

workers power

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Monthly magazine of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

HANDS OFF IRAN



Blair's whipping us up for war

**INSIDE • Elections: what alternative
for the working class? • Inside Iraq
and Iran • Zimbabwe general strike**



**League for the
Fifth International**

EDITORIAL

A classic imperialist provocation

The Labour government is whipping up hysteria over the capture of 15 British marines and sailors by Iran to provide a pretext for war. It claims that the military personnel were in Iraqi territorial waters, yet the exact location of the border is disputed. Moreover, *The Independent* has revealed that the Iranian action is probably in retaliation for a US attempt to kidnap top Iranian security personnel whilst on an official visit to northern Iraq.

Tony Blair indignantly condemned Iranian television footage of the captives. "All it does is enhance people's sense of disgust," he claimed.

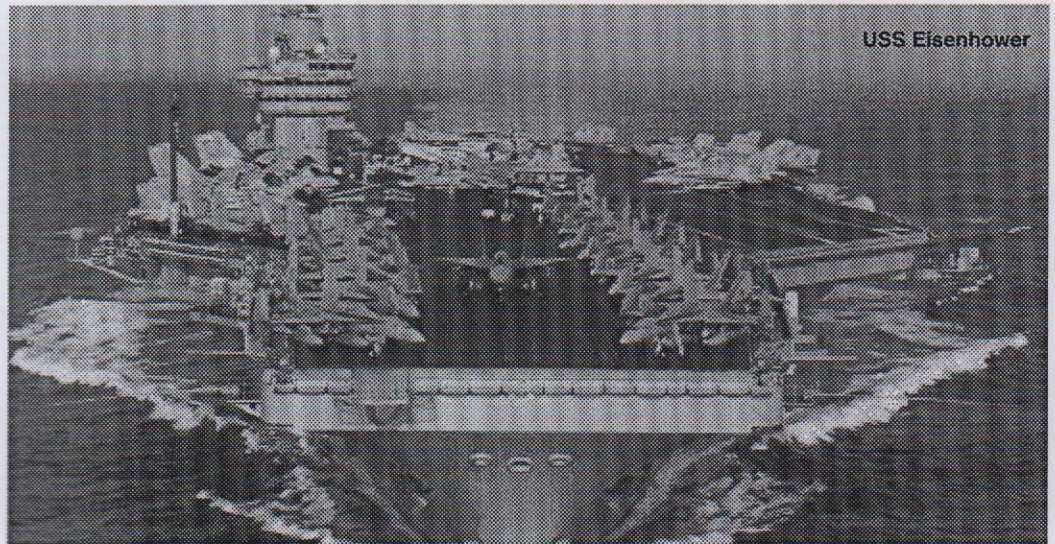
Would that be the same sort of disgust people feel at the brutal beating to death of Baha Moussa, a hotel receptionist, by six British soldiers and their acquittal because the judge could not decide which of them struck the fatal blow? The 26-year-old father of two suffered 93 injuries including fractured ribs, a broken nose and kidney failure during his detention.

Would it be the same sort of disgust people feel at this government's complicity in the CIA's "extraordinary rendition" flights, which transfer detainees to secret locations where they are tortured? There have been 170 such stopovers at British airports since January 2001.

The tender conscience of our Christian prime minister never moved him to express disgust at such events, so we know just what his "disgust" is worth.

The real reason for the sabre rattling has nothing to do with alleged mistreatment of British marines. The real reason is that the UK and US are mounting a case for attacking Iran. Blair is fearful the collapse in support for the war in Iraq will make British backing for an attack on Iran difficult if not impossible. A recent BBC poll found that not only did nearly 60 per cent of British residents believe the US and UK were wrong to invade Iraq, but that "given their experiences of the war in Iraq", 51 per cent would not support a government that said military action was needed because of a direct threat to national security. Half of all respondents said the war and its aftermath would be "very or fairly important" in determining their vote next general election.

The stand-off in the Gulf gives



USS Eisenhower

Blair the opportunity to stoke up national indignation and generate the support needed to back George Bush. This crisis is also being used to drag the Europeans on board. EU ministers have expressed their unconditional support for the UK, adding that the detention constituted a violation of international law, warning Iran of unnamed "appropriate measures" if the British naval team remain in captivity.

All this takes place against the backdrop of the UN Security Council's demands that Iran halt its nuclear program and the mounting number of warships in the Gulf and Indian Ocean. When the council slapped new sanctions on Iran recently, it set another 60-day deadline for compliance. The US has the vocal support of Israel. It is a rich irony for the Zionist settler state – the only nuclear power in the region – to threaten action to enforce UN non-proliferation decisions, having ignored any number of outstanding UN resolutions regarding the Palestinians.

Both the US and the Israeli regimes are threatening to bomb Iran's nuclear installations and the BS2s are being assembled on Diego Garcia. They will probably deliver a devastating air strike on Iran's military infrastructure as well as its nuclear research facilities. The USS John C. Stennis, accompanied by eight support ships and four nuclear submarines, is heading for the Gulf. The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower has been there with similar support for three months. The US is also sending Patriot anti-missile systems to the Persian Gulf region.

Of course this represents a terrible gamble for Bush and Blair but the US president has little to lose after his defeat in the Congressional elections. If he springs an air attack then the US Democrats, like the British Liberal Democrats, for all their huffing and puffing, will support "our boys" once they are in action.

We must defend Iran's refusal to bow to the pressure of the imperialist powers. For millions of people in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Afghanistan, imperialism and its local agent Israel are the overwhelming danger.

Thus, if Iran is attacked by the US or Israel, with support from the UK and its European allies, it is the duty of the antiwar movement worldwide to work for an Iranian victory.

In Britain we must respond to any move to attack Iran by launching mass direct action – demonstra-

tions, strikes and walkouts, blockades of military sites and mass civil disobedience. But to take such action takes organisation and leadership. The People's Assembly last month pledged itself to such actions. However, Workers Power warned that to rely on the MPs and union leaders to deliver such action would be fatal. We called for the formation of local people's assemblies to co-ordinate action from below. A repetition of 2003 where the actual invasion saw the end of the mass actions would be disastrous.

As we put it in our leaflet to the Assembly: "All around the world, there are hundreds of millions who detest imperialism and war and face a daily struggle against the capitalist ruling class. This is the force that can defeat imperialism: not the MPs, pacifists, charities, vicars and imams, but the working class millions of the cities and countryside around the world."

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League for the
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ELECTION 2007

I'M STANDING BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN CHOICE



... SO CHOOSE : WOULD YOU LIKE US TO SHUT YOUR
 a. SCHOOL. b. HOSPITAL. c. SWIMMING POOL. d. P.O.
 AND CHOOSE : WOULD YOU LIKE US TO INVADE :
 a. IRAN. b. ZIMBABWE. c. CUBA d. IRAQ (AGAIN)

NEWS IN BRIEF

ROYAL NATIONALISTS OF SCOTLAND

Flush with success at attracting lots of rich capitalists to support his party, Scottish nationalist leader Alex Salmond declared that former Royal Bank of Scotland chairman Sir George Mathewson has "contributed more to the Scottish economy than probably any other single figure over the past 25 years."

Really? A pampered parasite who has done nothing more than skim the profits extracted by other businesses from their workers has apparently done more for the economy than the millions of workers who have built and run Scottish manufacturing, mining, hospitals and schools since 1982!

This shows how hollow the SNP's claim is to be a "left" party. And gives an idea of what an independent Scotland under the SNP would be like - not a haven for workers in a small state protected from the ravages of globalisation, but the same old capitalist hellhole run by their banks.

SUPERUNION: SUPERBUREAUCRACY

The Transport and General Workers Union and Amicus agreed to merge last month after a membership ballot. Glancing at the transitional timetable for the new union, members would do well to remember that voting experience.

It will be two and a half years before the first delegate conference (November 2009), three and a half before members get a chance to change the rules (November 2010), and five years before they can elect a new general secretary (January 2012) - this is what (union) democracy looks like!

REFUGEES DEPORTED TO HELL

Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett wants the UN human rights council to impose sanctions on Robert Mugabe's regime. How shameful then that the Home Office is arguing that Zimbabwe is safe enough for 1,000 asylum seekers to be deported there.

25 March: Tony Blair calls for a no-fly zone over Darfur to prevent the Sudanese airforce attacking refugees.

29 March: the Aegis Trust reports that Sadiq Adam Osman, whom Britain deported to Khartoum in February, has been brutally tortured by the Sudanese government. Osman comes from Darfur, and has now twice escaped the genocide.

Stop all deportations!

IN THIS ISSUE

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7 The British National Party could gain more than 90 new seats in May. The blame for the rise of this fascist front rests firmly upon the shoulders of the Labour Party

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BROWN'S BRITAIN

Labour steals from the poor – gives to the rich

Keith Spencer analyses the effects Gordon Brown's last budget will have on the poorest in Britain

The Gord give it, and the Gord taketh it away - was the headline in the media after chancellor Gordon Brown delivered his last budget as he prepares to become Labour leader. While the media emphasised that there were winners and losers but fundamentally the budget was neutral, the reality is that "Gord" took it away from the poor and gave it to the big banks and multinationals.

Tax rises for the poor

Brown's most surprising measure came at the end of his speech, when he reduced the basic rate of income tax from 22p to 20p. But it was paid for by abolishing the 10p rate for those on low pay.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies and Financial Times both said that anyone earning less than £18,000 will be worse off. This is a large proportion of the working class. The median wage (which half of the workforce earns less than) in the UK for all employees irrespective of age or hours is £18,252. Therefore nearly half of the workforce will be worse off.

These workers will be concentrated in low paid, flexible jobs with few rights. They will be made up of most of the working class - manual workers, shop workers, migrants, women, part-timers, young people on lower minimum wages, students and so on. The labour aristocracy - in well-paid public sector or private sector white collar jobs - will benefit.

These flexible low paid jobs are what Gordon Brown wants more of. After all, during his budget he told parliament: "Britain must champion open markets, flexibility and free trade - an open and inclusive globalisation, not protectionism." Roughly translated, this means: Britain must join the "race-to-the-bottom" to lower pay and worse conditions for workers, so that we can attract more greedy capitalists and stop them taking their money overseas.

Even if we included only full time employees on adult rates (i.e. above minimum wage for adults), not on sick or maternity leave, the median is still only £23,240. So a large minority will still be earning less than £18,000.

The repulsive Sun newspaper, owned by Tony Blair's billionaire friend Rupert Murdoch, had to backtrack on the budget. Two days after praising Brown, the paper's Trevor Kavanagh was touring the radio and TV studios saying that it was a bad budget - after its readers contacted the paper in their droves to complain how much worse off they were actually going to be.

Brown even raised tax for small businesses

from 19 per cent to 22 per cent to clamp down on people registering themselves as self-employed.

Brown supporters defend the budget, saying that those on less than £18,000 benefit from tax credits and generous benefits. But even this is wide of the mark. The tax credits system is very complicated and often punishes the low paid by demanding huge paybacks when circumstances change. The Financial Times estimates that a lone parent with two children (a key target for Brown's "driving them back to work" strategy) faces a real tax rate of 70 per cent until they earn £25,000 - the poverty trap.

The tax credits themselves also have varying rates of take-up. The child tax credit has a take up of 82 per cent and working tax credit of 61 per cent (source: HM Revenue and Customs). So many people do not receive any extra money.

Childcare vouchers is another scheme that is supposed to help the poor and low paid by cutting the tax in nursery fees. But so far only 30,000 parents have used them. Also tax credits and benefits rise less than inflation making them inadequate in combating poverty.

Tax cuts for the rich

But the budget did benefit some. Corporation tax on profits was cut from 30 per cent to 28 per cent. The Institute of Directors said that the budget showed the chancellor was listening while Stephen Green, chair of HSBC, Britain's largest bank, said: "The news on corporation tax is a very welcome boost for business and one which serves to further enhance London's competitiveness."

But even the reduction in corporation tax was counterbalanced by cuts to allowances for companies investing in plant and machinery - so

manufacturing is also being made to pay for increased profits for the City and multinationals. Financial capital is the clear winner, reinforcing Britain's position as a parasite economy that produces less and less at home and makes its profits in the global money markets instead.

Since coming to power, Brown and Blair have seen a huge rise in the power of the city and of the salaries of the top 10 per cent. In 1997, manufacturing accounted for 21 per cent and finance and business services 26.4 per cent of gross value added (i.e. the amount of value produced in the economy before it is divided into profits, interest, rents and wages). In 2004, manufacturing accounted for 14 per cent while finance and business services was 33 per cent.

The UK accounts for 20 per cent of the world's foreign exchange each day (US only 9 per cent) and 42 per cent of the world's foreign equity trading.

The centrality of finance capital to the UK economy is also reflected in the huge increases in salaries and bonuses. Before Christmas, 200 city workers earned £8 billion in bonuses and the banks routinely give out enormous fees such as Royal Bank of Scotland's Fred Goodwin who gets £4 million a year, and HSBC's Michael Geoghan who received £7.8 million last year. When Labour came to power in 1997 boardroom pay was 25 times that of the average salary, now it is 120 times!

No wonder workers are turning away from Labour. So they should. After 10 years of this, workers should not be voting for this party, but organising the biggest possible break away from it towards a new politics of the working class - a new party.

For the few – not the many

Brown came to power promising to eradicate child poverty. But his support for big business is having the effect of increasing poverty. In February, a Unicef report slammed the UK for being at the bottom of a list of developed countries for child welfare. Children in the UK were living in poverty, had worse health and social conditions, poorer prospects and so on at greater levels than the other 21 countries in the study.

Labour ministers and supporters however said the survey was unfair as the figures it was based on were 4 or 5 years out of date and things have improved dramatically since then. But they haven't. Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) figures released after the budget show that the government has missed its own targets

for cutting child poverty - and that it is actually getting worse. Children living in poverty (after housing costs) rose by 200,000 to 3.8 million in 2005-6. Both the Child Action Poverty Group and Institute of Fiscal Studies have said that the government will miss its 2010-11 target of halving child poverty by 800,000 unless it spends an extra £4 billion - and then even then it only has a 50:50 chance

And it's not just children. Absolute poverty has also risen for the first time since 1994-5. Last year, 300,000 more people were living in absolute poverty compared with the previous year (using 1999 as a baseline). Also the number of working age adults without children living in poverty was at its highest since 1961 - when records began.

As election disaster looms for Labour... Time for a workers party!

In these elections millions of workers who used to vote Labour will be so disgusted by Blair that they will be turning away from him and his party.

After ten years, many have realised that Labour has not improved the lives of working class people and that it has no intention of doing so.

But where is the alternative?

The Liberals like to pose to the left wing of Blair - which isn't hard to do. But despite their antiwar rhetoric they backed the horrific Iraq war once it started and refuse to call for the immediate withdrawal of the troops. Their economic spokesman Vincent Cable is a top capitalist economist who always makes sure that their policies are aligned with the interests of the rich and the corporations. They are just as much a capitalist party as the Tories.

Cameron's shiny new image may seem a refreshing alternative to some people who are jaded with the Labour Party, they have been in opposition for so long many may not remember the horrific attacks on the workers that they carried out in the 80's. It was the Tories who ground the working class down for 18 long years, who sold off the utilities and the railways, who closed the mines and tried to bring in the hated Poll tax. Once in government the Tories do the bidding of big business.

One new party that is standing in the elections is the Respect Unity Coalition which was formed by an alliance of some socialist groups with former Labour MP George Galloway and a number of local Muslim politicians and initiatives. Respect opposes the war, but it is quite consciously not a socialist and working class party. It deliberately wants to maintain an alliance with

local property owners and religious institutions in the Muslim community, and therefore is unable to present a consistent working class alternative to Labour (see page 6).

In these elections, there is no party worthy of the votes of working class people. So the main aim at this time should be to press forward the case for a new working class party, for an end to the shameful situation we are in: that after 10 years in which the true anti-working class nature of the Labour Party has been exposed to millions, the working class movement, our unions and local campaigning initiatives, have still not had the strength of mind or the clarity of purpose to set out on the road to a new mass working class party as an alternative to Labour's big business agenda.

Unions funding their enemies

Despite the attacks of the government on workers' pay, on jobs, on conditions and on rights, and despite the bloody wars that are opposed by a majority of the population, the trade unions still fund Blair's party to the tune of millions every year. This is like a man who is being kicked in the head buying his attacker a new pair of boots. The so-called influence that this buys the trade union leaders over Number 10 is an illusion - it is not worth a penny, let alone millions of pounds of union members' hard earned subscriptions.

To those who want an end to Labour's wars, an end to spending on nuclear weapons, an end to privatisation and cuts in the NHS, an end to real wage cuts in the public sector and closures and outsourcing of industry and jobs, we need to focus our efforts on the formation of a

new party. This does not only mean recruitment of workers to a socialist organisation like Workers Power: it means building up massive pressure on the leaders of the unions and mass antiwar and anti-privatisation campaigns to break decisively with Labour, call a conference of delegates from across Britain and found a new working class party.

The fight for socialism

Workers Power believes that the interests of the working class can only be achieved by abolishing the capitalist system of production for profit, and replacing it with a socialist system based on democratic planning to meet need not greed. There is no way that the capitalists would allow this to happen without putting up desperate, violent resistance, in which they would be quite willing to trample on every democratic freedom to preserve their property. That is why we believe that a new workers' party would need to have a clear revolutionary policy if it were ever to be an instrument that can free the working class: it would have to state openly from the outset that elections - while useful for spreading revolutionary and socialist ideas - cannot be the means to change Britain or the world, and that to do that the working class will have to make a revolution, to rise up against the capitalists, smash their state forces of repression, and take power into our own hands.

The crisis of Labour is an opportunity to take forward the fight to build a new revolutionary working class party in Britain. If we squander this opportunity, there are reactionary forces waiting in the wings who may not prove so indecisive. (See page 7 on the BNP)

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Workers Power is affiliated to the
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Migrant slavery

In the month when the government, queen and church have united in praise of William Wilberforce and parliament's role in getting rid of slavery, ministers have reintroduced it. This autumn the Home Office is to bring in rules which would mean that any non-EU national who came to this country on a visa for domestic work - nanny, cleaner, cook and so on - would lose the right to remain in the country if they left their employer.

This means that a worker who is bullied, underpaid or even physically or sexually abused and who left their employer would be at the mercy of the immigration authorities. Domestic staff are now in effect bonded labour - they have to stick with their employer, however odious, without any rights. It will mean more cases of sexual trafficking and women being forced into prostitution and more cases of workers being super-exploited by gang masters, like the Chinese cockle pickers who drowned in

Morecambe Bay.

Meanwhile, the government is pursuing its racist war on asylum seekers. Even the MPs on the joint parliamentary committee for human rights have come out against the government policy of forcing asylum seekers into destitution. It found "hard evidence" of appalling treatment of asylum seekers: people being denied serious operations or sleeping in bus shelters, children and families being locked up in detention centres or having to live in sub-standard accommodation. It concluded that the ban on work and denial of benefits made "destitution seem deliberate".

Of course the destitution policy is deliberate. It is to drive asylum seekers out of the country, make them scapegoats for society's ill and expose them to racist attacks. Along with the government's attacks on Muslims is part of Labour's racist agenda - overseen by Blair and Brown.

ELECTIONS

Respect is not a working class

At the local elections Respect will be trying to gain more council seats. *Jeremy Dewar* argues that the mish-mash politics it and the main driving force behind it the SWP are putting forward will not advance the class struggle

On 3 May Respect will be standing candidates in the local elections, hoping to add to its councillors in Newham, Tower Hamlets and Birmingham. Members of the Socialist Workers Party will be crucial to these electoral campaigns and were the main force involved in setting up Respect.

This would have been inconceivable 10 years ago – back in 1995, the SWP criticised Arthur Scargill's attempt to set up a Socialist Labour Party because he was focusing on elections: "In words it is possible to talk about combining serious intervention in the elections with struggle outside the Commons. In practice, the two pull in opposite directions. The search for votes pushes a party towards a softening of its message, towards a search for accommodation with the union leaders in order to secure backing and finance. The alternative is to centre on struggle and to recognise that in any situation short of an insurrection revolutionary socialists will appeal to only a minority of the class." (*Socialist Worker*, 25.11.95)

From sectarianism to opportunism

Now even back in 1995 the SWP were not getting the question of elections quite right. Reformists, who see socialism being won through parliamentary democracy, do soften their message in order to get backing and votes. But for revolutionaries, elections can be used effectively, so long as they are not seen as an end in themselves, or mainly a way of winning votes, but as a means of conducting agitation for socialism, revolution and class struggle, a way of exposing the capitalists' lies, broadening and deepening the struggle outside parliament and the council chamber, and a way of winning workers and youth to the workers' own party.

Communists emphasise that the bourgeoisie would mobilise the unelected judges, police chiefs, top civil servants and even the army to sabotage the work of any government that challenged bourgeois power and privileges. We insist that a revolution will be necessary to overthrow capitalism and open the road to socialism.

As we will see, however, the SWP has not only revised its crude position from 1995 of rejecting socialist participation in elections, but has made a 180 degree flip. It has fallen into the trap of "electoralism", accommodating to union leaders, Labour MPs and even businessmen and property owners to win votes, and definitely "softening" the socialist message.

This won't help take the working class forward. In fact, by tying a section of the left to the middle class forces, Respect is acting as an obstacle to the creation of the real alternative that



workers need to Labour: a new mass workers' party (see page 5).

Respect was launched in January 2004 as a way of tapping into the mass antiwar sentiment and transforming the movement into a party that stood in elections on a range of social issues. At Respect's founding conference, Lindsey German said the aim was to build something "broader, wider, less explicitly socialist" than its predecessor the Socialist Alliance.

Hang on a minute. Socialism is the historic goal of the working class – it is no more nor less than the most consistent expression of our interests. To build something "less socialist" means diverting the working class towards a different goal. Since, in a society riven by antagonism between the classes, there can be no non-class goals. German's comments mean that Respect aims to win the working class to support policies that are "less" in our interests.

Old Labour revisited

And indeed Respect's programme is not socialist. At best, it is an attempt to re-establish the reformism of old Labour – and the key question that old Labour always fudged was private property. What does Respect have to say?

In *Another World is Possible* (April 2006), Respect's fullest policy statement to date, the party calls for the "organisation of society in the most open, democratic, participative, and accountable way practicable based on common ownership and democratic control". But ownership of and control over what? At least Labour's Clause Four called for "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

Respect mimics and dilutes old Labour's position because it does not want to "frighten off" Labour politicians, like Valerie Wise in Preston, Keith Adshead in Birmingham or Wayne Muldoon in Loughborough. So clarity over the need to forcibly expropriate the banks and major corporations, without compensation, dispossessing the capitalist corporations and placing them under workers' control, is thrown away. Warnings that any such action will meet resistance from the bosses and the state are simply not given.

But such opportunism is not confined to attracting Labour dissidents – it extends to Liberal Democrats like Tafazzal Hussain in Sunderland and Abdul Aziz in Birmingham. Many, like Hussain, are prominent businessmen. And as Respect has become more successful, it has attracted more businessmen hoping to use the party as a way into the council chamber. The most glaring example was the selection of Yasir Idris, a recruitment consultant and property developer in Birmingham's Moseley and Kings Heath ward. Sixty new members joined Respect in the two days before the selection meeting to ensure he won the contest by 35 votes to 20.

By his own account, Idris is new to politics and knows little about Respect, while his opponent, Helen Salmon, is a nationally known SWP

People's Assembly: SWP tails Liberals

What would Respect do if it had a dozen or more MPs? Last month's People's Assembly, billed as "the debate parliament wouldn't have", gave us a hint.

Tucked away in a declaration on Iraq was the demand for "the full withdrawal of all British troops no later than October 2007". Yet, in June last year, Stop the War's conference voted to "campaign for the immediate withdrawal of British troops". Why the change?

When challenged over this, SWP leader and Stop the War convenor Lindsey German told *Workers Power*: "We put in that date because it was the Lib Dems' position." Chairperson Andrew Murray elaborated: the aim was to unite behind "the broadest degree of parliamentary unity".

To believe that British imperialism can be defeated in the Middle East through parliament rather than workers' action is gross stupidity. To drop necessary demands in order to accommodate the capitalist Liberals, who admit they want the troops redeployed to Afghanistan, is criminal.

If the SWP leadership is prepared to do this in a mock parliament, imagine what they would do with a dozen MPs...

alternative

member, active in Stop the War and the student movement. Even Socialist Worker observed: "It is clear that the selection procedure in Birmingham will need careful re-examination to see if it has lived up to the organisation's aim of being a representative and inclusive coalition." (03.02.07)

But this is the natural consequence of building a party that straddles the classes. Instead of Respect becoming an instrument to fight the class struggle, it becomes hobbled by conflict between socialists and the middle classes within its own ranks.

Karl Marx once observed that, when opposing class forces are evenly balanced, a leader often emerges seemingly independent of the contending forces, but in fact rules in favour of one or the other. He called this highly volatile phenomenon Bonapartism.

It is no surprise then that George Galloway, Respect's only MP, has been free to say and do whatever he wants in the name of the coalition. He is the Bonaparte of the Respect Coalition and he has some terrible anti-working class policies. He called for a thousand dedicated border police to keep out "illegal" migrants; he signed an early day motion to review abortion legislation with a view to making it more difficult for women to terminate pregnancies. Notoriously he entered the Big Brother House in an embarrassing piece of self-promotion. And all without any mandate from Respect.

False start

The dominant forces in Respect – the SWP leadership, George Galloway, ex-Labour dissidents and a section of the Muslim petit-bourgeoisie and religious groupings – are keen to keep the coalition going. However, the project remains highly unstable.

Once the SWP saw the danger of Respect becoming overly dependent on the mixed class Muslim community, when all its non-Muslim candidates underperformed in Newham and Tower Hamlets, it got Respect to launch Organising for Fighting Unions to boost the trade union component of its acronym. But, as the case of Yasir Idris shows, middle class Muslims will also pursue their interests in the party. In short, Respect will continue to be a cross-class mish-mash.

It doesn't have to be this way, however. Respect's limited successes are testimony to the fact that a significant, politically advanced section of the working class – Muslim and non-Muslim – has broken with Labour. However, Respect is not the radical alternative that they need – and deserve.

As Marxists have always argued, the true interests of the working class cannot be achieved while we are still in hock politically to other classes. That is why Marxists have always stressed that the first goal must always be to establish an independent working class party – one that is not connected to the exploiters and which can pursue the working class' socialist goals consistently.

BNP: Bosses' Nazi Party

STAMPOUT



BADBREATH

By an antifascist activist

The rise of the British National Party is a serious threat. While the fascist party currently only has 49 councillors out of 4,000, it could gain more than 90 new seats in May. It has been gaining on average 20 per cent of the vote across the wards it stands in for the last few years.

The blame rests firmly upon the shoulders of the Labour Party. The NHS cuts, council housing sell-offs and slashing of benefits have alienated workers stuck in the poverty trap. Alongside this, the Labour politicians' campaign of racist lies conducted against asylum seekers and migrants has made the BNP seem acceptable.

Given the lack of a mass working class alternative to Labour, some workers are fooled into supporting the BNP – either because it appears to be fighting for the working class, or because they are protesting against the betrayal of the working class by Labour.

Either way, they are wrong.

The BNP remains a fascist party, virulently opposed to the working class. Its councillors have voted against free bus passes for pensioners, against more funding for council housing, and even against money for new schools – on the grounds they would encourage multiculturalism!

Despite the BNP's turn to "respectability" in recent years, they can't keep their snouts out

the trough. While claiming to "get tough" on unemployed workers and migrants, supposedly sponging off the state, six of their own councillors have been convicted of benefit fraud and non-payment of council rent.

Meanwhile, the BNP quietly maintains its commitment to street violence. Last November, a group of Nazi thugs attacked Unite Against Fascism supporters leafleting Morley South, Leeds, where the BNP has a local councillor. In Wiltshire in February, BNP members carried out street patrols, supposedly to tackle "antisocial" behaviour: in reality a show of strength.

Exaggerating the threat? I don't think so. The party's web designer, Lambertus Nieuwhof, planted a 25kg bomb under a mixed race school in South Africa in 1992. Former BNP candidate,

Robert Cottage, pleaded guilty in February to possessing 21 chemicals and shrapnel for bomb-making and four air-pistols. His wife said: "Rob believes there will be a civil war and the emergence of a new world order. [He] started stockpiling supplies."

No platform for fascists

To combat this threat, anti-fascist organisations, and black and Asian communities must organise self-defence. We must organise to prevent them meeting, campaigning and demonstrating. This can be done by mass counter-demonstrations, trade union action to prevent them using council facilities or media, and where necessary physically confronting them.

No reliance on the police, who are incapable of protecting black and Asian communities from racist violence, as a spate of killings of Asian taxi drivers in the past three months testifies.

We also need mass campaigns against privatisation and poverty, which are driving workers into the arms of the BNP. The BNP aims to divide white and black workers in order to allow the capitalists to get away with their attacks and exploitation unchallenged. The working-class must reject the BNP's racist lies and unite for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of a socialist state, which can abolish inequality and racism once and for all.

NORTHERN IRELAND

End of the Republican road: fight for a workers' united Ireland

Sinn Fein sell out reveals bankruptcy of Republican strategy for a united Ireland. *Bernie McAdam* says it's time for revolutionaries to forge an anti-imperialist workers party

Sinn Fein's decision to co-operate with the Police Service of Northern Ireland provided the DUP with the guarantee that Adams and Martin McGuinness had no intention of resisting British rule. It is this that forced Paisley and the majority of the DUP executive to form a devolved government with Sinn Fein on 8 May. But it will not bring equality, never mind a united Ireland to the oppressed nationalist minority in the North East.

The Assembly elections in Northern Ireland on 7 March produced an overwhelming vote for the Democratic Unionists and Sinn Fein. The DUP emerged as the largest party with 36 seats, then Sinn Fein with 28 seats, 18 for the Ulster Unionists and 16 for the SDLP. A power sharing Executive will be formed on 8 May.

Assembly to resume

The Assembly had been suspended since 2002 after unfounded allegations of an IRA spy ring at Stormont. The British government has ruled directly since then without any devolution of powers. It threatened the DUP that, if no devolved government had been agreed by 26 March, then direct rule from Westminster would resume. In the event, Tony Blair and Peter Hain accepted the DUP's request for a delay until 8 May.

The DUP claimed that they wanted further evidence that Sinn Fein would co-operate with the police, and to secure an extra £1 billion in funding, and the rescinding of the water charges, initial bills for which were due to go out this week. It appears that Westminster and Dublin have come up with the money and an agreement has been reached to stop the water charges, which had become deeply unpopular.

However, the strong showing in the vote for the DUP in the elections is not synonymous with the desire to share power with Sinn Fein. In fact, the DUP has always asserted that it would never share office with Sinn Fein. Its project has been to secure majority - i.e. Protestant - rule and any power-sharing executive would be profoundly unstable, with Paisley constantly seeking to undermine the Sinn Fein presence.

Britain not neutral

The British state has not been and will not be neutral in this. It has always sided with the Unionists when they try to force more concessions from Sinn Fein. It has always used the police in this process. And it has always employed dirty tricks.

It should be remembered that it was the police that raided Sinn Fein's offices in 2002 and triggered the suspension of Stormont. Three years later, the British state offered no evidence whatsoever to back up their charges, and Dennis Donaldson, one of the accused, admitted to being a British spy all along. Spies, double agents, lies and murders: British rule has always been present, just below the surface, during the peace process.

Neither has The Good Friday Agreement led to the two communities drawing closer together. All the elected MLAs have to register as Protestant, Catholic or Other, and all important legislation, including the status of the union with Britain, has to command support from each community. In other words, it entrenches the Orange veto against a united Ireland.

The election vote suggests that the Catholic community is very much in support of Sinn Fein's strategy. It is clear that Catholics do

not want a return to the war - the "troubles" - and have been lured towards Sinn Fein promises of a parliamentary road to a united Ireland. However, despite its vote, widespread concern does exist over Sinn Fein's support for the PSNI. This is not surprising, given most Catholics' loathing of their brutal and sectarian oppressors.

On the contrary, Sinn Fein's u-turn has generated a fierce debate amongst republican activists, as evidenced by the Ex-Prisoners' and Concerned Republicans' public meeting in Derry, which was attended by over 400 people. Three hundred and thirty ex-prisoners, who carry a lot of moral weight in the community, signed a petition in support of Peggy O'Hara's election campaign. Youth in Derry have fought against the PSNI in large number last month.

Only the working class can secure self-determination

In Derry 4.4 per cent gave their first preferences to Peggy O'Hara standing on an anti-police and anti-Stormont ticket, similarly 4.4 per cent for Davy Hyland in Newry. However, neither candidate stood on a clear platform of mass action, leading from today's struggles to a free 32-county united Ireland. On the contrary, their candidacies were marred by their failure to endorse an alternative to the dead-end guerrilla strategy of the last 35 years.

In the months to come, the likely forthcoming executive will be a highly unstable experiment. DUP will be constantly at war with its base over sharing power with Sinn Fein. On the republican side every police incursion into a Catholic area or recent arrests like those of Gary McGeough and Vincent McAnespie (over a shooting of a UDR soldier in 1981) will beg the question of Sinn Fein - why are we supporting the police? Of course it will be a government united in support of the capitalists and their policies not to mention all the attacks that will rain down on workers from rate rises to privatisations.

The task facing workers and youth in northern Ireland is to link the fight against the sectarian state and its police force to the struggle for a fundamental transformation in pay, jobs, housing, social services, and control in the work place, opening the way to working class power. A revolutionary party that fights for a workers republic must be built in the many struggles against capitalism and British imperialism that will emerge in the coming period.



Ian Paisley sits down with Gerry Adams for the first time ever at Stormont

G8 PROTEST

G8 and the global south

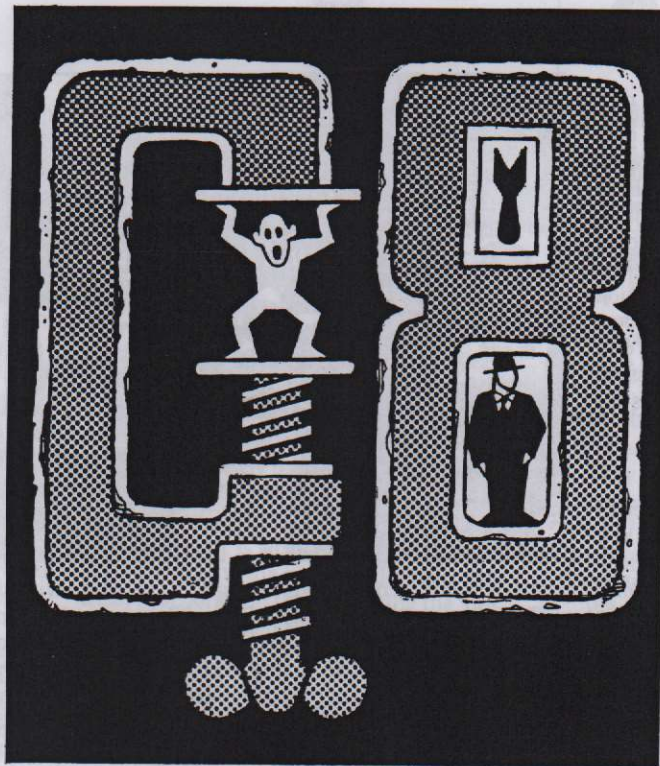
Joy Macready explains how, two years after the Gleneagles G8 summit and its promises, the issue of debt and third world poverty is still unresolved by the global powers

At the G8 summit in Heiligen-damm this June, leaders of the eight wealthiest countries will cry crocodile tears for Africa. As in 2005 at Gleneagles, George Bush and his cronies will discuss a "Marshall plan" for Africa, to "save" the Africans from themselves and their corrupt leaders, to "commit African leaders to democracy and good governance" - meaning to force open their economies even further to multinational companies seeking super exploitation and superprofits - no matter what cost to the people or the environment.

"The £25 billion 'Marshall plan' for the world's poorest countries pledged at the Gleneagles summit could re-industrialise Africa, and lift millions out of poverty if it is well directed," stated UNCTAD, the United Nations' trade and development arm. Yet it failed completely. Even ex-World Bank economist William Easterly admitted that half a century of trying to "save" the developing world from poverty with £1.1 trillion in aid has failed.

Why? Because these countries are chained to spiralling debt by the imperialist nations. The net financial transfer between developing and developed countries shifted from a balance of £23 billion in favour of developing countries in 1995 to an estimated outflow of £340 billion (around 5% of their gross national income) in 2006 - and the negative shift has been almost exponential since 2001. While most people in Africa live on less than £1 per day, African countries are forced to spend around £10 billion each year servicing old, illegitimate debts to rich governments and their institutions, the World Bank and IMF and African development Bank. Meanwhile, the World Trade Organisation keeps their economies subordinated to Western interests.

The IMF and World Bank were established in 1944, primarily by and for developed countries and better-off developing countries. The World Bank initially funded "development" projects in poorer countries in the 1960s and 70s. But in the late 70s a credit crunch in the US caused short-term US interest



rates to double between 1978 and 1981. The rise in rates left many borrowing countries unable to meet their debt repayments in dollars. Default would have meant the bankruptcy of several large commercial banks, so the IMF and World Bank began to make loans to debtor countries to ensure they would not default.

With these loans came greater conditionality. The IMF and World Bank claimed debtor countries had been unable to pay their loans due to failures in the structure of their economies - so they needed to "stabilise" and "adjust" in order to overcome this. A typical IMF structural adjustment program included policies to reduce inflation, increase interest rates, reduce public spending, increase taxation on spending, eliminate subsidies and stabilise the exchange rate by pegging the currency to the dollar. The World Bank promoted the liberalisation of trade, export-led growth, privatisation and general deregulation.

In order to get debts reduced or cancelled, or to get new loans, poor

countries had to adopt these policies favoured by the World Bank and IMF. So countries were no longer producing goods for internal consumption, but for trade on the free market and subject to the fluctuations of the market, as well as having to compete with wealthier countries and their subsidised goods. This is what imperialists call "free trade".

The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, the forerunner of the WTO, was aimed at massively reducing barriers and liberalising trade. Former US Trade Representative, Cala Hilla, who spoke for the US under George Bush Senior, summed it up: "I would like you to think of me as the US Trade Representative with a crowbar, where we are prying open markets, keeping them open so our private sector can take advantage of them."

The WTO was formed in 1995 to advance corporate interests in trade. The free trade that it enforces is not free at all but favours rich countries over poorer ones, forcing the poorer nations to open up their

economies to foreign investment and allowing repatriation of profits to the wealthy countries. When controls and assistance are removed, farmers and producers can be left unable to compete with subsidised imports from the US and Europe. This has an especially devastating effect on women, as they produce 60 - 80% of food in poor countries; they and other small scale farmers are the first to suffer from the loss of state support.

Hilla's statement above illustrates the power imbalance between rich and poor nations. The WTO is a secretive body, with negotiations conducted behind closed doors, and dominated by the G8 powers. Corporations lobby it to overturn national laws that seek to protect workers or the environment against the uncontrolled actions of big business. The Battle of Seattle in November 1999 saw thousands of people take to the street to protest against the strong-arm tactics of the WTO - they succeeded in shutting down the ministerial talks and forced the question of the legitimacy of free trade onto the world stage.

Some believe that global capitalist institutions which economically enforce the G8 agenda can be reformed, and that a "nicer" capitalism can work. We disagree. The capitalist system is a crisis-ridden system, driven to competition where there are few winners and many losers. And when imperialist nations cannot achieve their goals by economic coercion, they use military means. These countries monopolise the world's financial and productive resources while condemning billions under their rule to repeated bouts of war, ethnic conflict, growing inequality and environmental destruction.

Workers Power calls for the complete cancellation of all Third World debt. We fight for the right of countries to sustainably develop with a democratically planned economy. We fight for the expropriation of all the multinational companies, the giant banks and the national monopolies too. Fundamentally, we fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system - for an international socialist revolution.

TRADE UNIONS

A quarter of a million civil servants will strike on May Day. *Andy Yorke* says other public sector

All out on M

This year's Mayday will be boosted by a strike of hundreds of thousands of civil servants in the PCS union against Gordon Brown's 1.9 per cent public sector pay limit and his threat to cut more than 100,000 jobs. Anger in the other public sector unions over Brown's offer – a pay cut in reality when inflation is running at 4.6 per cent – has forced union leaders to reject the offer and consult members over strike action. Militants in Unison, T&G, GMB and Amicus need to pile on the pressure to make the union leaders name Mayday as the day for strike action.

Turn the Anger into Action

Unison conducted a consultation with health service workers in March. As the results roll in it is clear that in branch after branch the feeling is overwhelmingly to reject the pay offer and in favour of strike action. For instance the Leeds Teaching Hospital Unison branch had the "unprecedented" vote of 83 per cent rejecting and 88 per cent of those in favour of strike action. Similar sky-high figures for action reflect the anger rising around the country at Brown's fat-cat budget. A special meeting of Unison's health service group executive on 29 March met to discuss the ballot results as we went to press.

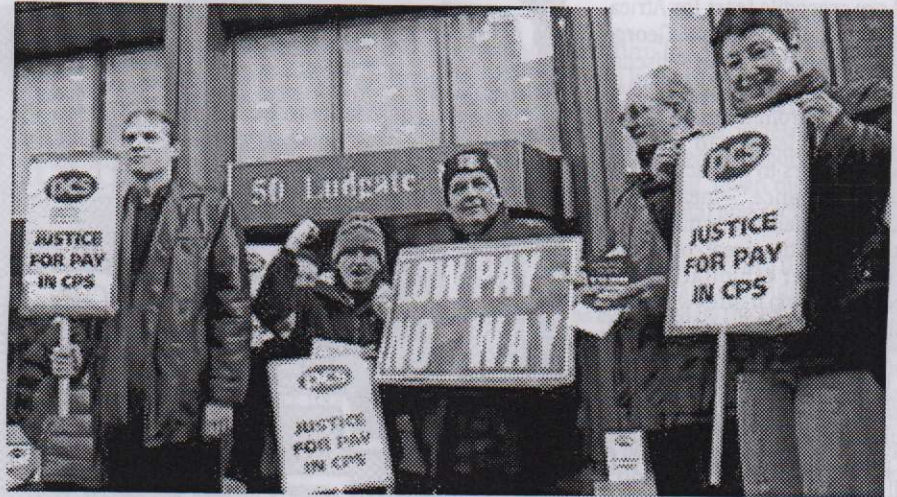
Local government unions – Unison, T&G and GMB – have rejected as "insulting" a pay offer of 2 per cent from the employers, instead sticking to their claim for 5 per cent and reducing the working week to 35 hours.

Brown's attack on pay comes at a time when more than 60 per cent of those in local government covered by the unions' pay claim earn £15,825 or less a year, £8,000 less than the national average, with 75 per cent of them women. These workers will be hit even harder by Brown's abolition of the 10 per cent tax rate.

Organise rank and file

The PCS had a one-day strike of more than a quarter of a million workers on 31 January, with 20,000 more in the Ministry of Defence and Passport Service striking on 30 March. Eighty thousand Customs and Revenue staff have been on a month-long overtime ban in March. Now the date has been set for another united PCS strike for Mayday.

But the pensions crisis and sell-out by the major unions shows the danger. The union leaders – including Mark Serwotka and the PCS executive – pulled the plug on a successful campaign in early 2005 to avoid embarrassing Labour with strikes just before the general election, then cut sell-out deals slashing pension



rights without even a serious struggle.

To avoid a repeat of that defeat, PCS militants need to convene a rank and file conference to debate out an alternative strategy to the leadership and establish a democratic movement to oversee it, with a leadership accountable and recallable.

We need delegate committees to build effective action and wrest control of the action away from the bureaucracy. Committees can also link

up with delegates from other public sector unions, and local defend NHS groups, pensioners committees, defend public services campaigns and so on. Such local anti-privatisation assemblies can organise action in support of the PCS, other public sector unions taking action and develop a generalised offensive against the government over attacks on public services.

An effective co-ordination of the unions

Make Your Vote Count?

The PCS leadership has dialled the May elections into its strategy of fighting Brown's pay limit. The Make Your Vote Count (MYVC) campaign is meant to put pressure on politicians standing in the local elections in England and Scotland, and elections for the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, to support the PCS policy on job cuts, privatisation and national pay in the public services.

The results are to be publicised to PCS members and the local community ahead of the elections so they vote for the candidate closest to PCS policy. The PCS claims that "The intention is to increase pressure on the employer to settle our dispute".

The problem is that this will lead workers voting for Lib Dems or even Tories, all non-working class parties that will promise local electors the earth but that nationally are capitalist and reactionary from the war in Iraq to taxation. This pick and mix strategy does not solve the current political crisis in the working class.

Hundreds of thousands of workers have left Labour, and millions have deserted it at the polls because of its neoliberal and imperialist policies. But the working class has no party of its own to fight. The main political question in the working class at the moment is the building of a new workers party, based on struggle and not just elections, democratic with accountable and recallable representatives based on the average wage of a worker, open to a debate on what its policies and programme should be so that socialists could influence and even win for revolution.

Most union leaders are not prepared to break from Labour; they have no other strategy than electing it. That is partly why they sabotage strikes and sell-out struggles, because these could damage an already weakened government. It is up to rank and file militants to resolve the political problem with a struggle for a new workers party. The coming conference for the Campaign for a New Workers Party on May 12 will be an opportunity to develop such a movement – get your branch to affiliate and a delegation to attend.

workers should, too, and smash Labour's policy of pay cuts

May Day!

and mobilisation of the public in their support would give public sector workers the support and confidence to break the anti-union laws. This would no doubt take place against the official leadership who will be scared of endangering their jobs and positions. Defiance of the laws would dare the government to prosecute: if they did they'd risk a massive wave of action in response.

Fighting Unions rally

A rally will be held on Mayday evening to bring together the strikers and demonstrators by the Organising for Fighting Unions (OFFU) campaign, the new leftwing network in the unions started by Respect and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Public sector union leaders such as Mark Serwotka and Billy Hayes of the postal workers CWU will be speaking at it.

It will be a series of speeches rather than an organising meeting. That would be a missed opportunity to organise a real left – a rank and file movement – in the unions. However the leadership of OFFU in the SWP do not want such a movement: they want to avoid any criticism of the left wing union leaders. The price that is paid, however, is that the strategy of these leaders and their record of struggle – such as Serwotka's terrible pension sell-out of 2005 – will not be criticised. Instead they get congratulations and hand-clapping.

The SWP insists that it would be sectarian to criticise or advance demands that these leaders haven't already backed. But this prevents us from hammering out a new strategy that can win.

The result of the SWP's tailing of these leaders is that the left never develops an alternative strategy because to put forward demands the union leaders don't support, or to criticise the bureaucrats, would see them walk out of OFFU. But the leaders only want a platform to cultivate their links to the activists in the union and keep them on board and behind the leadership. If they are criticised and their control was challenged, they won't take part.

SWP members including leader John Rees argued in an organising meeting for the Mayday OFFU rally that workers' "mood" was the key. He said that the mood was changing – more strikes were occurring, more were winning, new sectors from cleaners to NCP car park workers were taking action. He said Mayday was a "dramatic course" by the PCS leadership and the job of socialists is to connect it to the rising mood of struggle and

ensure the PCS isn't isolated.

But how? Isolation of the PCS is a danger, but the way to overcome it is by winning other public sector unions to strike action. A fighting "mood" is built by rank and file organisation that coheres around debate and action, and draws in new activists to struggle alongside the old militants, and by victories. Neither can be achieved without the rank and file organising independently of the union leadership, placing those demands on them that are necessary for victory, and taking independent action when necessary.

Yet it is precisely this that the SWP argues against in OFFU in favour of uncritical "unity" with Serwotka and other leaders. A rank and file movement is what the SWP refuses to organise despite the union bulletins it controls, Postworker in the CWU being the foremost with up to 10,000 copies distributed. It is a strategy that has and will continue to lead union militants into a dead end.

The potential this year for struggle is immense. Winning would deliver a defeat for the government on pay and open up the road to its defeat on a whole series of issues – pensions, privatisation, the occupation of Iraq, civil liberties and so on. The key is to build rank and file co-ordinations of those workers who see the need for an alternative to the go-slow strategy of the union leadership. This could lay the ground for an organised national rank and file movement in the unions and future victories.

What we say

- All out on mayday. Build for indefinite action until the 1.9 per cent is bust
- For rank and file control of the strike
- Link up with other public sector unions to build all out strike action in public sector
- Build worker/community assemblies to defend public services and fight for better pay and more investment



AIRBUS

Workers walk out – union condemns them

By James Roberts

March 23rd saw upwards of 2,000 workers involved in an unofficial walkout at Airbus's Broughton plant in Flintshire, North Wales. The action follows strikes by Airbus workers in France in protest at the announcement that there will be 10,000 redundancies across Airbus's European plants. Known as the Power 8 Plan the cuts will also include the closure of six European plants.

They have come at a time when Airbus appear to be going from strength to strength: order books are full for the next six years, and shareholders have been seeing an average 18 per cent per annum increase in profit for the past eight years.

When French workers took strike action earlier this month, Broughton local paper The Flintshire Standard News reported that British workers were being flown out to France as scab labour to ensure production of the A380 super-jumbo. They went on to say that despite calls for action from French union Force Ouvriere, it was "unlikely that British workers would strike".

In terms of official action, the reporters at the Flintshire Standard have not been wrong: so far the only union sanctioned action has been a 1,000 strong rally in Chester a few days before the walk-out. However, when workers at the Broughton plant found out last Friday that they faced the prospect of heavy job cuts, and no annual profit share, a meeting was convened at the start of shift on Friday 23rd and the workers chose to strike. The strike was continued by workers on the second shift, and despite contrary claims by Airbus, most of the 4,000 workers on shift took part in the action.

No sooner had workers downed their tools, than the convenor from Amicus (the union in which most Broughton workers are organised) Rob Dowey, began urging them to return to work. Not surprisingly in the week since the strike there has been no question of the cowards in the Amicus bureaucracy offering official support or getting behind any action that would be breaking the anti-union laws.

In the face of hostility from the union bureaucracy, Broughton workers are set with the task of linking up with workers in Airbus plants in both the UK and Europe if they are going to remount their efforts at unofficial action. If the Airbus workers are to be successful in their opposition, then it will be necessary for them to build a rank and file network, which bypasses the cowardly bureaucracy and connects workers at the Airbus plants across Europe.

MIDDLE EAST

Iran: Islam, repression

While the West plots “regime change” in Iran, *Simon Hardy* reviews a new book on the class struggle inside the country, a timely reminder that regimes can also be changed from below

For anti-imperialists, perhaps no country poses a greater dilemma than Iran. It is one of the few states to stand up to imperialism but it is ruled by an arch-reactionary clerical regime. The increasing threat of war makes it essential for socialists to understand the complexities of Iranian society and its history both in order to defend the country against imperialist attack and to elaborate a political programme for the working class to smash the regime and take power.

Iran on the Brink is an important contribution to that understanding, providing essential insights into the nature of the Iranian regime, its effects on the workers' movement and its relationships with the rest of the world.

Malm and Esmailian root their analysis of the Iranian regime in the dynamics of the revolution of 1979. In that year, the working class organised a successful revolution against the Shah, overthrowing his pro-imperialist regime with a general strike and mass demonstrations. Workers' councils, shoras, organised by mass meetings of workers, were set up across the country. Some even began to exercise control over production, acting as embryonic forms of a new working class state. Khane-ye Karegar (the workers' house) organised protests with slogans like “Workers' democracy is limitless”.

What was limited, however, was the workers' political leadership. The authors of *Iran on the Brink* correctly point to the lack of a revolutionary leadership in the workers' movement, whose main party, the Tudeh Party, was Stalinist and loyal to the USSR. Fearing the spread of a revolutionary movement, Moscow ordered a boycott of the shoras and Tudeh activists began a campaign urging workers to leave them.

At a time when it was crucial for the working class movement to go forward, this was enough to sow confusion and uncertainty in its



IRAN ON THE BRINK
Rising Workers and
Threats of War

Andreas Malm and
Shora Esmailian

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ranks. In the resulting political vacuum, the Islamists were able to take the initiative. They oriented towards the petty bourgeoisie of the market places, the Bazaari, a socially conservative force, certainly, but one that was fundamentally opposed to both the Shah and US imperialism. The alliance between the Bazaari and the imams, inspired and led by the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, was, therefore, both anti-imperialist and anti-working class.

Khomeini's rise to power

Khomeini returned to Iran after the Shah's departure and found the workers' movement prepared to hand him power. He ordered an end to strikes, condemning them as non-Islamic and began the counter-revolution, ordering his supporters to set up Shora-ye eslami, Islamic councils, in workplaces. This created a situation of dual power between the existing, but politically leaderless, workers' movement and the Islamists. The Islamic leaders resolved this in their own favour by organising and arming the petty-bourgeoisie and many unemployed workers in the Pasdaran. This

organisation took on violent fascist qualities and was unleashed on the workers' movement with the aim of crushing the revolution.

The lack of an independent leadership, and illusions in the Islamic movement's ability to fight imperialism, led to the drowning of the workers' revolution in blood. One eyewitness describes this period: “You could turn on the radio and hear nothing but the names of executed shora activists being read out with contempt.”

After consolidating power, the Islamic republic began an antagonistic relationship with the USA. The regime expelled US multinationals and established rigid control over industry, nationalising it and using it to enrich the leaders, which led to a generation of “Millionaire Mullahs”. This contrasted sharply with the abominable conditions of many workers in the country, especially those in the oil fields and the brick-making industry.

Repeated confrontations with the US, including the eight year war with Iraq, in which Saddam Hussein was funded and armed by Washington, served to maintain the

Islamic regime's “anti-imperialist” credentials as well as justifying repression of oppositionist movements. Nonetheless, as the book makes clear, Tehran also followed a policy aimed at achieving stable relations with the major imperialist powers, particularly via links with the European Union.

Increase in poverty

Today, the regime's disastrous economic policies have created mass unemployment. This is used by the bosses to keep down wages and to pressure workers into accepting harsher conditions. As a result of poverty, drug abuse is rife – 1 in 5 adults abuse drugs on a regular basis. Prostitution is also common as the sole means of income for young women and their families. The number of prostitutes in Tehran alone is estimated to be at least 300,000.

The regime has repeatedly attacked living standards: “In 2005 the government set the poverty line at \$320 per month. At the same time, it announced a new official minimum wage of \$130 per month... such arrogance is outstripped by employers who frequently offer wages as low as \$65 a month.”

Another aspect of modern Iran that the book deals with is the role of ethnic minorities. Iran is home to Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, Azeris and Jews. The state oppression of the Kurds led to a revolt in 2005 after a Kurdish leader was shot dead in the street by Pasdaran thugs. A mass uprising in Kurdish towns and villages was only crushed by the intervention of 100,000 troops.

Similarly, the Arabs live in one of the most oil-rich areas, but see only 1.5 per cent of profit put back into their communities. There were Arab uprisings in April and July 2005 and then again in January 2006.

In summer 2005, a conference of Iranian ethnic minorities, held in London, led to the founding of an organisation to coordinate their

and rebellion

struggles. Few of them want to separate from Iran, but all want an end to the Islamic regime. Since the “minorities”, when totalled up, account for over 50 per cent of the population, their collective action could have a powerful impact.

Other issues are dealt with to illustrate the source of the regime's power in its anti-imperialist rhetoric, its complete control over resources and production and its violent dictatorship over the working class. When it comes to issues in the news, like the nuclear programme and the possibilities for social change in the country, the authors seek to give some context to the headlines.

Without explicitly saying so, they suggest that anti-imperialists should defend Iran's nuclear programme. Indeed, they give some credence to the government's claim that it only wants to reduce the amount of oil that is used internally so that more can be sold internationally. An alternative source of energy has to be found and nuclear power is the first choice.

As the authors point out, both Germany and Japan have civilian nuclear power stations that could be used to create nuclear weapons, but neither of those countries has suffered sanctions or been subjected to detailed international inspection of its facilities. Why should Iran be treated differently?

This is, frankly, rather disingenuous. Tehran is almost undoubtedly trying to develop a nuclear weapon capability and has every right to do so. Perhaps the authors wanted to avoid offending a western audience brought up on hostility to nuclear weapons. Given their own commitment to a class analysis of politics, they would have done better to explain the difference between a principled defence of the right of a semi-colony to possess such weapons and principled opposition to all aspects of the military power of imperialist states, not just nuclear weapons.

Western liberals have generally identified two forces as possible sources of change. One is a reformist movement developing within the political system that



Iran is moving towards another decisive confrontation. The imperialists are clearly plotting the imposition of “regime change” – but regimes can also be changed from below

could liberalise the country and open it up to the west; the other is the development of a strong middle class that could act as a new comprador bourgeoisie.

However, the authors correctly point to the failures of the reformist movement that arose around the 2005 election campaign. They describe its political incoherence and ties to the political institutions that already exist in the country: “It emerged from the interior of the very state apparatus it was supposed to transmute.” Because of this, it failed to provide any kind of radical leadership to the oppressed. When the students protested, the head of the reform movement, Khatami, condemned them and sided with the security forces sent to crush them.

More recently, a third force has attracted the attention of some British journalists: Iran's youth. A chapter of the book is devoted to growing western interest in books, like *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and the wild sex and drug parties of middle class Iranian youth. Journalists provide anecdotal evidence of the dislike for the regime and even a pro-USA sentiment amongst many of the bikini-clad women and goateed snow boarders who drink Coca

Cola and praise the invasion of Iraq.

Those ideologues and writers who expect this select section of middle class youth to fulfil a “revolutionary” role are playing a dangerous game. Even though they may not support a military attack themselves, they are providing, as the book puts it, “an intellectual bridge requisite for a western attack on Iran”.

Oppressed workers

What these approaches have in common is that they overlook the exploited and terribly oppressed workers. The central theme of this book, however, is that Iran's history of political “frosts and thaws” is related to the strength of the workers' movement. The struggle against dictatorship is successful for a time, creates space for democracy to grow, and then is cruelly defeated, usually by reactionary forces supported by foreign imperialism. The 1953 victory of the Shah represented a defeat for the working class as the US imposed its control on the country. The defeat of the Shah showed that the Iranian workers had the courage and ability to take a serious step towards socialism, but the

rise of the Islamists and the subsequent counter-revolution ushered in a new era of misery and violence against the class.

Now, the Iranian working class is recovering. Since 2004, a series of major strikes and protests has gripped key industries, including the huge Iranian Khodra factory. The fact that most major companies are run by the state means that the workers' protests have an innate tendency towards politicisation.

All independent working class organisations are banned in Iran. No strikes or independent working class actions are allowed. Yet the workers are defying the regime to fight back. The book is full of wonderful examples of workers and socialists beginning to reorganise, learning the lessons of the '79 revolution, and refusing to accept their miserable situation.

Workers' demonstrations and strikes are routinely attacked, not only by the police but also the Pasdaran. Militants are arrested and thrown into prison for joining a trade union. Many are tortured by the regime and disappear. Some are simply shot dead on the picket line, as happened in 2004 during a strike of construction workers. Still the actions escalate. May Day has become an important day of struggle in Iran since 2004, with each year a bigger march taking to the streets. The number of strikes is growing too, with over 140 reported monthly by the end of 2005.

As the book's title says, Iran is moving towards another decisive confrontation. The imperialists are clearly plotting the imposition of “regime change” but regimes can also be changed from below; by the workers and youth who can lead a new revolutionary struggle against the reactionary Islamic government.

For that to happen, a revolutionary party that has learnt the lessons of past struggles, particularly 1979, and can apply a revolutionary policy to the struggles of today must be built. *Iran on the Brink* is a valuable book – not only for those who want to understand the history and present motivations of the Islamic republic, but also for anyone interested in the future of the struggle to overthrow the dictatorship.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan: for a sovereign constituent assembly!

Supporters of the *League for the Fifth International* in Pakistan look at the rising tide of militancy that is threatening to engulf President Pervez Musharraf

Protests by lawyers and rail-workers, a general strike in Kashmir and the biggest ever conference of peasants demanding land reform have greeted Musharraf this year.

The latest crisis began on 9 March when Musharraf suspended the Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry on spurious charges including misuse of authority and actions prejudicial to the dignity of office of the chief justice of Pakistan. But Chaudhry has been suspended because he refused to be the pliant stooge of Musharraf. Chaudhry has taken up the cases of those disappeared by the security services and declared privatisation of the state-run steel mills unlawful.

In response thousands of lawyers across Pakistan have protested against the regime. In Lahore there were violent clashes as the state responded aggressively by baton charging demonstrators. The government forced off the air two television channels, Aaj and Geo, that filmed the protests and then charged them with broadcasting "derogatory information about current national issues".

In his response to the charges, Chaudhry has accused three members of the Supreme Judicial Council, including its chair, of unconstitutional behaviour.

The Musharraf military regime is making a turn towards authoritarianism in the face of mounting discontent. Since the military coup in 1999 it has given total support to US imperialism and carried out a neoliberal economic policy. It committed 80,000 troops to take control of North Waziristan on the Afghan border, in the service of US imperialism, to halt Taliban operations. Last year it was forced to sign a peace deal with local tribal leaders in the face of military setbacks and growing popular anger in Pakistan.

Economic growth over the past few years has only been achieved



through a ruthless privatisation and market deregulation that have hit Pakistan's workers and poor. Its promises to tackle corruption have been shown to be fraudulent - the government is more corrupt than ever and many of those implicated in scandals have been pardoned.

The latest attack from the regime came after Musharraf declared his intention in February to have parliament elect him for a further five years. This is unconstitutional in the absence of new parliamentary elections, which Musharraf's supporters Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q) would be sure to lose if they were not to rig them (as he is widely regarded to have done in the presidential referendum of 2002).

The result is that Musharraf needed the Supreme Judicial Council to declare his actions legitimate. Thus judicial mavericks like Chaudhry had to be dealt with.

Now the masses of Pakistan must resist the junta. The lawyers' protests were an excellent start. It is vital, though, that the workers and peasants organisations must join the action and bring forward their own demands.

The protests can be transformed into a mass movement against military rule. Many of the leaders of the working class organisations and social movements oppose the dic-

tatorship. We need mass demonstrations, blockades, strikes and direct actions to bring down the regime.

Which way forward?

Revolutionary Marxists must seek to turn the anger of the masses towards the fight for the convening of a fully sovereign constituent assembly elected on the basis of recallable delegates - organised by the working class and social movements opposing military rule.

The immediate tasks of the constituent assembly must be to reverse the neoliberal programme of the Musharraf regime and bring the criminal military junta to justice. We fight within a constituent assembly to continue the class struggle against the capitalists and the big landlords by enacting an agrarian revolution that will give the land to those who till it, encouraging the peasants to organise co-operatives.

Women must be brought into the struggle for an end to military rule; this struggle must go hand in hand with the fight for the social, political and economic equality of women.

We call for workers control of production, nationalisation of big foreign multinationals and an economy planned for people's need, separation of religion and the state and

equality of all faiths before the law. Above all we call for the arming of the workers and peasants, democratic rights for soldiers, including the election of all officers so that the people - the workers and peasants - can never again be subjected to oppression and exploitation.

The military junta must not be replaced with another democratic bourgeois government, such as the Pakistan Peoples Party and the former Nawaz Sharif regime. We must fight to build up organs of working class and peasant power in the struggle for democracy in Pakistan. These co-ordinations or soviets can lay the basis for a new state that is not an instrument of capital but of working class power that fights for world revolution and socialism.

The present situation has the potential for a revolutionary struggle for power by the working class. The bourgeois class is divided, the state is weakened and convulsed with internal strife, and the social forces exist that can be mobilised on the streets in a struggle against the government. However, there is also a danger that the growing clerical Islamist forces will lead the struggle against the government towards the reaction of Sharia law instead of liberation.

The existing leadership of the working class hopes to appease the ruling class rather than struggle for power - which is a recipe for more neoliberal attacks. Pakistan, like many other countries, faces an acute crisis of working class leadership. In the coming period a revolutionary party must be built that fights to lead the masses towards the programme of socialist revolution.

- Demonstrations, blockades, occupations and strikes to bring down the regime!
- Fight for a sovereign constituent assembly with recallable delegates!
- No more privatisations and deregulations!
- Build a revolutionary workers party!

ASIA

Sri Lanka: defend the Tamils

The outbreak of fighting in Sri Lanka is the result of the Mahinda Rajapaksa government's intensified oppression of the Tamil minority. Support for the resistance and the Tamils' right to self-determination is the starting point for working class unity, writes *Simon Hardy*

The ongoing offensive by government forces in Sri Lanka is part of a new phase in the Sinhala chauvinist coalition's attempts to defeat the Tamil Tigers, the main armed force amongst the Tamil minority. It marks the de facto collapse of a ceasefire brokered by Norwegian mediation in 2002, which ended almost 20 years of war. The ceasefire led to no serious concessions to the Tamils demands. It was effectively ripped up by the new government of Prime minister Ratnasiri Wickrem-anayake in 2005.

During the last fifteen months around 4,000 people have been killed as government forces sought to retake the Tamil controlled areas.

The Tamils, about 18% of the population, are divided from the Sinhalese majority by both language and religion. The antagonism between Tamils and Sinhalese goes back to the divide and rule policies of the British colonialists, who typically used minority elites to help them maintain control. Thus the British favoured middle class Tamils for the civil service, medicine and law. Yet many Tamils, especially those working as labourers in the great tea plantations of central Sri Lanka, were



viciously exploited.

Since Ceylon became an independent state in 1948 and in particular from the mid-1950s onwards these privileges were reversed. The poor "Estate Tamils" were stripped of their citizenship and repeated attempts were made to force their immigration and to colonise Tamil areas with Sinhala speakers. Tamils suffered discrimination in terms of both language use in education, access to government jobs, and were periodically subjected to violent pogroms from Sinhalese chauvinist gangs, plus police repression.

This oppression naturally led to militant Tamil nationalist organisations being set up. The Tamil

United Liberation Front (TULF) was founded in 1976. They soon espoused the cause of forming a separate national state, Tamil Eelam (Tamil Homeland). The TULF won most Tamil seats in the 1977 election but was then excluded from Parliament. Since 1983 Tamil forces have been waging an armed struggle. The largest of these is the LTTE, led by Velupillai Prabhakaran, also known as the Tamil Tigers.

The LTTE have been accused of assassinations and repression of other Tamil resistance organisations, using child soldiers and even of "inventing" the suicide bomber (the so-called Black Tigers). It has been declared an illegal terrorist organisation by over 30 coun-

tries.

However it organises substantial armed forces and has control of a significant portion of the north and east of the island and is supported by much of the Tamil population.

The conflict cannot be resolved until the national oppression of the Tamils is ended. This means that the revolutionary forces of the working class, Sinhala and Tamil speaking must actively fight for the Tamils the right to self determination, up to and including total independence if they so wish. The alternative is more years of bloody warfare and division that is caused by an imposed 'unity.'

They must also support the LTTE's struggle against the repression of the Sri Lankan army, calling for the latter to cease its offensive and immediately and unconditionally withdraw from the Tamil areas. This does not mean either political support for the LTTE or endorsement of its indiscriminate actions against Sinhalese civilians or rival Tamil organisations.

Only on this basis can the working class be united in the struggle for socialism, which alone can finally end all national, racial and gender oppression, rooted as these are in capitalist exploitation.

Nepalese Maoists join government

By Richard Brenner

After 10 years of guerrilla struggle in the countryside, Nepal's Maoist party has agreed to join the ruling government coalition of capitalist Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has taken this step even though the hated monarchy of King Gyanendra remains in place.

Last year saw an end to a period of absolute rule in which Gyanendra had governed without a parliament or any elected representatives. But despite the self-sacrifice of the CPN(M)'s militants, it was not the long guerrilla struggle that brought this absolutist dictatorship to an end. It was the revolution in April 2006 in the cities, especially in the capital Kathmandu, which brought workers and youth onto the

streets, shut down the city in a general strike, paralysed the armed forces and threatened a full scale insurrection.

If at that time the Maoists had put their 15,000 rifles at the disposal of the mass movement, they could have smashed their way through the demoralised and wavering army and police, seized the royal palace, executed Gyanendra and his royal line, and opened a struggle for working class power based on workers' and peasants' councils.

Instead, despite all its fiery rhetoric and military training, the CPN(M) acted in accordance with the true essence of its Maoist ideology. Pursuing Stalin's theory of revolution by stages, it aimed not to secure a socialist revolution, but merely a democratic revolution, therefore limiting itself to keeping the rule of the King and the parliament.

In this the Maoists reveal how far they are

from the policy of Leninism (see page 22)

The Leninist policy in this situation would be to refuse to join the coalition government of seven capitalist parties, and to call instead for the complete abolition of the monarchy, immediate elections to a Constituent Assembly, land to the peasants, the expropriation of industry and the banks, and the spreading of revolution through a revolutionary appeal to the masses of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and China.

The path to this lies through the revolutionary smashing of the Nepalese armed forces and state bureaucracy.

A genuine communist party in Nepal would only serve in one type of government - a government of the workers and peasants based on their own democratic organisations. The betrayal of the struggle of the peasants and workers by the Maoists is a lesson for everyone.

ANTI IMPERIALISM CONFERENCE

Iraqi resistance speaks in Europe

The League for the Fifth International attended an anti-imperialist conference in Italy last month, which revealed the strengths – and weaknesses – of the Iraqi resistance

Resistance movements' leaders and representatives from across the Middle East came together at a conference over the weekend of 24 – 25 March in Chianciano Terme, Italy, to discuss uniting the struggle against imperialist aggression.

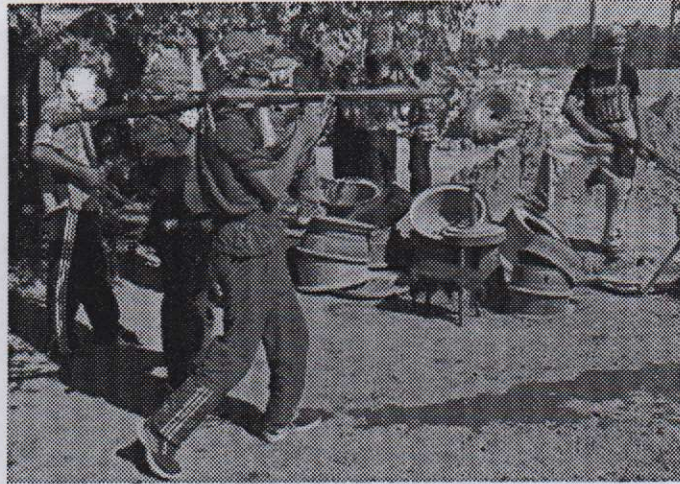
The speakers were varied, from well-known representatives of the nationalist Iraqi Resistance, like Abdul Jabbar al Kubaysi, to Ali Fayyad, one of leading theoreticians of the Lebanese Hezbollah, and others like the Left Radicals of Afghanistan, anti-collaborationist fractions of the old Iraqi Communist Party, Islamist professors, anti war activists, academics, and journalists. Most, however, came from the Sunni community.

The one speaker from the Iraqi Shi'a opposition was only able to participate by telephone link because the occupation forces are holding him under house arrest. Ahmed al-Hassani al-Baghdadi, nicknamed "the Red Ayatollah", stressed the need for Sunni and Shi'a alike to resist the invaders.

The aim of the conference organisers – the Campo Anti-Imperialista – was to build an "anti-imperialist front" to unite resistance forces in the Middle East with forces in "the West" willing to declare their solidarity with them. They hoped to reconcile the serious differences between the resistance movements and adopt a common political declaration. In this project they failed.

Naturally the Iraqi speakers were given pride of place, especially the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance (IPA), which co-sponsored the conference. This organisation is currently waging an armed struggle against the occupation forces and is part of an even larger group in Iraq called the Patriotic National Islamic Front that unites a sizeable part of the resistance movement from the Sunni-dominated areas. They vividly described the occupation and the heroism of the resistance to it.

However, there was a virulent streak of anti-Iranian chauvinism running through a number of their speeches. Of course it is true that



The Iraqi resistance faces a crisis of leadership

Iran has carried out an unprincipled policy with regard to the occupation, helping the US out of the tight spot it found itself in 2003/4 and now facilitating the negotiations between the US and the Iraqis and the neighbouring states.

Iraqi resistance fighters correctly denounce this. But to go on to say that Iran is equally or even more of an enemy than the US, to describe Iran/Persia as a historic enemy of Iraq, showed the limits of bourgeois nationalism. On the other side, the unofficial representative of Hezbollah in Lebanon would tolerate no open criticism of Iran.

Antiwar movement

Another issue discussed was the weakening of the anti-war movement in the West. Italian participants asserted that the mass Italian anti-war movement, which stood in the forefront of the great mobilisations of 2003-04, had withered to forces which could only mobilise 10,000 - 30,000 this March. Nevertheless speakers from the campaign against enlargement of the already huge US base in Vicenza described the broad mass character of the 300,000 strong demonstration, including pacifists, ecologists, trade unionists, members of many parties and individuals.

Larry Holmes, the speaker from the US antiwar coalition Interna-

tional Action Centre, spoke of the importance of solidarity with the resistance and the danger of illusions in the Democratic Party in the USA, which won control of Congress mainly because electors (mistakenly) saw them as the anti-war party.

The only speaker to address the issue of class and the incapacity of the bourgeois states in the region to resist imperialism was a speaker from Jordan, Hisham Bhustani, who called for socialist and secular forces across the Middle East to unite with anti-imperialist Islamists in action. Bhustani also correctly criticised the project of the Iranian regime in terms of expanding its sphere of influence over southern Iraq, but showed how this was leading to conflict with the US, despite Tehran's hitherto pro-occupation actions. But Bhustani was rounded on and rudely attacked for criticising the Sunni-Shi'a divisions both within the Iraqi resistance and between it and Hezbollah.

What kind of anti-imperialism?

The political problem with the idea of an "anti-imperialist front" became obvious as the conference came to the final session and the delegates could not reach an agreement. The chimera of an anti-imperialist front seemed to dissolve in front of the organisers' eyes as the sectarian divisions of the Shi'a

and Sunni and decades of Ba'athist hatred of the "Persians" exposed the hopeless task of uniting bourgeois nationalisms, let alone rival religious communalisms in a vague anti-imperialist block.

The political error of the Campo Anti-Imperialista's approach is that it does not take as its starting point the working class, which can and should strike tactical agreements with other mass popular class forces to fight imperialism. Such an "anti-imperialist united front", as envisaged by the Communist International at its Fourth Congress (1922), is the correct method to apply. But class independence of the workers in their struggle to lead the resistance is a precondition for this tactic to be effective.

The Campo Anti-Imperialista's insistence that the Iraqi Resistance is destined play the leading role internationally because it is on the frontlines is simply the old Third Worldist illusions of the 1970s and '80s revamped. Being in the forefront of a fight in no way guarantees either correctness of strategy or the capacity to unite such struggles internationally. The conference in Italy provided working proof of this.

The size of the conference, with only 200 participants, also provided negative confirmation of the need to fight to win the mass forces to anti-imperialist politics, rather than establish small initiatives on the fringes of these movements. Towards the very end of the conference, Michael Pröbsting spoke on behalf of the League for the Fifth International, explaining our perspective of working within the mass movements and social forums, fighting their right-wing leaderships, in order to win serious forces to anti-imperialist positions.

He also criticised the anti-Iranian polemics of many of the speakers and made it clear that we would support Iran in the event of an attack – as we had supported Iraq – despite the reactionary nature of their regimes. He appealed to all the forces there to build a powerful anti-imperialist current within the mobilisation against the G8 this June.

SLAVERY

The slave trade: unceasing resistance and revolt

Official celebrations credit William Wilberforce for the abolition of the Slave Trade. *Marcus Chamoun* looks at the slave rebellions that really forced Britain's hand

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century apologists for slavery made much of the fact that it had existed throughout recorded history, arguing that it was a natural or even benign state for those enslaved.

It was true that the Spanish and Portuguese, who initiated the transatlantic shipping of "human cargo", could draw on an existing trade in African slaves. But in doing so, they massively increased its scale and completely transformed its main features.

Indigenous African slavery differed from theirs in several ways. The racial element was missing - slaves were as likely as not to have the same origins as their masters. It was not always a permanent or inherited status - slaves could marry into their masters' families and lose their slave status, or own property of their own, including other slaves. Crucially, those enslaved were used primarily in domestic service or production - whereas the European plantation colonies combined the absence of individual rights for slaves with the chaos and tyranny of production for the market, with its constant drive to reduce costs and increase output.

Why didn't the European colonists use other sources of labour? One answer is that they tried and failed. Forced labour by the indigenous "Indian" populations of the Caribbean led to their being wiped out by disease and malnutrition. Poor or religiously persecuted Europeans, who sold themselves into indentured labour (a type of temporary slavery), usually became smallholders, unable to compete with plantation owners with the crucial advantage of scale in producing cash crops like sugar, coffee, tobacco and cotton. In the words of one historian, the colonisers were willing "to go to the moon" to satisfy the crying demand for labour - but Africa was closer than the moon.

Crucially, in a society where most people still owned their own means of production, "free" wage-labour would have been too expensive to use to produce these goods as cheap commodities for a mass market. In this way, slavery acted as the midwife of modern capitalism. It was necessary to reduce Africans to the status of property before a class of capitalists could arise to reduce a majority of Europeans to the status of wage-slaves.

At first, the trade was a Portuguese monopoly with the Spanish as the main buyers. John Hawkins first tried to break this monopoly with his 1562 expedition to West Africa. But the English seizure of Barbados and Jamaica from Spain meant that already, by the 1660s, England was the main slaving nation, with merchants in London, Bristol and (later) Liverpool growing rich on slaves and slave-produced goods.



Slave revolt aboard a trading ship in the middle of the Atlantic

Africans fight back

None of this happened without resistance. As early as 1526, Nzinga Mbemba, an African ruler in the Congo, used diplomacy with King John III of Portugal to try to end the trade in his country. One of the first recorded onboard slave revolts was in 1532, when 100 Africans on the slave ship *Misericordia* wiped out most of the crew and forced the survivors to take them back to the coast. Between 1699 and 1865, more than 50 major mutinies took place on ships during the "Middle Passage".

Coastal villages fortified themselves against the slave traders and the latter were often attacked before they had time to buy any slaves - as when the French slaver *Phoenix* was burnt in 1730. The crew of the English slaver *Perfect* were killed in a 1758 rescue mission that freed 300 Africans. Slave forts were attacked, as in the Christianborg revolt on the Gold Coast in 1727.

Once arrived, slaves escaped to form "Maroon" communities in hills and swamps, existing for decades or more in a state of war with the European authorities. In Jamaica, the British were forced to recognise the Maroon settlements after a war in 1730, in return for promises that they would hand back runaways and not raid the plantations to increase their numbers. This treaty was rejected by part of the Maroon communities. The existence of these communities along-

side slave plantations always gave others hope and undermined white pretensions to complete domination.

The first slave revolt in Jamaica in 1673 set the tone for a series of uprisings there and elsewhere, including "Tacky's Rebellion" in 1760 which took six months to put down, a revolt in Dutch Guyana in 1763, in French Montserrat in 1766, and a failed plot in British Antigua in 1736.

Alongside this "revolutionary" struggle was resistance that ameliorated slavery without ending it. Strikes or escapes took place for better conditions, food rations, or to protest or evade inhumane treatment. Feigning stupidity or illness, stealing and shirking allowed individual slaves to control their pace of work - turning the prejudices of their owners against them. Collectively, slaves could use conversion to Christianity - or the acceptance of a culture and religion of their own - to impose rest days or feast days as part of the local custom.

However, it was the French revolution - and its aftershock in Haiti - that sounded the death-knell for slavery, resulting in the second independent country in the Americas, the first to abolish slavery, and the first black republic. It was this, as much as religious belief or the industrial revolution that exposed slavery for the dying and anachronistic system that it was, and set the stage for Wilberforce, Clarkson and the Clapham Sect to win support for abolition.

ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe: Mugabe cracks for another seven years in

Robert Mugabe has let rip a storm of terror against the Movement for Democratic Change. An all-out general strike, defended by a workers militia, can get rid of the tyrant. *Jeremy Dewar reports*

On Tuesday 13 March, pictures of Morgan Tsvangirai, his face swollen and bruised, his head bearing a six-inch gash, were beamed around the world. The leader of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change had been arrested the previous Sunday as he stepped up to address a thousand-strong rally, opposing President Robert Mugabe's ruthless misrule. He was then beaten and tortured by the police, and hospitalised.

In an attempt to disperse the rally, the police had shot dead one MDC activist, Gift Tandari, and fired several more rounds into the assembled crowd. One activist - unnamed and in hiding to avoid detention - told the BBC how the youth fought back:

"There was a lot of action and as we threw punches in the air we cried in Shona: 'Ngatirwirei rusu-nunguko' - let's fight back for our freedom. When [the police] realised that someone had been shot, they tried to run from the scene... As they ran some of them dropped their batons so we picked up their discarded sticks and used them to beat their colleagues left-behind. The police were badly beaten."

Over 50 comrades were arrest-

ed that bloody Sunday in the working class Highfields area of the capital, Harare. The next day, 140 more MDC members were also arrested in Mutare. By the end of the month, a further nine prominent MDC members had been charged with attempted murder and terrorist plotting; one of the accused collapsed in court from injuries sustained in police cells.

As we go to press, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions - whose offices were also raided and ransacked, with videos and documents seized - is gearing up for a general strike for 3-4 April.

Zimbabwean crisis

The protests were triggered by Mugabe proclaiming his intention to stand for re-election next year. Now the ruling party Zanu-PF has endorsed his candidature, and a summit of 14 heads of neighbouring states also gave him their support. The stage is therefore set for more confrontation.

The reasons why Mugabe is so hated are not hard to find.

The agriculture-based economy is in freefall, following a much delayed land redistribution programme. Endemic corruption and a reactionary and ill-fated military adventure in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1998-2002) have added to the country's woes.

IMF-driven privatisation of industries and services had already led to severe hardships for the urban working class. Now the whole country, even the army, is suffering. Inflation is the highest in the world at 1,730 per cent. Unemployment is running at 80 per cent. Between three and four million Zimbabweans - out of 12 million - have fled the country in search of work.

Fuel and staple foods, like bread and sugar, are scarce, leading to widespread malnutrition. Meanwhile, Mugabe's homophobic denial of an AIDS epidemic, a ridiculous taboo on the subject of women's hygiene, and neoliberal "reforms"

in the health service have all combined to reduce the life expectancy for Zimbabwean women to just 34.

Western hypocrisy

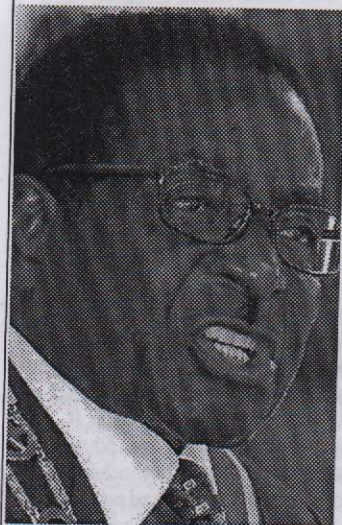
Western politicians are queuing up to denounce Mugabe. Condoleezza Rice has labelled his regime "ruthless and repressive", while Tony Blair called the situation "truly tragic". Britain has been in the forefront, imposing sanctions on Mugabe and his inner circle (seizing their foreign assets and banning them from travel), and now seeking to extend their pressure.

However, the concern of these self-styled humanitarians should fool no one. Up until 2000, when Mugabe turned against the 4,500 white farmers who had jealously guarded their ownership of 70 per cent of Zimbabwe's fertile land while millions of black peasants starved, Britain considered his regime beyond reproach. Yet, Mugabe's reign of terror against the trade unions, against his political opponents, and against the people of

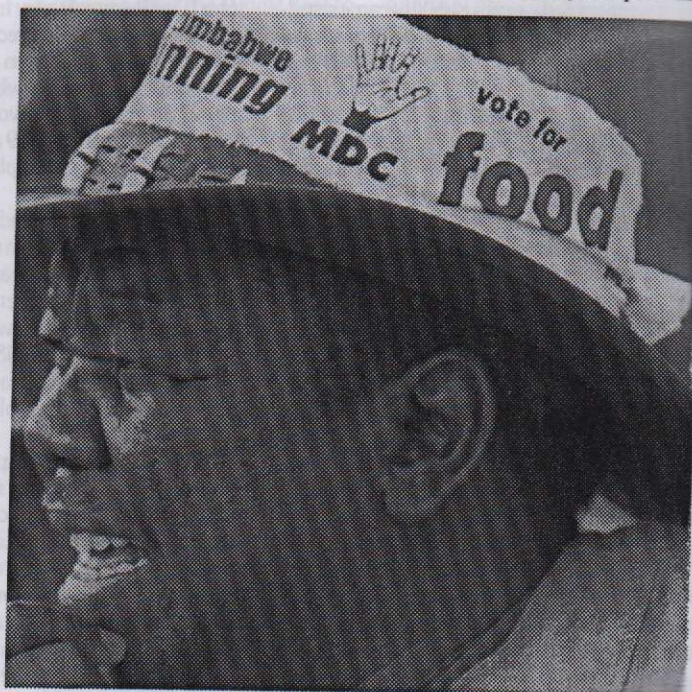
Matebeleland predated the eviction of the white farmers by 20 years.

The truth is that imperialism considered Mugabe a useful ally, along with other post-liberation leaders-cum-dictators like Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire-Congo) and Daniel arap Moi (Kenya), when they were worried about social revolution. That's why they did nothing to overturn the apartheid regime. Now that the Soviet Union has gone, they feel these people are disposable. They want neoliberal reforms to penetrate the Africa's markets and exploit its minerals. The corruption of Mugabe is only now considered a price too high to pay - not for the local working class but for Western corporations and banks.

Unfortunately, the MDC, for all Tsvangirai and its other leaders' courage, chose early on to form an alliance with the white farmers, to position itself to the neoliberal right of Mugabe's Zanu-PF, and to openly court imperialist intervention. This was an unprincipled and



President Mugabe



Tsvangirai, leader of the MDC

heads in grab power

fatal decision. It gave Mugabe, who had protected the white farmers from expropriation for 20 years, the mantle of an anti-imperialist freedom fighter and defender of the black peasantry once again.

This is a total fraud. Between 1980 and 1997, Mugabe was happy to resettle just 70,000 black farmers on four million hectares of the poorest land, leaving the white capitalist farmers in control of agriculture and up to 10 million black peasants landless. Since then he has starved the mass of black peasants of cheap bank credits, leading to the collapse of agriculture.

All out to oust Mugabe

The April general strike must become a springboard for the workers to rise up and oust Mugabe. Workers - in Zimbabwe or around the world - should not be confused by Mugabe's "let them hang" fake anti-imperialism. He is a tyrant and he must go - now!

Local committees of action need to make detailed arrangements for the running of the strike, the distribution of essential goods and services for its duration and the physical defence of the movement. These local committees will also have to control the strike because workers cannot trust their trade union leaders to mount the kind of action needed to oust Mugabe.

The ZCTU decision to delay the start and limit the duration of the strike has only allowed Mugabe's regime to garner support from Thebo Mbeki of South Africa and bash more heads. It was a dangerous and wrong tactic. The comrades should organise to extend the strike, making it indefinite, dependent on Mugabe's departure and the relinquishing of power by Zanu-PF. To achieve this they will have to form an alternative leadership - against the bureaucrats if necessary.

Another problem is security. The police blamed the firebombing of two police stations and a Zanu-PF office on "the armed wing of the MDC". The regime is clearly trying to provoke the youth and thus justify repression on an even greater scale. This calls for two things: iron discipline and a workers' militia. Both are needed.

Break from the MDC

But the strategic tasks facing the workers and landless peasants are political. Who should rule after Mugabe? How should the land question be solved? What should be the new Zimbabwe's relationship to the big Western powers and to its neighbours? How can the millions of unemployed be put back to work?

These are questions that can only be answered satisfactorily by the working class taking power and seizing the means of production and natural resources, and putting them to work for the good of all. It must form an alliance with the poor peasants, who should be granted rights to the land and the means to farm it efficiently. The remaining white farmers must be expropriated without compensation. But without massive investment in agriculture, without a re-orientation of production to feeding the mass of Zimbabweans, the country will continue to starve.

Democratic cooperatives of landless peasants and farm workers can plan and implement modern production sufficient to feed the cities and the villages. But to get the modern equipment and infrastructure needed to achieve this, the banks and big corporations - especially those belonging to the foreign imperialists - must be taken into social ownership and their resources applied to the task. After all, this wealth was stolen from the people over a hundred years ago. But to take the property of the rich, force is always needed. In short a social revolution, led by the workers and supported by the rural population, is not only possible today but absolutely essential.

Many thousands of workers support the MDC because it was initially set up by the ZCTU, of which Tsvangirai was the general secretary. But the workers need to form their own party now, to break their unions from their political subservience to the capitalist farmers, the urban middle class and British imperialism, and openly adopt revolutionary methods of struggle and socialist aims.

Stop Iraqi oil plunder

By Marshall Somerset

Iraqi trade unions have taken a firm stance against the pillage of the country's natural resources by rejecting the proposed hydro-carbon bill, which will hand over the country's oil and gas reserves to multinational companies.

All five union federations have said that they oppose "the handing of control over oil to foreign companies" whose aim is to "rob the country's natural wealth". Yet the bill looks likely to be ushered through parliament very quickly with the minimum of debate, despite the unions' demand that oil workers and the people have the right to participate in the discussions.

At the forefront of the fight against the bill is the General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE), which organises more than 26,000 workers in the four southern provinces, including Basra. Since the invasion, the GUOE has led a determined resistance to occupation and rip-off of the Iraqi oil industry. The GUOE has:

- Carried out successful strikes against US companies, such as Kellogg, Brown and Root, in the oil industry
- Convened several anti-privatisation conferences including one last August
- Organised demonstrations in Basra against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon
- Campaigned against the occupation and IMF austerity measures in Iraq.

The GUOE is now leading the resistance to the oil bill drafted by Iraqi

technocrats "advised" by the occupation forces. The bill aims to hand over all development of new fields to foreign companies, and may take a large chunk out of existing fields by claiming that they are being redeveloped.

The oil bill has been in the pipeline for several years. The NGO Platform has revealed that in 2004 the UK government was already talking with oil companies about drawing up such a law.

The GUOE is calling a conference in June to discuss taking action against the bill including an all-out strike. If all five union federations attend such a conference and support strike action, the bill can be halted. The action of workers will show how it is possible for the working class to oppose the occupation and unite people, irrespective of religious or political beliefs. The strike could bring the working class to the head of the resistance and provide an opportunity to take up demands beyond the oil industry, in order to build a mass, active anti-imperialist movement in Iraq.

Socialists and anti-imperialists in the UK must support and build solidarity with any action by the workers. We must also campaign at home to expose Britain's role in creating the bill and take urgent action if any UK troops are used as strike breakers, including calling on soldiers to refuse to carry out such orders.

The Hands Off Iraqi Oil coalition has been set up to campaign against the oil bill and build solidarity with Iraqi workers. It can be contacted at www.handsoffiraqioil.org



RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1917

The April theses: Lenin

After the February Revolution of 1917, the Mesheviks and Bolsheviks both believed that the revolution was bourgeois in character and that the working class could not introduce socialism. But when Lenin returned to Russia in April, he overthrew the party's old position and reorientated in order to lead the working class to power

This article by Dave Hughes was originally published in Workers Power no 92, April 1987, edited by Dave Stockton

The explosion of anger that swept aside the Tsarist regime in February 1917 led to a profoundly contradictory situation at the level of state power. Conservative and liberal politicians declared themselves the Provisional Government, although they had not participated in, let alone led, the uprising. They were deeply fearful of where the mass mobilisations and the workers' and soldiers' councils – the soviets that mushroomed – would lead. The revolution had given the soviets power. Now it had to be stopped.

However the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet also wanted a return to order. The Menshevik (reformist) leadership of the Executive Committee – Nikolai Chkheidze, its chairman, and Matvei Skobelev – together with the right wing of the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) and Alexander Kerensky, were convinced that the Russian Revolution, as a bourgeois revolution, must find its expression in a bourgeois government. The Soviet executive pledged support to the Provisional Government.

While the mass of Soviet delegates agreed to this, they also established (independently of the executive) an "observation committee" to watch over the Provisional Government on behalf of the Soviet. This expressed both working class mistrust of the Provisional Government and a belief that the Soviet's job was to pressure that government to ensure it kept its promises. As a mass meeting of the Petrograd cable workers declared on 3 March:

"We consider the essential issue of the moment to be the establishment of strict control over the ministers appointed by the State Duma, who do not enjoy popular confidence. This control must be constituted by representatives of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."

The workers looked to the Soviet to exercise that control. Workers' resolutions were automatically sent to the Soviet, not the Provisional Government. The soldiers too, who had mutinied to

make the revolution, would accept no deployment orders not signed by the Soviet. What had emerged was a situation of dual power: power divided between representatives of two irreconcilable class forces. The working masses saw the Soviet as the weapon of their struggles. The bourgeoisie saw the Provisional Government as its bastion against those struggles. State sovereignty was, in reality, split.

Such an arrangement reflected illusions on the part of a majority of workers in the feasibility of a partnership with the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the Soviet did not recognise that dual power was a shifting and unstable moment in struggle, the outcome of which must be resolved on behalf of one or other of the contending classes. They saw it as a permanent agreement between equal partners. As Leon Trotsky later put it: "In the revolution of 1917, we see the official democracy consciously and intentionally creating a two power system, dodging with all its might the transfer of power into its own hands."

Thus dual power can never be an objective of struggle – except in the sense of seeking the maximum strength for the workers organisations and the minimum for the remaining forces of the bourgeoisie. In reality it could only have been a prelude to one side or the other breaking the stalemate and depriving the other class of all power. As Trotsky explained:

"Either the bourgeoisie will actually dominate the old state apparatus, altering it a little for its purpose, in which case the soviets will come to nothing, or the soviets will form the foundation of a new state, liquidating not only the old governmental apparatus, but also the domination of those classes which it served."

THE BOLSHEVIKS UNPREPARED

Until Lenin's return to Russia on 3 April, the momentous events of the February Revolution found the Bolshevik Party programmat-



Lenin speaking at the Taurida Palace in April 1917

ically unprepared for its outcome – dual power. A special conference was summoned, lasting from 2-10 April, assembling 149 delegates representing 79,000 party members. It soon revealed an organisation with serious divisions about the way forward.

The Petersburg Committee, in charge of the whole city with its 15,000 party members, took the most conservative stance, believing that the tasks of the day remained those of the democratic revolution. On 3 March they resolved to: "...not oppose the power of the Provisional Government in so far as its activities correspond to the interests of the proletariat and of the broad democratic mass of the people."

This position was completely evasive about how "far" the Provisional Government was actually serving the interests of the masses, and implied no immediate challenge to the dominant Menshevik line within the Soviet executive.

The District Committee in Vyborg – the main industrial heart of the city – advanced a programme of demands that expressed mistrust of the Provisional Government. But they too continued to believe that the character of the revolution remained a democratic, bourgeois one.

The Russian Bureau of the exiled Central Committee – comprising Alexander Shlyapnikov, Vyacheslav Molotov and P A Zalutsky – veered between several different positions. At first they called for Provisional Revolutionary Government to be formed, from above, by the parties represented on the Soviet executive.

re-arms the party

Its agenda was to be confined to the “three whales” of Russian Social Democracy’s minimum programme: the eight-hour day, the democratic republic and the confiscation of landed estates and their transfer to the peasantry, as well as preparing a constituent assembly.

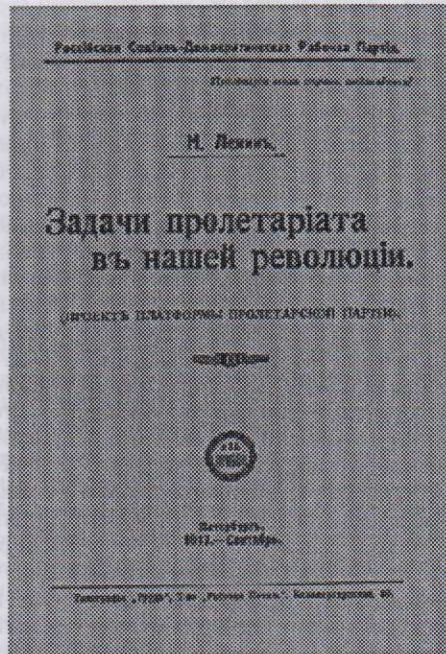
Once again the perspective was of a purely democratic stage, beyond which the revolution could not go. Indeed initially this led them to ban leaflets issued by the more “left” Vyborg district calling for the formation of a soviet-based government from below. However this perspective of a pact with the other Soviet parties ran into a major obstacle. The Mensheviks and SRs, far from wanting to participate in a workers government with the Bolsheviks, wanted to enter one with the bourgeois parties, the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) and the even more conservative Octobrists. Both of these parties wanted to carry on the war effort at all costs.

The rapid realisation of this fact pushed the Russian Bureau to the left and by 22 March it was characterising the Soviets as the embryos of a new state power.

It was the editorial board of the Bolshevik daily paper Pravda that occupied the most right-wing stance within Bolshevism. Edited by Joseph Stalin, M N Muranov and Lev Kamenev, the paper declared on 7 March: “As far as we are concerned, what matters now is not the overthrow of capitalism but the overthrow of autocracy and feudalism.”

Stalin reasoned: “The Provisional Government has, in fact, assumed the role of defender of the conquests of the revolutionary people . . . At present, it is not in our interest to force events by hastening the eviction of bourgeois strata who, inevitably, will one day detach themselves from us.”

On 15 March, Kamenev used Pravda’s pages to advocate conditional support for Russia’s war effort now that the autocracy had been overthrown. Small wonder then that by mid-March rank and file worker Bolshevik cells in the Vyborg district were voting for calls to expel the Pravda leadership from



Cover of Lenin's pamphlet, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, which embodied the April Theses. It was first published in September 1917

the party.

This confusion was partly a product of the contradictions of Bolshevism's previous position that the bourgeois revolution, though it should be led by the workers and peasants (unlike the Mensheviks who insisted the bourgeoisie must lead it) must end in a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”. This government was to constitute a self-limited stage, distinct from the socialist revolution. Yet February 1917 saw the logic of the mobilised masses’ demands pushing beyond the minimum programme of the democratic republic. The soviets, militia and factory committees were the embryo of a new type of state, whose content was working class democracy, transcending the limits and forms of bourgeois democracy.

In their own particular ways the contending Bolshevik factions were either attempting to limit the struggle to the terrain of democratic demands (the Petrograd Committee and Pravda) or were striving to go beyond this (Vyborg and the Russian Bureau), but were as yet incapable of consistently posing this as a programmatic goal.

SHOCK AT FINLAND STATION

Lenin announced his change of position publicly immediately on

his return from exile to everyone at the reception at the Finland Station. The Menshevik Chkheidze, at the head of the Petrograd Soviet's official welcoming party, pleaded with Lenin to play his part in “the closing of the democratic ranks”.

Lenin, to his consternation, ignored his words and declared to the crowd: “The world-wide socialist revolution has already dawned. . . Any day now the whole of European capitalism may crash. The Russian Revolution accomplished by you has paved the way and opened a new epoch. Long live the world-wide socialist revolution.”

It was Lenin who was able to transcend the limitations of the old Bolshevik programme and perspective. And it is testimony to the vitality and strength of the Bolshevik cadres, as historically constituted since 1903, as well as to the open and democratic debate in the party that led to its programmatic re-arming at the crucial hour.

This refutes the Stalinist myth that Bolshevism was always monolithic, that temporary factions and factional struggle were alien to it. Likewise it refutes the Menshevik and anarchist dogma that Bolshevism was rigid and inflexible, incapable of learning from the revolutionary masses. It is, in short, the practical proof of the correct-

ness of democratic centralism – ensuring full democratic debate and then a focused and disciplined carrying out of a decision once taken.

Why had Lenin changed his perspective on the historic tasks which the Russian Revolution could accomplish? His writings during the war, especially Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) led him to see that Russia was one, albeit exceptionally weak, link in the chain of world imperialism. It was not just a backward country – it was one entire historic stage behind Western Europe, thus awaiting its bourgeois revolution in order to progress to capitalism. Of necessity, therefore, the programme of an ongoing Russian Revolution could no longer be conceived of in the terms of an isolated national and democratic revolution, but instead as a component of the international revolution against capitalism itself.

This realisation – coupled with a sharp recognition of the nature and potential of the soviets in February and March 1917 as a different type of state, one directly participated in by the worker and peasant masses, not standing over them and oppressing them – made it possible for Lenin to re-elaborate and re-focus the Bolshevik programme in the face of Russia's social explosion. This was to pit him against each of the contending Bolshevik groupings in Petrograd and enable him to create a higher synthesis out of their most healthy reflexes, especially the reflexes of those closest to the rank and file insurgent workers.

Lenin's initial responses to the Russian Revolution were expressed in a series of articles submitted to Pravda, his Letters from Afar. These had been written in Switzerland between the outbreak of the February Revolution and his departure for Russia. Their political content constituted such an alarming break with the “old Bolshevism” still dear to Stalin and Kamenev that the editors published only a curtailed version of one.

In these articles Lenin argued that the Soviet was “an organisation of workers, the embryo of a workers' government”, and that the

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1917

only guarantee of destroying Tsarism lay “in arming the proletariat, in strengthening, extending and developing the role, significance and power of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies”.

Lenin realised that what was now necessary was to smash the old bureaucratic police and military state machine of the exploiting classes and replace it with a state of a new type based on councils of delegates elected in the workplaces, barracks and villages, and recallable at the shortest notice by their electors.

This process was underway thanks to the actions of the masses in the February Revolution, but it needed to be completed consciously if the remnants of the old state machine, the army under the former Tsarist High Command, were not to use it to carry through a counter-revolution, which would sweep away the democratic gains of the workers, which, he emphasised, already made Russia “the freest and most democratic country in the world”.

In forming the militia and the soviets, the Russian workers had taken a course in which “they themselves should constitute these organs of state power”. In his third letter Lenin announced:

“I said that the workers had smashed the old state machine. I would be more correct to say have begun to smash it.”

The dual power outcome of the February Revolution necessitated either the transition to the workers’ council (soviet) state or the triumph of bourgeois reaction.

A BREAK WITH “OLD BOLSHEVISM”

In order to programmatically re-arm the Bolshevik Party for the struggle Lenin presented his “April Theses”, The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution.

Lenin clearly explained that the task was to advance from the first stage of the revolution in which the insufficiently class conscious workers had needlessly ceded power to the bourgeoisie to a second stage “which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants”.

Of necessity this meant the Bolsheviks adopting a stance of refusing all political support to the Provisional Government and maintaining intransigent opposition to any talk of “revolutionary defensism” as long as Russia was waging an imperialist war.

But most importantly it meant recognising that the struggle had gone beyond the democratic programme, not because a democratic stage had been completed (as Stalinist historians have always claimed) but because the

struggle for a parliamentary republic would be a backward step compared with the struggle to realise the potential of the workers’ council state that existed embryonically in the soviets. Only this outcome of the unresolved dual power could ensure the economic and political well being of the working masses.

As Lenin put it: “To return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies would be a retrograde step. Instead the party must fight for the abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, and for all these functions to be passed to the whole armed people.”

However Lenin was also clear that his programme did not envisage the immediate “introduction” of socialism, i.e. a totally socialised and planned economy. In reality the proletarian revolution was to begin the transition to socialism, as an integral part of the international revolution. It could do so by establishing soviet control over a single national bank and bringing “social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies”.

At its very heart, the 10 April Theses foreshadowed a programme of transition from dual power – the limits and dangers of which Lenin increasingly warned of – to the proletarian dictatorship, the goal of the Marxist programme.

Lenin’s struggle to re-arm the Bolsheviks met with bitter resistance from many of his comrades. When Kamenev published the theses in Pravda, he prefaced them with the remark: “As for the general scheme of comrade Lenin, it seems to us unacceptable in that it starts from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is ended, and counts upon all immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution.”

Lenin’s reply to such criticism was clear and to

the point: “My answer is: the Bolshevik slogans and ideas on the whole have been confirmed by history; but concretely things have worked out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected. To ignore or overlook this fact would mean taking after those “old Bolsheviks” who more than once already have played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality.”

He went on to explain: “The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the

proletariat and the peasantry has already become a reality in the Russian revolution... The Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies – there you have the ‘revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry’ already accomplished in reality. This formula is already antiquated. Events have moved it from the realm of formulas into the realm of reality, clothed it with flesh and bone, concretised it and thereby modified it.”

Over a process of three weeks of argument and debate in all the districts and cells of the party, Lenin won the majority to his programmatic line of advance. Putting its wavering and vacillating behind it, the Party now set out to win the masses to recognition of the potential power of the soviets and the fast-growing workers’ militia, the Red Guards. The Party now embraced a programme of transition to workers’ power.

Breaking with a view of the Russian Revolution as an isolated national event, the Party now fought for the Russian workers to stand in the vanguard of the international revolution. As Lenin told the party conference that endorsed his line: “The great honour of striking the first blow has fallen to the Russian proletariat, but it should never forget that its progress and revolution are but part of a world-wide and growing revolutionary movement which is daily becoming more powerful... We cannot see our task in any other light.”

Thus thesis ten of the April Theses stated as a key goal of the Bolsheviks: “We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social chauvinists and against the Centre.” By this Lenin meant an International, which excluded and fought those who supported the imperialist war, had gone over to the bourgeoisie and those who would not fight them but vacillated between imperialism and proletarian revolution.

LESSONS OF APRIL 1917

In the Bolshevik Party Lenin had forged an instrument for revolution that had been tempered by years of struggle – both theoretical and practical, both internal and external. This Party was, despite the waverings of some of its leaders, a revolutionary party receptive to the needs of the revolution. Moreover it was an internally democratic party which could be won to change its positions. The triumph of Lenin’s line reflected the strength of the Party itself and not just Lenin’s genius. As Trotsky put it:

“The revolutionary tradition of the Party, the pressure of the workers from below and Lenin’s criticism from above, compelled the upper stratum during the months of April and May, employing the words of Stalin, “to come out on a new road”.

At its very heart, the 10 April Theses foreshadowed a programme of transition from dual power – the limits and dangers of which Lenin increasingly warned – to the proletarian dictatorship

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We fight to:

- Abolish capitalism and create a world without exploitation, class divisions and oppression
- Break the resistance of the exploiters by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution smashing the repressive capitalist state
- Place power in the hands of councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry, the poor - elected and recallable by the masses
- Transform large-scale production and distribution, at present in the hands of a tiny elite, into a socially owned economy, democratically planned
- Plan the use of humanity's labour, materials and technology to eradicate social inequality and poverty.

This is communism - a society without classes and without state repression. To achieve this, the working class must take power from the capitalists.

We fight imperialism: the handful of great capitalist powers and their corporations, who exploit billions and crush all states and peoples, who resist them. We support resistance to their blockades, sanctions, invasions and occupations by countries like Venezuela, Iraq or Iran. We demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. We support unconditionally the armed resistance.

We fight racism and national oppres-

sion. We defend refugees and asylum seekers from the racist actions of the media, the state and the fascists. We oppose all immigration controls. When racists physically threaten refugees and immigrants, we take physical action to defend them. We fight for no platform for fascism.

We fight for women's liberation: from physical and mental abuse, domestic drudgery, sexual exploitation and discrimination at work. We fight for free abortion and contraception on demand. We fight for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men and against their harassment by the state, religious bodies and reactionaries.

We fight youth oppression in the family and society: for their sexual freedom, for an end to super-exploitation, for the right to vote at sixteen, for free, universal education with a living grant.

We fight bureaucracy in the unions. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice, and earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. Rank and file trade unionists must organise to dissolve the bureaucracy. We fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers control.

We fight reformism: the policy of Labour, Socialist, Social-Democratic and the misnamed Communist parties. Capitalism cannot be reformed through peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by force. Though

these parties still have roots in the working class, politically they defend capitalism. We fight for the unions to break from Labour and form for a new workers party. We fight for such a party to adopt a revolutionary programme and a Leninist combat form of organization.

We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must, therefore, be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a socialist political revolution is the only way to prevent their eventual collapse.

We reject the policies of class collaboration: "popular fronts" or a "democratic stage", which oblige the working class to renounce the fight for power today. We reject the theory of "socialism in one country". Only Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution can bring victory in the age of imperialism and globalisation. Only a global revolution can consign capitalism to history.

With the internationalist and communist goal in our sights, proceeding along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International.

That is what Workers Power is fighting for. If you share these goals - join us.

CONTACT

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International

Workers Power
BCM 7750
London
WC1N 3XX

020 7708 0224

workerspower@
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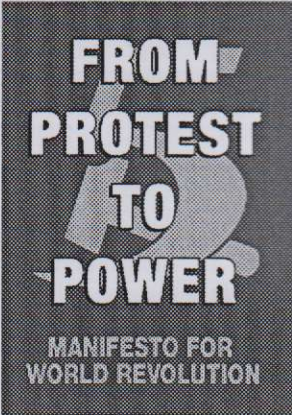
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Scotland and independence

By Richard Brenner

The collapse in support for Labour has raised the prospect of a victory for the Scottish National Party (SNP) in the Scottish Parliament elections in May.

Hundreds of thousands of working class voters are turning away from Labour in Scotland. As in England and Wales, workers are sickened by Blair and Brown's callous attacks on the health service, their tax rises for the poor and tax handouts to the rich, the quagmire of Iraq and the war threats against Iran, the huge spending on nuclear weapons, the cash-for-honours corruption and the constant stripping away of civil liberties.

Scottish workers remember the Tories too - how Thatcher closed the pits and imposed the hated Poll tax on them before the rest of Britain, how communities were broken up as Scottish manufacturing was destroyed.

The utter failure of the socialist left to capitalise on this crisis of support for Labour, and the ignominious split in the Scottish Socialist Party last year have left the way open for the Scottish National Party of Alex Salmond to emerge as the main opposition to Labour north of the border. They could become the biggest party in the Scottish parliament at Holyrood. If so, they say they will call for a referendum on full independence for Scotland.

The Scottish Nationalists are not a working class party. Although they call themselves "left-of-centre", and try to appeal to anti-war and pro-NHS sentiment to attract votes from working class people, the SNP is a capitalist party. As they come closer to power, they are attracting serious support from the super-rich. Recently Brian Souter, the vicious right wing boss of bus company Stagecoach - who hates unions and gays with equal venom - has donated £500,000 to Salmond's party. And Sir George Mathewson, former chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland, the world's fifth biggest bank, has called for Salmond to be First Minister.

What attitude do communists take to this?

First, any worker who wants to fight back against capitalism needs to oppose any support for the SNP in the elections. A vote for the SNP is a vote for capitalism in Scotland. Whether they form an executive alone or in coalition with the other parties, an SNP government would be a government against the working class, a government for the Souters and Mathewsons.

Second, communists believe that the separation of Scotland from Britain would not be a step forward for the working class. Alex Salmond points to the examples of Ireland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland as mod-

els for the "prosperity" that an independent Scotland would have. No worker should be fooled by this.

Under globalisation, being a small country does not protect workers one bit from the constant attempts of capitalists to boost profits by slashing away at welfare and giving tax breaks to the rich.

Third, communists recognise that the collapse in support for Labour poses a huge crisis of leadership for the working class movement. The disgust felt by millions must be used to rally trade unionists, socialists, campaigners against closures, antiwar activists and youth to a new working class party across Britain.

The purpose of a workers party is not to create a patchwork quilt of smaller capitalist states but to overthrow the state in which

Under the banner of nationalism, the ruling class tries to bind the workers to their capitalist exploiters; the so-called "national interest" is a way of making workers think that they share the same interests as the ruling class

their members live and replace it with a working class state that can progressively take economic ownership out of the hands of capitalists and run it under the democratic control of the workers themselves.

In the event of a referendum on independence, in response to a straight question, "Do you want Scotland to separate from the UK and be independent", communists would call for a "No" vote. This is not because we support the United Kingdom. We stand for a united fight of the working class to get rid of the monarchy, the House of Lords and all undemocratic institutions and establish a socialist republic of Britain.

If, however, a majority of the Scottish people expressed in a referendum their desire for independence, then communists would actively support their democratic right to separate. This would mean the whole working class - especially the workers of England and Wales - taking direct action to prevent any attempt by Westminster to prevent Scot-

land exercising its right to self-determination. Any attempt to retain Scotland within the Union by force or fraud, would only deepen nationalist sentiment in Scotland and further divide the Scottish workers from the rest of the British working class.

The general approach of communists is based on proletarian internationalism. We believe that the working class has no country. Every modern capitalist nation state is divided primarily between a ruling minority class of capitalists and a majority class of workers. Under the banner of nationalism, the ruling class tries to bind the workers to their capitalist exploiters; the so-called "national interest" is a way of making workers think that they share the same interests as the ruling class.

This is why the flirtation that the SSP and Solidarity has with the SNP and Scottish nationalism is so dangerous for the British working class. Just at the time that we needed a new working class party across the country, the left in Scotland cut themselves off from their comrades in England and Wales by forming a party in Scotland only. Now even that limited national project has ended in an acrimonious divorce and division for the Scottish left.

We reject with contempt the British nationalism of Gordon Brown - who is attempting to rally voters against the SNP with a disgraceful appeal to the "great traditions of Britain" - in reality a tradition of exploitation of workers at home and atrocious imperialist conquest and robbery abroad, from India and Ireland in the 19th and 20th centuries to the looting of Iraq today.

We also reject the Scottish nationalism of Salmond, Souter and Mathewson. Of course the Scottish working class has a heroic tradition - the tradition of Red Clydeside, of the revolutionary shop stewards movement, of John Maclean's internationalist opposition to the First World War, of the great struggles of shipyard workers and miners from the 1960s to 1980s, of the great Poll Tax rebellion. These struggles were waged alongside and in the forefront of the rest of the British working class.

Therefore, communists oppose the campaign for Scottish independence, while recognising the right of Scotland to separate from the UK if the Scottish people - despite our advice - so choose. But above all we fight for a new working class party in Britain, as part of an international party of social revolution, to fight for the final overthrow of the British capitalists and to create a workers' republic in which the Scottish, English and Welsh workers can democratically plan production to meet need not greed.