

workers power

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As capitalism plunges us in deeper ecological crisis... we have a choice...



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**League for the
Fifth International**

EDITORIAL

Brown and Labour in crisis

By Jeremy Dewar

Gordon Brown and his successor at the treasury, Alistair Darling, are being mauled. They pumped £26 billion into Northern Rock to stop the bank collapsing, and now look unlikely to get the taxpayers' money back. They cut jobs when they merged Whitehall's tax and customs departments, and now computer discs with bank and personal details of 9.5 million parents have gone missing. They introduced anti-corruption measures to "clean up politics", and now they have broken the rules by accepting dirty money.

This is the legacy of Tony Blair. Under his leadership, Labour became more openly a bosses' party: not just fighting British imperialism's wars, but delivering privatisation, tax breaks and slashing workers' jobs, wages and pensions. In the process, Labour picked up the corrupt and incompetent practices that are endemic to all capitalist regimes. But, while this was a slow process of disintegration, the tipping point has been reached and Labour is now unravelling at pace.

Of course, the press has played its part, pumping up Gordon Brown in order to crush any opposition to him from the Labour left or the unions, and then dumping him from a great height once that threat had receded. But it is not just a media circus. This play is being acted out in earnest.

The purpose of the Brown-bashing is to twofold: first to toss him from crisis to crisis, at each turn demanding he lashes out at the working class; second to prepare the ground for a Tory government, which the bosses will need during the economic downturn.

So what should socialists do?

No smoke without fire

Certainly we have no interest in shielding Labour from its crisis. On the contrary, we should expose the fact that each calamity is rooted in its anti-working class policies and demand their total reversal.

Northern Rock's crisis was not a blip, caused by exceptional market conditions. Without the expansion of cheap credit, Brown would never have had his decade of unbroken economic growth. It was Brown, too, who stripped the Bank of England of its supervisory role over the banks. And, of course, Labour did not hesitate to throw money at Northern Rock to prepare for its cheap sale to Richard Branson, whose Virgin Rail soaked up £1.4 billion in government subsidies last year.

The irony that it was the private postal group, TNT, which mislaid the CDs containing child benefit recipients' details, will not be lost on CWU postal union members in Royal Mail. Similarly, members of PCS, the civil service union, are outraged that an officer on £14,000 a year is being blamed, while government cuts are the real reason.

But just as Labour refused to contemplate nationalising Northern Rock – without compensation to its former owners – so, too, it has refused to ditch plans for a national ID card and data-

base, despite the obvious scope for identity theft.

Who pays the piper?

The scandal that most disgusts workers – especially those who pay Labour affiliation fees through their union subs – is the party's secret acceptance of £670,000 from property developer David Abrahams.

This contravened the spirit, maybe the letter of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000). It also follows swiftly on the heels of the loans for peerages inquiry. At that time, the police did not prosecute for lack of evidence, though officers did complain that they were hampered every step of the way by party officials. The current investigation, Operation Minerva, may reach the same conclusion.

But why did Abrahams, Labour's third biggest individual donor, demand anonymity? Is it not reasonable to suspect that planning permission for a business park in Durham, which had been previously blocked, was granted to Abrahams, directly after he made a £200,000 donation to Labour, because of his gift? And if there is no corruption, then why are Labour leaders, Gordon Brown, Harriet Harman, Scottish party boss Wendy Alexander and chief fundraiser Jon Mendelsohn so keen to deny any knowledge of the dealings, a denial that Abrahams hotly contests?

This set of questions prompts another one. What have the unions, which have given Labour over £100 million in the past decade, received for their money?

Nothing, except a kick in the teeth.

True to form, Gordon Brown wasted no time sticking the knife into the unions. Despite the fact that union funding is by far the cleanest money in politics – democratically voted on and openly declared – Labour now backs the Tory demand to outlaw all donations of over £50,000. Never mind the fact that the unions represent six million workers, while the bosses are a tiny handful of people. The £50,000 limit is precisely aimed at denying the working class any influence over Labour – or any other party.

Crisis set to deepen

Britain's ruling class has decided it's time to dump Labour. So they will use the last years of Labour's reign to hinder the ability of the working class to resist the cuts in jobs, incomes and services that will accompany the coming recession.

Gordon Brown has promised more privatisation and three more years of public sector pay restraint. He has signed up to an attack on Iran. New repressive laws and curbs on migrant workers' rights are in the pipeline. The union leaders, scared stiff that any resistance will open the door to the Tories, will, just as they have done in the autumn, do all they can to limit their members' ability to fight back.

The reformist left in this context is playing a treacherous role. Only a few months ago, leading figures in the Labour Representation Com-

mittee and the Communist Party of Britain publicly questioned the possibility of reforming Labour. John McDonnell's failed leadership bid and the closing down of party democracy caused both him and CPB leader Rob Griffith to call for a new political route.

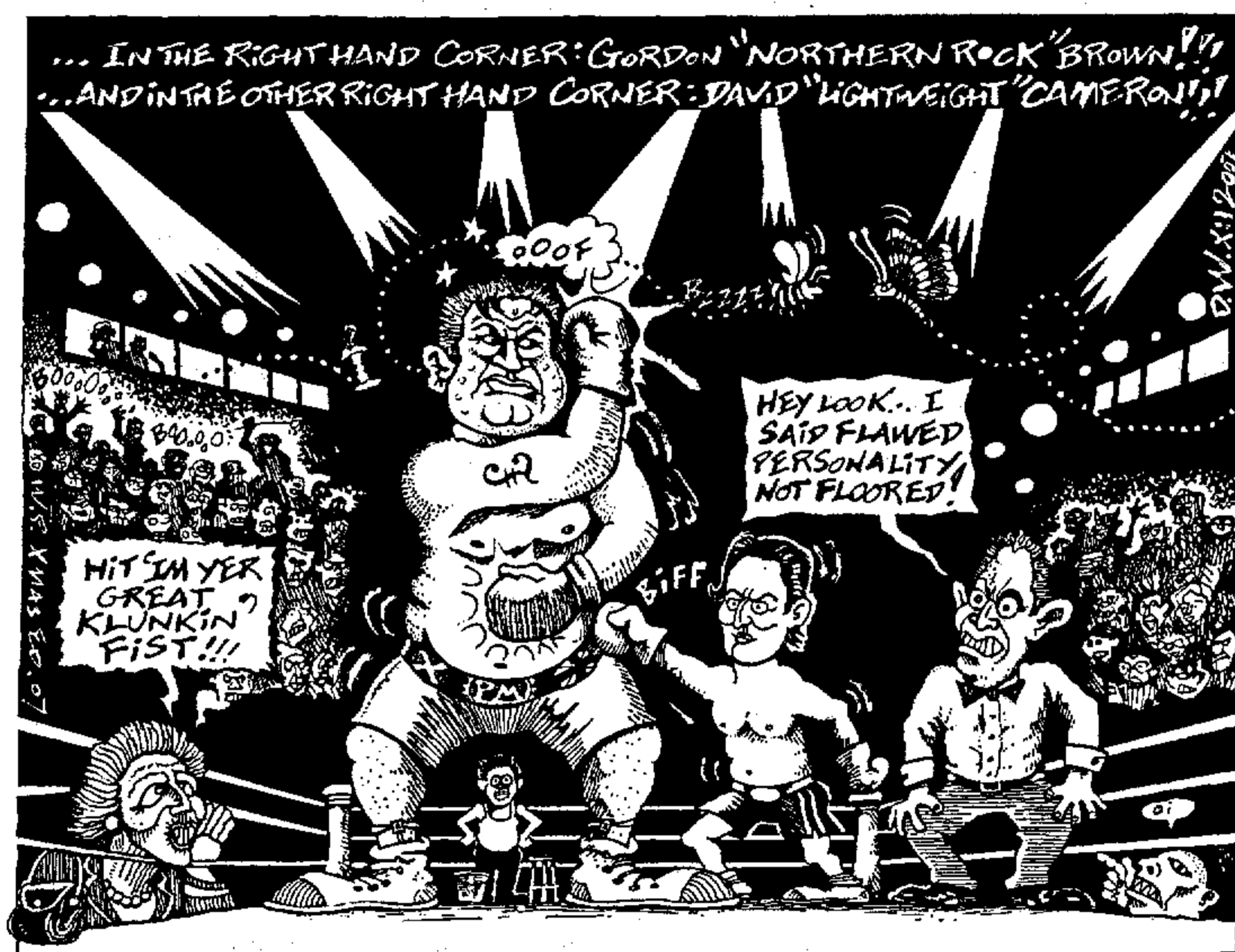
Shamefully, it appears, the receding of the election and the split inside Respect have made them retract this uncharacteristically bold step. Instead the LRC launched a "broad united front for socialism" open to "the left outside the Labour Party". Behind the rhetoric about unity, however, this is an attempt to shepherd those forces in the unions and the political groups who have broken from Labour back into the fold, where, faced with the threat of a Tory victory, they can be frightened into voting Labour because "there is no alternative". The inevitable price for this cowardly policy is to limit active resistance to Brown's attacks to such protests as will not threaten the survival of his government.

Back to Labour or forward to new party?

For all the LRC's talk about a united front for socialism, it rules out affiliation from organisations that stand candidates against Labour. But socialism, if it is to be more than an empty phrase, is the political goal of the working class struggle, the expropriation of the capitalists and the demolition of their forces of repression (the state). It can only be brought about by a revolution. The Labour left mean by socialism little more than a few social reforms that leave capitalism and its repressive state completely intact. Today's Labour Party is no longer a viable instrument even for this non-socialist goal. Only political parties can strive for power. So the reformist left, in trying to block the creation of a new working class party and channel everything through the Labour Party, is blocking even its own wretched programme.

Thousands of activists, workers and youth will reject this tried and failed strategy. They will demand their unions stop funding Labour, that their struggles are not derailed to save the government. But here is the danger. The absence of a working class party committed to fighting privatisation, cuts, racism and war is holding back our struggles. Only with such a party can the demoralising effects of defeats like that of the postworkers be minimised if not avoided.

That's why Workers Power will not stop campaigning for it – for an open debate in the fighting unions, campaigns and political groups on the kind of party and programme we need, culminating in a democratic conference. But we need to start now – before further defeats under Labour today prepare the ground for a resurgent Tory government. We state openly – we need a party not just to stand in elections, not just to propose reforms but to provide the leadership for the full spectrum of the class struggle – in the trade unions, in the campaigns against racism, against imperialist war, for democratic rights and so on, showing that they all lead towards a revolutionary struggle for power.



NEWS IN BRIEF

HOWARD'S END

The defeat of John Howard in Australia was terrific: the best election night since Michael Portillo's ousting in 1997. Not only did Howard lose his job as prime minister, he also lost his seat! A similar fate befell Mal Brough, who was responsible for the racist police actions against aborigines. Kevin Rudd's Labor party was elected and immediately announced a commitment to Kyoto and the withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq.

Whilst the Labor Party appeals to wide sections of workers and youth, people who voted for them must also be prepared to organise to fight against them when they inevitably launch attacks on workers. Rudd has already promised to forge ahead with more free market reforms, which will mean attacks on working conditions and wages.

BBC STRIKE

The BBC announced 2,500 job cuts in October. It only averted industrial action when it agreed to not push for compulsory redundancies. However, they have since reneged on the deal, and now BECTU, the NUJ and Unite unions are balloting their members to strike. BBC workers need a huge strike to defeat these attacks – all out like the Screenwriters Guild of America would do the trick!

BLASPHEMY LAWS BE DAMNED

When Gillian Gibbons spent nine days of a 15 day sentence in a Sudanese jail because she allowed school children to name a teddy bear Mohammed, many people – in Sudan as well as Britain – were rightly appalled. It was indeed an offensive piece of "justice".

But what was just as offensive was the hypocrisy of British journalists and politicians. Are there not foreign nationals from Muslim countries, who are under house arrest in Britain, or in jail in Guantánamo Bay, Basra and Bagram, with no evidence presented, or even charges laid against them? Is it not an offence in Brown's Britain simply to log onto a website deemed to be supportive of "terrorism"?

And Britain has its own blasphemy law, which carries a maximum life sentence for insulting Christianity. In 1977, *Gay News* was found guilty for publishing a poem about a Roman soldier's love for Jesus.

We say, give us all a Christmas present and abolish this barbaric law!

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GLOBAL ECONOMY

A warning for the

The global economy is entering a major crisis. The capitalists will try to make the working class pay the cost of the crisis, and tensions between the major powers will rise. Get ready to resist. *Richard Brenner* provides the analysis

Here we go again

It seems like only yesterday that the newspapers and TV were full of stories about how well the economy was doing.

They said because we'd had 13 years of unbroken growth, and because China and India were soaring, the free market and capitalism were the strongest, the soundest, and the most stable system the world had ever seen or could ever see.

Now the same papers and programmes have the same

journalists in the same ties telling us a very different story. This summer's financial crisis looks set to hit the real economy.

Of course every time the economy goes into an upturn the bosses say the sun will shine night and day. But capitalism is an unstable system - it goes into crises and recessions every seven to 10 years. Some of these crises are sharper than others and, as we show on these pages, this one looks set to be sharper than many.

Banks in crisis

Banks like Northern Rock borrowed millions to offer mortgages to people on low incomes. Now no one wants to lend to them. Northern Rock only survived because the Bank of England poured more than £24 billion into it. Imagine all the schoolbooks and operations that could be paid for with that sort of money.

But it's not just Northern Rock - the whole banking system is affected.

Banks that offered mortgages to low earners (so-called "subprime mortgages") packaged this debt up and lent it on around the world. When they finally realised it was

all based on money that wouldn't be paid back, the banks panicked. So far they have notched up losses of more than \$200 billion - and many think there's more to come.

So in August the banks stopped lending money to each other, to corporations and to millionaires who want to buy and sell companies: this was the global credit crunch. To get money flowing again, the Federal Reserve (US version of the Bank of England) cut interest rates to make it cheaper to borrow.

It didn't work. The rate of interest that banks charge each other has continued to rise. The credit crunch is still on, and with a vengeance.

House prices tumble

The US economy is the largest in the world and has a huge impact everywhere. Like Britain, they have had a long property boom, with rising numbers of people buying their own houses and prices nearly doubling over the last 10 years.

Now that has come to a sudden end. Property prices in the USA are falling for the first time since 1991. The number of people who can't keep up their mortgage payments has skyrocketed. Home repossessions rose by 30 per cent over the last year.

Now British house prices have stopped rising too. Mortgage lender Nationwide said UK house prices saw their biggest fall in 12 years during

November.

And the Bank of England said the number of new mortgages for home buyers is down 31% from a year ago.

People have been borrowing on the "extra" value of their homes - this extra cash will now dry up. That in turn will lessen the amount of money people spend in the shops. This could work its way through into job losses as factories and shops lose orders.

Within a year or so homes might be cheaper to buy. But if house prices fall like they did in the last property crash, people could get caught in the "negative equity" trap as they watch their homes fall to lower values than they paid for them.

Inflation is back

The US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England would like to be able to stave off a recession by cutting interest rates, boosting the economy by making it cheaper to borrow money. They did this last time, when the Americans cut interest rates 11 times, from 6 per cent to just 1 per cent between January 2001 and the summer of 2003. This was what lay behind the housing boom.

Can't they just do this again? Not without risking serious inflation and destabilising the world economy even more. So what's changed?

The last 15 years have been very unusual because recessions in the USA and Britain have tended to be very mild and not to last for long. The underlying reason for this was that inflation was very low - driven by cheap imports from China and the Far East. Britain and America could cut interest

rates without fearing the normal consequence of that - inflation. China and the developing cheap labour economies created global disinflation, falling prices.

But now this is coming to an end. In April the price of imports into America from China rose for the first time in years. Inflation is back.

Oil prices have surged - a barrel has reached \$100 so petrol prices are going up. China is sucking in such a huge amount of oil that it increases demand massively, while reserves are dwindling.

Food prices have risen sharply, including staples like wheat, pork, milk and cooking oil. Chinese inflation hit a 10-year high in August, pushed by a spike in meat prices.

Europe is being hit, too - Germany's inflation is the highest for 14 years and in the euro zone it is at its highest level in more than six years.

working class

Falling dollar to hit jobs

As a boom turns into a crisis and then a recession, speculators on the money markets suddenly realise that many of the complicated financial instruments they are holding are not worth anything like they thought. So investors dump the funny money they moved into in the boom years and try to move back to the most dependable, highest quality forms of money. There is a dash for cash.

You would expect the rich to be dashing for the leading form of cash, the world's number one currency, the good old greenback dollar. But there's another problem. The dollar is on a sharp downward dive.

An American buying a euro paid 90 cents for it in 2002. Now it costs him nearly \$1.50. Anyone sitting on a pile of dollars is sitting on something that is losing value by the day.

So the Chinese and Japanese governments - who hold well over a trillion dollars in their reserves - have been carefully trying to move out of dollars.

The fall of the dollar helps US manufacturers who sell abroad because it makes US exports cheaper. But it undermines the dollar's position as the world's senior currency - and the tremendous advantages the US capitalists get from this leading position (which they call "seigniorage").

Above all, the falling dollar is a sign of the decline of the core of the US economy. By December 2005 manufacturing employment in the USA fell to its lowest level since 1945, more than 3 million less than in July 2000. Between 1993 and 2007 the US balance of trade fell from a deficit of \$70 billion to \$759 billion last year.

International tensions

In a sharp economic crisis each major country tries to make the others bear the brunt. French President Nicolas Sarkozy may be backing America's wars, but when he visited Washington he told Congress that if it tried to offload the costs of the crisis onto Europe it would face "economic war".

Then the EU leaders went to China and demanded that China's currency should rise in value so that it stopped "stealing" the EU's export markets. The Chinese bluntly refused. As the crisis mounts, the thieves fall out.

Recession

When the credit crunch first tightened in August lots of official predictions came out saying that the trouble in the money markets wouldn't affect the "real economy". Now they've changed their tune.

The US Federal Reserve cut its prediction for 2008 economic growth to 1.8 - 2.5%, blaming the credit crunch and the housing collapse.

The White House followed suit and cut its forecasts of growth. And the Commerce Department reported that growth of retail sales fell from 0.7 per cent to just 0.2 per cent in October. If this develops into a full-blown recession - and there are many signs that it will - this will mean more job losses and repossessions.

es and repossessions.

The Bank of England now predicts a sharp slowdown in UK economy next year - and higher inflation as well. Governor Mervyn King said, "Certainly compared with the very small movements we've seen in the last 10 years this looks like a very sharp slowdown".

Finally, falling US spending will definitely have a serious impact on China. A huge 38 per cent of China's output was for export last year, with the USA receiving between 13 and 20 per cent of these exports.

This would also have a major effect on Europe, whose biggest economy - Germany - is the world's number one exporter, including of machinery to China.

A Marxist analysis

The working class movement has produced only one theory that can even begin to explain the crisis that the world economy is entering today: the theory developed by Karl Marx.

Unlike the failed theories of the capitalists - all of which have to pretend there is nothing fundamentally wrong with their profit system, and which therefore cannot explain why the system regularly goes into crisis - the Marxist theory predicts and explains regular crises and breakdowns of the system.

Before capitalism, every economic crisis in history was a result of underproduction. But under capitalism there is already enough to meet the needs of every human being on the planet many times over.

Under capitalism, crises are caused by overproduction - and this means the overproduction not just of useful things like food and fuel, but of every form of value - of money, of property, of financial instruments. Crises are caused by the overaccumulation of capital.

Through the course of the boom phase of a cycle, the rate of profit

received by a capitalist - his or her return on every pound invested - gradually begins to fall. Marx explained how this was caused by the fact that capitalists compete with one another by raising productivity through introducing new technology, but that ultimately this reduces the proportion of their capital that is based on living human labour - and this living labour is the real source of their profit.

The resulting tendency of the rate of profit to fall drives capitalists to direct their money out of manufacturing in the more advanced countries and into speculation on the stock exchange, into property deals, or abroad into developing low wage economies. It also forces them to try to cut wages at home and employ migrant labour on terrible pay and conditions.

Eventually this pressure on the rate of profit causes the actual overall mass of profit to fall. Then the only way the capitalists can get back to turning a big enough profit is to devalue a mass of "overvalued" capital. This is what economic crises are. That is why today banks are losing billions; why house and prop-

erty prices plummet; why people are thrown out of their homes; why factories and shops will close in the years ahead; why inflation reduces the real value of wages.

It is why the bosses will try to get us all to work harder for less and compete among each other for fewer jobs. It is also why the bosses of different countries will start fighting - first at the negotiating table, but one day on the battlefield - over who will bear the brunt of the devaluation.

The main problem is that in every country of the world the leaders of the official labour movement are unable to explain the crisis, unprepared to warn the workers, unwilling to organise the struggles.

We must create a new leadership, able to wrest control of the working class movement out of the hands of these misleaders.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Karl Marx wrote: "These contradictions, of course, lead to explosions, crises... these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to its violent overthrow." Speed the day.

MIDDLE EAST

As Gaza starves, Abbas betrays his people

By Kam Kumar

Now into its 16th month, Israel's blockade of Gaza has created a severe humanitarian crisis for the 1.5 million inhabitants. Food, medicines, and basic necessities are scarce. With 85 per cent of the population reliant on United Nations handouts, children are severely malnourished.

When Israel closed the Karni cargo crossing, hundreds of factories shut down, throwing 25,000 out of work. The Israeli military has even banned fishing off the Gaza coast, firing on boats that defy them. Seriously ill Palestinians are invariably refused permission to leave Gaza for treatment, so they die in agony, like 20 year-old Nail al-Kurdi, waiting at the border crossing.

The shipment of fuel needed to run water pumps and generators for hospitals is extremely limited by Israel. Close to 100 out of 150 petrol stations have shut down.

Gaza is entirely sealed off from the outside world by a fence guarded by watchtowers, snipers and tanks. Israel controls Gaza's airspace, coastal waters and airwaves. Gazans are being starved, beaten and killed into submission. During the month of October alone, as many as 46 Palestinians were killed, including a number of children.



Abbas, Rice and Olmert seal the deal

Annapolis: a new sell-out

None of this even made it to the table at the "peace" talks in Annapolis, USA. Hamas, which won the Palestinian elections in 2006 but faced economic sanctions from Western powers and Israel, was barred from attending. Instead USA's man in Palestine, President Mahmoud Abbas, was the sole negotiator, strong armed by the US and Israel into accepting a 437 word resolution which places no demands that Israel would find unacceptable, while insisting that the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority crush all resistance to Israel as a precondition for any settlement.

The statement says that the

"implementation of the future peace treaty will be subject to the implementation of the road map, as judged by the United States". At least this has the merit of acknowledging the true relationship between the Palestinians and US imperialism.

Annapolis was never about giving justice to the Palestinians. It legitimised Israel's stolen Palestinian lands and its "Apartheid Wall", which will take even more. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert denied refugees right of return to their original homes. To underscore Israel's dictatorship over the Palestinians, its parliament, Knesset, passed a bill barring any division of Jerusalem.

Both Abbas and Olmert are

endorsing a "two-state" solution. Abbas' position exposes him for what he is: a weak puppet of the US. Recognising Israel as an exclusively Jewish state and agreeing to crush any resistance to it and US imperialism is an arch-reactionary solution to the conflict.

The central demand contained in the road map is for Abbas to ensure the "security of Israel" by dismantling "terrorist organisations". To prove his complicity, the PA police force, which is controlled by Abbas' Fatah party, severely repressed an anti-Annapolis demonstration in Ramallah. Over 200 protesters were arrested and one man killed. So Abbas is now doing the Israeli army's job for them.

But Abbas' popularity is diminishing, even in his stronghold, the West Bank, so he is in a very weak position to attack Hamas. Israel, of course, would be delighted to help him by launching a military operation against Gaza. The divide and rule tactics of the imperialists are starting to come to fruition.

The siege of Gaza must be broken, the declaration of Annapolis made a dead letter. This means supporting the resistance fighting the Israel's occupation and the traitors under Fatah's leadership, and demanding Britain and the EU recognise the elected Hamas government and supply aid to Gaza.

Iraq: calm before the storm

By Marcus Halaby

Unable to claim military victories following the "surge" of US troops, the occupation forces have nevertheless claimed improved security in Iraq. Economic life has picked up; fewer soldiers and civilians have died. Sectarian militias are less conspicuous and Iraqi refugees are returning from Syria.

This, however, may prove merely to be the calm before the storm. The chief cause of the improved situation is a political realignment in Iraq, motivated by a response to a US drive to war on Iran, which, once it begins, will bring more violence and instability.

Many of the refugees in Syria

have returned due to restrictions and poverty. Jordan, the favoured asylum of more wealthy Iraqis, has seen no such mass return, while a million remain internally displaced.

The key intended target of the "surge" was Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, seen as a source of resistance to the US and an ally of Iran. Hoping to reduce prime minister Nuri al-Maliki's dependence on Sadr, the occupation forces attempted to provoke an intra-Shia conflict. But Sadr's unilateral ceasefire neatly sidestepped this.

Indeed, for all his radical talk, Sadr seeks a political role within the new Iraq and is willing to do deals with the US. He has 30 MPs and a handful of ministers in the American-backed government.

On the other side of the equation,

formerly insurgent Sunni militias, like the 1920 Revolution Brigades and the Islamic Army in Iraq, have also shown their willingness to collaborate. They have accepted American arms and training, as well as government support to fight al-Qa'ida's hated and reactionary Islamic State in Iraq.

Workers can end divide and rule

The calculation of the Baathists, who run many of these militia, is that a war with Iran will bring the occupation into conflict with the Shia, and open the way for them to become America's chief ally, just as sectarian Shia militias were in the period after the 2003 invasion.

This "divide and rule" strategy may have short-term results, but creating a balance of power between

rival sectarian militias will strengthen the tendency towards civil war in the longer term.

Only the working class - drawing in the new trade unions, civil society and resistance fighters, but organised in its own party - can unite the Iraqi masses to drive out imperialism. Sectarian forces - Shia or Sunni - cannot. Workers and youth need to organise an independent force to expel the US, mobilising the women as well as men in their fighting units.

They should link this to the struggle of the unions against the new oil law, and bring the working class to the head of the liberation movement, so that the working class can establish a socialist government, based on direct democracy and the armed people.

Iran: US war drums increase tempo

By Rebecca Anderson

The US has stepped up its threats of a military strike on Iran. It is using Iran's development of nuclear power and accusations that its Revolutionary Guards are aiding the Iraqi resistance as a pretext.

The US Senate recently declared the Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organisation but so far the US government has been unable to back up these allegation with anything beyond finding Iranian made weapons. Major-General Rick Lynch has said that Iraqi militias were "trained in Iran and they're conducting operations in our battle space. They're Iraqis but they're [Iranian] surrogates and they're still out there."

This takes place against the background of US sanctions against Iran. It is now illegal for US companies to have any economic relationship with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp, which controls a large business

empire in Iran.

The main thrust of the propaganda machine has been the argument that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is trying to develop nuclear weapons. Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which forbids the making of super-enriched uranium for nuclear bombs. Countries that have refused to sign the treaty and continue developing nuclear weapons include US allies, India and Pakistan, but it is Iran that the US threatens to bomb.

Under the NPT, Iran is perfectly within its rights to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes, and yet the US is demanding that it cease this activity. The United Nations Security Council has already passed two resolutions against Iran's nuclear activity – in March 2007 and November 2006 – and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has sent inspectors to Iran to check that it is complying with the NPT.

The IAEA report released this

month said that its inspectors had been satisfied that the power stations will not be used to make nuclear weapons. More recently the US government's own National Intelligence Estimate states that it now believes with "high confi-

The US government is attempting to cripple the Iranian economy with sanctions while creating media support for war

dence" that Iran stopped its weapons programme in 2003. This has thrown the US hawks into confusion but Bush has said: "Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous and Iran will be dangerous if they have the know-how to make a nuclear weapon."

The US is pushing for a third round of UN sanctions on Iran. It is attempting to cripple the Iranian

economy, while drumming up media support for war. So far it has the support of all the countries on the Security Council except for China and Russia.

The US wants control of the Middle East and its oil wealth. It is losing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and its whole strategy for the region is in jeopardy. Iran has become the only strong state in the region obstructing US plans. That is why Washington and its nuclear-armed ally, Israel, is ready and willing to take part in air strikes, not only on Iran but possibly on Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon, too.

The international anti-war movement must be ready to mobilise on the scale it did in the months before the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It must clearly declare that it will defend Iran against attack, however repulsive its anti-worker and anti-democratic regime. The last year of the Bush-Cheney presidency sees the Neocons weakened by their failures, but none the less vicious for that.

Iranian women must ally with workers

By Natalie Sedley

Earlier this month, Iranian women's rights activist Delaram Ali was given a sentence (currently suspended) of a flogging and two and half years in prison. Her "crime" was participating in a demonstration calling for reform of Iran's Islamic legal system, which discriminates against women.

The legal system prevents women from taking roles in the judiciary and giving their voice less weight than men's in court. Delaram's persecution is surprising as she is not one of the main leaders of the women's movement; it is a warning to women against involvement in opposition politics.

But harsh treatment is by no means restricted to those women who dare to be politically active. In October, Zahra Bani Yaghoob, a 27-year-old medical graduate from Tehran, was arrested by Iran's morality police while walking with her fiancé. The fiancé was released an hour later, but Zahra was kept in prison overnight and was found

dead the next morning. The police claimed that she committed suicide by hanging herself but her family maintain that she had no reason to take her own life and her father accused the police of assaulting and murdering her. Association with the opposite sex is a common ground for arrest in Iran, where strict gender segregation is imposed. It is usually punished by payment of fine or flogging.

There has been a big clamp-down since the beginning of this year when Iran launched a "public security and moralisation campaign." While some kind of crackdown on dress usually occurs each summer in Iran, this year it was particularly intense. In one day, nearly 300 women were arrested for problems with their clothing, such as wearing a tight coat or letting some strands of hair show under their veils. There have also been attacks on "Western" hairstyles, make-up and "decadent" films, and young people who flout dress codes are accused of being "walking advertisements for Western deviant sexual and Satan-worshipping cults". Retailers have been

warned not to sell tight, revealing clothing and police have even ordered some to saw the breasts off shop mannequins because they are too revealing!

These incidents are oppressive to women. However, we must avoid the mistake of seeing women's freedom solely as the right to choose their dress and show their bodies as some argue in the west. Women must have the right to wear what they like, be it western-style clothes in Iran or the veil in the West, where they often face discrimination and racist attacks. But there are so many other rights and freedoms such as legal equality, economic opportunities, and freedom to choose how to live and who with or to love and have sex with that must be fought for.

There are also aspects about women in Iran that are less keenly reported, such as their high level of education – more than half of students starting university in Iran are women. Furthermore the media says very little about the treatment of women in other Islamic states allied to the US and UK such as Saudi Arabia.

Clearly, the Western media's is showing the Iranian regime in the worst possible light both in terms of its treatment of women and its nuclear programme, in order to justify an attack on Iran.

The struggle of Iranian women against oppression shows great courage. Workers, like the Teheran bus drivers, whose leader has been imprisoned several times, are also fighting back.

The working class must now broaden its struggles against the Iranian state and bosses into a struggle against all oppression; women, lesbian and gay people and ethnic minority groups. A strong working class movement can fight not just economic demands but full political rights for all oppressed groups and open the road to the full liberation of women, lesbians and gays and ethnic groups. The Iranian regime is a disgustingly reactionary force, and we fight for regime change from below in the shape of a socialist revolution to secure real freedoms in the country and not some fake "democratic intervention" from imperialism.

UNIONS

NHS: sacked for fighting back

Manchester nurse and union activist Karen Reissmann was sacked for talking to the media about NHS plans for cuts, privatisation and “reorganisations”. The Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust labelled this “gross misconduct” and dismissed her in mid-October.

Encouraged by the failure of the union leaders to organise effective united action over pay and job cuts, NHS bosses are now turning to victimisation of union activists. They are also blaming workers for the effects of spending cuts.

Two healthcare assistants were sacked by the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, where a two year outbreak of Clostridium difficile infection cost 345 people their lives. Despite the Healthcare Commission finding a “shortage of nurses so dire that staff did not have time to wash their hands between patients”, the two assistants are to be held responsible. Meanwhile the Trust’s chief executive, Rosie Gibb, was offered a £250,000 pay-off.

More than 100 of Reissmann’s colleagues, mental health workers who care for over 1,000 seriously-ill psychiatric patients, have walked out on a wildcat strike demanding that she is reinstated. Support and funds have flooded into

Unison’s offices from across the country from people suffering from government cuts and fighting the creeping privatisation of the NHS.

The trust has tried to force staff back to work by deducting pay for strike days that they haven’t yet taken! Some staff, who were expecting almost £1,000, received around £150. Sheila Foley, the Trust’s chief executive, even threatened to report striking workers to their professional bodies on misconduct charges to get them struck off the register – until she was told that workers have a right to strike.

Last month, more than 1,000 trade unionists and health campaigners demonstrated in Manchester to support Reissmann. They included members of Unite, CWU, FBU, NUT, PCS and RMT: unions that are facing the same attacks in their workplaces.

Workers from Southbrae day-care centre, part of Glasgow’s provision for people with learning and physical disabilities, brought solidarity greetings from their own indefinite strike that has now gone on for two months.

Karen is appealing her case in December. But the campaign of action is key. The healthworkers will need to strike again and ask for solidarity action. They should involve users of their service and

their families, explaining the effects of cuts and proposing they also join the action, for example by occupying offices of the Trust.

This way, we may not only save the jobs of Karen and others, but also put national strike action back

on the agenda. A mass movement involving all the unions and NHS users can force the Labour government to drop its policy of piecemeal privatisation and the restore cuts.

• For more information go to www.reinstate-karen.org

Stop the witch-hunt!

Karen Reissmann is not the only trade union militant to be victimised.

Michael Gavan was sacked last month from Newham Council for organising a mass meeting of refuse and cleaning workers and “representing the members and not the council” [sic].

The same month the child support agency sacked Eddie Fleming, the PCS branch chairperson in Hastings.

Yunus Baksh, joint chair of Unison’s North of Tyne health branch, has been suspended from his job for more than a year following “anonymous” complaints. Yunus was really victimised for fighting cuts in the NHS Trust where he works.

Union leaders sabotage

And what have the union leaders done to protect their members?

Unison has suspended Yunus’ branch and prevented it from supporting him.

At the time of writing, Michael Gavan’s branch has been told by Unison leadership to do nothing until the result of an appeal is heard.

Meanwhile, Karen Reissmann has had excellent support from her workmates and fellow trade unionists but the national leadership has barely lifted a finger.

Rank and file workers, on the other hand, know the worth of a good rep – and that’s why they are prepared to take strike action to defend them. They have every right to demand their well-paid office-bound “leaders” get off their arses and fight for the sisters and brothers, without whom there’d be no union!

Civil servants to strike over shoddy offer

Up to 90,000 workers in job centres, benefit offices and other services run by the Department for Work and Pensions will strike on 6 and 7 December. They are fighting a proposed three-year pay deal that would leave 40 per cent of the workers with no pay rise next year. Members of the Public and Commercial Services union voted overwhelmingly (76 per cent) against the pay deal and for the strike and an overtime ban.

The deal would mean a pay cut in a sector where one in four earn less than £15,000 a year. The offer averages 1 per cent a year, taking wages for lowest paid staff to just 24p an hour above the national minimum wage. The DWP is also planning to close three pension centres at the cost of 650 jobs, part of Gordon Brown’s

plan to cut 100,000 civil service posts. Some 60,000 have already gone.

Brown as prime minister is no different from Brown as chancellor. His recent Comprehensive Spending Review announced cuts of £30 billion across Whitehall. These announcements came on top of an “efficiency programme” that has seen 30,000 jobs lost from the DWP. More than 500 job centres and benefit offices have gone and there are plans to cut a further 25,000 jobs from Revenue and Customs and to close 200 local tax offices.

The PCS has already held two one-day national strikes this year – on May Day over 200,000 civil servants stayed out. Yet, despite this support, the PCS is still clinging to its policy of limited strike action, claiming, against all the evidence,

this has the greatest impact on the media, public opinion and politicians. It will take more than a day or two to defeat Brown – we will need all-out indefinite action to force him to retreat.

Although PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has been very radical in his criticism of Brown and his support for public sector workers in France, he has not delivered the united action that is needed. As other unions, including the CWU, RMT, NUT and Unite, were gearing up for strike action against government cuts, Serwotka raised the possibility of a united public sector fightback. But, instead of campaigning publicly for this, he entered private discussions with the other union bureaucrats.

Then, one by one, the other public sector union leaders betrayed. Serwotka lamely explained that

united action had “proven impossible this year – for a mix of industrial and political reasons”.

Even worse, he and the executive have disregarded the two-to-one vote for union-wide action that they themselves asked for. Why? Because the cabinet office has agreed to “meaningful and formal talks”.

Hang on a minute – we’ve seen this before, in the postal dispute. Then talks simply led to more attacks. The same will happen in the civil service.

The lesson is clear. Activists in the DWP need to seize control of their strike from below and escalate the action rapidly towards all-out action. If they need solidarity to win – then they are entitled to seek it from their leaders and directly from PCS members in other departments.

Ward and Hayes deliver for Royal Mail

Postal workers have voted 64 per cent to accept a real cut in pay for 2007 and 2008, heavier workloads and job losses. A CWU rep says that they could have won, were it not for their leaders

Once the Communication Workers Union leaders made it clear that they would not lead a serious fight for victory, it was always going to be an uphill struggle to stop the sell-out. Posties had already lost £500 each, many up to a £1,000 because of unofficial action. Although they had brought Royal Mail to a standstill not once but twice, the prospect of starting all over again was not a pretty one. Activists report that many posties accepted the deal, resigned to defeat rather than believing the official union line that it was a victory.

And a defeat it certainly is.

The 5.4 per cent pay "rise" is not backdated and only worth 2.7 per cent over the year – less than inflation and a real wage cut. The 1.5 per cent on offer next year (i.e. another cut) is tied to "flexible working" and at the management's discretion.

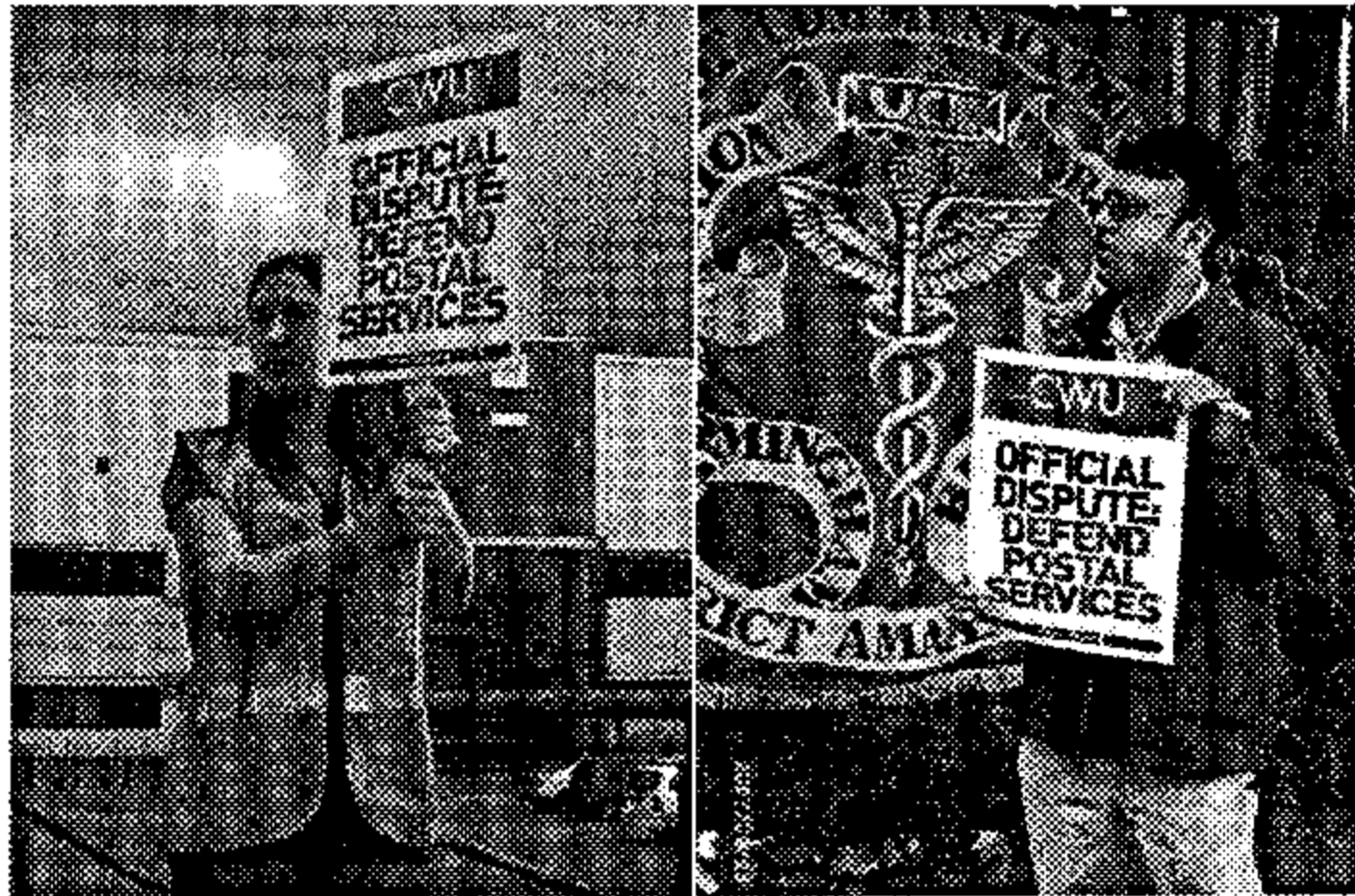
And what does this "flexibility" mean? Speed-ups and a huge increase in workloads for postal workers.

On top of this, other key issues are still up for grabs: cuts in our pension, delivering junkmail for free, and in January local trials to introduce covering for colleagues on the sick and working longer hours in the winter and shorter ones in the summer. Jubilant managers will go on the offensive and victimise reps and activists.

How the vote was lost and won

But this was not a done deal from the start, and the CWU membership is not to blame – the strike proved their will to sacrifice and struggle. This was a sell-out manufactured at the highest levels of the CWU, with Dave Ward and Billy Hayes using every trick in the book to beat down the aspirations of ordinary postmen and women.

Twice they suspended strikes that were hitting home, demobilising and confusing members, who watched in dismay as Royal Mail cleared backlogs. When thousands went on unofficial strike, the bosses and behind them the government panicked. On 12 October a judge banned our strikes, but instead of fighting on like the Prison Officers' Association did in the sum-



Birmingham pickets in the summer – when victory looked certain

mer, Ward and Hayes lost their nerve. From the jaws of victory, they snatched defeat.

Rank and file members launched a brave Reject the Deal campaign with few resources and the threat of discipline if managers caught them giving out leaflets. Meanwhile CWU HQ in Wimbledon sent out three letters to members, and posted an online podcast. Our "leaders" used Royal Mail jargon about how we had to make concessions, how the business was changing and postal workers needed to change too.

Fake lefts like Pete Keenlyside toured the branches. In one breath he stated that the strikes were magnificent and he recognised postal workers' will to fight, in the next he said we should quit before the strike crumbled! Keenlyside's hypocritical answer was to lobby the Labour Party to back postal workers more in the future – this after Brown himself had sided with Royal Mail and condemned our strike!

Where now for postal workers?

Despite all this from the leadership, still more than a third of CWU members who voted rejected the deal, even though this would mean striking in the Christmas period and losing more pay.

Local action will be inevitable if we are to resist the renewed offensive. But instead of fighting together in a national strike, the struggles will begin in isolation. We need to unite the offices that do mount resistance, but we cannot rely on the union leaders, not even the "left wingers" on the executive.

Alongside this guerrilla resistance, however, the militant minority will be asking: How can we get the union back on track before it's too late? How can we get rid of the sell-out merchants and make sure our leaders are accountable in future? How can we break the union from Labour and what is the political alternative?

Workers Power has consistently called for all those branches and workplaces that have taken a militant lead by walking out, waging local strikes over and above the national action, or recommending a "No" vote to seize the initiative and call a conference to hammer out answers to these questions. Now we repeat that call.

Many have lost all confidence in the current leadership and will want to organise an alternative slate for the coming national elections. But only if we found a democratic rank and file movement, open to all militant activists and branches, can we ensure that the new leaders do not sell us out again. Remember – Dave Ward was a "left" once!

Bureaucracy is not a matter of personal weakness – it is a result of the social position of the full-time and unaccountable officialdom. It is a result of the membership not having the means to control disputes and the actions of negotiators. Free of the control of the rank and file, but subject on a daily basis to the pressure of the management, the billionaire media and the government, even former fiery left wingers cave in. The power and privileges of this entire caste needs to be

dissolved.

We believe that every union official should be regularly elected and instantly recallable by the members they claim to represent. They should be also be paid the average wage of the members to deter careerists. We fight for every dispute to be under rank and file control: what is said on our behalf in negotiations, what kind of strike action is taken, whether and when it should be suspended, what constitutes a victory or not.

Mass meetings and elected strike committees can do all this, without any recourse to bureaucracy or individual postal balloting.

New workers party

A major reason why Billy Hayes capitulated this autumn was that he did not want a head on fight with Gordon Brown and the Labour government. Saving Gordon, keeping Labour in office, fear of Cameron's resurgent Tories, all meant he saw selling out our struggle as the lesser evil. No matter that it was Brown and Labour which backed the reforms of Royal Mail bosses Adam Crozier and Allan Leighton.

We need to resolve this political crisis facing the trade union movement and the working class. Thousands are already stopping their contributions from going to Labour. There will be a struggle leading up to CWU conference to disaffiliate from it. But to just abolish the political levy would be a step backwards.

Non-political trade unionism will leave us with no weapon to fight against the government, whether it is attacking our jobs, or dismantling public services and sending our youth to war. The fighting unions, the campaigns fighting against war, racism and privatisation, the radical youth need to found a new working class party, one where strikes are not called off to save the prime minister from embarrassment, and where any MP that turns against the workers is recalled and replaced. We need a party that fights for socialism as tenaciously as the Labour Party defends capitalism.

In short, we need a revolutionary combat party.

• Turn to page 20 for more on the left and the postal strike

SWP IN CRISIS

What went wrong?

The biggest left group in Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, suffered a serious setback when its Respect project split in November. *Simon Hardy* explains the political roots of its crisis

The Respect project has split in two with the overwhelming majority of non-Socialist Workers Party members going with Respect Renewal. Respect now has only a tiny number of non-SWP members, which reduces it to an electoral front for the SWP. Thus the entire perspective and practice of the SWP over the last four years lies in ruins. Despite this, the SWP leadership maintains a line of “official optimism” that things are going great and very few mistakes have been made. Many members have started to question this line openly.

The entire history of the SWP and its predecessors has been one of dramatic zigzags. Each one saw them lose members, declared to be ‘out of touch’ with the new line. What marks all of them is a thoroughgoing adaptation to what the SWP leaders judged at the time to be the limits of the political consciousness of workers in Britain. This has always been key to what they advanced in its day-to-day agitation. In the 1970s it was militant rank-and-file trade unionism, in 1999-2003 it was the left reformism of the Socialist Alliance, from 2003-2007 it was the populism of Respect. In Stop the War it was something nearly identical to the Popular Front of Stalinism, with the Liberals leadership and so-called progressive Tories (Michael Ancrim) invited along to demonstrations and Peoples Assemblies.

Instead of outlining the policies necessary not only to win the struggles of today but also to open the road to the struggle for workers power- the socialist revolution, the SWP has always presented two faces. One is an abstract revolutionary message for its members in their open forums and at Marxism. The other is a much ‘softer’ reformist message for workers in struggle. This method is called tailism, and it is a classic hallmark of a centrist organisation, one that swings between revolutionary propaganda and reformist practice, that cannot guide its activities with revolutionary principles.

However recent changes in the

practice of the SWP has been even more dramatic than usual. The process began around 2000 with their return to electoral work after over twenty years of resolute abstention. Only twelve years ago they were writing:

“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”.

At the time Workers Power replied that this showed a complete lack of faith in their own capacity to resist temptation. We argued that, providing they were armed with a clear revolutionary programme it was possible to use the electoral tribune to put these ideas across to working class people at election times. The ‘secret’ was simply that revolutionaries used election to win workers to revolutionary ideas. The votes they got measured this. The reformist approach was to “win” votes, win seats, and eventually win office in local councils or in parliament. In order to achieve this it is vital to adopt exclusively such policies as would maximise the votes. Because the “power” won by these means was not even the power to substantially improve working class peoples daily lives within capitalist society let alone to overthrow capitalism such an approach was unprincipled and self-defeating for revolutionaries.

We predicted that if the SWP actually turned to electioneering they would verify their own prediction and indeed “soften their message” in the “search for votes”. We have been proved totally right. But this has nothing to do with the inherent nature of electoral work, after all the Bolsheviks carried it

out in the Russian Duma. It is because if you approach electoral work in a reformist vote catching manner – the end goal of winning seats becomes the most important objective.

As soon as the SWP started to engage in any kind of election work they lurched rapidly to the right, first standing on a left reformist basis in the Socialist Alliance, then moving further to the right with Respect, creating a party which was explicitly “non-socialist”. This was indeed a “softening of the message”.

As soon as this opportunist model of building non-revolutionary parties to the left of Labour took hold and became theorised, it signalled a massive shift in direction for the SWP, towards increasing accommodation to non-revolutionary forces. An example of this was their position on immigration controls; they correctly argued for “no borders” in the Socialist Alliance, but then dropped it for Respect, saying that it was ‘unrealistic’ to call for it now. The smash up of the whole Respect bandwagon has thrown this whole approach into crisis. Voices questioning what the SWP leadership is doing are getting louder and louder.

Internal discontent

In November a think piece by long-term SWP member Mark Steel leaked a document that he had written to the SWP pre-conference internal bulletin, but which had been refused. In it he points to the decline of the SWP in terms

of membership and influence, since the late 90s. And indeed there is little doubt that this is the case. The steadily declining size of Marxism over the last few years testifies to this.

The SWP’s own membership has undoubtedly dropped over the last decade. In an article by John Rees in May 2003 *Socialist Review* he claimed the SWP had 10,000 members. By the 2004 conference the SWP central committee claimed 4,240 registered members, and despite the call by John Rees for “every SWP member to become a Respect expert” (i.e. to join Respect) after Galloway was elected in 2005, Respect’s membership before the recent split was only around 2,500. A real sign of the strength of the SWP came when they launched a petition against the autumn political attacks by George Galloway. Even after being online for over 3 weeks only 1,100 people signed it – it can be assumed that this figure is much closer to the real size of the SWP. Widespread reports suggest hundreds of SWP members are dropping out in disillusionment.

Mark Steel sees the root of the problem in the objective problems of the past four or five years, pointing to the failure of the anti war movement, despite its size and scope, to stop the war. He castigates the SWP leaders failure to accept such setbacks, their “official optimism” and he calls for a more democratic culture of internal debate and discussion.

In the pre conference bulletin



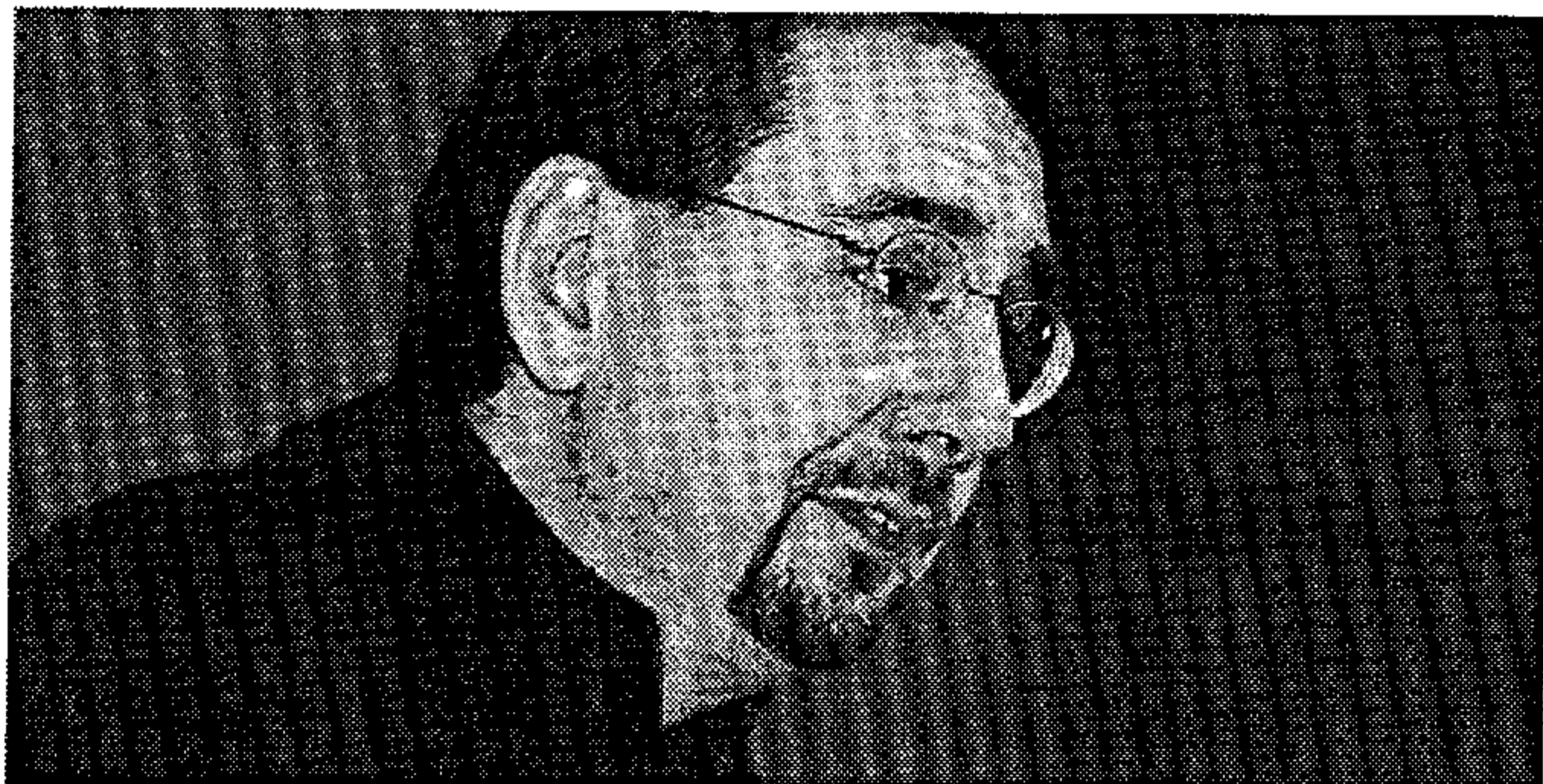
Mark Steel has written a critical appraisal of the SWP’s failures

he writes, “the gap between the rhetoric and the reality has left countless comrades feeling it must be them that’s failing. If only they were more organised, or understood the perspective better, they’d be enjoying successes such as those they’re being told about. And so we arrive at the remarkable outcome in which the party designed to embolden socialists, to make them feel stronger and more capable of intervening in daily conflicts, makes them feel helpless and demoralised.”

Of course as Workers Power pointed out at the time the failure to stop the war, the failure to mount more than the token mass demonstration was a real setback. However we also pointed out that these defeats were not simply objective events but subjective failures, indeed betrayals by the leaders of the working class. The period from the autumn of 2002 and the autumn of 2003 – of the preparations for war, of the mobilisation of over a million people, of a major political crisis, posed the real possibility of turning mass protest into mass direct action.

But this could not have been done except by putting the “left” trade union leaders on the spot, by demands on them to call for strike action to stop the attack on Iraq, by open mass agitation to mobilise the rank and file to direct action. The SWP would not do this. Whilst supporting the isolated actions, like the Motherwell train drivers strike action against a munitions shipment in 2003, it shielded the union leaders and the left MPs from any criticism for their inaction. In short, true to its historic method it tailed behind what it thought was the maximum that the existing consciousness of the workers would stretch to. Unsurprisingly this turned out to be just what the left trade union leaders would go along with – Sunday demonstrations, a Peoples Assembly that was limited to being a talking shop, debates in Parliament with lobbies in parliament square.

It is no surprise that the SWP leadership does not allow any real internal discussion, any real drawing of a balance sheet of their manoeuvres; rejecting the very idea of their party possessing a coherent political programme in favour of simply “relating to the struggles” and building compartmentalised “united fronts” with forces well to their right the party acting as the organising and propaganda core of each of them. Since the death of SWP founder Tony Cliff at the turn of the century, the new leadership – especially John Rees, Lindsey German and Alex Callinicos – even downgraded the calls to “build the revolutionary party” which had characterised the SWP’s work in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact the previous “build the party” policy saw the SWP become very isolated during the historic class struggles of the 1980s, which the SWP laughably described as the period of the down-



John Rees, Socialist Workers Party leader and architect of the failed Respect project

turn.

The SWP theorised this relegation of the party by claiming that they were now operating the “united front of a special type”, effectively long term single issue campaigns with star platform speakers – MPs, union leaders, authors – focused on big rallies, mass demonstrations and, in the case of the Socialist Alliance and Respect, election campaigns. The political spectrum of the “united front of a special type” was limited to what was acceptable to the celebrities. There was no question either of the SWP leaders themselves exceeding these limits, let alone making any criticism of their partners, whatever they said or did or failed to do.

The united front

The fact that sooner or later the SWP falls out violently with their erstwhile partners – George Monbiot in Globalise Resistance, Liz Davies and Mike Marqusee in the Socialist Alliance and now George Galloway, Salma Yaqoob and Nick Wrack in Respect – is directly related to this entirely dishonest relationship, whereby the SWP uses them to attract the audiences and to conceal to a degree the SWP’s organisational grip. Of course when these figures recognize that they are regarded as “useful tools” and break loose, the SWP discovers all its principled differences with them and their supposed crimes – often things the SWP had ferociously defended them over until the break.

This is in glaring contrast with the revolutionary communist tactic of the united front, which is based on unity in action (strikes, mass demonstrations, etc.) with reformist-led mass trade unions and parties. But there must be complete freedom of criticism, otherwise the revolutionary strategy and, indeed, the revolutionary organisation will be hidden from view, and workers will be unable to see an alternative leadership when the reformists betray.

This same opportunist approach was applied to the SWP’s union work (see

pages 20-21), forcing them to cover for the betrayals and sell-outs of the left union leaders, in the same way that they used to cover for George Galloway’s right wing politics before the autumn of 2007.

Even if the SWP were to swing back to the left, to the the 1990s emphasis on building the revolutionary party, this would be unlikely to halt their decline. Indeed it would in all probability speed it up. Firstly even if at its peak – in the early 1990s – it really had 10,000 members, the SWP was not a real party, a significant fraction of the working class vanguard, able to challenge the reformist for leadership in the mass struggles. It was a propaganda society, an organisation that spread the basic ideas of ideas of Marxism and working class history, as they understood them. In addition it mobilised support for ongoing struggles.

To go beyond this, to even approach the stage of being a real party of the working class vanguard, the SWP would have to develop a revolutionary programme which explains the overall strategy for working class power, one which shows how to move towards this goal from every battlefield of the class struggle. Secondly it would have had to use genuine united front tactics to force the trade union leaders and the left reformists onto the terrain of mass struggle. Here during militant united mass action, the influence of revolutionaries – due to their tactical clarity and fighting skills – could spread like wildfire to the rank and file.

The reformist leaders would expose themselves for the cowardly, unreliable and treacherous elements they really are. But the SWP has never been able to hold to such a course. Either it engages in gross opportunist adaptation to the leaders, whilst trying to keep a tight grip on the organisation, or it spins off into sectarian self-promotion, obstructing the necessary unity in action that the class struggle constantly demands. That is why the SWP is a centrist organisation that cannot and will not build a revolutionary party in Britain or internationally.

The SWP has always presented two faces: one an abstract revolutionary message for its members, the other a much ‘softer’ reformist message for workers in struggle

CLIMATE CHANGE

Capitalism, pollution and the solution

A number of solutions are being pushed forward from across the political spectrum.

Joy Macready explores the limitations of the capitalist answer, and builds the case for socialism

Over 3200 Bangladeshis lost their lives as a result of Cyclone Sidr, with another 2 million struggling for basic necessities like food, water, shelter and medicines. This is the shocking reality of climate change – it is not just a polar bear floating away on a small piece of ice in the Arctic. Climate change impacts the weather patterns across the globe causing droughts, floods, desertification, temperature increases, an increase in wild and unpredictable weather like hurricanes – which has a serious effect on human existence, especially those in more precarious places such as Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world.

Scientists are in agreement that human activity is driving climate change. Global warming stems from the increase in greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, in the atmosphere, mostly put there by the burning of fossil fuels. The problem is compounded by a positive feedback mechanism – i.e. the more greenhouse gases we pump into the atmosphere, the greater the effects and the planet heats up exponentially. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has re-evaluated its initial estimate and now says that average temperatures could rise as much as 6.4°C by the end of the century as the oceans and land become less able to absorb CO₂.

The crisis is acute and something needs to be done – some scientists estimate that there are only eight years left before the damage done becomes irreversible. But what can be done about it?

Rely on capitalism

It took an economist, Sir Nicholas Stern in his climate change review a year ago, to make big business sit up and take notice. He said the world was facing not only a potential economic disaster but also the “greatest market failure the world has ever seen”.

The capitalists responded with measures designed to provide the appearance of action whilst in no way threatening their profits. This has led governments and corporations alike putting their money (literally) on carbon trading schemes like the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. The idea is to cap the level of greenhouse gas emissions and then systematically reduce the amount, so that companies or countries that are emitting less or changing to greener production methods can sell their credits to other firms/countries that are not investing in



Direct action protester outside oil giant BP's headquarters in London

such methods.

However, the only regional emissions trading scheme faltered at the first hurdle. The EU ETS was launched in 2005 and phase one collapsed last year because the EU Commission over-allocated the emission quota. This illustrates the complexity of trying to quantify all aspects of

The bosses have responded to the climate threat with measures designed to provide the appearance of action whilst in no way threatening their profits

emissions and their environmental impact.

Phase two of the ETS, which will run from 2008–2012, will allow for almost 80 per cent of savings to be made through offsetting. Offsets, which came in the form of Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism credits, allow carbon users to reduce their net emissions by funding an emissions-reducing project abroad – which is the way multinational firms such as HSBC can claim to be “carbon neutral”. To offset emissions, people can plant a tree in another country or pay to maintain a “carbon sink”, such as a swamp, which absorbs the CO₂. The science behind quantifying the amount of trees that it would take to offset a tonne of carbon emissions is not only questionable, it is also just another way of letting big business go on with business as usual.

That is the bottom line – no capitalist govern-

ment or business is ultimately going to do anything that damages their profits. That is why the intergovernmental treaties, like Kyoto and the post-Kyoto deal to be brokered in Bali this month, are not in reality binding, even for the countries that ratify the agreement. Plus how can an international solution work if the US, the world's biggest polluter per capita, refuses to ratify it and is instead setting up its own committee of the 16 world's biggest polluters that don't have to set targets that would interfere with their economic development?

In Britain, a country that is “leading” the fight against climate change, Labour's record on cutting emissions is abysmal. The UK government's targets of reducing carbon emissions by 60 per cent of 1990 levels by 2050 has been ridiculed. Brown just recently cut £300 million from the government department, DEFRA, which is supposed to be spearheading Britain's fight against climate change. The government has also announced £7.6 billion expansion plans to almost double the number of flights out of Heathrow to maintain Britain as a major aviation hub within Europe. In a follow up to the Stern report (meant to answer its environmental critics), Labour announced plans to leave international aviation out of the emission targets in this year's climate bill – so flights can continue to increase without affecting the 2050 targets.

The last paragraph shows the illogical, anarchic drive of the capitalist system. As Marxists, we understand that the root of environmental degradation lies within the capitalist system, the continued expansion of capital, accumulation of profits and the development of the productive forces, i.e. industry, on a global scale.

Green localism

Other political movements, although rejecting the free market answer to fighting climate change, look instead to reducing individual carbon footprints by promoting a local solution still within the capitalist system. Environmental activists, whether members of a Green Party or NGOs/charities like the Sierra Club or Greenpeace, believe that it is just the scale on which capitalism operates that is the fundamental problem. They say that it is big business and big capital is the root cause of the environmental crisis, and only if you could go back to a smaller capitalism, a local capitalism, then the problems would go away.

The main weakness in this theory is its failure

to understand the dynamics of capitalism, the drive to competition and profits, and the relationship between capital and labour. The Greens obscure the internal dynamics of the capitalist system: the drive to competition and monopoly on one hand, which means that small firms compete, acquire each other or drive the other out of business until the most successful become larger firms; and on the other hand the exploitation of workers, which is based on who owns the means of production, allowing the accumulation of surplus value by the capitalists. So even if you are a small, local capitalist, you still own the factory and exploit workers and the environment to gain a profit.

The Greens do not see that the working class movement is the primary agent to fight climate change. Yet the working class has a vital interest in stopping capitalism laying waste to our world. Throughout its history, workers have fought to stop dangerous production methods and impose safety standards on the capitalists and on their state. Through forcing legislation on the ruling class, it has made tangible gains, helping to create a habitable environment in many cities and towns again.

The Green's strategy of localism cannot be successful in overcoming climate change, which is an international problem. Academic geographer David Harvey explains the contradiction: "Localism often allows the command of particular places but this does not mean having the capacity to control or command the process of production; the capitalist class can shift capital, playing one locality off against another, or undermine local strategies by the exercise of political power at national or global scales of governance."

Lastly the green movement also emphasises an individualist response to environmental issues. The political slogans that the greens have contributed to the movement – "think globally, act locally", "reduce, reuse, recycle", "walk gently on the earth" – emphasise the localism and the individualism of their politics. The focus on individualist choice takes the burden of climate change off the big polluters, but without changes in their behaviour greenhouse gas emissions will continue to grow, no matter how much recycling consumers do. The focus on the individual also promotes reactionary movements like Nimby-ism (Not In My Backyard) where those individuals with more political power or money can dictate to those who do not.

Marxists believe that only the shift from the anarchic system of capitalism to a democratically planned global economy will be able to address the needs of the majority population and take into account the environment as well. In this way, we do not reject technology outright, like some of the more radical, "deep greens"; we realise that technology has been crucial to the development of society, but that there is a balance between society and nature. As Marx and Engels said: "Know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men [sic]. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist."



Carbon trader: "Roll up! Roll up!
Fresh pollution bought and sold!"

Bureaucratic versus democratic planning

The idea of a planned economy conjures up the environmentally destructive policies of the Eastern European, Stalinist states. What all Greens have in common is their critique of the socialist/communist movement as being only interested in the rapid growth of the productive forces, and they criticise the Stalinist states for their appalling environmental record. Chernobyl is the first argument that comes to mind.

The Chernobyl disaster proved that state ownership in itself is no guarantee of acceptable security, if it is under bureaucratic control. In the case of the Stalinist states, the drive for mass industrialisation from the bureaucracy meant that there was no democratic input. The five year plans of industrialisation did not take into account the environmental impact, only the need to fulfil the quotas of production.

But when we raise the question of a planned economy, we are fighting for a democratically planned economy, one that can take into account the totality of the environmental and social impact. Through exposing the lies of the ruling class, throwing opening the company or government secrets, the masses can make well-informed democratic decisions.

Socialist solution

The first and most immediate issue is to stop the pollution that is causing climate change. The government set targets are woefully inadequate. We propose a massive and rapid shift away from fossil fuel emission to renewable energy. This means cutting our industries dependency on oil

and coal burning which creates harmful CO₂.

We wouldn't pump money into expanding roads but radically improving public transport – creating workers councils to decide how best it should be run. With the information at our disposal we could make informed decisions regarding food production and distribution, etc.

And how would we pay for this? We would tax the corporations – 200 of the top companies in the UK pay next to no tax. We would also tax the rich, with a steeply progressive tax.

But no demands for a sustainable environment can be secured permanently without the seizure of political and economic control from the capitalists. Therefore in order to fight for a clean and safe environment we need to struggle for workers' control, the expropriation of capitalist corporations, construction, utilities, energy production, and transport industries, under workers' control, with no compensation to the former owners, and a democratic global plan of production. Only in this way can we eradicate the huge disparities between overcrowded cities choking in traffic congestion and a deprived, depopulated, countryside.

In reality very few of these radical demands can be realised without building a movement which mobilises mass forces internationally to fight climate change. We need more joint action, protests, mass demonstrations, including strike action by workers.

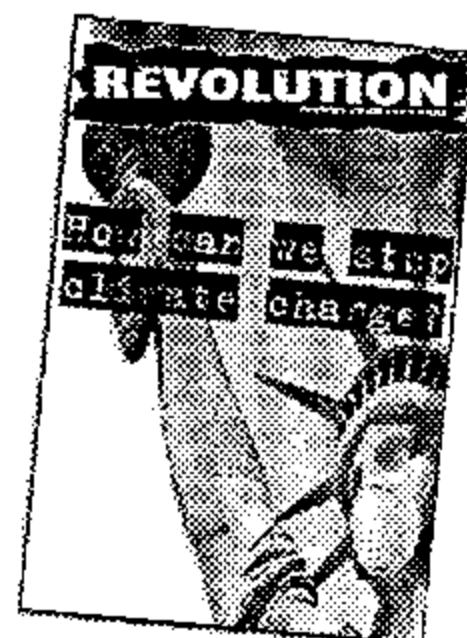
Ultimately, climate change can only be overcome if the working class advances its own program, its own revolutionary solution to the environmental questions, on an international basis. The struggle against the destruction of the natural foundations for human life, and for a rational, conscious relationship between humanity and nature, is a central question of the socialist revolution today, a central question of building a classless, communist society.

Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Conference

Saturday 9 February 2008
University of London Union
Malet St, London WC1E 7HY

Speakers: Mark Serwotka, PCS; Matt Wrack, FBU; Francis O'Grady, TUC; Christine Blower, NUT; Michael Meacher MP; Caroline Lucas MEP
delegate fee £10

Revolution, the independent socialist youth organisation, has published a new pamphlet "How can we stop climate change?" which is available to buy now
Only 60p
(including P&P)



FRANCE

Trade union leaders betray

After weeks of strikes against pension reforms and days of riots in response police brutality in the

Under major attack from the self-proclaimed French Thatcher, Nicolas Sarkozy, trade unionists and youth fought back in November. The wave of major neoliberal attacks launched by this reactionary president has provoked mass resistance. So far however, this has lacked two factors vital to victory: solidly organised unity in struggle and clear and determined leadership.

The main battle erupted over Sarkozy's determination to end the pension schemes of the railway, metro, electricity workers, the so called "régimes spéciaux". The rank and file were prepared for a long and bitter fight and were united around the demand to scrap the pension "reform". The leaders of the major trade union federations however saw things totally differently.

All of them, except the smaller SUD union, are convinced that the Sarkozy reform is inevitable and that their role is not to organise the resistance to this neoliberal assault but to "accompany" it by negotiating minor concessions for their members.

The Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) is the second largest union federation and the strongest in the militant railway sector, the Paris Metro, suburban train line RER and the national rail company SNCF. The CGT has the reputation of being the most militant of the major union federations. Yet under the leadership of Bernard Thibault it has been moving rightwards, not without internal resistance. Since Sarkozy became president Thibault has several times been to the Élysée Palace for friendly discussions. The CGT is moreover participating fully in negotiations that will lead to a new labour law, one which will certainly greatly reduce workers rights.

The far from combative attitude of the CGT leaders to Sarkozy is clear from a recent well-informed article in *Le Monde*

"Nicolas Sarkozy has kept good relations with Frederick Imbrecht, general secretary of the CGT-energy section, with whom he is on familiar terms and on whom he regularly pours praise." (26 November)

So how did the trade union leaders succeed in derailing the strike despite the growing determination and combativity of their membership? First, instead of uniting all the workers under attack by Sarkozy, they mobilised them separately and in isolation. After a successful strike and day of demonstrations on October 18 railway workers prolonged their action for several days. But union leaders got them back to work with the argument that they should "prepare their forces" for another strike and mass day of action the following month.

Yet once again the federations did all they could to split their forces. The railway and metro workers were to strike on November 14 and the rest

of the public sector on November 20. The union leaders clearly hoped the rail strike would peter out between these dates, making united action between different sectors impossible. Instead the rail workers, voting daily in mass meetings or *Assemblées Générales* (AGs) prolonged their action. University and *lycée* students came out in occupations and strikes protesting the *Loi Précresse*, a neoliberal reform of education.

Therefore on November 20 – the day of action from public sector workers, especially those in education, post and telecommunications, was the day when the three main sectors in struggle finally marched together. Consisting of metro and railway workers, postal, gas and electricity workers, teachers students, the demonstrations were a great success: 700,000 nationwide, with 80,000 protesting in Paris. Yet on the Paris demonstration CGT marshals forcefully kept the youth and the workers apart. The union leaders

anger and resentment was strongly expressed on the demonstrations. Not only was the right-winger François Chérèque, leader of CFDT, chased off the Paris demo by furious workers but Thibault too was loudly whistled at the SNCF AGs he spoke at. Marchers chanted derisively "Sarkozy-Thibault – même combat" (Sarkozy-Thibault, it's the same fight).

Sarkozy quickly understood he had to do something to rescue his most precious asset in the workers ranks, ironically commenting, "We have to save private Thibault" (*Le Monde*, 26 November).

This he did by immediately offering to open negotiations with the unions. All the federations apart from SUD jumped at the chance. The latter at first said it would not join the negotiation but then later did so.

These talks will last for a month and will end just a few days before Christmas, thus blocking any attempt to renew the struggle or link it to the students, the teachers or the post and telecommunications workers.

Thus thanks to their leaders' evident betrayal and lacking any centralised means to stop it, the morale of rail workers was weakened and in the following days, under covert but strong CGT pressure, the isolated local AGs voted for the "suspension" of the strike.

The union leaders naturally hailed the opening of negotiations as a great success. Meanwhile not only the French right wing press but bourgeois media around the world hailed Sarkozy's victory as though it were their own.

Though of course no agreement surrendering pension rights has yet been signed the potential of a united struggle, one which was going forward and gaining in strength, has for now, been squandered. In October-November, there was the opportunity to defeat the pension reform, as workers did in 1995 and again with the First Employment Contract (CPE) in 2006. A massive political struggle – culminating in a general strike was entirely possible. But the union leaders were not interested in this potential: on the contrary they feared it like the plague and did all they could to prevent it from happening.

A revolutionary party

Was a general strike against Sarkozy nevertheless possible? Yes it was. The missing element that could fight for this policy in a consistent way was a political force, a revolutionary party with real roots in the working class. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), despite claiming to be "100% left" and orientating to the mass movements and social struggles, restricted itself to saying "the *cheminots* have not been defeated" and "the struggle goes on". What was completely lacking was any serious vocal opposition to the CGT and the other union federations' betrayals.

Union Federations in France

Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT)
 Confédération générale du travail (CGT)
 Force Ouvrière (FO)
 Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC).
 Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques or G10 Solidaires (SUD)
 Federation for National Education (FEN)

were dead against the 'politicisation' or radicalisation of the strike from the beginning and did not want a repeat of the successful anti CPE protests in 2006.

Saving Private Thibault

Even before the strikes started the union leaders had already signalled they were ready to surrender to Sarkozy. On the eve of the strike Thibault indicated to the press that he would accept negotiations section by section, effectively disorganising the united front of action against the reforms. It appears that there was a struggle between Didier Le Reste, leader of the CGT-railworkers (*cheminots*) and the CGT's general secretary Thibault. Le Reste was under much greater pressure from his own militant members, as well as the smaller more radical union, SUD-Rail. In 2005 Thibault tried (unsuccessfully) to prevent the federation opposing the neoliberal European Constitution. On that occasions he was defeated by Le Reste. This time Thibault won out and headed a CGT delegation to the Minister of Labour Xavier Bertrand, on November 13.

Thibault's offer was immediately recognised by the *cheminots* as a stab in the back. Their

struggle against Sarkozy

working class suburbs. *Marc Lasalle* analyses the latest social explosion in France



Transport workers vote to continue strike action before the bureaucracy called it off

A correct policy would have been to fight for workers self-organisation beyond the AGs of the sections, for strike committees, at a local, regional and national level. These could have broken the union bureaucracy's control of the movement. These rank and file workers bodies should have taken the power not only to decide how to spread the strike, to decide on its objectives, but chose when and how to negotiate. Above all such a party would have stressed the political, class wide character of the struggle against Sarkozy. The need to smash his entire anti-working class programme to pieces, to bring down his government, to open the road to working class power.

Pushing through the pension reform is clearly an important victory for Sarkozy. However, this is far from a strategic defeat for the French working class. This is just the first in a long series of battles against his neoliberal agenda. The real face of Sarkozy is now evident for everybody and the betrayal of the union leaders has also revealed their nature. They are an obstacle to the victory of the workers in their struggles. Railway workers have shown that it is possible to resist, to do this successfully workers need to organise democratically from below. The workers' vanguard needs to build a revolutionary party to stop further betrayals and lead the struggles to victory.

Fight racist police!

After the death of two young men from immigrant backgrounds – Larami and Moushin – in Villiers-le-Bel, in the northern suburbs of Paris, youth and the local population burnt cars and blocked the streets in protest against the racist police who had not only knocked down the two youth but fled the scene without even calling an ambulance. This lasted for several nights and resulted in almost one hundred policemen being taken to hospital. Only after a military-style intervention by heavily armed police could the government take back control of the area. Helicopters are regularly patrolling the sky at night. This is the ugly face of Sarkozy's new social order.

What is the social fuel for the riots? Bruno, a local, explains:

"All generations are on the streets," preparing stones and going back to attack the police. "Everybody hates the police. The two youngsters that have been killed could have been their sons or their brothers." "Policemen are used to hitting motorbikes with their bumpers, this is why we do not believe in a coincidence." "We have hit the police because they did the same to us: CRS were aiming at the head with flashballs. And some of us wanted to scare them so that they stop hitting our motorbikes with their cars". (*Libération* 29 November).

Exasperation against police brutal police harassment is such that riots like this are regularly erupting in the French *banlieues*. In the spring, a racist police stop and search swoop in the Gare du Nord (the main Paris station) triggered a violent protest. The police lost control of the station until late at night. However, this is not just a few bad policemen; the

racism of the police simply reflects the racism of their leaders. Sarkozy, echoing the arguments of French fascist Jean Marie Le Pen, explained that the problem of *banlieues* originates from immigration and the state's lack of control of it. This is a disgusting lie to cover for the crisis of the capitalist system that makes young and older people of North or sub-Saharan African origin suffer disproportionately high levels of unemployment.

Local youth have no hope of getting a job and the only state intervention there is by the police: regular racist ID checks, provocations, brutality are part of everyday life in the *banlieues*. These are the same factors that led to the nation-wide riots in 2005. Revolutionaries should call the work-

ers movement to build solidarity with these young people against police racism. They should call for the immediate withdrawal of the CRS and the police from these areas and allow local residents and youth self-defence groups to keep order. They can easily protect their own lives, homes and social facilities – they have the right to!

- Build self-defence squads to defend the *banlieues* and expel the racist police!
- Release all the people arrested!
- For a massive program of public investment to build schools, hospitals and decent housing!
- A programme to promote decent jobs for all *banlieue* youth – under workers' control!



Neighbourhood policing in Villier-le-Bel in northern Paris

PAKISTAN

President Musharraf survives... for now

Pervez Musharraf is still in power, having manoeuvred through the protests and the opposition movement, and, although he has resigned from the army, free and fair elections are still a mirage. *Luke Cooper* asks where next in the fight against the regime

On the 28 November Musharraf completed his long-awaited transformation into a civilian president, resigning as the army chief of staff, before being sworn in again as head of state. But a venomous snake that sheds its skin remains a snake. His words at the inauguration ceremony offered little comfort. He said the army is an “integrating force”, the “saviour of Pakistan” without which the country “would not survive” and he lambasted those that dared to “raise fingers at the army”. The move comes four weeks after Musharraf declared a state of emergency – suspending the constitution and passing all power into his hands. He proceeded to purge the judiciary of all his opponents and carry out mass arrests of opposition activists. The main target of Musharraf’s “second coup” was the judiciary and, in particular, the Supreme Court was due to rule on whether his re-election as president was legitimate (the provincial and national assemblies appointing him were elected five years ago in a rigged ballot).

Crackdown and resistance

It is impossible to say exactly how many opposition party members, lawyers, trade unionists and social movement activists have been incarcerated in the crackdown on dissent over the last few weeks – but it is likely to be well over 10,000. Despite this there has been a series of protests against the state of emergency across the country. Lawyers and students in particular have organised militant protests at law courts and universities. Lots of smaller, “flash” demonstrations have also been organised where small groups of activists assemble with placards and shout anti-military slogans and give out leaflets before vanishing again.

The actions of the students are particularly important. Since the military regime of the Zia-ul-Haq of the 1980s, student unions have been banned and campuses policed by the violent Islamic fanatics Jamaat-e-Islami (or similar-type violent organisations). At a Punjab University protest the leader of the Justice Party Imran Khan was due to speak, only to be bundled into a police van by Islamist students and taken to prison.

The movement of the last few weeks has begun to shift the balance of forces against these reactionaries. Students are demanding their basic democratic rights – like the freedom to meet without persecution, hold cultural events, and so on – while also mobilising

against the regime. Action committees against the regime have formed at universities across Pakistan (in different cities) and the formation of a new national student’s federation is being discussed.

Protests continue to be heavily repressed. However many activists have now been released from custody, and Musharraf is talking about the state of emergency coming to an end in December.

Bourgeois parties ready to do corrupt deals

The courage of the militant resistance movements is beyond question, but there is no getting round the fact that these demonstrations have been far smaller than those that shook Pakistan this summer. Heavy repression from the state has been one factor in this but not the overriding one – the lawyers have suffered just as much repression as any of the political parties but are still fighting. In truth, there is a crippling crisis in the leadership of the Pakistani masses. After the mass protests, street fighting and strikes of the summer, Benazir Bhutto and the PPP chose to stabilise the regime by entering negotiations with Musharraf on a future coalition government.

For a moment, it looked like the state of emergency had irreversibly alienated the PPP from these plans. For the first time they called for Musharraf to leave office and Bhutto called for a “long march” protest. But in the face of heavy repression, they have ultimately climbed down and now look set to participate in the elections. This is despite the fact that, with the judiciary purged, there is nothing stopping Musharraf’s supporters from rigging the elections – so what are Bhutto and the PPP thinking?

The main strategy of these parties, including the more rhetorically oppositional Pakistan Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif (PML-N), is to win back Musharraf’s bourgeois supporters in the PML-Q and irrevocably damage Musharraf’s social base of support. The PPP has combined this tactic with a call on the imperialists to pressure Musharraf. Neither have a perspective of overthrowing the regime.

The political divisions in the Pakistani ruling class are inseparable from the complex web of corruption and patronage. The “boom” since 2001 (GDP has grown by on average 7 per cent per year) has been based on expansion in demand based upon the injection of American credit and aid, plus the corrupt privatisation of state assets. The benefits have accrued to the rich, but specif-

ically the military, and those with close links of patronage to it, and the banking and rentier ruling class. There is actually common talk in Pakistan of the “economic crisis” that grips the country based upon jobless growth, a massive trade deficit, rising inflation and spiralling inequality.

From the point of view of the capitalist opposition parties, their strategy is not so stupid. They want to constitute a stable capitalist political order in Pakistan and they need to win support in the military and the PML-Q to do so. A ruling class divided is also a ruling class in flux. Musharraf is ultimately just one person, increasingly isolated, and the powers-that-be will disperse with him when he becomes too great a liability.

Islamism and the war on terror

In the summer, *Workers Power* argued that the Red Mosque massacre had qualitatively changed the relationship between the military and radical Islam. As the actions of the Jamaat-e-Islami, noted above, illustrate, the relationship between the military and these forces remains a complex one. Bhutto was also quick to implicate the intelligence services in the horrific attack on the large “celebrations” in Karachi on her return. But at the same time, the military remains engaged in bitter fighting in the regions that border Afghanistan. In the two and a half months that preceded the state of emergency, the military had lost some 1000 soldiers in this fighting. To put this in perspective, America has lost just 3,880 in four years fighting in Iraq – that is just how bitter the fighting must be in these areas.

As one Pakistani columnist recently explained: “The United States has asked us to wage war on one million armed people in Balochistan, in search of 2,000 Al-Qaeda operatives – do we really think it is worth it?” Too true. The military, trained to fight tank battles with India, is now engaged in a vicious war that they cannot win against guerrilla fighters not only in Balochistan but also Swat, Waziristan and the North West Frontier Province. Nor are all those they are fighting simply jihadists as the western media would have us believe. In Balochistan, for example, the fighters use the language of a national liberation struggle against the dominance of the central Punjab region.

Despite the Red Mosque massacre, the military remains riddled with internal divisions – as sections of the intelligence services in particu-

lar remain close the very people on whom the US demand they wage war. Musharraf himself aptly summarises the problem the US has given them when he commented in an interview: "We were first fighting for 10 years with the mujahideen, the Taliban – we were training them. The US was giving us money to train them. You were giving us arms to hand over to them. That is what we were doing. For one decade, we did that. And we launched a jihad together. Then, suddenly, you leave us."

Prospects

The threat of a civil war, rising nationalist and sectarian fighting amidst a debilitating economic recession, and a region on fire is a catastrophic prospect. It could create a prolonged period of crisis in Pakistan and it is only the working class that can offer a progressive resolution to it. The endemic corruption of Pakistani capitalism, the deep inter-penetration between politics and privilege, make it all the more urgent that the struggle for democratic change is linked to an anticapitalist, revolutionary programme. This is even more important because of the timidity and betrayal of the capitalist parties in the democratic struggle.

There is mass disenchantment amongst the people, who remember these parties' role in government in the 1990s, for these corrupt parties. This is particularly so amongst the working class in the cities, as the PPP's base remains amongst the peasants on the land. Significantly, the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation has come out opposing the regime and calls for action, but has so far restricted these to small symbolic protests. The formation of a new, radical students movement must be linked to the militant sections of the Pakistani working class. Prior to the state of emergency, campaigns were beginning to crystallise for a new working class party. As a new period of public activity could now open up, re-activating these campaigns is important – and revolutionaries should argue openly and clearly for a revolutionary programme of action for socialist revolution.

Turkey's war on the Kurds

By Mark Booth

On 1 December the Turkish army launched a severe attack on the bases of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), carrying on the nation's policy of trying to crush the Kurdish separatist struggle.

Roughly one fifth of the Turkish population is Kurdish who have been systematically and brutally oppressed for generations by the Turkish ruling class. Recently the police and anti terror forces have been condemned for their use of torture and extra judicial executions of Kurdish people. Kurdish women are regularly raped and tortured by police and guards in Turkish prisons.

The national liberation struggle by the Kurds is a fight that must be supported by all consistent democrats, workers and socialists in Turkey.

The Turkish ruling class fears that an autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq will give impetus to the national struggles of the Kurds in Turkey and threaten the breakaway of several Southern regions to form an independent Kurdistan.

Following the parliamentary elections, which returned the governing AKP (Justice and Development Party) to power, the PKK resumed attacks against the military in southern Turkey. Although partly a response to the increasing repression suffered by the Kurdish people, it is also due to the fact that for the first time the ruling AKP received more votes in the Kurdish regions of Turkey than the DTP, a Kurdish party sympathetic to the PKK.

The PKK has seen its support decline in the past years and is hoping to regain support as the situation polarises and repression increases. Despite this reactionary policy of the PKK, it is correct to support their struggle against the Turkish state and resist attempts by the parliament to ban the DTP.

2007 has been marked by an increasing tension in the country, as the military and right wing organisations, with the help of the media, whipped

up nationalist fervour against the Kurds. The military demanded action and was able to secure a vote in parliament, authorising actions against PKK bases in northern Iraq.

This threatened to draw Turkey into conflict with the US, whose main base of support within Iraq is the Kurdish controlled north which maintains some semblance of stability compared to the rest of the country. To prevent a split in the coalition – whilst generating support for a Turkish incursion – Turkey's generals sent a delegation to the US. Having secured US support, the army launched artillery attacks on the Kurdish rebels. The Pentagon is passing intelligence to the Turkish army to locate PKK bases.

Turkey now has 100,000 troops stationed in the region bordering Iraq and the Turkish cabinet has voted to allow the army to pursue Kurdish rebels into Iraq. Yet the attack on the PKK is only a pretext for the Turkish ruling class to crush the Kurdish people and cripple any attempt they make at establishing an independent state.

While we do not support the tactics or nationalist politics of the PKK and other Kurdish organisations, socialists must recognise that theirs is a legitimate struggle for national self-determination against the oppressive Turkish state.

However, the Iraqi Kurdish leaders that have done a deal with imperialism are being used by their new masters in Washington – they are now providing a bulwark of support to the occupation of Iraq. Ultimately the US will prioritise its alliance with Turkey and allow attacks on the Kurds to take place, as long as it is not too destabilising for the region.

Only a genuine national liberation struggle, led by the working class, can organise across Kurdish area and link up to the Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi workers for support. What is required to make this happen is a revolutionary communist party.

Only this way will the Kurdish people be able to throw off the chains of oppression.



LATIN AMERICA

Bolivia: only revolution can defeat the right

Once again Bolivia is in a revolutionary situation, but this time the counter-revolution is on the offensive, due to the weak and vacillating actions of Evo Morales, writes *Keith Sellick*

Bolivia's Constituent Assembly is due to publish the country's new constitution on 14 December. But the right wing minority has already said it will refuse to recognise it, setting the rich lowland areas of the country they represent on the path of secession. That could leave president Evo Morales and the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) facing the prospect of civil war, or accepting the break up of the country.

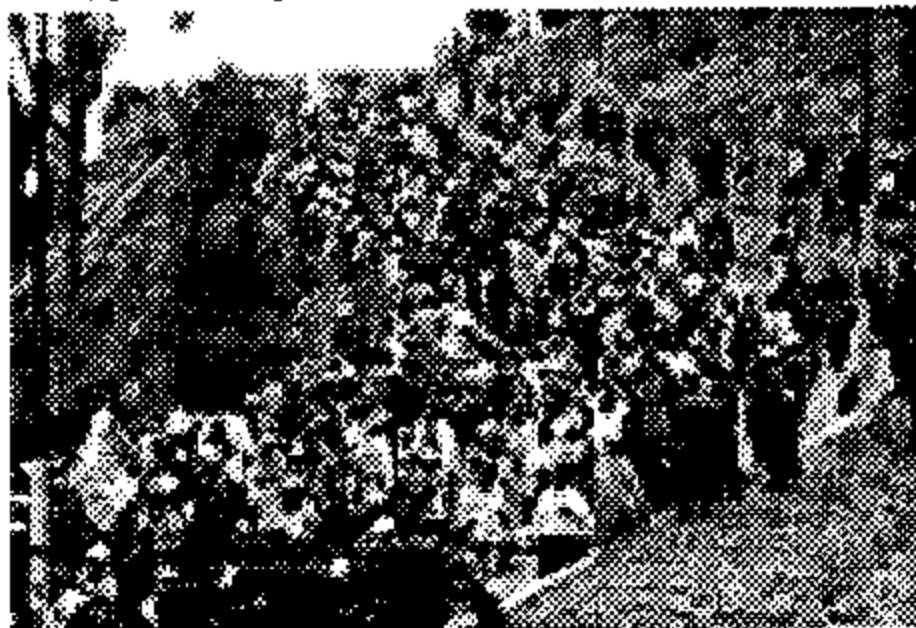
In November right wing youths besieged the assembly in the official capital city of Sucre (population 247,000). They demanded that the seat of government in La Paz be moved permanently to Sucre, thus putting it beyond the pressure of the masses of the largest urban centres in Bolivia, the twin cities La Paz and El Alto (population 1.8 million).

Indigenous people who came to defend the assembly were violently attacked; 300 peasants were thrown out of the city's university and, in another clash, three people were left dead and more than 100 wounded by right-wing thugs. The assembly was forced to retreat to an army college outside the city. The right wing deputies boycotted the move. Soon after, a bosses' strike paralysed the economy in the lowlands.

New constitution

What is it that the right wing elite are in revolt against? The new constitution rejects privatisation and supports indigenous people's rights to their own language and self-rule at local and regional level. It recognises collective and communal property. Bolivia is defined as a communal state with several "nations".

Though the constitution is clearly not a direct threat to capitalism, it does strike at the rule of the white Spanish-speaking elite, or oligarchy, at the corruption that enabled their parties to exclude the indigenous majority from education, political power and access to the best land,



Workers, peasants and indigenous people march against the right wing in El Alto

silver, tin, and natural gas and oil reserves.

The location of the oil and gas reserves in the south-western provinces lies behind the right's push to separation, leaving the impoverished highland provinces and the majority of the population with nothing.

The other factor that sparked the anger of the rich oligarchs was the pensions reform. People over the age of 60 will now be entitled to a minimum pension, paid for out of revenues from the gas and oilfields, and by cutting back money allocated to municipal governments, such as Santa Cruz, Bolivia's second largest city with around 1.5 million people and the centre of right wing resistance.

The right has frustrated the workings of both the assembly, and the Bolivian Congress (where they have the majority in the upper house). They control 95 per cent of the media; organise themselves into civic committees, which are fronts for big business and landowners; have set up fascist youth groups, based on middle and upper class students, which attack MAS members and indigenous people; and have the support of the USA and Britain.

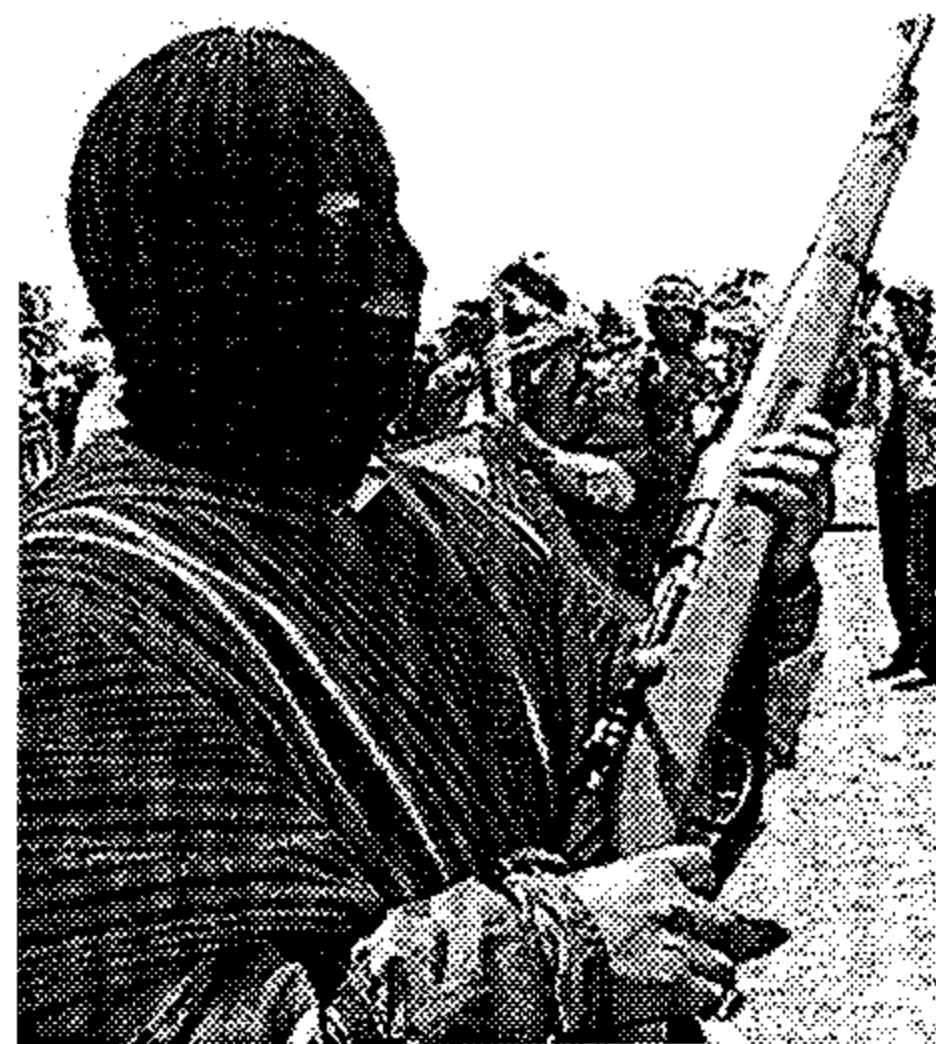
Workers and poor peasants

MAS supporters, indigenous people's and peasants' organisations, trade unions and women's groups are fighting the threat of secession. Peasant and indigenous groups in the south west have vowed to occupy and takeover the oligarchs' farms, if they carry out the threat of secession. In addition, an indigenous militia, the Red Ponchos, which enjoys Morales' backing, has called for a general strike, and threatened to march on Sucre.

The crucial question is: if the Right wing controlled provinces actually secede, what will the army do? The right wing governor of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes Villa, recently called on the army to intervene against the government. His appeal was rejected but there can be little doubt that sections of the army high command are willing to overthrow Morales.

The solution lies not in courting the army commanders, but in winning over the rank and file soldiers. To do this the workers, peasants and indigenous people need to demonstrate that, unlike Morales, who has wavered from right to left and back again, they will defend their right to the national wealth of the country arms in hand. This alone can make the ranks of the army waver and come over to the people.

To fight the counter-revolution and the break up of Bolivia the full force of the social revolu-



A Red Poncho militiaman

tion must be unleashed. The working class can take the lead, uniting the indigenous people and peasants behind them by immediately:

- Setting up neighbourhood committees, like the Fejuve in El Alto, all over Bolivia to organise resistance against the right: blockades, occupations, marches and a general strike
- Arming themselves, creating a mass workers and peasants' militia under the control of the popular committees
- Appealing to the peasant and worker ranks of the army to oust their reactionary officers
- Seizing the big farms of the rich landowners and giving the land to the peasants
- Demanding the nationalisation without compensation of the entire oil and gas industry and the property of the entire business elite.

Revolution: the only solution

Workers should withdraw political support for Morales' timid and conciliatory government and set out to create a workers and peasants government, based on the popular committees and militia. Crucially, the workers need their own party to fight for nationalisation, planning and expropriating the bosses - in effect for socialism and the smashing of the capitalist state, something that the MAS with its talk of Andean capitalism will never do.

However we must also be prepared to resist the right overthrowing Morales, or any attempts at secession by the Santa Cruz bosses. The world's labour movements, especially those in US and Britain, must mobilise against their own governments if any action is taken in support of the oligarchs.

Referendum defeat shakes the Hugo Chávez' project

President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela was pushing hard for sweeping reforms of the constitution but lost the vote in early December, *Tim West* looks at the potential crisis developing

On December 2nd Hugo Chávez received his first defeat at the polls since his election in 1998, in vote on proposed reforms to the 1999 Bolivarian constitution. Chávez had promised the amendments would "deepen the roots of the revolution" and entrench "popular power".

His proposals were rejected by 49.3% to 50.7%, with a 45% abstention rate.

This defeat was greeted with dismay by the large numbers of Venezuelans massed behind Chávez and his "Bolivarian socialist revolution," and it will certainly encourage the Right, already celebrating on the streets. It will be warmly welcomed in the White House too. It could well be used as a launching pad to destabilise Venezuela and even launch a coup against Chávez. But this defeat is largely one of Chávez' own making. It is defeat for his populist and Bonapartist methods and can only be countered by the methods of the class struggle.

Why was Chávez use of the referendum and constitutional amendments a false one which courted defeat? Firstly Chávez threw together in his proposed amendments some positive albeit limited reforms- one which could be supported - with undemocratic measures which strengthened the still capitalist Venezuelan state and could thus not be supported.

What was in the constitution?

The positive measures promised social security to those who work in the informal sector (50% of Venezuela's workforce), outlawed sexual discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, enshrined the results of previous land reforms promising "the abolishment of latifundia", enacted a 36 hour week and made free university education a right for all. In addition the amendments sought to lower the voting age to 16 and recognised the creation of



A supporter of Chavez is devastated at hearing the result

"communal councils," allocating 5% of the annual national budget to these grass roots bodies.

All these revolutionaries could critically support. Our criticisms are their modesty, the fact that they do not abolish the 1999 constitution's protection of private ownership of the land, the factories, the banks, the media etc.

But the package of amendments also sought to strengthen the powers of the presidency. The proposal to lengthen the presidential term from 6 to 7 years and greatly increase his powers during a state of emergency could not be supported. The right to due legal process for those arrested during it was removed, as was the guaranteed right to freedom of information, and the time limit of 180 days.

In short these changes increase the already considerable authority of the presidency. Obviously the argument put forward by Chávez and his followers is that these measures would only have been used against the Right, against any coup by the old oligarchy, sponsored by US imperialism. But what if Chávez were to be assassinated, himself turn to the right, or replaced in a palace coup by some

one like General Isaías Baduel, his former Minister of Defence who played a prominent role in defeating the 2002 attempted coup but has now turned to the right? Then these draconian powers could all be used against the working class.

Leon Trotsky, a figure Chávez has praised and quoted, once said (with regard to the calls to strengthen the state "against fascism")

"...we must vote against all measures that strengthen the capitalist-bonapartist state, even those measures which may for the moment cause temporary unpleasantness for the fascists."

The presidency - no matter who occupies it - remains an institution of the bourgeois state which be it said revolutionaries are in favour of totally abolishing not strengthening.

Abstention

Most of the left, including the majority in the independent and militant union federation the UNT, carried away by Chávez's populist rhetoric, supported a yes vote in the referendum. An exception was Orlando Chirino, a national co-ordinator the UNT, who called for an abstention. This was, in the view of the League for the Fifth International, a correct position to take.

Despite Chávez radical rhetoric, the profound economic inequalities in Venezuelan society have persisted. In the rural sector it's a similar story: despite promises to redistribute land, the reforms have been limited to expropriating "unproductive" land. Meanwhile, landless rural workers who occupy land without government backing have been threatened with jail.

Furthermore, the government is proposing to politicise the military without fundamentally reforming its bourgeois character. The army high command, ultimately loyal to capitalism, even where it pays fulsome lip service to Chávez and Bolivarianism, has not been weakened let alone bro-

ken up as would be necessary if the workers and peasants were to take power and build a genuinely socialist society.

Contradictions developing

Indeed, events like the defection of Baduel highlight the contradictions within the Chávez camp. These contradictions even have a class character at the mass base of the Bolivarian socialist movement. It demonstrates the possibility of a rupture between the Chavista leaders and the base, one which the working class movement must encourage, rather than either treating "Bolivarian socialism" as a united and static entity on which no demands can be placed. Another danger would be to regard its evolution to revolutionary socialism as an inevitable product of the objective process.

Whilst defending the right of the working class to organise independently as organisations such as the UNT have led the way in doing, the working class must ensure the social defeat of bourgeois and imperialist backer sponsors of the "No" campaign on the streets and in the workplaces. But this must be done by depriving the reactionaries of all their remaining bastions of power, their control of the media, of the economy and their control of the army.

Through the mobilisation to defeat those reactionary sectors the Venezuelan working class can consolidate its gains so far and demand delivery on those it has been promised. To do this it will require the creation of councils of delegates, amongst the workers, peasants, urban poor and the rank and file soldiers. It will need a democratically controlled militia. Above all it will need a revolutionary party, which at present can be fought for within Chávez's PSUV and in the trade unions. But with the forces of reaction emboldened by Chávez' self-inflicted defeat, time is not unlimited to fulfil these urgent tasks.

DEBATE

Postal strike: did the left provide a strategy to win?

Despite eventually being sold out, postal workers showed a will to win. But did the self-styled revolutionary left provide a way? *A Workers Power member in the CWU investigates*

The postal dispute was the most powerful strike in Britain for many years. Two rounds of solid strikes shut down the postal network and piled up a backlog of over a million items. Ninety-five per cent of posties came out. Picket lines were well attended and lively. Thousands walked out on wildcat strike in defiance of the anti-union laws, threatening to turn the dispute into an all-out strike.

However, this inspiring story was also a tale of betrayal by Communication Workers Union leaders, Postal Deputy Secretary Dave Ward and General Secretary Billy Hayes in particular. Twice they called off the strikes, just as they were beginning to hurt the all-important business customers. A high court injunction on 12 October gave them the excuse to cut a deal, giving Royal Mail nearly everything they wanted.

Postal workers faced what Marxists call a crisis of leadership. The main obstacle between them and victory was their own leadership. Marxists strive to resolve this crisis by offering an alternative strategy and tactics. That's why it is worth examining what those groups that claim to be Marxist - Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and Alliance for Workers Liberty - had to say during this dispute.

What type of action?

The leadership's strategy of dividing the members up and sending them out on different days - rolling strikes - came in for heavy criticism from the rank and file. But what sort of action was needed? Usually the SWP simply called for "more" or "harder" action, occasionally being more specific: "We would have preferred a two-day strike with everyone out together, [which] would be much more visible to the public." (18 July SWP bulletin)

The Socialist Party was even more vague, only at the very end musing that it was "likely that all-out national strike action is needed to win this dispute". This was a one-off after-thought, not an active campaign.

Of course, any escalation would have been welcome. But limiting the action to protest strikes, telling the bosses in advance when we were going back to work, and giving the bureaucracy the chance to call - and call off - the dates would remain the main problem.

This is why Workers Power petitioned and leafleted for an all-out indefinite strike. It was not only the quickest and most decisive way to win our struggles, it could have broken the company's modernisation plans and taken us towards the union's agreed goals: £400 a week, no to flexibility, no cuts to jobs or pensions, a 35-hour

week with no loss of pay. Such a struggle could pave the way to defeating privatisation itself. But this would have also dealt a political body blow to the Labour government - exactly why the CWU leadership ruled out the all-out strike.

The problem is, the left ruled out such a strike too, as well as many key demands. For instance, the SWP argued only for a rise above inflation - the same position as Dave Ward, who described the £400 a week goal as a "long-term" aim to be achieved over five years!

Of course, Workers Power did not present our proposal as an ultimatum. We had a dialogue with workers and militants: would support escalating action leading to an all-out strike? But as the dispute wore on, and wildcat strikes posed the question of the indefinite strike point-blank, more and more militants supported our view.



Tailing the wildcats

The Alliance for Workers Liberty supported the rolling strike tactic as "currently the right one" in July, but demanded the union back those that refuse to cross picket lines. But crossing picket lines was the defining feature of the rolling strike. So how could it be the right tactic? This was also the approach of CWU militants in key branches such as Liverpool, who wanted to spark a decisive confrontation by walking out and inspiring others to follow, forcing the strike to reach a tipping point.

Once Ward and Hayes hatched their sell-out and suspended the strikes, however, the wildcats began to fold. Two weeks later Liverpool finally went back after their heroic stand, embittered. At the mass meeting of up to 800 workers that decided to end the strike, the last speaker from the floor said: "Next time something kicks off, and somebody else needs help, don't phone us - Liverpool's phone is the last to ring."

The AWL did not give a lead to these militant, courageous workers but tailed them. Rather than demanding the leadership call an all-out strike and fighting for it among the membership, the AWL relied on workers spontaneously walking out. When they didn't, demoralisation set in. The call for extending the walkouts needed to be combined with the demand for all-out strike on the leaders and members.

Even more embarrassing for the AWL was the regular and mostly uncritical column space that they gave to CWU executive member Pete Keenlyside who eventually supported the sell out by the PEC.

Socialist Worker

Autumn of discontent?

The SWP had a member on the CWU Postal Executive Committee (PEC), the CWU President, Jane Loftus, who, along with Sue Bond (Public and Commercial Services union vice-president), issued an appeal: "We believe our two unions should be uniting their battles, and should set a date for coordinated strike action in the near future. This could become a day of action and solidarity for the entire labour movement." (4 August Socialist Worker)

Behind this was a wider campaign for a united public sector strike to smash the 2 per cent pay limit (i.e. real pay cut), with ballots in several major public sector unions and a TUC resolution calling for "coordinated industrial action".

Why call only for a one-day strike when the CWU was already taking two-day strikes and weekly days of action? Because its favoured bureaucrat Mark Serwotka (PCS General Secretary and Respect member) would only contemplate one-day protests, and so the posties would have to rein themselves in for the sake of unity!

Worse, they did next to nothing to build for such a strike from below. In a few isolated areas, like Bristol and Leeds, they set up local postal support groups or public sector pay campaigns, but if they involved other left forces, like in south London, they boycotted them. Without local action committees to coordinate the struggle, as Workers Power called for, the SWP appeal, like the TUC's resolution, remained a dead letter.



Bristol: a militant stronghold, but unable to stop the bureaucratic sell-out (photo: Indymedia)

POST WORKER

Rank and file control

But despite having organisations under their control that could link up the militant rank and file and give them a political direction in their fight against the bureaucracy - the Post Worker newspaper in the CWU, Organising For Fighting Unions across the movement - the SWP refused to activate them. Post Worker did not produce a single paper or bulletin from July to November. Its website was not even updated. Then Post Worker refused to support the Reject The Deal campaign in the ballot, because the SWP was afraid of losing its links to the London leadership, which was recommending a Yes vote in support of Dave Ward.

When Workers Power proposed to the OFFU steering committee that it call a national conference to hammer out an alternative strategy for both the postal strike and the united public sector strike, the SWP voted us down.

Nor did the Socialist Party do any better. It echoed the PCS call for co-ordinated action across the public sector. However, although it has considerable influence in the National Shop Stewards Committee, it refused to use it to campaign either in the postal dispute or for a public sector revolt. Having agreed with RMT union leader Bob Crow not to "interfere" in other unions' affairs, it blocked our resolution at the NSSN conference calling for escalating strike action in the CWU and a united strike.

What's the point of setting up these networks, if they are shut down when they are most needed? But it got worse. Loftus voted against the deal on the PEC, but then refused to campaign against the sell-out, putting her cosy relationship to Hayes and Ward above the needs of the workers. Putting positions above principles and policy is the hallmark of every bureaucrat, left or right.

Indeed, the SWP and Socialist Party never even named the bureaucracy or condemned any leaders by name, not even Hayes and Ward. Workers Power alone called for strike committees to run the dispute locally and nationally, made up of delegates elected from workplace meetings. Without developing such organisations, even an all-out strike could be foiled by the leadership - as the fizzling out of the wildcats showed.

Socialist Worker occasionally called for strike

committees, but failed to distinguish them from branch committees, which were often bureaucratic. The AWL was better, calling for strike committees and national meetings of reps and so that "not just the top full-time officials" controlled the strike. We need rank and file fighters to replace the bureaucracy, not just squeeze in alongside them.

We linked the call for strike committees to the proposal for a rank and file conference of militant workplaces and activists that could hammer out a strategy to win. It could lay the basis for a movement to replace the bureaucracy with accountable, i.e. recallable fighters, paid the average postal worker's wage.



New workers party

The postal strike was inherently political. By defeating the CWU, the boss class wanted to open the way for steamrolling a series of anti-working class measures across the public sector and make us pay for the impending crisis in their system.

The Labour government could have intervened and resolved the dispute in the workers' favour, and many militants called on it to do so. After all, the CWU has paid Labour millions in affiliation fees and donations. But instead Gordon Brown condemned the strikers and demanded a return to work on Royal Mail's terms.

Thousands of CWU members cancelled the Labour Party contribution in their political fund as a result, and there is likely to be a call to disaffiliate at conference 2008. While this wrongfooted the AWL, which continues to support Labour and merely called for a "debate about political representation", the SWP eagerly supported the spontaneous movement.

But it is not enough to break from Labour. Apolitical trade unionism would leave the working class without a mass party of its own to fight for an alternative to Labour's privatisation, anti-union laws, the destruction of wages, pensions and conditions. We need a new party, one that can fight for a different system, socialism, while

at the same time providing a political leadership to today's struggles and linking them to the overthrow of capitalism.

The SWP did not even argue for the CWU to support Respect. While the Socialist Party did call for a new workers party, it was for one modelled on old Labour and fighting elections with a programme of reforms within capitalism. This was to be achieved by a passive campaign of collecting signatures, rather than a militant intervention into the struggles against the Labour government.

Where now?

The vote to accept the deal is a real defeat. However, it is not the end of the story. Royal Mail's "consultation" on pensions ends on 16 January, after which it intend to impose working till 65, and wind up the final salary scheme, whatever the answer. London Region is recommending a campaign to reject these counter-reforms (which Hayes and Ward support!) and has called for a conference.

As flexibility trials start in January and Royal Mail, arrogant in victory, presses home its advantage, tensions will rise. More strikes and walkouts are inevitable. A rank and file movement must be built to make sure these sparks are not snuffed out and fan them into a nationwide wildfire once again. In the process we could develop an alternative leadership, and a strategy to defeat restructuring and privatisation. The conference called by London could take a step in this direction.

The crisis of leadership that we referred to in the beginning of this article is the major problem facing the working class. It is not just the sell-out bureaucrats; this crisis is also manifested at the level of the rank and file and the far left. The postal strike shows this to be the case.

Workers Power does not claim to have all the answers, and we have much to learn from the rich diversity of tactics that workers develop in struggle. However we believe that we gave answers to the burning question on how to win the CWU strike, qualitatively better answers than the rest of the left, which sway between reformism and revolution and are what Marxists call "centrist".

We appeal to all CWU militants who have appreciated our political and practical support during their strike to join us, so that we can have a bigger voice in the coming struggles.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Should we defend Iran from imperialist attack?

The horrors of Tehran's regime are sometimes used to argue against defending Iran from attack. *Josh Davies* argues that anti-imperialism is the only consistent policy for socialists

Not content with the catastrophe inflicted on Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration has now started beating the war drums again – threatening an attack on Iran. Just as Saddam Hussein's Iraq was said to have "weapons of mass destruction", we are now told with equally questionable conviction that Iran must be attacked because it is developing nuclear weapon capability. The hypocrisy with which George Bush and his allies treat these questions never ceases to amaze. Not only do they seem to forget that they hold vast nuclear weapons arsenals, but they also seem to discover new and radical politics when the war drums begin: for example George Bush, the fierce opponent of abortion rights, suddenly discovers his passion for women's rights.

America's whole foreign policy and its threats against Iran are not conditioned by a desire to struggle endlessly for democratic rights and freedom. If they were, then America would not be a staunch supporter of Israel and its terrorising of the Palestinians; it would not support the reactionary theocracy in Saudi Arabia, or the military regime in Pakistan.

No, America's foreign policy is driven by its sense of strategic, geopolitical interest. When it launched the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan it was making the strategic calculation that, if successful, it could establish proxy, obedient regimes in a part of the world that had become known for its opposition to pax-Americana while also controlling the oil. Its leading intellectuals argued this could secure "American leadership" of the world for at least the next 50 years. The question then is if we oppose the motives of the United States – oil, power and profit – should we fight for their defeat in these wars?

Revolutionaries are unequivocal in saying "yes". The actions of the US are not simply reactionary policy choices but are about the system we live in – imperialism. Imperialism is not simply the domina-

tion of one state over another; it is the current stage of the capitalist world system. Huge industrial and retailing companies, banks and investment firms – such as Siemens, Citigroup, HSBC, Halliburton, BP, Toyota, Wal-Mart – dominate global markets. Their interests are policed by the military, diplomatic and political might of the great powers. This leads to a systematic division of the world between imperialist states and their corporations, who together dominate and exploit semi-colonial countries, whose independence is more on paper than real. In the 21st Century, on the battle ground of Iraq and Afghanistan, enormous blows have been struck by the resistance to US occupation. These are victories not only in the struggle to free these states but for those who suffer oppression and exploitation under the imperialist world system.

Political errors

The Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) argues vehemently against this. They opposed the war on Iraq but today refuse to call for the immediate withdrawal of troops. The withdrawal of troops from Iraq, they argue, would mean the inevitable crushing of the working class movement by reactionary Islamist forces. In taking this stance the AWL is guilty of making the US troops the guardians of the labour movement – when in fact they are the main threat to it. In the coming war against Iran the AWL argues that we should support neither the Americans nor the Iranians – saying instead that we should support the "third camp" of the international working class. They argue that this is the only consistent internationalist position that takes a principled opposition to both sides.

In their justification for this position they argue that the imperialist system, in which some very powerful states prosper at the expense of others, does not really exist in the same way today as it did at the time of the First World War, for example. They are forced to do this, because

otherwise they are open to the charge that they not defending the democratic rights of nations who oppressed from imperialism to national self determination. Yet, this is what they are guilty of doing!

It sounds radical to talk about the "third camp" of the working class, but in truth the consistent internationalist position is to defend the self-determination of Iran, i.e. the right for the Iranian people to decide its own destiny and control its own resources free of interference and invasion of the US.

But what would the argument of the AWL mean on the ground when Iran is attacked? In such situations, oppressed semi-colonial bourgeois regimes will seek to mobilise its population using anti-imperialist rhetoric and enter armed conflicts with imperial armies. They can do this successfully because the Iranian people suffer from oppression and super-exploitation at the hands of the imperialist countries, and will therefore see the urgent need to unite against imperialism. In this situation revolutionaries should not agitate against the war, but support the resistance to the US attack – as part of a united front to repel the invading force. Does this mean that we support the reactionary politics

of the regime? Not at all, but we can support their military actions against the invading force.

Moreover, we can use the crisis created by the conflict to demand democratic rights, including for women and ethnic minorities, workers' rights, including control over production for the war effort, and the arming of the working class. This connects the anti-imperialist struggle with the struggle for socialism, by fighting for a workers revolution to defend Iran. In contrast the AWL counterposes the struggle for socialism to a defence of Iran in the event of imperialist attack. If the working class and socialists in Iran were to adopt this position it could either open the way to the victory of the imperialists or cede the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle to reactionary parts of the movement like the regime of Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

In Iraq the AWL methodology means abstaining from the struggle to liberate the nation from the occupation of the western military forces and the corporations. At home in Britain and the other imperialist nations it leads to implicit support for the imperialist armies and avoiding the harder, anti-imperialist argument.

Nick Cohen's racist arguments

Despite huge opposition in the west to the "war on terror" some who still described themselves as "of the left" even argued we should support the war on terror (they were in truth ex-leftists). They included Nick Cohen of *The Observer*, the academic Norman Geras, who together co-authored the *Euston Manifesto*, and many others of their ilk.

Rather than focus their attention on the disaster unfolding in Iraq, they turned their polemical fire on the "anti-Americanism" of the Left. They went as far as to make racist attacks against the Left for building an anti-war coalition

with Muslims.

Their claim was that whatever the motives of the US, we should support this democratic regime in seeking to establish similar democracies across the Middle East. When this "democracy building" began to fail, Cohen *et al* argued it was because of Islamic fanaticism that only made the struggle all the more important. Now, they join the US administration in attacking those that oppose an assault on Iran as apologists for the regimes record on women's and workers' rights. Does anyone really believe that the US has women's rights in mind when they attack countries like Iran?

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.

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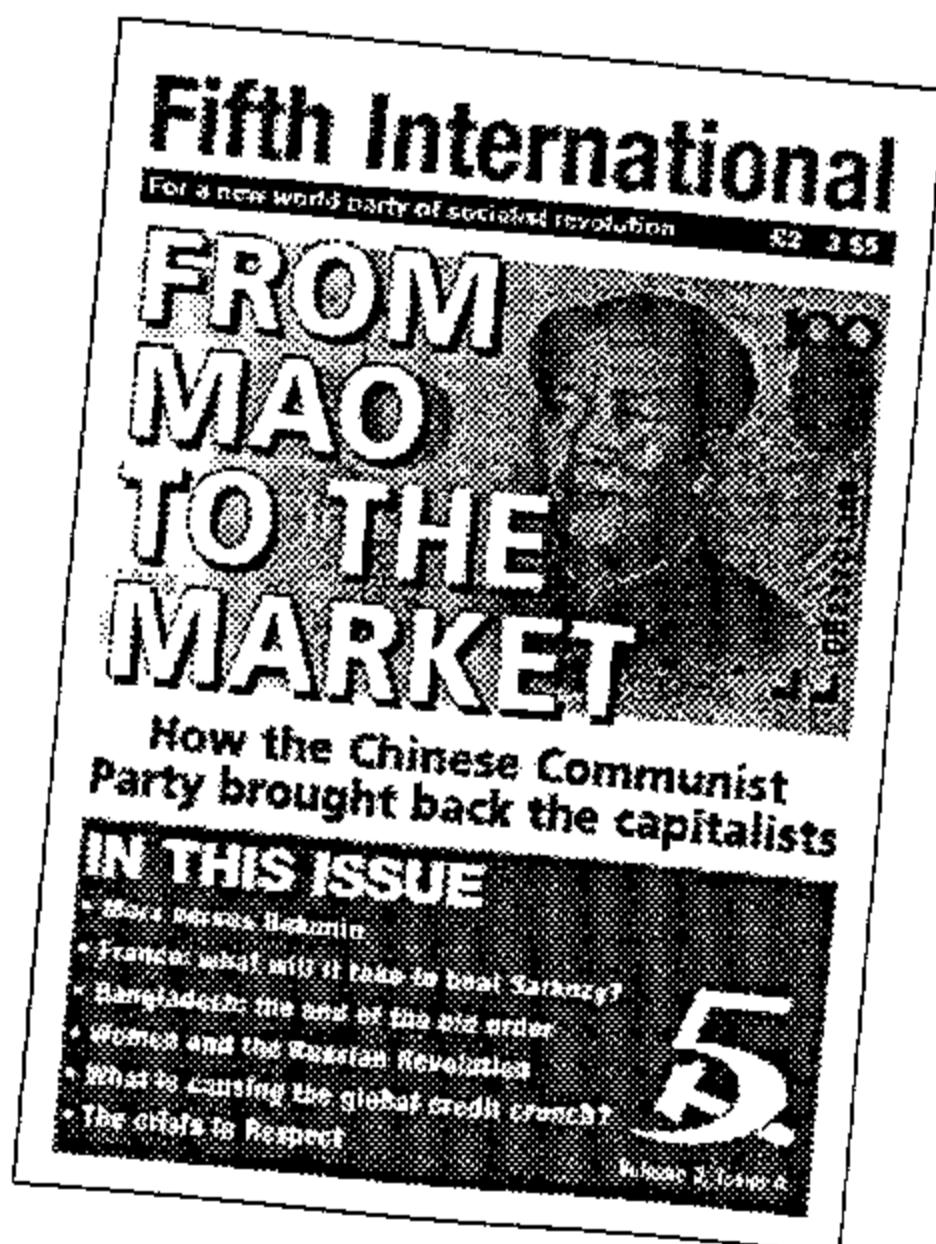
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Free speech and no platform for fascism

By Luke Cooper

The British National Party (BNP) has recently jumped into the public spotlight again after leader Nick Griffin was invited to speak, alongside holocaust denier David Irving, at the Oxford Union on the subject of free speech. Their presence sparked a protest of 1,000 students and launched a debate on whether student unions should maintain their position of refusing to give fascists a platform. By an unfortunate coincidence, two days later at the University of East Anglia, the student union overturned its position on "no platform" - again, in the name of free speech.

As Luke Tryl, the Oxford Union president, put it on Sky News, "The reason the Oxford Union was founded 184 years ago was to promote and defend freedom of speech. This is what this debate is about." Neither Tryl nor the movers of the referendum motion at UEA are known to have fascist sympathies or links, but both have become intoxicated with the idea of free speech. The sheer simplicity of it is surely what makes it so attractive. Indeed, the French 18th century philosopher, Voltaire, summed up this attitude when he said: "I detest what you write, but I would give my life to make it possible for you to continue to write."

Reality, of course, is not as simple as all that. The appeal to freedom is a corner stone of liberal ideology, but freedom for what and from whom? Capitalism and freedom have never had the most comfortable relationship. The capitalist class, in order to overthrow the old feudal order in France, mobilised the masses under the democratic slogans of freedom of speech, assembly and the press.

The revolutionary constitution of 1791 proclaimed: "Liberty to every man to speak, write, print, and publish his opinions without having his writings subject to any censorship or inspection before their publication, and to worship as he pleases."

In the same spirit, the first amendment of the American constitution enacted that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

In times of social and political crisis, when capitalism is challenged on the streets and in

the factories the freedoms that once appeared so essential to liberal discourse quickly evaporate. In France the noble ideas were abrogated within two years of their proclamation. In the USA, in the years following the first and second world wars, a veritable reign of terror was unleashed against the left.

Every state has provisions for a state of emergency, when all these liberties are - temporarily - abolished. Therefore the rights to free speech, assembly, organisation and so on are far from absolute. Indeed if the working class makes too vigorous use of them in its struggle against the bosses and their state, they are summarily suspended by monarch or president alike.

Role of fascism

In periods of prolonged social crisis, where the police prove insufficient and the army unreliable, the capitalist class will turn to fascism. For revolutionaries, this has a specific meaning. Unlike other capitalist parties, the fascists seek to build a mass, violent movement on the streets, not only with the aim of taking power but also of smashing working class organisations.

Its base of support is the enraged middle classes, who find themselves squeezed between workers and the capitalists and impoverished in times of economic crisis, plus non-class conscious workers and the criminalised strata (lumpenproletariat). The common feature of fascism, found in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, was the violent civil war it carried out against the working class.

Their rise to power was not automatic, only possible when the leadership of the working class betrayed the struggle, refusing at the crucial moment to take the power. For the capitalists, too, resorting to a single dictator, who is not easily dispensed with or controllable, is always a last resort - when the alternative is the breakdown of capitalist class rule.

As this shows, Marxists see the struggle against fascism as part of the working class struggle against capitalism. It is because the fascists will smash up the organisations of the working class, like the unions, that they need to be physically stopped from organising now - they need to be "no platformed".

It is easy to become complacent in a country, like Britain, that has never experienced fascist rule - and whose ruling class stress their "anti-fascist" credentials by forever pointing to the role of Britain in the Second

World War. But there is nothing peculiar about German or Italian capitalism that led it to resort to fascism. Winston Churchill, Britain's supposed great anti-fascist leader, said when visiting Italy in 1927: "if I had been an Italian I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you from the start to finish in your triumphant struggle... against Leninism."

If this tells us anything it is that capitalist democracies like Britain grant no absolute right to freedom of speech. On the contrary, the ruling class treats "freedom" relatively. From antiwar protesters, persecuted with anti-terrorist legislation, to striking postal workers threatened with legal action, or Muslim foreign nationals incarcerated without trial, democratic rights and freedoms are dispensed with when conflict with the interests of our rulers.

What's more, the capacity to actually exercise "liberty of speech" is enormously restricted by the bosses' monopoly of the media, pumping out a deafening stream of pro-capitalist propaganda, giving little or no space to strikers or "extremists" - unless, like Griffith, they can be used to shift the political debate to the right.

The democratic rights and freedoms the working class enjoys in Britain today all had to be fought for by movements like the Chartists and the Suffragettes. The coercive apparatus of the capitalist state was turned against these movements, just as it is used against protesters today.

Revolutionaries do not call for the BNP to be banned by the state precisely because we know such draconian powers will be used against the working class and the left in times of crisis. We know that only the working class, treating the fascists as their most deadly enemies, can wage a progressive struggle against them.

As Trotsky put it, our task is simple: "Grab every fascist... by their collars, acquaint them with the pavement a few times, strip them of their fascist insignia and documents, and... leave them with their fright and a few good black and blue marks." In doing so, we remember Hitler's telling comments which he made after taking power in 1933: "Only one thing could have broken our movement - if our enemies had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed the nucleus of our movement with extreme brutality."

This is precisely what the policy of granting no platform to fascists is meant to achieve.