mass movements it led (the MST and the CUT). In Italy Rifondazione Comunista performed a similar trick.

The famous Principles of Porto Alegre, which banned the participation of political parties and the making of

decisions by the Social Forums were imposed on the movement. Of course there was no mass discussion, no democratic agreement to adopt them. The reformists and NGOs supported them because it protected them against criticism from more militant ideas and organisations. The autonomists and horizontals were delighted since it seemed to ban politics and leadership. Until the penny dropped that it was all simply a façade.

This political "neutrality" as to what goals the movement should adopt was a great weakness, if what you wanted was worldwide co-ordinated action against capitalism, imperialism and war.

In fact the crying need to go beyond mobilising against this or that gathering of the globalisers, or assembling for pseudo-academic talkfests, made itself felt more and more with every passing year. 60,000 activists came to Florence not just to discuss what common actions to take in the year ahead, not even how to slow down the advance of global capitalism, but also in order to discuss what should replace it, how to replace it, and who could replace it. In short these vital questions opened up the issue of what strategy, what programme the movement needed.

Because Florence was the first ESF, the sheer intoxication of being "tous ensemble" meant that even dyed-in-the-wool reformists spoke like revolutionary firebrands. Everyone was carried forward too by the urgency of doing everything possible to stop George Bush's war on Iraq. This remains the burning question not only for this movement, but for the millions who struggle against capitalism and imperialism in countries like Argentina, Brazil and Indonesia; for the militants of the Intifada, for the workers and youth in Iran, all of whom are threatened to get squeezed between the dead ends of political Islam and nationalism.

Inside the anticapitalist movement, the neo-reformists of Attac, Bernard Cassen and Susan George, plus figures like George Monbiot in Britain, are now trying to impose their version of "another world" on the movement - capitalism with a human face. They are directly allied to the old reformists too: with the Brazilian PT, ruling in a popular front with neoliberal bourgeois parties and using participatory budgets to make the poor divide the limited cake for themselves rather than canceling the foreign debt and seizing the wealth of the rich; with the Italian Rifondazione Comunista, the French CP and SP opposition leaders all preparing to repeat the disastrous governments and coalitions of the 1990s.

Revolutionaries have to oppose any attempt to commit the movement to this sort of political agenda. The workers who join in the Social Forums in countries like Italy, who are attracted to the movement because they are fed up with the dead end of reformism in the unions and social democracy deserve and need something better than a new logo for the very same reformism.

The reformists, but also a number of centrist tendencies (those forces who oscillate between reform and revolution) have also put forward manifestos, programmes and perspectives for the movement. Many of them give a detailed account, some a sharp critique of the madness of global capitalism. But none give a revolutionary answer to this cruel and insane system. How can the working class smash it and replace it with a fundamentally different world? What kind of state do we have to replace the bourgeois state apparatus with, in order to build "another world"?

Worst of all these socialists of the International Socialist Tendency (the SWP) and Trotskyists of the Fourth International (Socialist Resistance) refuse to challenge the reformists,

like Cassen, meekly accepting the ban on parties. They hide behind a social movement façade, either working within Attac itself or Globalise Resistance, rather than challenging the spurious authority of the Porto Alegre principles. Likewise they accommodate to the spontaneism and libertarian structurelessness of the movement.

Faced with these awkward questions these leaders of the "left wing" of the movement hide behind the lame excuse that the time is not ripe for democracy or leadership and we cannot afford to drive away the grandes dames and grands seigneurs of the movement - Susan George, Bernard Cassen, Chico Whitaker. Too much class politics, too much radicalism would risk this.

In Susan George's latest book "Another World is possible IF..." she devotes a whole section to attacking what she calls the trap of "the only solution is revolution." Feigning a world-weary "I've seen it all before" approach she insists that class struggle is impossible passé and that revolution is undesirable because of the suffering it would cause. But what of the suffering that capitalism with its famines and imperialist wars, its sweatshops and mass unemployment causes? Those who perished in revolutions are only a fraction of this ongoing holocaust.

No wonder that on the streets of Europe and the world on 15 February 2003 millions have shown no fear of these words. And it is when the masses take up the call for revolution that these leaders shake in their shoes. It is these leaders who are frightened to break their links with the capitalist order; with its comfortable editorial or professorial chairs and its trade union offices.

Does any anticapitalist fighter really believe that we can go forward with such leaders? That we can or should sacrifice our unity in action, the advance into battle which we need to make, just to keep the Bernard Cassens, Susan Georges or Chico Whitakers happy?

We don't need to artificially arrange any split from them. But neither do we need to fear a split with them. If we go forward determinedly they will desert at once. What we do need to avoid is a split from decisive action, from the class struggle, from the revolutionary youth, workers and peasants. If the movement stands dithering in its present impasse then the ranks of the fighters will be divided. No way! Let's go forward.

Nearly seventy years ago Leon Trotsky wrote that the crisis of mankind is essentially the crisis of working class leadership. The mass mobilisation of the last few years - magnificent, inspiring as they were and are - have not been able to bring down the real evil Empire of our times. The new anticapitalist movement, like the "old" workers movement, has developed its own form of the crisis of leadership, not least because it has borrowed a large number of its leaders from the workers' movement and its intellectual hangers on. Overcoming this is only possible if revolutionaries fight for what is necessary, for a programme for working class power.

Likewise, as Europe's bosses seek to divert anger against their misrule onto migrants and racial minorities, the spectre of the Nazis and the Fascists threatens to rise again. Militant anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations are needed to counter the lies of the hate-mongers, and physically smash their would-be stormtroopers.

The trade unions remain crucial weapons in the anticapitalist struggle,

capable of turning off the tap of profits at source, establishing workers' control over production and planning that production for social need. The rank and file workers need their own movement, however, to wrest control of the unions from the bureaucratic class collaborators who currently control them.

A number of radical unions in Europe and around the world have joined in the movement from the outset but most of the bigger unions have been slow and hesitant. Yet recently, in every militant struggle, the rank and file have sought to link up with the social movements - through social forums in Italy, inter-professional committees in France, social assemblies in Germany. With every new upsurge in the movement, we need to develop these links into real action councils for our movement.

Similarly, the major unions suffer from being tied to the socialist and Labour parties that are implementing neoliberal measures and building up arsenals of mass destruction. We need new working class parties that, rather than seek to rule for the capitalists, will implement anticapitalist measures and pave the way for a socialist society.

In short, the anticapitalist movement, the workers movement, the movements of the racially, nationally and sexually oppressed, youth, women - must all be brought together to create a new International - a world party of socialist revolution. This must be a Fifth International, founded on the accumulated revolutionary communist heritage of the previous four workers' Internationals but learning too the lessons of their collapse, degeneration or betrayals.

The size of the current movement, the reshaping of the working class, the repulsive face of global capitalism and impasse of reformism all mean that the new International can be a mass International from the very beginning. Whilst mobilising against privatisation and unemployment, social cuts and debt, environmental destruction and imperialist wars, it can debate out and at last decide on a new revolutionary strategy.

At the heart of such a strategy must be a determination to seize the wealth and property of the multinationals and the billionaires, so we can plan for the eradication of war, poverty and disease, and build a classless society, where oppression and exploitation will be things of the past.

To achieve this, we will need to paralyse, split and dismantle the repressive machinery of the state and replace it with the rule of democratic workers' councils and a workers and popular militia. The leaders of Attac and the existing workers' parties may holler about respect for parliamentary democracy - but they and their reformist predecessors have never hesitated to use the police, the courts and even the army to crush our movement when their capitalist masters demanded it.

Even the Naomi Kleins and Luca Casarinis will object to the "authoritarianism" of such a suggestion, preferring a never-ending symbolic push and shove with the state forces. They fear the direct rule of the working masses and the armed people; we don't. And, if the great anticapitalist movement is not to sink back into the reformism of yesteryear, or be crushed by the state forces once it has talked itself into an isolated corner, then it must adopt a revolutionary programme and become an international revolutionary party to carry it out.

## 1999 N30

WTO Conference in Seattle is ringed by mass protests. Teamsters and turtles unite! Developing countries tell USA to shove WTO deal. Mass arrests. World wakes up to the movement

## 2000

WEF in Melbourne under siege. Dockers join in. Prague G7 meeting nearly invaded by three columns of protesters. Montreal G20 meeting ringed by steel fence. Fence torn down

## 2001

From Bush inauguration thru to Gothenburg EU summit, the movement sends world leaders into hiding. 300,000 in Genoa against G8. Carlo shot dead by police. Massive repression

## 2002

WSF in Porto Alegre. 60,000 strong European Social Forum in Florence issues a call for mass anti-war demos

## 2003

30 million march against war on 15 February. In September, Cancun meeting of WTO ends in chaos as developing countries reject pro-imperialist deal



**COLOMBIA: STOP THE KILLING OF TRADE UNIONISTS**

Workers Power received this from the Colombia Solidarity Campaign

In the morning of Thursday 5 August the Colombian army executed three trade union leaders. The assassinations took place in a district of Saravena, in the oil rich province of Arauca. Officers of the soldiers that carried out the killings claim that they were fired on first. But according to eyewitnesses, the soldiers took the trade unionists out of the place they were staying and shot them in the street. This was another extra-judicial execution.

At the same time the army detained internationally-known trade union and human rights activists Samuel Morales and Marie Raquel Castro. The army and Colombian government are already making inflammatory and unjustified accusations against these leaders, prejudicing any just hearing.



Protest against the killings at Colombian Embassy, Washington

Arauca is a showcase of President Uribe's security policy. In September 2002 it was declared a Zone of Rehabilitation and Consolidation, and has since suffered military control. There were huge raids in November 2002 when 2,000 people were interrogated in one operation. Since then, the trade unions and social organisations have been under constant attack.

The Colombia Solidarity Campaign recently visited the region as part of the International Caravan to Save Life. In Saravena, where last week's assassination took place, the delegation witnessed military patrols on every street corner. The delegation had to pass through 14 military roadblocks in one morning in order to reach the village of Pueblo Nuevo. There, in a gathering of some 600 hundred peasants and indigenous people who had come together for protection, we heard testimony about dozens of victims of army and paramilitary killings.

The murder of trade unionists in Colombia has to be stopped. We call on trade unionists, on all democrats and defenders of human rights to join our protest this Tuesday. We must keep up the pressure to prevent a state cover up of the crimes of the Colombian military, and to gain the release of Samuel and Maria.

- FREE SAMUEL MORALES AND MARÍA RAQUEL CASTRO!
- FOR AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION INTO THE ARAUCA ASSASSINATIONS NOW!
- REMEMBER LEONEL GOYENECHE, JORGE EDUARDO PRIETO CHAMUSERO and HÉCTOR ALIRIO MARTÍNEZ

Send messages of concern to the Colombian Embassy  
mail@colombianembassy.co.uk

# Chavez, the left revolutionary s

Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez has rapidly become a darling of the international left. But, *Stuart King* argues, while it is necessary to defend Chavez from imperialist inspired attempts to oust him, socialists need to struggle against his populism

President Hugo Chavez has become a bit of a "poster boy" for the anti-globalisation movement. The editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Ignacio Ramonet, is a long time Chavez supporter. Richard Gott and Selma James – fellow travellers of radical regimes in the "third world" – now write eulogising articles about him in the *Guardian*. Figures on the left as varied as Tariq Ali and Alan Woods of *Socialist Appeal*, have even been invited into the inner sanctum of the presidential office.

In one sense this is no great surprise. In a period where the US empire and neoliberalism has swept all before it, Chavez has definitely stood against the tide. Compared too with the indecent haste with which leaders like Lula have submitted to the Washington Consensus, Chavez seems to be a man of rare principle. His attempts to improve the lot of the poor, to obstruct the neoliberal FTAA, his practical support for Cuba, his advocacy of a participatory democracy, and the fact that he has fought off several US inspired attempts to oust him, have led many on the left to become uncritical supporters.

Chavez has followed the path of many progressive military officers before him. Sincerely appalled at the desperate poverty of most of his people while watching its super rich rulers milk the country of its oil wealth, Chavez first sought to change all this through the traditional means of a military coup in 1992. When the coup failed Chavez turned to "the people", i.e. to populism. And he found a population eager for change, angry at the corruption of the elite, desperate for education, health care and the other social services which the fabulous oil wealth of this country patently made possible. Chavez won the presidency in 1998.

But what did he want to do? Certainly he wanted a degree of redistribution of wealth to the poor. However at that time Chavez was not very radical – initially he talked about following the 'Third Way' of Blair and Clinton.

It was the response of the selfish and pampered Venezuelan ruling class and US imperialism that really radicalised Chavez. His modest measures of redistribution were stigmatised as communist. A series of attempted and actual coups and several bosses 'general strikes' attempted to drive him from office. Once more Chavez was forced to recognise that he needed the active support of the poor and the dispossessed to stay in power. The army could not be relied upon. Most of its high command was, heart and soul, a part of the Venezuelan elite and loyal to the USA which had armed and trained it, and used it to guard the oil riches of the country.



President Hugo Chavez and supporters

A crucial turning point was the April 2002 coup. The high command of the army had him seized and removed from office – his supporters among the younger officers seemed paralysed and helpless. It was only the massive demonstrations, led by the shanty town dwellers mobilised by his Bolivarian circles, that turned the situation around and gave heart to his supporters in the armed forces to lead a counter-coup and put him back into power.

Marxists have encountered and analysed such events and such radical military regimes many times before. Chavez' presidency can be seen as a form of left Bonapartism. Venezuela has seen an increasingly bitter conflict between the demands of imperialism and the popular classes. In this situation a strong government (and most often a strong ruler) is needed to create a new stability. Chavez is such a strong leader. He has endowed the presidency with extraordinary powers, courtesy of a constitution developed by him-

self and installed via a referendum. It is a government that appears to rule independently of all the sections of society in conflict, ruling for the nation and against the selfish interests of this or that section. It continues to defend capitalism, as Chavez certainly does, but has to rest on the mobilised masses – on their actions and organisation – to defend itself against imperialism and its agents within the country. This means the government must sometimes meet the demands of the masses. But Chavez also relies on his supporters in the army of course – for without them he could not keep the expectation and the actions of the masses under control and when push comes to shove Chavez will drop the demands of his Bolivarian circles rather than lose the support of his loyal officers.

The last thing that revolutionaries and anti-capitalists should be doing at the moment is sowing the illusion that Chavez is some kind of revolutionary out to smash the Venezuelan

ruling class and hand power to the working masses. His reforms which benefit the poor, in education, health and in food subsidies, are very important but remain modest in the context of the enormous wealth of Venezuela. And even these reforms are dependent on the economic conjuncture – the current high price of oil. Any reversion to more normal price levels would see the finance for these reforms wiped out.

Tariq Ali, a former leader of the Fourth International, who has himself abandoned any hope of a socialist revolution is a genuine enthusiast for Chavez. But he is enough of a realist to recognise that Chavez is no revolutionary. After a long interview with the president, he wrote in the American journal *Counterpunch*,

"It became clear to me that what Chavez is attempting is nothing more or less than the creation of a radical, social-democracy in Venezuela that seeks to empower the lowest strata of



# t and strategy

society. In these times of deregulation, privatisation and the Anglo-Saxon model of wealth subsuming politics, Chavez' aims are regarded as revolutionary, even though the measures proposed are no different to those of the post-war Attlee government in Britain."

He quotes Chavez as saying, "Are we aiming in Venezuela today for the abolition of private property or a classless society? I don't think so." Chavez goes on to say that the rich should pay their taxes and there should be a redistribution of wealth, that making such advances, "even if it is only a millimetre in the right direction" is better than "dreaming about utopias".

The former Marxist Tariq Ali strongly agrees, "That's why he won. [the referendum]", he declares.

But it is also how the Venezuelan revolution will be led to defeat despite winning this or that battle. Without overthrowing the semi-colonial capitalism that condemns the workers and peasants of Venezuela to exploitation and poverty, without ending the countries subordination to the international system of imperialist exploitation, any gains for the masses can and will be clawed back. The Venezuelan capitalists, and their masters on Wall Street, are not going to stand back while "their" wealth is redistributed.

The Chavez government must be defended against military coups, bosses strikes and sabotage. But this defence cannot be an expression of political confidence or general support for Chavez. We can support specific action by Chavez against the elite or the imperialists but revolutionary socialists must never paint up Chavez in revolutionary or socialist colours or fail to explain the nature of his regime before the masses. Yet this is exactly what Alan Woods, Socialist Appeal and their international tendency are doing. They have a particular responsibility because their Hands off Venezuela Campaign is actually publicised by the Chavez regime inside the country and they have a small organisation called the Revolutionary Marxist Current which is active there.

Woods and his tendency correctly recognise that a revolutionary situation exists in Venezuela and that the masses have enormous illusions in Chavez. But instead of being absolutely clear on the nature of Chavez' populism - pointing out the limitations of his politics, the dangers of his compromises with the bourgeoisie - they end up as little more than cheerleaders for the great leader.

For example in a recent set of Theses on Revolution and Counter-revolution in Venezuela, Woods declares: 'Chavez and his supporters are leaning on the support of the masses to strike blows against the oligarchy and imperialism. They did not originally have a socialist perspective, but only the notion of clearing out corruption and modernising Venezuela. They wanted a fairer, more just and equal society, but imagined that this was possi-

ble without breaking the bounds of capitalism. But this immediately brought them into conflict with the bourgeoisie and imperialism. The masses took to the streets and imparted an entirely different dynamic to the process. The mass movement has provided a stimulus to Chavez and in turn he has encouraged the movement in a revolutionary direction.'

The whole theme is that while Chavez did not 'originally have a socialist perspective' (implying of course he might have one now) the pressure of the masses has led him to give it a 'revolutionary direction'. This is far from the truth. When Chavez was restored to power after the 1998 coup he told the masses to go back to their homes. While he purged the immediate coup plotters in the high command, the officer caste was of course left in place. All the other levers of power of the capitalists - monopoly control of the press and TV, control of the oil and transport industries, the police in the capital - went untouched. Chavez is doing exactly the same now - asked by a journalist what he would do if he won the recall referendum he said he would invite the opposition to dinner. Some revolutionary direction!

Woods and co are not unaware of the dangers and do point to the failure of the regime to take measures to defend themselves and the masses against the bosses and imperialists. But they are disarmed by their belief, indeed a schema, that Chavez will be pushed left by "the revolution" that the state in their words "is no longer controlled by the bourgeoisie." This is to suggest that a situation of dual power, favourable to the masses already exists in Venezuela. This is not the case.

The armed power of the state is still in the hands of the representatives of the Venezuelan capitalists. The workers, peasants and "Bolivarian circles" are largely disarmed. Thus the state machinery and above all the army can still be used against the masses if they threaten to go beyond the bounds set by Chavez.

Revolutionary Marxists have to give correct answers that can strengthen the workers and weaken their opponents. To suggest that Chavez will be an ally throughout this process, to cede to him the role of director of the revolution, is truly fatal. Certainly demands can and must be put on Chavez and his government - such as placing the media, banks and industry under the control of the workers, arming the defence committees, disarming the police and setting up rank and file soldiers groups but the movement must be warned to rely on their own revolutionary strength and not the goodwill of Chavez. If this is combined with intransigent opposition to the imperialists attempts to remove the government, such arguments can strike a chord with the masses, help break them from Chavez' populism and build a party of socialist revolution in Venezuela.

## Bolivia: after the referendum the gas war continues

By Dave Ellis

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. It has an external debt of \$6 billion and most Bolivians survive on a monthly income of less than \$200 (about £120). No wonder then that the Bolivian people are demanding that their recently discovered \$70 billion worth of natural gas reserves are used to improve their standard of living. But the imperialists, the oil and energy corporations and the ruling class of Bolivia have other plans. If they get their way, not one new school, hospital or road will be built from the wealth generated by the gas reserves.

After the discovery of the reserves in 1996, the government of the day, led by President Sanchez de Lozada (Goni), signed a deal whereby a number of multinational corporations would extract and export the gas via a pipeline that would pass through Chile, before it is shipped out to the US and Mexico. This was legislated for in the Hydrocarbons Law (No. 1689).

The Bolivian people were told this was the only way that these natural resources could be exploited. Bolivia would stand to gain an annual income of around \$500 million, about enough to make its debt repayment every year. The generosity of the imperialists knows no bounds!

### RESULTS OF NEOLIBERALISM

The Bolivian people decided to mobilise against this sell off of their assets. They demanded the nationalisation of the gas so that the wealth could be used for the benefit of ordinary Bolivians. They had seen a decade of privatisation and deregulation deliver nothing but poverty. In 2000, militant actions by workers and peasants had defeated the government over water privatisation in Cochabamba.

When the plan to sell off the gas became known, the workers and peasants mobilised against it. In October last year there was a national revolt. The COB (the main trade union federation) called a general strike. The peasants and their union, the CSUTCB, blockaded the roads. The country was paralysed. The government tried to use repression to defeat the movement. The army and the police killed over 80 people. But this could not crush the resistance.

In El Alto, a city of one million just outside the capital La Paz, the workers and unemployed organised local assemblies and elected delegates to a co-ordinating body and the COB also sent representatives to it. When the government sent police and troops to restore control in El Alto, the co-ordinating body called for armed self-defence brigades.

Mass demonstrations took place in the capital La Paz. After a number of days, with unrest increasing throughout the country, President Goni was forced to flee the country.

### THE LESSON OF OCTOBER

The October revolt should and could have led to the workers and peasants of Bolivia taking power but their leadership proved unable to take advantage of the revolutionary situation. Alternative organs of power, like the co-ordinating body in El Alto, were beginning to appear all over the country. The peasants were occupying the land and the workers taking control of the factories and mines.

A revolutionary communist leadership, organised in a revolutionary party, would have called for the deepening and extension of the workers' and peasants' newly founded organisations - developed them into real soviet-type councils. These councils would have been the foundation of a revolutionary workers' and peasants' government.

But the leaders of the COB and the CSUTCB did not push forward; rather they dissipated the movement and allowed the Bolivian rulers and their imperialist masters to regroup. The ruling class just replaced Goni and Carlos Mesa was made the new president. Mesa attempted to defuse the struggle over gas by declaring that a referendum would be held on the gas sell off and a new constituent assembly would be convened. Mesa even talked about bringing to justice those politicians and army officers responsible for the massacres at El Alto during the revolt. But from the start the new Mesa government was only formed to demobilise the mass movement and prepare a strategy to allow for the eventual sell off of the natural gas, one way or another.

### REFERENDUM TRICKERY

Despite the fact that the majority of the population of Bolivia were against the privatisation of the gas, Mesa was busy preparing for the continuation of the sell-off plans. In July a referendum was held with no less than five questions (see box) to allow the Mesa government to continue a policy of selling off the gas via the multinationals. The referendum was a trick: its aim to give legitimacy to the government's policy and to divide and weaken the opposition to it.

All the questions were posed to make it appear the government would increase the control over the extraction and export of the gas. But none of this will mean anything: Mesa has already confirmed that all existing contracts with

### The referendum questions

The five questions on the referendum were:

1. Do you agree that the Hydrocarbons Law (No. 1689), enacted by Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, should be repealed?
2. Do you agree that the Bolivian State should recover ownership over all hydrocarbons at the wellhead?
3. Do you agree that Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos [the state-owned oil company privatised under Sánchez de Lozada] should be re-established, reclaiming state ownership of the Bolivian people's stakes in the part-privatized oil companies, so that it can take part in all stages of the hydrocarbon production chain?
4. Do you agree with President Carlos Mesa's policy of using gas as a strategic resource to achieve a sovereign and viable route of access to the Pacific Ocean?
5. Do you or do you not agree that Bolivia should export gas as part of a national policy framework that ensures the gas needs of Bolivians; encourages the industrialisation of gas in the nation's territory; levies taxes and/or royalties of up to 50 per cent of the production value of oil and gas on oil companies, for the nation's benefit; and earmarks revenues from the export and industrialisation of gas mainly for education, health, roads, and jobs?

the energy corporations will be honoured.

The workers' and peasants' organisations demanded that a simple question be put for the nationalisation of the gas reserves and production. Mesa refused to do this. As a result the COB and CSUTCB, along with other indigenous and peasant organisations, called for a boycott of the referendum. But the boycott was not successful. The majority response to all five questions was "yes". The overall abstention rate was around 40 per cent - despite voting being compulsory, with fines for staying at home. Of those who voted, between 20 and 28 per cent for each question handed in either blank votes or spoiled ballot papers. But Mesa and the media declared the referendum a victory on the basis that a majority had participated in the referendum and a majority said yes.

The weakness of the campaign was due to two main reasons; first, the treacherous policy of Evo Morales, indigenous leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). Morales was a leading figure in the opposition to Goni. Now he called for people to vote on the first three questions.

Morales argued that if these three questions were approved it would allow the congress to pass legislation to nationalise the gas. Morales knew this would not happen and argued that compensation be paid to the corporations affected. Otherwise, he claimed demagogically, "it would be declaring war against the rest of the world".

Morales and the MAS have been important pillars of support for the Mesa government. At every turn since October last year, Morales has undermined direct action against the government and has continued to give it critical support in congress. Two weeks before the referendum, Morales was expelled from the COB as a "traitor".

The defeat was also due to confusion and division among the more militant opposition. Some organisations called for people not to vote at all and organised actions to physically stop the referendum from going ahead; others called for people to spoil their ballot by writing "nationalisation" across their papers. Peasants in the Santa Cruz region occupied gas installations and disrupted gas supplies by literally turning off the taps. In El Alto there was a civic strike during the referendum days.

Bolivia's rulers, on the other hand, were completely united. The government ensured the full use of its repressive forces with the army and police mobilised in all the key regions of the country. The Mesa government poured \$800,000 into the Yes campaign. All of the establishment was lined up to back the referendum: the neoliberal political parties (MNR, MIR, NFR), the Catholic Church, Evo Morales and the MAS, the Permanent Human Rights Assembly, the Human Rights' Ombudsman's Office. Numerous NGOs equated participation in the referendum with support for direct democracy. The IMF made a \$120 million loan contingent on a yes vote in the referendum, while President Lula of Brazil declared his support for a yes vote.

Despite the spin the referendum result is not a clear vindication of Mesa's policy and neither is the struggle over. In La Paz, El Alto and Cochabamba there have been demonstrations organised around the umbrella campaign National Co-ordination in Defence of Gas and Hydrocarbons, demanding the freezing of gas and oil prices and the nationalisation of gas and oil. There are mass assemblies and strikes taking place in many cities. A national transport strike is paralysing parts of the country and the peasants, in particular the cocaleros (coca growers regularly attacked by US trained special forces), have started to blockade the highways again. Mesa might have won the referendum but he has yet to secure the sell-off.



# US fails to crush Iraqi resistance!

The recent stand-off in the city of Najaf and the peace deal brokered by Ayatollah Sistani has exposed Iraqi prime minister Allawi's weakness. *Michael Pröbsting* and *Jeremy Dewar* examine the political fall-out

Iyad Allawi must be ruing the fact that his mate Tony Blair has been forced to retract his invitation to Labour's annual conference. He certainly wouldn't get a standing ovation in any assembly in his own country, following his unsuccessful attempt – the second in five months – to crush Muqtada al-Sadr's insurgent Mehdi army.

On 26 August, in a last minute, bloodily botched attempt to do this job for his US masters, Iraqi police killed up to 110 unarmed supporters of Sadr and, more importantly, of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the moderate 75 year old spiritual leader of Iraq's Shia majority. In the most bloody day of the stand-off, 501 others were injured and a mortar seriously damaged the main mosque in Kufa, also a revered Shia shrine. The attacks came as a peace deal was signed by Sadr and Allawi's government.

How did it come to this? And what does the deal mean for the people of Iraq?

During the nationwide uprising against the US occupation this spring, Sadr's movement played a central role. It was, alongside the Sunni insurgents in Fallujah, Ramadi and Samara, the most important force in the rebellion, and forced the the US colonial administration under pro-consul Paul Bremer to "transfer power" to the Iraqi puppet government of Allawi.

Robert Fisk accurately described Allawi as not so much the premier of Iraq as "the mayor of downtown Baghdad". Once Saddam Hussein's secret service chief, Allawi later crossed over to the CIA and M16. With such a dubious past it is surprising that he has no support among the people. As long as he has 137,000 American soldiers with their Abram tanks, humvees and Apache helicopters to keep him in power, he will not need it. The moment they go so will he.

The siege of Najaf by 2,000 US marines and 1,800 Iraqi troops was intended to crush Sadr's heavily outnumbered and outgunned forces. For three weeks, the US threw in its most high-tech weapons, including cruise missiles and cluster bombs. The effects on civilian residents of turning a densely populated old city into a free fire zone can only be imagined.

Against this, the Iraqi resistance had only AK-47s, mortars and rocket propelled grenades. Thus they had to draw the occupiers into the warren of the old quarter. This equalised matters since the US army is still wary of risking heavy casualties. If it can't be a "turkey shoot" then Uncle Sam doesn't want to play.

Despite claims to the contrary, there is no doubt that Allawi and the US provoked this battle. According to the Financial Times: "US forces in Iraq

went on the offensive against two Islamist political groups yesterday [2 August], arresting an influential Sunni cleric in Baghdad and breaking a two-month ceasefire with followers of Shi'ite radical Muqtada al-Sadr, based in Kufa. Reuters news agency quoted witnesses saying that US forces had moved into Mr. Sadr's neighbourhood in Kufa, next to Najaf, and were exchanging fire with members of Mr. Sadr's Shia militia, the Mehdi Army."

Only, after the interim government refused to release Mehdi prisoners, did Sadr declare an end to the ceasefire on 5 August.

Allawi, posing as "strongman", declared, he would "teach these criminal outlaws the lesson they deserve... Your government has decided to hit back with an iron fist [against] all these desperate criminals that are attempting to hinder the bright future of the people of Iraq."

US Secretary of State Colin Powell backed him up, "Our forces in Najaf are squeezing the city, frankly, to help stabilise the situation and deal with [the] Mehdi army... The violence is being perpetrated by outlaws and by former regime elements and by terrorists who respect no truce, who respect nothing except force."

Indeed, "former regime elements" were indeed employing their old skills – in the service of their old commander, Allawi. First, they expelled Arab TV reporters from al-Jazeera, and then tried to force all journalists to leave Najaf. When words failed to disperse the reporters, the ex-Baathist police officers used methods they had perfected under Saddam and started shooting at their hotel.

**The deal brokered by Sistani will not liberate the Iraqi masses from decades of suffering in this oil-rich land. Its "five points" hand power back to the Iraqi police and army**

Later in the month, Allawi's regime used other Saddam techniques, ranging from the comical to the diabolical. Like Saddam's communications chief they pugnaciously announced that they had taken the Imam Ali shrine from Sadr's men when the TV clearly showed they hadn't. Then Allawi's men fired on unarmed Shia protesters, marching on Najaf to support the peace deal. George Bush has often blamed the violence in Iraq on former Baathists; by a savage irony, for once he was right. However, as in April and May, the



US Marines faced a mounting crisis. As they edged closer to the Imam Ali mosque, where Sadr was based, thousands of Iraqis – some armed, some unarmed – rose to oppose them.

In Basra, protesters demanded the withdrawal of US forces from Najaf, while the Mehdi army seized control of all the major roads. In Diwaniya, thousands of demonstrators burned down the offices of Allawi's Iraqi National Accord. From across the country, thousands of "human shields" marched to Najaf, to support the rebel fighters – or take up arms themselves.

#### WIDESPREAD DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstrations were not confined to Shia areas. In Fallujah, around 3,000 protesters shouted, "Long live Sadr. Fallujah stands by Najaf against America." A convoy of 40 trucks brought food, water and medicine to Najaf. Spokesman Ghalib Yusuf al-Eisawe explained: "We came here to express real brotherhood for the people of Najaf and to support the people here." Protection for the convoy was provided by the Fallujah police.

Even delegates to the Iraqi National Conference – 1,300 hand-picked Iraqi leaders, designed to promote a US-controlled road to "democracy" – turned on the prime minister and his imperialist backers. Despite US tanks guarding the conference and a curfew, several mortar rounds rocked the conference building on the opening day. Delegates leapt to their feet, chanting "Yes to Najaf" and, raising their fists in the air, "As long as there are air strikes and shelling we can't have a conference." A group of delegates eventually led a peace mission to negotiate with Sadr.

Not surprisingly, this affected morale in the new Iraqi police and army. In an interview for al-Jazeera, the police chief of Sadr city in the capital, Kadim Muhammed, stated, "We are not ready to fire a single one shot against any Iraqi – whether he belongs to the Mehdi army or not." More than 100 National Guardsmen and a battalion of Iraqi sol-

ders also refused to fight. A Defence Ministry official commented bluntly, "We expect this, and we expect it again and again."

And so, the US and British occupation forces can also expect their plans to be defeated again and again.

This was yet another unsuccessful attempt to crush Iraqi resistance and make the country "peaceful" for imperialist exploitation. A military success would be a relief for George Bush and Dick Cheney, whose popularity is sinking ahead of the presidential elections in November. But that now looks more remote than ever.

But, no matter who wins the US elections, the entire US plans for the Middle East are at stake. Unless they are able to crush the resistance, they will be unable to exploit the Iraqi oil reserves, the world's second largest, and establish US air bases and garrisons, from which to control the whole region.

The Iraqi resistance must now use this latest setback for the imperialists. The question is, what should they fight for?

The deal brokered by Sistani will not liberate the Iraqi masses from decades of suffering in this oil-rich land. Its "five points" hand power back to the Iraqi police and army, and call for a census of the Iraqi people in advance of elections in January. The extent to which it is intended to incorporate Sadr's Mehdi army within the new Iraqi armed forces will become clearer in the days and weeks ahead. But the purpose of a census is immediately transparent.

It is designed to show that 60 per cent of the Iraqi population are Shia Muslims, and prepare the ground for Sadr, possibly in an alliance with Sistani or other Islamist leaders, to turn that majority into a landslide victory in the elections.

But to divide the people along religious – or ethnic or gender – lines would be to repeat the tactics of Saddam Hussein, and Iraq's colonial ruler, Britain, before him. A gruesome display of what Sharia law under Sadr might look like was left behind in Najaf;

daily life in Iran provides more horrors. The Sunni Arabs and Kurds, not to mention many thousands of Shia women and men do not have to settle for an Islamist state after such heroic resistance to decades of dictatorship and foreign occupation.

#### ANOTHER ROAD IS OPEN

The resistance of local guerrilla struggles must be transformed into a national popular uprising. What is crucial is not so much the quantity or quality of the insurgents' arms, but the attitude of the masses, first and foremost the working class, but also the urban poor and the youth. To make the US occupiers and their Iraqi stooges turn tail and run, they must change from being sympathetic observers of the fight into resistance fighters en masse.

Only by mobilising the people via democratic mass organisations – in the enterprises, in the workers' quarters of the cities, among the urban poor and in the villages – will it be possible for the Iraqi working class to seize leadership of the national liberation struggle from the reactionary Islamist clergy. The organised working class must link the fight for jobs, basic services and democratic rights, including women's rights and the rights of the Kurdish people to self-determination, to the armed struggle against Allawi and the occupation forces.

The creation of workers' and peasants' councils, democratically elected in the cities and villages, will be needed to carry through a general strike, which could then develop into a mass armed uprising. In such a way, national independence could be embodied in a sovereign revolutionary Constituent Assembly.

The Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions and the independent unions can play an important role in this, but only if they take sides in the armed struggle. Opposition to the Islamists is necessary, but so is a united front with them. The suspension of oil supplies to Baghdad by the workers in Nasiriyah on 10 August was an excellent example of such solidarity action. The oil workers' statement read: "We stopped pumping in protest at the inhuman conduct of the interim government and its co-operation with the occupation forces to ransack the holy city of Najaf and insult the Shia, their symbols and holy places."

But to carry the revolution from this starting point on to the social liberation of all the toilers and the oppressed, that is, into a socialist revolution, a political leadership is also needed. This must be a genuine Trotskyist leadership which says openly that without proletarian revolution there will be no national liberation or democracy.



On 17 August, Mário Bango, a 21 year-old Roma activist, appeared before the Supreme Court of Slovakia to appeal against his conviction of attempted murder and his sentence of 12 years imprisonment. *Joy Knight* was at his appeal and reports on the campaign to free him

# Mário Bango's sentence cut by two years

Mário entered the court looking gaunt and pale, but with a fighting spirit. He showed the gallery his notebook with Che Guevara on the front. International solidarity activists from Britain and Austria were there to give their support at a very difficult time - this was the highest court and was seen as the last possibility to overturn the conviction of a lower court. On 20 November 2003, the Regional Court had convicted him of attempted murder and sentenced him to 12 years.

Mário's crime? Defending himself and his twin brother, Edo, against a racially motivated attack on a bus in Petrazalka, a district of Bratislava in March, 2001. Because of the racism Roma face in Slovakia, they are often victims of physical attacks and Mário carried a knife for self-defence. He used it against their attacker, Branislav Slamka. Slamka died in hospital a few weeks later from a brain haemorrhage. Slamka was known for his racist views and had fascist associations, although it is unknown if he belonged to a fascist organisation.

The case was politicised from the beginning. The prosecuting lawyer, Robert Fico, is the leader of the chauvinist "social democratic" opposition party in Slovakia, and touted as a future prime minister. The parliament held a minute's silence to honour Slamka - something that is only done in very exceptional circumstances, for example when Nato attacked Yugoslavia.

During the proceedings, the gen-

SELF DEFENCE  
IS NO OFFENCE!



FREE MARIO!

## Supporters of the Free Mário campaign include

**Jeremy Corbyn**, Labour MP; **Kate Hudson**, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; **Mark Thomas**, comedian and campaign activist; **Alex Callinicos**, Professor of Politics at York University and leading member of the SWP; **Dita Sari**, leader of the People's Democratic Party (PRD) and the National Front for Indonesian Workers' Struggle (FNPBI); **Matyas Benyik**, ATTAC Hungary; **Pierre Khalfa**, leader of French rail union, SUD-PTT; **Jonathan Neale**, Globalise Resistance and author; **Ivan Tishev**, the Bulgarian European Partnership Association; **Christina Haralanova**, Social Rights Bulgaria; **Helena Paggesson**, ATTAC Sweden (All in a personal capacity)

eral prosecution office changed the charge levelled against him by the District Court from "grievous bodily harm" to attempted murder.

Mário's case was that he acted in self-

defence or "necessary defence". Other mitigating details included the fact that Slamka's death was not caused by the wounds inflicted by Mário, but by a brain haemorrhage two weeks later.

These facts were presented for a second time, to the Supreme Court.

The outcome of his appeal, although lessening the sentence by two years, highlights the institutional state racism that the Roma face. None of the mitigating circumstances were taken into consideration and the conviction of attempted murder was upheld. The state racism that the Roma face in Slovakia does not end with the judicial system but permeates every aspect of life. Roma are marginalised in Slovakia. They are discriminated against in education, employment and housing. In eastern Slovakia, unemployment is as high as 94 per cent in Roma areas.

The Free Mário Bango Campaign organised a press conference on the steps of the Supreme Court directly following the decision where Mário's lawyer, Stanislav Jakuběš, addressed television and radio journalists on the outcome of the trial and possibilities to take it further. Michael Pröbsting from Austria spoke about the political nature of the case, pointing the finger at Fico and his racist party. At the same moment, Fico had also called a press conference at his party's headquarters. The story was picked up by three different news channels. Two were more favourable and gave a better account of the case, while the third was very biased towards the court's verdict.

The struggle for Mário's release still continues. Mário's lawyer wants to continue to pursue the case in the courts. He wants to initiate an extraordinary measure and convince the general pros-

ecution office to call this verdict illegal. He will also again argue for the mitigating circumstances to be taken into account. And there is a possibility of appealing to the Constitutional Court, but it is much more difficult to argue in this court and most rulings are upheld. This will take up to one year because it is a big case. Last, but not least, is taking it all the way to the European Court.

But this could take years. Right now Mário's youth is being stolen from him. There are things that we can do outside the courts. We must build solidarity and demand his immediate release. We must build a mass international campaign and put pressure on the Slovakian government so that it becomes politically untenable for them to keep him in prison.

## FREE MARIO BANGO NOW!

Write to Mário to show him your support and to keep his morale up: Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982 Ústav na vy'kon väzby priecinok 1077 Chorvatská 5 812 29 Bratislava Slovensko/Slovakia Please sign the online petition soon to be up on the [www.freemario.org](http://www.freemario.org)

# Interview with Gratton Puxon of the Trans-European Roma Federation

A rally at Paynes Lane, Broxbourne on 22 August dedicated a memorial park to Johnny Delaney, a 15-year-old boy who was murdered in a racial attack in Cheshire last year, and commemorated the memory of more than 500,000 Roma who died in the Holocaust or have been victims of present-day ethnic cleansing, writes *Joy Knight*.

The rally was also a show of support for Harry and Linda Smith, who have lived on their land at Paynes Lane for 15 years and are now being faced with eviction. Three members of the BNP were elected to Epping Council, basing their campaign on a pledge to "evict Gypsies from private or council land." Already most families have been forced to leave Paynes Lane.

These evictions expose the institutional racism that Romani and traveller communities face - according to the Traveller Law Research Unit, while 80 per cent of all planning permission applications are approved, 90 per cent of applications submitted by Gypsies are refused. Due to a lack of authorised sites, approximately one third of Gypsy travellers are forced to stop on sites without permission, where they face being moved on as the law catches up with them.

## What is the significance of the rally today?

GP: The significance is that it is 60 years since Auschwitz and the killing of the last Romanis in what was called the Zigeunerlager, or Gypsy Camp. We are remembering not only Auschwitz but the ethnic cleansing that is going on today and happening in our own country. We are seeing the rise of racism and the terrible intolerance and prejudice against gypsy people. We are here today to draw a line in

the sand to say 'Don't cross this line' because where are people going to go?

## Is this type of eviction or clearance from their land happening to other traveller communities across Britain?

GP: Yes. There are now 2,000 Romani families that have purchased their own land because they were advised to by the government. They cannot get the planning permission, so like what's happening to Harry Smith here, the council will come down on Tuesday and say pay a thousand pounds fine, go to prison or leave your own land. Now another man, Peter Robb, who left this land a few weeks ago and went to another piece of land in Colney Hatch, is in prison - Pentonville - for a month for living on his own land. You see there is no way out for Romani people and we are desperate.

## How is this affecting the Romani community?

GP: You can see the solidarity today with travellers coming from Essex, Bedfordshire, Trent, and showing solidarity with the Smith's, one of the oldest families in the country. The government is telling us that the law will be changed, but we are saying that until that law is changed, we want a moratorium on the evictions - no more evictions until there is somewhere to go and we can get the planning permission.



Gratton Puxon, (left)

## Would you say that the traveller and Romani communities are subject to discrimination by the British state and how does this discrimination manifest itself?

GP: The discrimination has never been worse than it is today because it is hidden behind planning regulation. They will not openly come out and say what they feel and there seems to be a deep-seated gypsy prejudice in this country that has existed since the middle ages. In 1554, 450 years ago, you could be hung for being a gypsy; now it seems that you can be put off your own land, your children are denied the chance to go to school and you are at thrown to the mercy of the police at the roadside.

## What are you fighting for?

GP: We are making a stand to say that there must be a change in the law. But meanwhile the harassment, the suffering goes on. We want to stop the evictions, a moratorium on the evictions across the country until the law is changed so people have a chance to get the planning permission and settle themselves.

We are not asking for tax payers money; we are asking for a chance to buy land and set up our own caravan park.

## Is this happening to other Roma communities across Europe and are you linking up with other campaigns?

GP: Of course we are linked up with the Roma across Europe. The Polish Roma now living in London have come here today to be with us. The Czech Roma are here. And of course this is happening all over the country. Up in Coventry at Bulkington Fields, we stopped the eviction once, but they came back again. Now the families that have been thrown off Bulkington have moved to a piece of land next to it and are trying to keep the fight going. They are being told they will face prosecution again.

This whole campaign started about two years ago because of a place called Woodside. It was 14 acres of land which had a caravan licence but once the Romani people bought it, they were refused planning permission and told they had to get off the land. The local council has spent nearly a million pounds to close Woodside down and it looks like it is coming too close to that.



# No to UN intervention in Sudan

Rekha Khurana examines the origins of the conflict in Darfur and the international response

Most people would have heard the recent news reports coming out of Africa about the conflict in Sudan. Suddenly the international community is shocked by what's happening, but this conflict has been going on for a long time without even a mention in the Western press. Once again the suffering in Africa hits the news only when it becomes so atrocious that it cannot be hidden any more.

What has happened in Darfur in Western Sudan can be described as ethnic cleansing. More than a million people have been turned into desperate refugees by the Islamist regime in Khartoum, the country's capital. The government has used bombers, helicopter gunships, paramilitaries from the regular armed forces and an estimated 20,000 Janjaweed militia to terrorise the people of the region.

The government's campaign has produced an exodus of more than 200,000 refugees into neighbouring Chad and around 50,000 villagers died as a result. Reports of wholesale rape and kidnapping have been made by aid agencies. It has been predicted that many more people will die of starvation and disease in the coming months unless there is a massive increase in aid.

Darfuri people include both subsistence farmers and nomadic pastoralists, raising camels in the north and cattle further south. The widespread media designation of the former as "black Africans" and the latter as "Arabs" is misleading at best. True the nomadic population largely regard themselves as Arabs but they are black. The farming population are closer to their African cultural origins but they too are Muslims.

Conflicts between farmers and nomads migrating in search of water and pasture for their animals have occurred in Darfur for centuries, but without anything like the present crisis occurring.

Starting in the 1980s the Islamist government in Khartoum set out to arm the pastoralists whilst disarming

the farming peoples, the majority Fur – after whom the region is named – as well as the Masalit and Zaghawa.

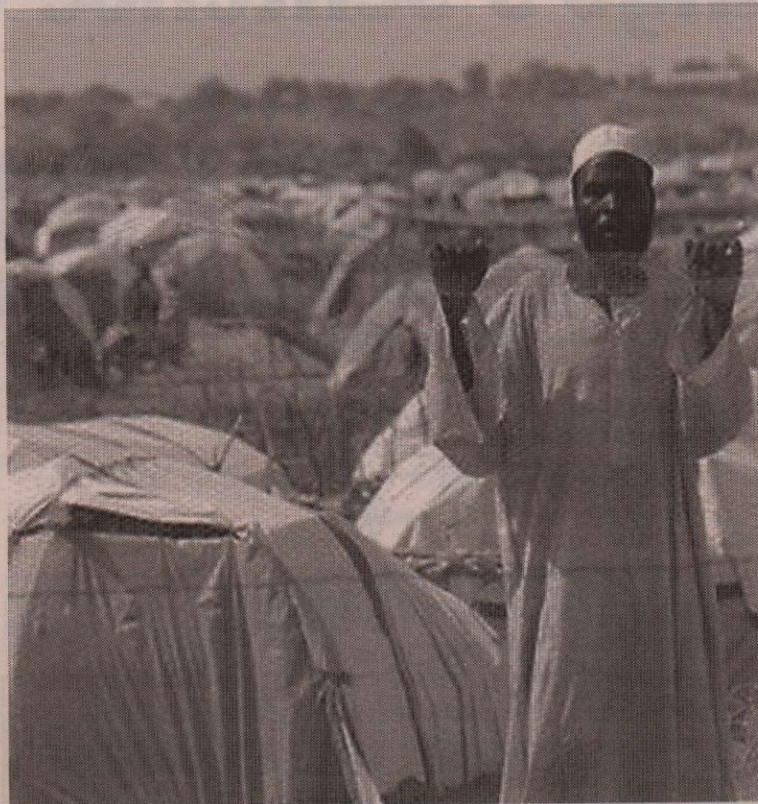
Ethnic identities have hardened as the Islamist regime promotes its favoured groups, "Arabised" them and even encouraged a "war on the Africans". All of Darfur's peoples are Muslim, but the farming communities have cultural practices such as beer-brewing, and less patriarchal relations between men and women, these have been declared "anti-Islamic" by the Islamist regime.

In Darfur two resistance movements grew up against government oppression, the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the smaller Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The former, born out of an earlier Darfur Liberation Front, is secular, while the latter is led by Darfuri Islamists alienated from the Islamist regime in Khartoum.

In the winter of 2003, the two movements took up arms. The regime responded by unleashing the Janjaweed militia on a ferocious killing spree. To western governments who complained, they replied that the militias were outside its control. Independent sources all report that there can be no doubt that government forces supply arms and transport, and Sudanese army officers direct their activities.

The government has announced several ceasefires but none are really carried out. Peace negotiations in Chad and Ethiopia in July reached no conclusion. In July, Colin Powell, US secretary of state, and UN secretary-general Kofi Annan visited Sudan. The regime promised once more to disarm the Janjaweed, protect the refugees and allow foreign relief workers and human rights organisations into Darfur, so far with no results.

On 30 July the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution drafted by the United States threatening sanctions against Sudan if it does not disarm the Janjaweed in the western Darfur region within 30 days. The resolution includes a provision permitting the "interruption" of econom-



A refugee stands behind a fence at the Abu Shouk camp near El Fasher in the Darfur region of northern Sudan

ic, transport, communications or diplomatic measures" – sanctions by any other name. UK foreign secretary Jack Straw visited Sudan less than a week before the UN's 30 August deadline. He said that there appeared to be some evidence of improving security within the refugee camps, and the priority now was to improve security outside those camps. He also added that it would be up to Kofi Annan to decide whether the Sudanese authorities had done enough before a decision was taken on international action.

Meanwhile, peace talks between rebel groups in Darfur and the Sudanese Government are due to restart in Abuja, Nigeria next week. The JEM and the SLM/A have both made it clear they will not disarm without a political deal. The African Union intends to broker some sort of interim agree-

ment between the rebels and the Sudanese government. It is hoping such a deal could include the disarmament of both the rebels and their enemies, the Arab militias, including the Janjaweed.

The government's aim is to maintain "Sudanese unity" – and to tighten its grip on Darfur's valuable mineral wealth, principally uranium. This fight is related to the struggle in the South, a potential source of huge oil wealth. Sudan has 2bn barrels of recoverable oil and currently produces 250,000 barrels a day despite the war.

West Africa supplies 15 per cent of US oil and the figure is growing. Since 9/11 the US ruling class has become disillusioned with the unstable and unreliable Saudi royal family. Hence, oil companies and the US military have developed a powerful interest in the

petrochemical riches of sub-Saharan Africa. The continent appears to be on the verge of a new oil rush – what the Guardian has called a "new scramble for Africa". Only this time there is one big grabber. Vice President Cheney's recent National Energy Policy Report states that West Africa is "one of the fastest-growing sources of oil and gas for the American market."

The only way for the oppressed nationalities, for the peasants and workers of Sub-Saharan Africa to prevent a economic and environmental catastrophe is to oppose any "humanitarian" invasion or occupation of Sudan by US, British or French imperialism. They will only intervene to get their snouts in the trough of the vast mineral wealth.

Africans need only to look at what the hundred years of plunder of the Arab world has done for the ordinary working people of the region. If Blair and Bush want to stop ethnic cleansing, let them stop Ariel Sharon from grabbing the land of the Palestinians. Of course, they can and should supply ALL the food, shelter and medical aid the refugees need at once. But even this would be only a drop in the ocean, a tiny fragment of the reparation they owe for the plunder of Africa.

The people of Darfur should not look to or have any illusions in the UN providing a solution to this crisis, let alone the Sudanese army which works hand in hand with the Janjaweed. The UN will only act in the interests of the imperialists and the multinationals to continue the exploitation of resources from Sudan.

Instead the people of Darfur need to form armed militias in order to defend their villages against any future attacks. African workers, peasants and youth across the whole region should help the Darfuri people, not only to survive but also to drive out their oppressors.

But beyond this a struggle needs to be launched across all these states against the imperialist plunderers and their local stooges. Only thus will the sickening cycle of corrupt dictatorships, repressive religious obscurantist regimes and genocidal outbursts be ended in Africa.

# WTO deal stops slide into trade conflict

By Keith Harvey

A collective sigh of relief from EU, US and Japanese governments could be heard last week. The reason was that the so-called Doha Round of international trade talks was still on track after into-the-night negotiations reached a series of compromises to produce an agreed text and keep the process alive.

The agreement comes nearly five years after the collapse of the Seattle WTO talks and one year after a failed attempt in Mexico to re-launch a round of multilateral talks, the price of a further failure was likely to have been a gradual break-up of the WTO system and a new wave of bilateral trade deals, brokered by the US, that could have seen globalisation go into decisive reverse.

The agreement last month averts that short-term scenario but in truth the fate of the Doha Round remains in doubt. The original timetable set out in 2001 envisaged the round of negotiations to be finished by 2005. But in Cancun last year the Third World countries combined to effectively block progress on the round since the EU and US negotiators refused to countenance any reduction in the huge subsidies they provide to their rich agri-businesses which allow them to dump exports of cheap food

onto Third World markets.

So this time Washington and Brussels had to come with some concessions or risk a further fiasco. In order to appease countries such as India and Malaysia, the 30 July agreement says that negotiations on investment, competition and government procurement will not form part of the Doha Round.

Of course this does not mean that these issues are out of the WTO system, as the developing countries have demanded – they can be resurrected in some future round of negotiations but the imperialist countries belatedly realised that to secure any of their objectives on agriculture they had to back down for now.

So what did last week's agreement nail down? On agriculture the EU, US and Japan have agreed – on paper – to eliminate all export subsidies. The EU has said it will eliminate \$3bn of them if the USA agrees to cut a similar amount in export credits. However, both have refused to be tied down to a date! Similarly G8 countries have agreed in principle to cut the level of aid to their rich farmers by 20

per cent, but no date has been set.

But on one of the most contentious issues – the level of cotton industry subsidies made by the US to its producers – the US insisted the negotiations take place separately. African countries wanted "fast track" talks to eliminate the \$3bn given to US cotton growers that effectively destroy the living of African cotton farmers, but the US government has refused, saying only that the talks will be carried out "expeditiously".

Even the *Financial Times* said that the agreement "has resulted in only a sketchy blueprint for cutting agricultural tariffs".

On areas like liberalising trade in industrial products the FT said plans "are equally skeletal" and the provisions on liberalising trade in services – the fastest growing sector in many countries – "amount to little more than an exhortation to governments to negotiate harder".

Since Seattle and the rise of the anti-capitalist movement the governments of the Third World have been forced to not lie down and roll over in the face of every demand for more trade liberalisation from the USA and EU. Of the 147 members of the WTO most are poor or very poor and exploited ruthlessly by the multinational

corporations present in their countries and by an unfair system of trade rules.

In recent years a group of Group of 30 stronger semi-colonial countries, led by Brazil, have co-ordinated their negotiating strategy; since Cancun this group has been able to pull more African countries behind their stance.

To date, this strategy has forced the G8 to drop its more ambitious goals for now – in the liberalisation of services for example – but the G30 still operate within the WTO rules framework which in itself refuses to recognise the legitimacy of using trade and investment barriers by poor countries as a weapon for fending off the destruction of their domestic markets by G8 multinationals.

The WTO, IMF and World Bank must be torn down. Trade and finance rules written by rich countries for the benefit of their corporations cannot deliver development for the Third World. Only the ending of capitalism and the movement of capital for profit can put an end to the growing inequality between nations and classes that is the hallmark of globalisation.

● For more on globalisation see: [www.fifthinternational.org/LFIfiles/globalisationmainpage.html](http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFIfiles/globalisationmainpage.html)



# Schröder doesn't like Mondays

By Frederik Haber,  
IG Metall

In Germany anger is mounting against both main parliamentary parties, against the entire political establishment and against the media.

A wave of demonstrations has swept the eastern region of the country. Called "Monday demonstrations" after the huge mobilisations which overthrew the Stalinist government in 1989, they are largely spontaneous. Tens of thousands in more than a hundred towns assemble in central points every Monday, then set off on a march through the streets. In Leipzig, for example, as many as 20,000 people regularly gather to furiously denounce the government's "reforms".

The spark that ignited this blaze of protests was the "Hartz IV" bill, which will cut unemployment benefits, making the families of those out of work support them and forcing them to take any job offered, no matter how badly paid or where it is. Germany's once-generous unemployment benefits will be cut from three years to one. Job-seekers must then find employment or apply for a new, lower, means-tested benefit that will even take into account their children's savings.

The Hartz IV bill, being introduced by Gerhard Schröder's SPD-led government, is named after its author, Volkswagen's head of personnel, Peter Hartz. The new social policies, part of Schröder's controversial Agenda 2010, particularly hurt regions of former East Germany where unemployment stands at 18.5 percent, more than double the western average.

Despite the propaganda of "bringing the unemployed back to work", occasionally both the government and bosses give the true reason for their cutbacks: they want to put pressure on



20,000 people march on a "Monday protest" against social welfare cuts in the Leipzig, eastern Germany

all wages by building a huge pool of low-paid labour.

Workers, who have saved something over decades of work, will lose everything, if they lose their job: a good way for the bosses to blackmail their workforce into cutbacks, by threatening them with layoffs.

The Monday demos also started partly because of the weaker control the reformist apparatus exerts on the working class of East Germany. The SPD has never established organic links with the working class in the East, scarcely surprising as it is losing its links in the West. Only through the trade unions does reformism exert its influence over the working class nowadays, although the SPD remains the dominant force within the bureaucracy. In regions with disappearing industries and high unemployment rates, therefore, this influence is weaker.

Nevertheless, the Monday demos have spread to the west, although they are smaller there.

The Social Democrats (SPD) are going through their worst crisis since World War Two. Members are leaving

in droves and the party is losing every local and regional election. But the Christian Democrats (CDU) vote is scarcely going up. The seesaw-system of the old Federal Republic, where either the SPD or CDU would recover support while in opposition, is not working anymore. By collaborating in the Hartz IV attacks, CDU support is dramatically down in the opinion polls, and it might even lose the elections in Saxony and Brandenburg in September.

So there is a real political vacuum. Talks about the need for a new party have not stopped since March, when some lower trade union officials and left academics launched two small initiatives. After fusing, they have now collected more than 3,000 members, but the potential is far greater. Local meetings brought 300-500 people together. Media coverage was quite high at first, but has now fallen and become very hostile. The bourgeoisie seems to have sensed that this new party could grow into more than a mere toy to pressure the SPD.

The growing Monday demos have

given far more support to the PDS, the old East German ruling party which has reinvented itself as a second social democracy. It was almost finished after attacking workers and students in Berlin, where it is in coalition with the SPD. By supporting the mobilisations, the PDS is now likely to win the elections in Brandenburg, where it has around 35 per cent support.

This is why the project of a new party has drawn more support in the West. Regional assemblies will elect committees in November and also delegates for a national convention. But the success will depend on whether "Electoral Alternative Work and Social Justice", as it is called, can gain ground from the mobilisations. Till now it has hardly shown itself on the streets. Many union leaders are quite reluctant to support the Monday demos openly, let alone call their members onto the streets. The new party supporters are still timid when it comes to challenging the SPD majority in the bureaucracy. With cowardly behaviour like that, the project will be doomed.

A new party is a direct challenge to

the Social Democratic Party; but it will have to challenge its control of the unions if it is to break its monopoly of working class political representation. Trying to avoid this conflict by building a "left" party instead of a working class party will only reproduce the trajectory of the Greens, which has itself developed from a petit bourgeois left party into a bourgeois liberal party.

This lesson should also not be lost on those who believe that Respect can develop as a "left" alternative to Labour. It can't; without basing itself clearly on the working class, as a class, it will be pulled to the right in its populist chase for votes.

There is also the danger that the long standing reformist in charge of the project at the moment will completely restrict it to warmed up reformist policies. Of course, many of these policies are supportable, but if the methods of the class struggle are not used to fight for even them, and its members and supporters are left with no activity beyond the scramble for votes, while trying to convince the capitalists to adopt a new Keynesianism, nothing will be gained.

Many rank and file militants hope that either Oscar Lafontaine, former leader of the SPD, or Franz Steinkühler, leader of the IG Metall during its most militant period, will join the Electoral Alternative. Reformists dream that support from prominent union leaders and parliamentarians is the answer. Revolutionaries emphasise that the rise of the class struggle will bring in militant workers, the unemployed as well as youth.

If a new working class party is formed - whatever its initial politics - revolutionaries such those of Arbeitermacht, the German section of the LSI, will fight to win it to a militant intervention in the class struggle and to a revolutionary transitional programme.

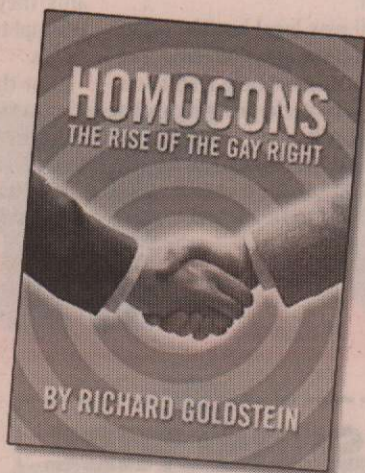
# The Rise of the Gay Right

Alison Hudson reviews Homocons by Richard Goldstein (Verso 2003)

The private decision - whom to have sex with - is still a matter of state interference in most parts of the world. Whether directly, in the form of the outlawing of homosexual sex, or indirectly in the form of the denial of rights that heterosexuals take for granted. And "gay-bashing" is still an every day fear in many countries.

Yet lesbians and gays, in the west at least, are more visible and tolerated than ever before. Richard Goldstein asserts, early in "Homocons - The Rise of the Gay Right", that for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites and the people who identify with even more variations of non-straight sexual identity, "it is the best of times, it is the worst of times."

In Bush's America, while queers (Goldstein's preferred alternative to the ever lengthening acronym LGBT...) "frolic through the nation's living rooms" in TV shows and sitcoms such as Will and Grace, 97 per cent of American lesbians and gays feel they are subject to employment discrimination, 23 per cent say they have experienced serious problems in employment and/or housing, and their average earnings are well below those of straight people.



Social services often refuse to recognise queer people or their partnerships, and "homophobia...is a recurring nightmare in the average American High School."

But since the end of World War Two, in the "gay belts" of the big cities, a community has grown up that offers refuge and safety, culture and politics, and, increasingly over the last twenty years, tailor-made consumerism. Goldstein's elegantly written book is concerned with the middle class lesbian and gay "strivers", the homosexual conserva-

tives, rising out of this community, whose aim, Goldstein warns, is to destroy it.

"A Place at the Table" (title of a seminal work by Bruce Bawer, an author of the gay right), is what the homocons want; acceptance into liberal bourgeois society, to be allowed to share the feast with the movers and shakers they desire to be.

But as there isn't enough room at the table for everyone, the homocons' fear and anger at the possibility of being left out - after all they were born white and middle class, how dare they be excluded because of a silly little detail such as their sexuality! - is targeted at the radical folk of their own community, the ones who don't care if they "frighten the horses" of respectable society. According to Goldstein they reinforce heterosexual norms: "Attack queers...perform a valuable service for liberal society by policing the sexual order. If they weren't so viciously efficient at this task, they would never have gotten where they are."

Goldstein's book charts the progress of various pressure groups and high profile writers in their attempts to court the American establishment.

New York Times journalist Andrew

Sullivan gets Goldstein's vote as hypocrite of the year. His assertions that gays don't need anti-bias legislation, or laws against hate crimes, that "once we have the right to marry...we should have a party and close down the gay movement for good".

Lesbian writer Camille Paglia may ostensibly be a Democrat, but Goldstein's analysis of her writings provides jaw-dropping examples of her anti-woman and anti-lesbian and gay opinions. Paglia styles herself as a "lesbian with a male brain" or a "dyke hating butch" who deplores what she sees as the infantile, "back to the mother" world of the lesbian community.

Paglia on rape beats most right wing commentators hands down; essentially her argument is that men cannot help themselves, and that "when women make mistakes they must accept the consequences". If this means rape then her advice is "pick yourself up, dust yourself off and go on." She has even suggested that Mathew Shepherd (a young gay man murdered by homophobes in the mid west) asked for the fate that befell him by cruising straight men.

But the ultimate sin of the homocons, as Goldstein perceives it, is

their attack on the notion of community. "You have no secret rites, no distinct set of values. You're only an individual who must make your own way in the world, unable to depend on the safety of belonging to an elect tribe," in the words of gay conservative Dale Carpenter.

For Goldstein, the gay community is a form of socialism in itself. He locates its origins in the utopian socialism of Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde. He believes that "people with a common experience of stigma are a people" transferring the Marxist analysis of national oppression to the gay community. In this sense, while he knows that the poorer and blacker you are, the harder living with oppression is, he sees the gay community as necessary for liberation, separate from any notion of united class struggle.

Reliance on the community on its own for liberation, however, can mean an over-reliance on a "security blanket". Instead of the freedom to really be whatever you want to be, that a socialist struggle against the roots of sexual oppression could bring, sexual outsiders will be condemned to live in the "glittery world apart" that capitalism allows them... sometimes and in some places.



# Chavez victory a blow to Bush's plans

**M**id-August saw Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez win a crushing victory over the opposition's attempt to oust him in a recall referendum. In one of the largest ever electoral turnouts, Chavez won 59 per cent of the popular vote compared to the opposition's 42 per cent.

Chavez came to power in 1999, promising a "Bolivarian revolution". He won support from the poor and oppressed, by campaigning against the corrupt and bloated ruling elite in Venezuela. They had spent decades lining their pockets from oil revenues while leaving the vast mass of the population in poverty.

The attempt at recall was the third serious attempt made at ousting the democratically elected President since he came to power. In April 2002, the military seized Chavez in a coup, replacing him with their own puppet president. Within days, mass demonstrations by the poor from the shanty towns led to a split in the armed forces, and Chavez was re-instated.

The opposition then launched a business shutdown at the end of 2002. This two month bosses' lockout managed, through the co-operation of top and middle managers, to shut down the vital oil industry - Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). Venezuela is the fifth largest oil producer in the world and oil accounts for 80 per cent of its revenue. Using the military and with the support of progressive oil workers the strike was defeated and collapsed in February 2003.

The economic cost has been enormous, Gross National Product dropped 27.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2003, with inflation reaching a high of 38 per cent. The Venezuelan economy is still feeling the effects over a year later. Inflation is running at 20 per cent and unemployment is high: official figures are around 15 per cent, but in reality it is much higher, with significant underemployment.

Having failed to oust Chavez on the streets or with the military, the opposition now turned to the "constitutional" option. Chavez had introduced a very democratic aspect to his new constitution adopted in 2000 - any elected official could be recalled if 20 per cent of the electorate signed up to a petition calling for a referendum. Had the opposition won on 15 August new elections would have been called within 30 days.



The defeat means the President's term now runs until February 2007.

The referendum was proof that both Chavez and the masses in Venezuela had learned the lessons of the coup and reactionary strike. The campaign involved millions of people in mass political campaigning. Voter registration drives were launched deep in the rural areas and in the shanty towns. Citizenship drives enfranchised immigrants who had lived in the country for generations without rights or votes.

But this alone would not have delivered Chavez victory. The poorest sectors of the community knew that the social reforms introduced under the Chavez presidency would have been the first things to go if the opposition got their claws on power.

Chavez had used the failed strike to break the opposition's strangle hold over PDVSA. Around 18,000 managers and workers were sacked from PDVSA for refusing to return to work - almost a third of the workforce. The change in the balance of forces in PDVSA was demonstrated when the new blue collar oil workers' union threatened strike action if Chavez was ousted in the

referendum. Chavez could now use the massive oil revenues, bolstered by rising world oil prices, to finance his social and poverty relief programmes. This year alone PDVSA has allocated 30 per cent of its investment funds to these social programmes - around \$2 billion dollars.

In every small village and shanty town education and health programmes have been launched. In Venezuela, despite its enormous oil wealth, only 16 out of every 100 school students attending primary school finish secondary school. The education "missions" have set out to change this, setting up new schools in the poorest areas and further education classes for the estimated 1.5 million who missed out on secondary schooling. This new education programme has been greeted with massive enthusiasm by the poor.

An estimated 11,000 new local health clinics have been set up in the poor areas offering free medicine. 10,000 Cuban doctors help staff these clinics, and in return Venezuela provides Cuba with oil at a discounted price.

Not surprisingly the poor of Venezuela turned out in their millions to register a vote for the government that promised to retain and extend

these services. After the victory, even the Economist magazine felt it necessary to observe that "it was another manifestation of poorer Latin Americans' loss of faith in the free market reforms that swept the region in the '80s and '90s".

Chavez' victory is an undoubted blow to Bush's plans for Latin America. The Venezuelan president represents a rallying point of opposition to the USA's neoliberal policies, which is why the US State Department has backed every attempt to get rid of him, constitutional or not.

Chavez has destroyed plans for privatising the PDVSA and has shown how state directed industry can be used to benefit the poor not just the rich. He has been a constant critic of the planned Free Trade Association of the Americas (FTAA) - the USA's attempt to bind Latin American countries into a free trade bloc that benefits the multinationals. He has given political and material aid to Cuba to the fury of Washington.

For all these reasons, Chavez remains target number one for Washington. Already a former Venezuelan President living in Miami has suggested the way forward is to liquidate Chavez and establish an authoritarian government. Bush has to be more circumspect - Venezuela after all supplies 13 per cent of the USA's oil. With Iraq in flames and oil at record high prices, oil needs to be kept pumping. An illegal ousting after massive democratic endorsement, recognised by the Organisation of American States and Jimmy Carter amongst others, would certainly lead to an explosion in Venezuela and beyond.

Chavez has won himself a breathing space. But if the masses in Venezuela do not use their victory to drive forward against the forces of counter-revolution and privilege, they will find that it is only a breathing space.

Without breaking the power of the capitalist oligarchy for good, placing all the resources of the country at the disposal of the workers and peasants, they will face another, perhaps more violent, attempt to remove the small gains they have made so far.

For this they will need more than Bolivarian circles tied to Chavez. They will need their own mass organisations of workers and peasants, armed to defend themselves against the coup plotters, and to take the power for themselves.

● See pages 10-11

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