

Workers power

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

★ VISTEON ★ GLASGOW ★ WATERFORD ★

OCCUPATIONS

ARE

BACK



Visteon workers take control of their factory

INSIDE:

THE NEW MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS' CONTROL

- Visteon workers occupy and face down police and courts
- Glasgow parents occupy schools
- Lessons of the Waterford occupation in Ireland



League for the
Fifth International

NEWS IN BRIEF

Spying on your Facebook

Imagine someone tracking your every move on Facebook. Imagine they wrote down everyone you contacted, every message you wrote, every friend you made. Then imagine they kept it on a giant database, ready to use whenever they wanted to build a case against you, for whatever reason they chose. Welcome to Britain 2009.

The government has admitted that it plans to spy on Facebook's 17 million British users, keeping track of who they contact and what they write. This information will be added to a database, keeping tabs of every email and phone call, stored for years and searchable by government spies.

An EU Directive forces phone companies to store this data. Telecom firms receive about 500,000 requests a year from the intelligence services for information on who is talking to who.

The government says again and again "if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. This implies that government is always a force for good and can always be trusted. Can it?

No wonder so many people are starting to realise what's going on. The government and secret services are preparing to clampdown if millions of us stand up to them as the crisis mounts.

Britain's favourite sexist tyrant

If you want to know where online spying can lead, look at the case of Pervez Kambaksh.

For downloading an article from the web, he was dragged before a tribunal of three clerics, his lawyer was denied the right to speak for him, and he was summarily sent to jail for a cool 20 years.

His crime? The article was about women's rights. The author? The United Nations.

Do we hear Gordon Brown calling angrily in the media every day for his release? Do we hell. For this is Afghanistan, the government is the US and British puppet Hamid Karzai, the man to whom Britain and America are rushing tens of thousands of troops on the grounds that he is defending 'democracy' and even 'women's rights'.

And it's not just reading articles about women's rights that is illegal in this pro-Western fundamentalist regime. Under Karzai, a law has just gone through parliament forcing women to make themselves available to their husbands at least "once every four nights."

When Brown and Obama say they are fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan, they're lying.

Support the Prisme occupation

Twelve workers at the packaging firm Prisme in Dundee occupied their factory on 4 March after receiving redundancy notices with immediate effect. They were owed thousands of pounds in redundancy payments and holiday pay. Yet management blithely told them, "Unfortunately we do not have any money to make these payments to you."

The 12 mostly-young occupiers stated: "We will hold out for as long as it takes." The Dundee Trades Council, the FBU and other unions have donated funds; others should follow. Trade unionists can take workplace collections, pass branch motions for solidarity funds, and send messages of support.

The Prisme occupation and the Waterford Crystal occupation in Ireland have inspired other workers to occupy factories in what could become a wave of protest against job cuts.

Workers at Visteon have held occupations in North London, Essex and Belfast - you can read more on page 5 of this magazine..

You can text/phone messages of support to the Prisme workers by calling 07970 875 455 or emailing prismeworkerssolidarity@googlemail.com.

For more revolutionary news, analysis, history and theory go to...

LATEST NEWS INCLUDES:

- What a day! Protesters paralyse City of London
- Victory to the Visteon workers!
- 'We won't pay for their crisis' - tens of thousands march for jobs, justice and climate on 28 March
- Police prepare to provoke violence and attack demonstrators
- Campaign Against Climate Change holds trade union conference

www.workerspower.com

LATEST NEWS INCLUDES:

- Irish Congress of Trade Unions' shameful sell-out
- Waterford occupation goes down to defeat
- Days of action in France: we need an indefinite general strike to win
- Coup attempt in Madagascar must be resisted
- The Crisis in the global car industry
- League proposal to the EPA: We won't pay for their wars and their crisis! Organise the resistance Europe-wide!

www.fifthinternational.org

EDITORIAL

Spread the occupations

Forty thousand marched through London to tell world leaders at the G20 summit that the working class shouldn't be forced to pay for the bankers' economic crisis. On 1 April, thousands more invaded the City of London.

Demonstrators were furious that governments have spent trillions bailing out bankers, but sit on their hands while around the world hundreds of thousands are losing their jobs every month.

Within days workers facing job cuts took direct action. Workers at Visteon car components factories in West Belfast, Basildon and Enfield were outraged when bosses axed 565 jobs without decent redundancy pay – so they occupied their factories.

And they are not the only ones forced by the crisis to take matters into their own hands. In the same week parents outraged at a threat to two primary schools on the Barracks estate in Glasgow showed they weren't going to let their children be forced to pay for the bosses' crisis – and they occupied the schools.

Messages of support have flooded in to Visteon and to the Glasgow schools occupations. Thousands of workers up and down the country can see that this is a really important step forward in the fight to stop the bosses forcing working class people to pay for the economic crisis.

But so can the bosses, the government and the police. They are terrified of a massive wave of resistance this spring and summer. They want to stop it – by police violence and legal repression. The Visteon workers in Basildon were intimidated into leaving their occupation by the arrival of a massive force of police in riot gear who threatened to storm the plant. Demonstrators in the City of London were subjected to "the kettle" – being penned in for hours without access to water or toilets, effectively arrested without charge. They were subjected to baton attacks from which one person died. The aim in both cases is to intimidate people into backing down.

Times of capitalist crisis like these reveal the truth of what Marx and Engels said, that "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole capitalist class", and that its real core is "special bodies of armed men, with material adjuncts,

courts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds." We can see this clearly as the government saves the wealthy bankers and industrialists from the consequences of their actions but consigns their workforces to the dole queue at a moments notice. When did the police ever evict capitalists or arrest them for stealing our pension funds and redundancy pay?

Let's build up solidarity and support for the occupations. Send messages of support, visit the protests, demand the police and bosses back down when workers are threatened with the law for defending their rights.

Messages of support have flooded in to Visteon and to the Glasgow schools occupations

Above all let's follow the example of the Visteon workers and the Glasgow parents wherever jobs are axed or pay is cut. Let's spread a wave of occupations against closures and cuts across the country. Let's link up with similar occupations in France and make it Europe-wide.

And if the employers dare to call on the anti-union or trespass laws against workers, we need to be ready to defend the occupations on the spot and the trade union movement should call a general strike until the bosses back down.

One man with the power to call six million workers out on strike is TUC general secretary Brendan Barber. He told a rally of workers marching against the G20 in Hyde Park that world leaders should take 'action' to stop the crisis. But he never said what action he was going to call. He left the stage without calling for a single minute of action, without a word of support for workers at Prisme in Dundee who at that very minute were occupying their factory against closure.

As he left the stage, TUC organisers played a video on a giant screen which scrolled through a

long list of job losses in plants, offices and shops the length and breadth of Britain. It made for grim viewing. So why won't the TUC do anything about it?

Brendan Barber could start by calling a one-day general strike to show the bosses our strength. The French workers have done it. Why won't he?

The contrast between the heroism of the workers at Visteon and the inaction of the TUC is stunning.

The lesson is clear. In every union and every industry, we need to organise from below – to build action with the union leaders where possible and without them where necessary.

We should link up from below and build committees of action in every town and city, bringing together working class people from every workplace threatened with job cuts, every community facing cuts in schools and hospitals.

The Labour Party of Brown and Mandelson has paid billions to the bankers and the bosses and is kicking workers in the teeth. If they can nationalise banks just to save them from their losses, why can't they nationalise companies declaring job losses? The workers could then manage and run these industries ourselves as part of a planned economy – to meet public need, not private greed.

If all the banks were nationalised they could be merged into a single state bank and used to direct funds where it is needed to run a socialist planned economy in the interests of all.

That would mean Labour breaking with the capitalists – something they have no intention of doing.

So if Labour's helping the bosses and not the workers, why are our unions paying millions to the Labour Party? Across industry, across the private and the public sector, in every factory and shop, the call should go up now for the unions to stop funding Labour and to set up a new workers' party instead.

A new workers' party could unite the working class in a fight against the capitalist system of crisis and unemployment.

The system isn't working – but the workers are the overwhelming majority in this society. We have the power to take over in a revolution and run society ourselves.

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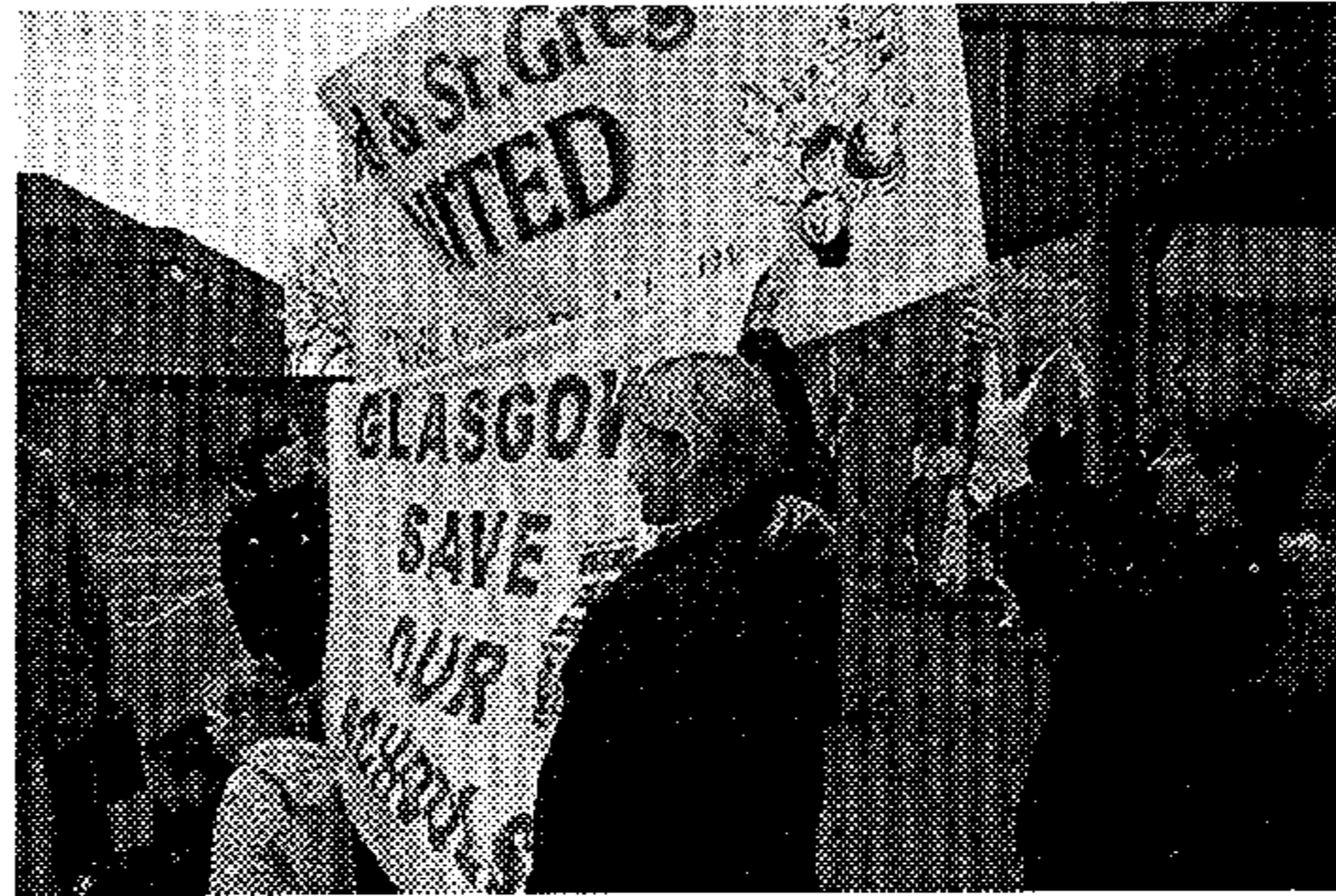
Glasgow parents occupy primary schools

On the afternoon of Friday 3 April, parents and children began a well-organised sit-in of St Gregory's and Wyndford schools. *Billy McKean* reports on their spirited defence of education

Glasgow City Council will make a final decision on plans to shut down 13 primaries and 12 nurseries on 23 April. Parents intend to remain in occupation at the very least until their children return to school on the 20 April. Resolve is strong and morale high; there is a good chance the occupation will hold out for longer.

St. Gregory's and Wyndford both serve the long-suffering Wyndford or "Barracks" estate in Maryhill. The BBC has sought to paint the cuts with a progressive veneer, alleging that parents want a merger. The occupiers have answered those who seek to divide parents on this basis with the slogan "Wyndford and St. Gregory's united will never be divided" on their banner.

Council bosses intend to save £3.7m in their cutbacks - the same sum planned for allocation to local property developers "affected by the recession". Scottish National Party MSP Bob Doris pointed out at a mass meeting of the Save Our Schools campaign in February that £100,000 of savings would come from axing staff. The necessity of



taking the fight into the unions is not lost on the occupiers who invited EIS teachers' union member Bob Fotherington to speak on their rally.

Despite some left-posturing and bluster from Labour and SNP MSPs over the proposed closures - with Doris speaking of his "utmost support and encouragement" for the occupation - not a single Glasgow Labour councillor has spoken out against the schools massacre. Council chief Steven Purcell has become a central hate figure;

over 100 angry Barracks residents chanted at the rally: "We shall not be moved - not by your Labour, your Purcell, nor your government!"

Full-time mum Alison, whose youngest daughter is a pupil at Wyndford, told Workers Power: "Labour won't get in the Wyndford again" and made it clear that accepting a joint campus is a last resort. Her spirits were high, but she told us that the council's plans are untenable. Wyndford pupils would have to travel 1.4 miles to school in Sum-

merston, but it is illegal for parents to put their 4-11 year-olds alone on the bus. Meanwhile, police have attested in writing that the narrow stretch of pavement along the busy Maryhill Road is far too dangerous for children to walk alone.

Save Our Schools organiser and prominent Scottish Socialist Party member, Richie Venton, proposed a midweek local march but failed to call for extending the occupations in the crucial weeks preceding the council decision on the 23 April. An honest mistake? We'll be asking why in the coming weeks as we look for support to spread the occupations.

Messages of support for the occupiers have been sent Prisma factory occupiers in Dundee and the Visteon workers in Enfield and West Belfast. Students involved in the occupations at Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities also showed up in numbers, as did parents from schools across the city.

One mother, Tracey from Victoria Primary in Govanhill, summed up the mood when she said: "We're all going to win if we all stick together". Quite right!

Postal unions: time for action against privatisation

By a CWU rep

The government is getting worried about its plans to privatise Royal Mail. A key parliamentary subcommittee has rejected the need for it, while a backbench revolt has seen 147 Labour MPs sign a motion against privatisation. According to *the Mirror*, John Prescott has started secret talks with CWU union leaders to salvage a compromise: trust status, like the BBC, in

exchange for "modernisation", i.e. massive job losses and office closures. Union activists should watch our leaders and pile on the pressure for no concessions. We don't need another half step towards privatisation. The government is wobbling, so let's push them over.

But CWU leaders Billy Hayes and Dave Ward have other plans. For months they have been trying to get Royal Mail to stop imposing cuts and hold negotiations for a nation-

al agreement, in return for the union accepting some cuts.

The problem is Royal Mail isn't listening. The union has asked branches to refuse changes, but these are being imposed anyway and locally postal workers are demanding ballots for strike action. Edmonton in North London has taken two rounds of strike action already against imposed cuts to hours and hiked workload, while the London division is threatening

to ballot the whole region.

Instead of endless negotiations, while Royal Mail imposes cuts, and lobbying MPs, when the government will rely on the Tories to inflict privatisation, we need a national strike against restructuring and privatisation. Action works - Bristol branch forced Royal Mail to back down from its proposals after going through with a ballot. Now activists need to demand the London ballot goes national.

Visteon: bosses climb down

By Peter Main

Occupations work! That is the first lesson of the disputes at Visteon plants in Belfast, Enfield and Basildon. Last week, management at the three plants simply ignored workers' rights and announced that all 565 were to be sacked without warning or notice. No negotiation, no consultation, no argument. At Enfield the whole meeting lasted just six minutes!

Outraged by the company's arrogance, the workers responded with direct action. First in Belfast and the following day in Enfield, they occupied their plants, demanding at the very least that their contractual rights to redundancy payments be implemented. A week later Visteon not only agreed to talk, but to fly a union delegation to the US to meet the executives of the parent corporation.

The climbdown was announced on 6 April, at the Central Criminal Court in London, where Kevin Nolan, Unite convenor at Enfield, had been summoned for refusing to obey a court injunction.

At a solidarity rally he had made it clear that there would be no backing down by the workers: "If I have to go to jail, then I have to go to jail. I've got nothing left to lose and anyway it will probably be a more comfortable bed than I've had for the last three days."

It was this, and solidarity action, such as the refusal of Ford workers at Southampton to handle Visteon products, that forced management into negotiations.

All the plants were part of the Ford motor corporation until 2000, when they were sold off to the



Visteon workers and supporters picket the court in London

US-based Visteon. Part of that deal was that the workers would retain their previous Ford contracts and conditions, including pension rights. Last week, Visteon refused to recognise those rights or even guarantee workers their wages.

The administrators, KPMG, say the firm has never been profitable, has losses of £669m and cannot afford redundancy and pension payments. So Ford simply hived off the plants to cut its losses, while continuing to be their main customer. Now Ford denies any responsibility.

Although the closures came without warning, Visteon has been planning this move for a long time. As Frank Jepson, Unite convenor at Basildon, told the rally: "They began outsourcing work to non-UK suppliers in 2006."

Rank and file control

By occupying their plants, the Visteon workers stopped the firm in its tracks and took the initiative. They are absolutely right to insist on maintaining the occupations while negotiations take place. Now they have to make sure they keep control of their dispute.

The Unite delegation, which includes not only Kevin Nolan but also joint General Secretary Derek Simpson, will be under pressure to compromise... and Simpson is a professional compromiser. Unlike Visteon UK, the US parent company cannot hide behind bankruptcy claims. The delegation should make no deals on anything less than the workers' full rights, including pension entitlements. And everything should be

brought back for decision by mass meetings.

Of course, even if Visteon concedes in full, that would still mean closure and the loss of 565 jobs. A defeat for Visteon would be a hollow victory for the workers. Could anything more positive be won?

The occupation tactic is powerful because it denies the company control over its property. It means they cannot cut their losses by selling off equipment and real estate. It puts the workers in control. But that raises the question, "what should the workers do with the factory?"

That question will certainly be posed if Visteon does not concede. All firms claiming bankruptcy as a reason to sack workers and close plants should immediately be nationalised, with no compensation for the owners who ran them into the ground. The government has now nationalised the greater part of the banking system; that gives it the means to keep workers employed and to develop alternative plans for production. If they can bail out banks, they can bail out jobs.

As the recession deepens, there will be many more bankruptcies and attempts to close factories. What the Visteon workers have done is an example to all the workers who will be faced with redundancy. Occupations not only force concessions out of the bosses, they also show the need for a society-wide solution, the overthrow of the system where production is geared to private profit.

Victory to the Visteon occupations!

For more info call mobile phone in factory - 07799 896 466

Yorkshire Post: the fight goes on

By Keith Sellick, NUJ

Journalists at the Yorkshire Post and Yorkshire Evening Post are engaged in the biggest dispute in regional newspapers for 20 years. The (National Union of Journalists has already been on strike for a month to defend jobs and is planning a new round of strikes in mid-April.

Johnston Press, which owns the titles, has debts of £500m, its shares have fallen from £4.70 to just 7p and it is slashing jobs across the UK.

Not that this affected former chief executive at Johnston Tim Bowdler, who left the compa-

ny with a pay-out of just over £1m - half of that as a "performance" bonus! No wonder 97 per cent of union members voted for strike action.

The striker also told us other Johnston titles need to join the strike. NUJ members in Wakefield, Dewsbury and Sheffield are balloting to strike, as are those in Burnley, Nelson and Clitheroe in Lancashire.

But it's not just Johnston. Last month, 400 redundancies were announced at Northcliffe in Kent and Essex, 50 at Eastern Daily Press and 250 at Guardian Media Group in Surrey, Berkshire and the North West.

We need a coordinated national strike action

across all regional newspapers - even if this means breaking the anti-trade union laws, which prevent workers from separate workplaces from defending jobs together.

The Halifax chapel last month called for such a strike. Now the NUJ Left supports one. The Yorkshire strikes have inspired us all - now we must return the favour by showing them we have the courage to break the law and stand up for all of our colleagues.

Benefit for striking journalists

Wednesday 15 April, from 7.30pm

Bar B Lo, 76 Marchmont Street, London WC1

More details at www.nujleft.org

WORKPLACE

Lessons of the Waterford occupation

By Dave Stockton

The magnificent eight-week occupation by workers at Waterford Crystal has ended in defeat. According to the Irish Times, workers were "left bitter and resentful after calling off action" The Irish Independent reporter said they were "ashen-faced yet simmering, [as they] left a long and 'angry' meeting of Unite union members".

Crystal blower Billy Kelly who has worked at the plant for 30 years said: "It's very sad and it's a bitter pill to swallow. The Government didn't come on board with this whatsoever; we were on our own. The gun was put to our head... We had no choice, the union's back was against the wall."

The gun Kelly was referring to was the threat to withdraw a 10 million euro "ex gratia payment" for dismissed workers, to be shared out on the basis of length of service at the Kilbarry plant.

The purchaser of the Waterford Wedgwood group is a private equity fund - KPS Capital Partners. It is interested only in the world famous

brand names, not the Waterford manufacturing facility. It seems "Waterford Crystal" will be made somewhere in the Far East, Eastern Europe or Latin America.

The original company once employed 3,000 people in Waterford, but a series of downsizings over the past twenty years left only around 485 workers to be made redundant, when it went into bankruptcy on 5 January. According to the agreement with the new owners, it will have just 176 employees in the city, mainly on the administration and tourism side. However, even those jobs are only guaranteed for six months.

Unite, is now hoping the Irish government will at least save the employees' pension scheme, currently about 110 million euros in deficit, or - an even longer shot - the European Commission will to step in. Given the Irish government and employer's present stance this would seem a forlorn hope.

Tragedy

This is a tragic conclusion to a very brave fight. The workers have clearly succumbed in part to the sheer

brute economic power of their exploiters. First their long-term exploiters in the bankrupt company ran the company into the ground, stole their pensions and have no doubt moved on to greener pastures and other workers to exploit. The new gang of asset strippers, who have taken it over, and the Irish government have threatened them to take the "ex gratia" redundancy payments or get nothing beyond the dole.

But the role of Unite and the ITUC in all this should be closely investigated. The union seems to have concentrated all its efforts on the search for benevolent capitalists and cartels of local businessmen to take it on. It seems the active solidarity, which the officials mobilised, was minimal, certainly not what the Waterford workers needed and deserved.

For all this the Waterford workers were 100 per cent right to occupy the plant. Without this they would not have got a penny out of the company. But the danger that always faces an occupation is isolation and delay, thus allowing the greater economic might of capital to grind them down. This power cannot be overcome by

lobbying governments and businessmen.

Politics

Only a political campaign, mobilising nationwide other workers to take solidarity action that hits their own employers and hits the state too, could force major concessions, such as nationalisation with no compensation to the bankrupts, who exploited the workers for so long. And it is in the direct interest of these workers themselves to come to the aid of an occupation, like Waterford, indeed to repeat their example in every firm trying to layoff its workforce, close or relocate.

We are at the beginning of a tidal wave of closures and redundancies. The further it is allowed to go, the weaker and more divided the unions will be. Now is the time to fight back.

The only adequate response is a tidal wave of occupations and strikes - a general strike - that will show the power of the working class to say "no" and, beyond that, to offer a solution to the crisis, workers' power and socialism.

G20 hypocrisy on tax havens

By Joel Lands

The G20 leaders have hailed their summit as a success after - among other promises - making a pledge to impose sanctions against tax havens and also clamp down on corporate tax avoidance.

Yet, as the industrial slump means a collapse in profits, corporations and the rich are desperate to decrease what they pay in tax in order to boost their balance sheets.

Even in the "boom years" tax evasion was rife. An estimated US\$255 billion is lost globally in tax every year from rich individuals with more than \$1m in cash or "liquid" assets, who together hold a colossal \$11.5 trillion in off-shore accounts.

Immediately following the summit, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a list of tax havens, particularly condemning Costa Rica, Malaysia, Philippines and Uruguay.



Don't be fooled, though. There is some slight of hand going on here. The OECD's black list has some blatant omissions. For example, Guernsey and Jersey are not even mentioned.

Indeed, of the world's 72 major tax havens, 35 - so nearly half - have links to the UK. And even in Britain tax avoidance is rife. The City of London grants massive tax

breaks to so-called "non-domiciles", i.e. rich individuals who are not registered as living in Britain even if they spend most of their time here. §

Since the 1970s, many governments have followed the example of the UK/US and massively shifted the tax burden from the rich to the poor. There is a lot of talk now of the "end of Anglo-Saxon capital-

ism" and the "Washington consensus" but, while the world is certainly changing, none of the G20 have suggested reversing this trend of wealth distribution.

It is in the nature of capitalism that the rich will move money to where it will make the most profit and be taxed the least. Also, the division of the world into nation states under capitalism means there will never be one global state to enforce a global taxation regime.

So what's the answer? It's up to the working class to fight for a punitive taxation regime on the rich everywhere. The only way tax avoidance can end is when businesses are forced to open their books for inspection by their workers, who have no interest in allowing billionaires to dodge tax. While the 20 richest countries raised the issue of tax dodging at the London summit, it is down to the millions of workers, who have an interest in wealth redistribution from the rich to the poor, to actually fight for it.

STUDENTS

Universities plan to cut jobs and courses for working class

A *UCU member* reports on the fight to save up to 700 jobs at London Metropolitan University. Below, *James Roberts*, a student activist, talks about the campaign against cuts in Liverpool

London Metropolitan is a university in crisis – a crisis created by its own management. In early March, the Higher Education Funding Council for England announced that it was cutting £18m from the university's teaching budget and also "clawing back" £38m because of man-

agement's misreporting of student numbers.

The Met's immediate response was to propose 330 jobs cuts, which would inevitably threaten not only individual courses but the overall range of provision. Days later, Vice Chancellor Brian Roper announced his resignation, leaving no one with

formal responsibility for the financial mess. Management proposed that, within the statutory 90 days for negotiation, the University and College Union (UCU) and Unison should agree to two weeks of consultation over a voluntary redundancy programme.

The requirement that these take place over Easter shows how serious that proposal was. Clearly, the real intention was to plan for compulsory redundancies at the end of the teaching year.

Now, management has announced their "strategic plan". This, at least, lays bare what their real intentions are: they want to rationalise course provision, increase "throughput" of students and "modernise" course delivery. In other words, they want to reduce the number and length of courses and possible combinations of courses, and to replace lecturers and support staff with "virtual" learning programmes.

This would lead to a reduction of 550 full-time equivalent jobs, as many as 700 actual posts, approximately one quarter of the total establishment. This goes to the heart of London Met's character as a university that has taken the need to recruit its students from "non-traditional" backgrounds. Currently, it has more students from ethnic minority communities than all of the so-called elite universities of the Russell Group put together.

As we go to press, UCU has voted to ballot for industrial action and Unison has taken the decision in principle, if no progress is made in negotiations. Clearly, strike action is required quickly, before the end of the academic year. However, the scale of management's plans show that what is needed is not only a defence of jobs but a campaign to gain control over the university itself, so that those who work and learn there can decide what is taught and how it is taught.

Fight the cuts at Liverpool Universities

Workers Power: *What are the effects of the proposed cuts at the two universities?*

James Roberts: The four departments they are proposing to cut at Liverpool University are politics, philosophy, statistics and probability, and American studies. This is based on RAE research statistics, showing how much money they generate. They're nothing to do with the quality of the courses.

At John Moores [James' university], they're axing 34 courses and restructuring departments. They claimed the funding council forced them to cut their intake, but we now know this isn't true.

Overall, it's an attack on local Scouse youth. Sixty per cent of John Moores intake comes from lower income backgrounds. Both universities have promised alternatives but these are only fine if you have enough money to move to another city.

WP: *How are the campaigns going? What actions are there?*

JR: There was a demonstration of about 700 people a couple of weeks ago outside the meeting where the Liverpool Uni cuts were being ratified. As a result they reworded the resolution to delete reference to "mandatory closures" but only to insert a "consultation" process. The main problem with this is the Vice Chancellor, Howard Newby, who slashed departments when he was at LWE in Bristol.

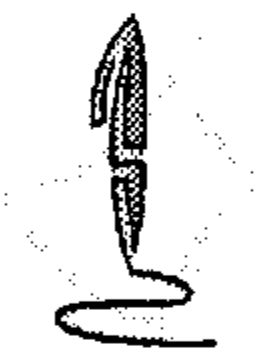


Since then it's gone a bit quiet, mainly because the students' union is run by Conservative Future – the Tory youth group, but also because the universities kind of shut down for exams. To overcome this, lecturers and students at both universities are now getting together as a group. On 9 May there is a city-wide demo in defence of higher education. UCU at Liverpool and John Moore's are on board, but Conservative Future's dragging its feet.

WP: *At London Met, the attack is also aimed at its diverse student intake and character. It sounds like this is the case at John Moores. How can the campaign be linked to the fight for control over what is taught and how it is taught?*

JR: John Moores style of management is entirely corporate. The unions and the student union are completely ignored, so we're aiming to reclaim a bit of control. We're actively discussing this.

Letter from Leeds council worker



Dear **workers power**

I am a shop steward for Unison Leeds Local Government branch, working in social care supporting people with learning disabilities to live independently in the local community.

This is a vital service for any civilised society, yet one that is under attack and undervalued in the maniac, anti-human system we call capitalism. Meanwhile, the big bankers, who screw up society and cause thousands of people to lose their jobs and homes, have praise and pay rises heaped upon them.

Leeds City Council sacked one of our most respected shop stewards, John McDermott of East North East Leeds Housing, in February merely for doing his legal

duties as a steward.

Without agreement, the council want to remove some of our customary holidays, impose car park charges for staff and make it quicker to sack people. They intend to cut hundreds of jobs, making the rest of us work harder while the service suffers. They are bypassing our union and if we don't strike against this there will be more to come.

We need to raise trade union ideas with council staff. There is a lack of union visibility among colleagues that needs to be tackled. We need a fighting, strong and militant trade union. These days, when the capitalists are putting the boot into society's poorest people, we need this more than ever.

It's time for a new, fighting students' movement

As the National Union of Students turns its back on the struggle to defend education, *Simon Hardy* reports on grassroots activists' moves to organise afresh

On 18 April, hundreds of students, radicalised by the wave of university occupations around the defence of Gaza, will come together to create a new national student coordination. Its aim will be to be more democratic and act in defence of students' rights and as a direct challenge to the National Union of Students (NUS).

The aim of the coordination is to:

- Link up with students internationally in struggle against other forms of injustice, particularly those fighting the "Bologna process" in Europe.
- Draw in school and college students who face many of the same problems as students at the universities.
- Encourage coordinations at a local level, drawing in all these students and allowing cross-campus organisation in cities and towns.
- Provide an alternative avenue for campaigning both alongside existing student union executives where possible, but without them where necessary.
- Provide a space to assess and debate what our education should look like and challenge the increasing corporatisation and privatisation of our education system.

These are exactly the things that the NUS should be campaigning around, but they're not.

NUS conference shuts out left

The passing of the Governance Review at the extraordinary NUS conference earlier this year has cemented the power of an undemocratic clique within the NUS, as proved by events at its recent conference. The current leadership, an alliance between the Labour Students and a group called the Organised Independents, consolidated their grip on the NUS. They ruled the conference with an iron fist, whipping up anti-socialist prejudices among the delegates and strutting around like the



The occupation at Manchester University, which lasted over a month this winter and won all the students' demands

young bureaucrats and wanna-be parliamentarians that they are.

There were few important or meaningful debates at the conference. Those debates that did occur were the result of the socialist groups intervening on key issues such as free education. A number of unopposed motions were placed at the front of the conference order paper, leaving the more important issues like Gaza at the end, which meant that they fell off the agenda due to time constraints. The resolutions that were taken were banal, offering an opportunity for the reformist candidates to speak in favour in order to raise their profile for the elections.

The reality is that the right-wing, undemocratic nature of the conference in no way reflects the growing mood of students for more radical action. The conference refused to support the recent university occupations and even voted against the NUS taking a position of defending those students involved. Many delegates called for these students to be expelled from the NUS!

Throughout the conference, the Organised Independents and Labour Student leadership hurled accusations at the left for being "divisive". A resolution put to conference from Manchester University called on the NUS to disaffiliate from Stop the War Coalition in protest over its "aggressive" tactics in the occupations. This was

not taken by the conference, where the argument could have been had out in front of 2,000 students, but instead referred to the incoming NEC, which is packed with people who are gunning for the real student activists and their organisations.

As a result of the Governance Review, conference was able to vote to pass important issues, such as scrutinising the financial accounts, over to a new body of mainly unelected "experts", the Board of Trustees.

Witch-hunters and managers

And who is on this Board? Shockingly, David Fletcher, Sheffield University's registrar and secretary, was elected – a management thug who threatened to take the Sheffield University occupiers to court in March. One Jaqueline Davies had a very lucky month indeed – not only was she elected onto the Board, she has also recently been made head of talent and executive resourcing at Lloyds Banking Group.

A university manager and a banker – their contribution to the NUS will be invaluable, we were told. Tom from the SWP summed up the correct attitude to the Board of Trustees when he shouted: "Smash the Trustee Board!"

The conference ended with some disgusting red-baiting. A motion of censure was proposed and passed by the conference against Rob

Owen (SWP) and Hind Hassan, a left activist from Leeds University, because of a stage invasion organised at the extraordinary conference earlier in the year – a result of the chair's refusal to allow time for discussion on the crisis in Gaza.

A disabled student proposed the motion of censure saying that the stage invasion had resulted in wheelchair users feeling intimidated and threatened. Wes Streeting, re-elected as president, pointed out that a student had a panic attack and that the actions of Owen and Hassan had been "divisive".

In reality this was an orchestrated and carefully synchronised attack on the left as punishment for daring to bring the protest movement into the heart of the NUS itself. Hassan and Owen fought back, pointing to the politically charged nature of the charges and the reason for the protest itself – the backsliding by the NUS when it refused to even discuss the Gaza crisis, let alone take a position on the massacre.

Standing ovations for the NUS leaders who denounced Rob and Hind were followed by a significant vote in favour of censure. The left delegates walked out in disgust.

Where next?

Debates have now opened up on the left over the future of our work in the NUS. It is an undeniable reality that a right wing shift has occurred and the new structures of the Governance Review will make it much harder for the left to intervene effectively.

Some, such as the AWL, are calling for a new student federation to replace the NUS. Others are still intent on fighting within the NUS for as long as possible, arguing that it is not impossible to "reclaim it". These and other important issues will be discussed at the 18 April student coordination meeting at UCL in London.

National Student Coordination
12:00 noon, 18 April
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1

WORKERS' HISTORY

Workers of the world unite on May Day

Worldwide demonstrations, like the G20 protests, have a long history. May Day, dating from the 1880s, is the oldest. Joy Macready recalls its origins and shows how we can use it today

May Day has, since its first fully international celebration in 1890, been a rallying point for workers in struggle. Slogans raised on its marches and rallies included the legal shortening of the working day, granting universal suffrage, the fight against wars and protests against tyrannical regimes from Tsarist Russia in the early 1900s to Apartheid South Africa in the 1980s.

In countries like Britain, May Day was seldom celebrated with enthusiasm by the Labour Party or TUC leaders. It really only takes off when great strikes or antiwar struggles are underway – as it did during the Miners' Strike in 1984-85. Faced with a crisis that threatens millions with unemployment, there are extra reasons to make May Day 2009 once more a militant festival of resistance.

International Workers' Day

The origin of May Day is bound up with the struggle for the shorter workday – a historic demand of the working class. In the nineteenth century working 14, 16 even 18 hours a day was universal, as in many sweatshops today. So in many countries the early workers' movement raised the slogan "eight hours work, eight hours recreation and eight hours rest".

The First International (1864-1876), an organisation of working class parties and unions, stressed the significance of this demand at its Geneva Congress in September 1866:

"The legal limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvements and emancipation of the working class must prove abortive....The Congress proposes eight hours as the legal limit of the working day."

In 1884, the US trade union movement adopted a historic resolution declaring the eight-hour day "to constitute a legal day's labour from and after 1 May 1886".

Eight-hour day leagues and associations sprang up in many cities; drawing the unions and unorganised workers together and developing alongside an escalating strike movement.

On 1 May 1886 came a massive wave of strikes and demonstrations

**'Join the struggle
of our brothers,
stand with them
under a common
flag upon which
is inscribed:
Workers of the
World, Unite!'
– V. I. Lenin**

with up to a half a million participating. Nearly 200,000 American workers shortened their working day by up to five hours. There was still far to go – millions still laboured over eight hours a day – but a great first step had been made.

Haymarket Martyrs

Then police attacked a workers demonstration on 4 May in Chicago, the centre of the movement. A bomb was thrown, killing a police sergeant. Four anarchists were framed up and executed (later they were exonerated). They became immortalised as the Haymarket Martyrs by the international workers movement and ever after honoured on May Day.

The newly founded American Federation of Labour, regrouping after the harsh repression following Haymarket, began a popular campaign for action on 1 May 1890. An international meeting of Social-

ist parties in Paris in 1889, founding the Second International, agreed to this and declared 1 May as a day on which the workers of the world were to fight for the eight-hour day. The first May day was a great success with possibly over a million workers marching or striking, many illegally.

Engels called attention to the significance of the first International Workers' Day mobilisation:

"As I write these lines, the proletariat of Europe and America is holding a review of its forces; it is mobilised for the first time as one army, under one flag, and fighting for one immediate aim: an eight-hour working day."

While leaders of the Second International's unions and parties were to retreat from strike action on May Day in the future, it remained a focal point for the international working class wherever it was strongly organised, combative or in struggle.

Lenin, on the revolutionary wing of the Second International, saw May day as a key event for the workers movement to take stock of – "the victories over the bosses during the preceding year and lay plans for struggle in the future". The Bolsheviks worked hard to introduce the tradition into Russia and build it as a focus for struggles, such as the protest movement after the 1912 massacre of miners in the Lena goldfields.

May Day today

May day's political nature is shown by the other slogans that have been raised on it since, such as Universal Suffrage, War Against War, Against Colonial Oppression, Free Political Prisoners – and many more. Last year US dockers staged a May day strike against the Iraq occupation, in solidarity with Iraqi unions.



The recession is already taking its toll on jobs as the bosses try to make the workers pay for their crisis. Two million unemployed in Britain could top three million by next year. The OECD expects the crisis will swell the number of unemployed by 25 million in the top 30 industrialised countries in 2010.

It is time for the workers' organisations to fight this with demonstrations, strikes and occupations. We should call on the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and union leaders to organise a coordinated response, as Workers Power chanted on the demonstration against the G20 – "TUC, here us say; general strike on first of May".

Turning our back on protectionism and chauvinism, embodied in the "British jobs for British workers" slogan, we need to espouse the internationalism that May day embodies.

As Lenin wrote in April 1896 in preparation for 1 May: "It is high time for us Russian workers to break the chains with which the capitalists and the government have bound us in order to keep us in subjection. It is high time for us to join the struggle of our brothers, the workers in other lands, to stand with them under a common flag upon which is inscribed: Workers of the World, Unite!"

RMT launch nationalist platform for elections

The RMT has launched a "No to the EU - Yes to Democracy" platform to stand in the Euro elections. *Luke Cooper* argues that the left should not support this nationalist electoral bloc

The RMT and *The Morning Star*/Communist Party of Britain drew up this platform behind closed doors, with no open invitation to join the electoral campaign and no democratic discussion over its politics. It was not even mentioned at January's RMT-organised conference on working class political representation. Since its launch, the initiative has won support from the Socialist Party's front organisation, the Campaign for a New Workers' Party, and Tommy Sheridan's Solidarity in Scotland.

The platform has a short list of ten demands:

- Reject the Lisbon Treaty.
- No to EU directives that privatise our public services.
- Defend and develop British manufacturing.
- Repeal European Court of Justice (ECJ) anti-trade union rulings and no to social dumping.
- No to racism and fascism.
- No to EU militarisation.
- Restore democracy to EU member states.
- Replace unequal EU trade deals with fair trade that benefits developing nations.
- Scrap EU economic rules designed to stop member states from implementing reflationary policies.
- Keep Britain out of the Eurozone.

Workers Power would normally welcome a union-led platform standing against Labour in elections as step towards a new workers' party, even if the process had not been as democratic as we would like. But the fact is that these 10 demands are not a working class platform. On the contrary, by emphasising opposition to the European Union, and defending "British" democracy and industry, its programme echoes the nationalist UK Independence Party.

We don't need to support the EU to know that making every one of our electoral demands "anti-EU" fosters illusions in British capitalism. This focus on the EU inevitably implies that everything wrong with Britain started and finished in Brussels. Just look at how "No to EU" attacks the anti-trade union rulings of the ECJ. Certainly the ECJ has made reactionary judgements and workers across all of Europe must oppose them - but Britain has the most reactionary anti-trade union laws in Western Europe. The recent one-day general strikes in France against the crisis would be illegal here.

The call to restore democracy "to EU member states" also fosters unjustified illusions in national parliaments. How democratic are our House of Lords, our monarchy, and our House of Commons, whose members we only get to elect twice a decade? The British capitalist



state is no more or less democratic than the institutions of the EU - although, given that it controls an army and police force, it does have a lot more power to attack our struggles.

By emphasising opposition to the European Union, and defending 'British' democracy and industry, its programme echoes the nationalist UKIP

The bottom line is that the European capitalists are no better or worse than our own. EU directives are no worse than laws passed in Westminster. Indeed the Lisbon Agenda was modelled on Thatcher and Blair's measures already long in force in Britain. We need to fight privatisations and cuts in services wherever they come from. In this struggle we need the support of our brothers and sister across the Channel. French, British and German corporations have workforces all over Europe and we need to fight together against them, not divide ourselves on national lines. Those fine old slogans on our union banners - "Unity is Strength", "Workers of All Countries Unite" - really come into their own at times like this.

While disappointing, the emergence of this nationalist labour movement platform is unsurprising given recent events. The sad truth is that the first major round of industrial struggle by workers against the crisis adopted the reactionary

slogan "British jobs for British workers". A section of the British trade union leadership is now actively pushing a campaign that blames the wrong people for job losses: foreign workers instead of the bosses.

The "No to EU" platform contrasts quite sharply with the People's Charter project, which the RMT is also sponsoring. There are certainly problems with the People's Charter - it doesn't say how its proposed reforms could be won or paid for, has no strategy beyond a call for progressive parliamentary legislation and does not call for a workers' government founded through revolutionary action from below. But the Charter's demands are still far better than the "No to EU" Campaign.

They include, for example:

- Reduce hours, not pay, to create more jobs.
- Raise the minimum wage to half national median earnings and scrap the lower youth rate.
- Stop repossessions. Give local government the power and money to build and renovate affordable quality homes.
- No cuts in public services. Save public money: bring energy, transport, water, post and telecoms back into public ownership.
- End corporate profiteering in health, education, social and other public services. Stop the EU privatisation directives.
- End racism and discrimination in all its forms. No scapegoating of migrant workers.

The Charter does not raise the need to expropriate industry and run it under workers' control, or call for taxes on the rich, and promotes Keynesian instead of anti-capitalist measures, which is why we don't think the People's Charter is at all adequate. But if it is really the programme of the RMT leadership, why don't they use the European elections as an opportunity to publicise it to millions, to offer an alternative to those who otherwise may sink into apathy, or, worse, be driven to the right?

Many comrades in the RMT rightly see the need to do something due to the possibility that the BNP could make a breakthrough in these elections by winning a Euro seat. This is indeed an alarming prospect. But we can't fight the BNP - or UKIP for that matter - by appropriating their slogans like "British jobs for British workers".

That's why the whole Left and working class movement should oppose the "No to EU" campaign. It's not a step forward. It's not the move to a new workers' party we urgently need, but a step backwards towards nationalism. Unless we stop this chauvinism that has broken out inside the labour movement, then we won't be able to unite and fight against the bosses.

TRADE UNIONS

Unite and fight to smash the anti-union laws

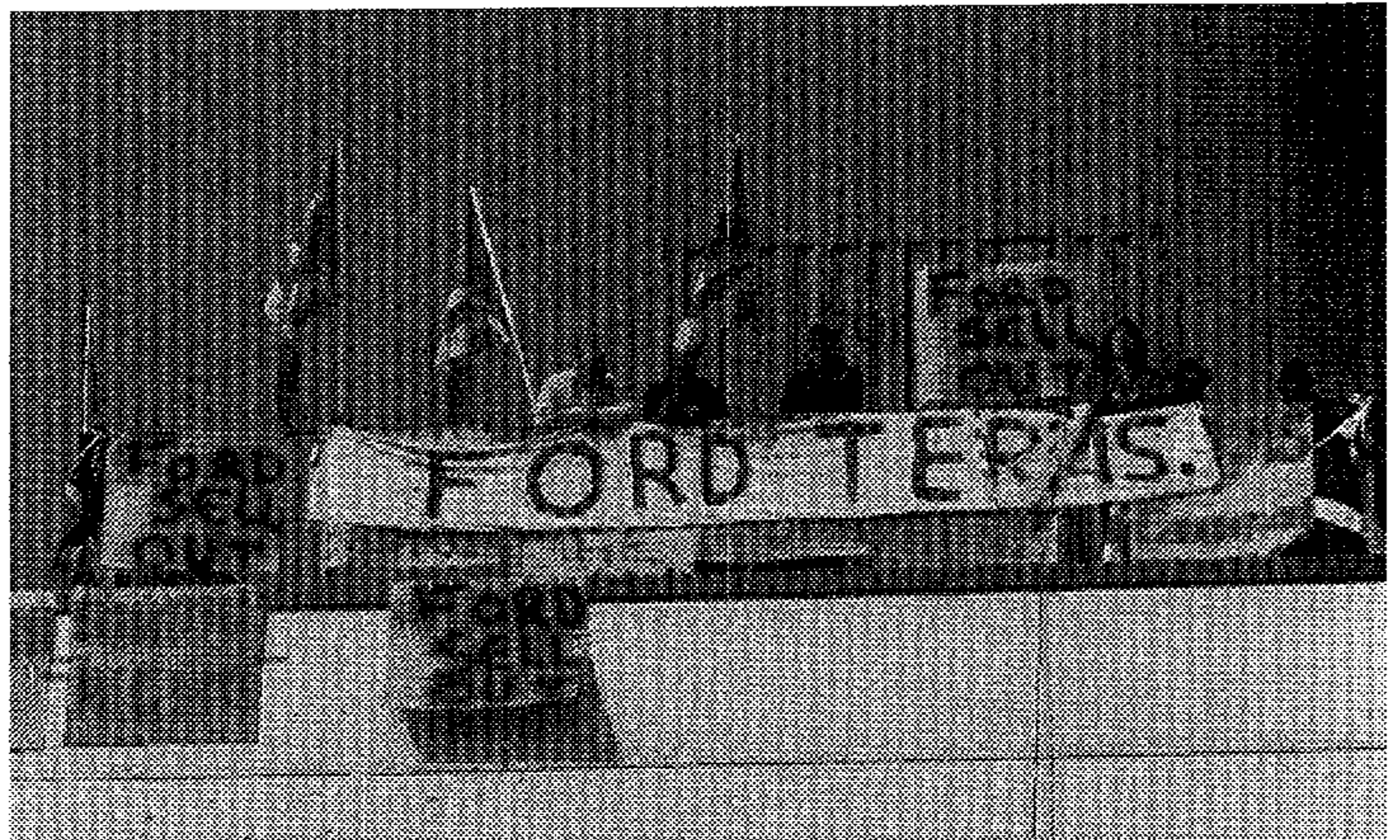
Militant action can put the anti union laws into the dustbin of history, argues *Rebecca Anderson*

As waves of job cuts rip through the British economy, the necessity of quick decisive strike action and walking out in support of other workers is clear. In the last few years, different groups of workers have broken the anti-union laws with no legal repercussions: the Gate Gourmet workers in the T&C walked out after threats of widespread job cuts in 2005; in 2007, the posties took wildcat strike action and the Prison Officers Association organised a one-day walk-out; and, most recently, construction workers in Unite organised reactionary wildcat strikes during the Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) dispute.

It is this type of working class action that the anti-trade union laws prohibit. They were brought in piecemeal over two decades by a Tory government reacting to the power of the British trade unions and the threat they posed to the Tory programme of privatisation. It started with the 1980 Employment Act, which made striking in solidarity with others illegal, abolished trade union recognition rights, restricted the numbers allowed on a picket line to six, and also restricted the right to a closed shop.

This was followed up with other laws that broadened the category of illegal solidarity action, for example international strikes against the same employer; banned political strikes; made balloting for action more difficult; made unions liable for "damages" caused by strikes, e.g. loss of profits; and made unions liable for all illegal action taken by their members unless they publically denounced them, in which case the members leading the illegal action could end up in prison.

The Tory government used this legislation to send in police to break up picket lines, fine trade unions, imprison strikers and intimidate the unions into passivity. The extensive legislation also illustrates the power and potential power that British trade unions had



Visteon workers, occupying their factory in Enfield, could be brutally evicted by the police under the law

up until the 1980s – and the power that they would possess if these laws were repealed or broken.

When the unions campaigned for Labour in the 1997 general election, the incoming government promised to repeal these laws. Yet 12 years later, these laws are still intact despite the fact that 90 per cent of Labour's funding comes from the trade unions. Britain has the most restrictive trade union legislation in Europe and a governing party that would collapse if it lost the financial support of trade unionists – precisely the class that it's attacking.

Despite the enormous power that the trade unions have over the Labour Party, union leaders refuse to use it. Last year the Labour National Policy Forum in Warwick was hailed a success because Labour agreed not to privatise Royal Mail if the unions dropped their demand for the repeal of the anti-trade union laws. Today, Mandelson and Brown are busy trying to privatise the post while the trade union leaders sit by and do nothing.

In recent months, trade union leaders have broken the anti-union laws when it suits them, e.g. when they are organising chauvinist strikes against Italian and Por-

tuguese workers, but then turn around and use them as an excuse not to take the action necessary to stop the government and bosses making the working class pay for the economic crisis.

Workers unite in struggle

The Gate Gourmet workers, the posties, prison officers and, despite the chauvinism of their strike, the LOR workers' actions show us the way forward: the anti-union laws can be defeated in struggle. Faced with a recession where workers across the UK and the world are facing the same attacks at the same time, workers must be able to walk out the instant the bosses announce job cuts and not have wait six weeks for the result of a postal ballot; Mini car workers must be able to walk out in solidarity with those who manufacture Volvos; and agency workers must strike alongside permanent staff.

The anti-union laws are already being broken, but even where the union leaders support it, as in the LOR strike, they refuse to generalise it and use it to fight all job cuts and unite workers in their struggles. Where they don't support it, as in the postal strike, the workers

taking illegal action are left isolated and can be demoralised by their leaders' unwillingness to defend their members.

Break the law – not the poor!

The working class battle cries of "One out, all out" and "Never cross a picket line" must be revived if we want to defend ourselves against increasingly vicious attacks. If the Labour Party won't repeal the anti-trade union laws then we must break them; if the trade union leaders won't break them, then we must organise among the rank and file of workers to do it ourselves and link up with other offices, shops or factories that are brave enough to take wildcat action. These laws are nothing compared to the power of the organised working class and the potential power of the millions of currently un-unionised workers in the UK. We can't let our leaders tell us otherwise.

Yes, the government might take legal action against us but the same solidarity and militancy used to break the laws can be used to defend ourselves against them. If we are to defend every job then we must take whatever action needed and not let the bosses' laws hold us back.

Northern Ireland shootings show British hypocrisy

By Bernie McAdam

The killings of two soldiers and a policeman in March by dissident Republican groups have been widely condemned by the Good Friday Agreement parties. The Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward called those responsible "barbaric criminals". Sinn Fein minister Martin McGuinness attacked the Real IRA (RIRA) and Continuity IRA (CIRA) as "traitors to the island of Ireland" and urged nationalists to assist the police.

In reality, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), already clamping down on the nationalist community, has now upped its intimidating police presence with raids and arrests of outspoken republicans such as Colin Duffy, who the police have harassed for years. Duffy and five others were detained without charge for 11 days, and, after the courts ordered his release, Duffy was re-arrested and charged with the soldiers' murders.

Socialists and anti-imperialists should not join this hypocritical and reactionary chorus of condemnation.

First, the British government cares little for the lives of troops it sends to Iraq, Afghanistan and Ireland. And it is downright hypocrisy coming from a government that throughout the "Troubles" perfected all the instruments of repression since used in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan: torture, internment without trial, juryless courts, collusion with right wing death squads and a shoot to kill policy.

Second, Britain has no right to occupy other countries and we should demand the immediate withdrawal of all British troops from all these places including Northern Ireland. If British troops were not occupying part of another country, then they would not be killed. Ultimately the government has put British soldiers in harm's way and bears full responsibility for their deaths, not those justifiably resisting imperialism.

It is the British government that provoked the attacks by deciding



Belfast demonstration against the shootings

to deploy the undercover Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR) against dissident republicans only days before. Such elite army units are hated for their role in Britain's dirty war against nationalists in the Troubles, which included assassinations.

Shootings: a dead end

However, the shootings by dissident republicans will only bring down further repression on these groups, and offer no way forward for Irish workers in their struggle against British imperialism. Tiny armed groups such as RIRA and CIRA focus solely on the "armed struggle", repeating the same mistakes of the Provisional IRA campaign but this time in a situation where they do not have mass support for such actions among the nationalist community. It reflects their delusion that small groups of fighters unrelated to the mass of workers can drive out British forces.

The fight for national liberation can only be successful if the working class, as a mass social force, comes to the head of a linked anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle.

An immediate campaign should be launched to demand the release of Colin Duffy and all republicans and the scrapping of the 28-day detention and anti-Terror laws, no involvement in the PSNI and Police Boards, and no deployment

of the hated SRR. As the basis of an anti-imperialist united front, this campaign could mobilise workers against repression and force Sinn Fein to break their partnership with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which defends British rule and Protestant privilege.

Such a mass mobilisation would rock the undemocratic Northern Ireland state and show the need for self-defence against state forces, with democratic, mass defence organisations against police incursions.

The national question

The national question is rooted in history, the 400-year long brutal occupation of Ireland and the 1921 partition of the island in the name of a minority Unionist population, ripping the industrial heart out of Ireland and leaving it poor and divided.

Today the national question will not go away because it is also rooted in the economic structure and the exploitative, semi-colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland, both North and South, even if its exploiters have diversified to include American and European multinationals. In Northern Ireland, Catholics remain relatively poor and Protestant workers privileged in jobs and housing, while the current capitalist crisis has revealed the weakness of the "Celtic Tiger".

Now Ireland is reeling from recession on both sides of the bor-

der and the possibilities exist to develop a revolutionary working class struggle against both British imperialism and the capitalist rulers of the South. Necessarily this will involve rejecting the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which did not allow a vote on a United Ireland and instead entrenched divisions.

Socialists argue for a mass workers' campaign against job losses, closures, cuts to welfare, and privatisation - one bringing together Nationalist and Unionist, Catholic and Protestant workers in common action against their exploiters. Occupations like the Derry Calcast workers last year and now the Visteon workers in Belfast point the way forward. Linking these struggles to the mass movement against the crisis in the South is vital.

Socialists should at the same time use such unity to explain to Protestant workers the role of imperialism in Ireland's economic problems. Demonstrations and strikes will expose the PSNI and convince workers that the same state powers used to repress the nationalist community will be used against the workers' movement and so must be opposed, bringing the two struggles closer together.

Much of the Left avoid this struggle to break Protestant workers from their unionist, pro-imperialist consciousness. The Socialist Party minimise or ignore unionist ideas, while the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and Ireland hope economic struggles will automatically overcome "sectarianism" for good. This conveniently ignores the national question and the fight against imperialism in Ireland.

The enormity of the crisis demands a workers government, North and South, based on the organisations of struggle of the workers themselves. For such a movement to develop Irish workers need to build revolutionary party with a programme linking the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles into a revolutionary challenge to both states and their British backers. No time to build it like now!

FRANCE

Sarkozy and unions heading for a decisive confrontation

By Jo Cassidy

The latest fashion in France is 'boss-napping.' Redundant workers at the Caterpillar factory in Grenoble barricaded their boss in his office, till he agreed to decent redundancy pay. Workers at pharmaceutical giant 3M and Sony took their bosses hostage, too.

Two one-day national strikes have taken place there in the last two months, the most recent on 19 March. Three million took to the streets in 200 towns across the country. The message of the demonstrators was against unemployment, public sector cuts and bailing out banks and private industry at the expense of the taxpayer.

Unions also demanded a higher minimum wage and an end to the 50 per cent tax ceiling for the rich. Strike action brought large parts of the country to a standstill, affecting rail, electricity and schools, as well as parts of the private sector such as the car industry, oil and retail.

In the education sector the movement, underway for nine weeks and having held a dozen demonstrations, shows no signs of weakening. On the 2 April, 31,000 people took part in demonstrations across France - 25,000 in Paris alone. The movement, which is comprised of teachers, researchers and students, is protesting against the Law for the Reform of the University (LRU). The LRU was introduced in 2007 and will give universities autonomy from the state in order for them to be run like private enterprises.

The movement is also opposed to reforms on the status of lecturers in higher education and the training of teachers - both of which will make the profession more precarious. Despite the government offering to withdraw and reassess aspects of the reforms, teachers rightly pledge to continue their struggle until all the reforms are permanently withdrawn. They will not be fooled by governmental manoeuvres to demobilise the struggle.

The backdrop to the intensifying class conflict is the deteriorating economy - shrinking at the fastest rate in 30 years. With a further 350,000 lay-offs predicted this year, unemployment is set to hit double figures and, as President Nicolas Sarkozy refuses to increase taxes on the rich in the face of a widening public spending deficit, further cuts in public services are certain. It is therefore no surprise that Sarkozy's popularity is plummeting.

With three quarters of the population supporting the national strikes, there is real potential for the French working class to force the entire government attack into retreat, if not chase Sarkozy from power. If this were to happen it would certainly encourage the working class all over Europe to follow suit.



However, the path to such a victory is not free of obstacles. The trade union leadership will not call another national strike until May Day, despite pressure from the rank and file and the Left. This is a piece of incredible stupidity at best; at worst it is a matter of outright sabotage. It will give Sarkozy the breathing space to regain control and rally support.

The strengthening of the class struggle on a local level, shown by the "boss-nappings" and teachers' protests, demonstrates the willingness among workers to take action and fight. Unfortunately their leaders do not share this willingness.

The New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), formed only a couple of months ago but already with 10,000 members, has criticised the union leaders for failing to take the struggles forward. They have written that "it is now the responsibility of the workers themselves in their workplaces and in their communities to take their struggle into their own hands and to strike and occupy."

The NPA is absolutely right - now is the time to step up the struggle, not to shy away from it. A recent victorious 44-day general strike in Guadeloupe, a Caribbean island that is part of the French Republic, points the way forward for the French working class.

The warning shots fired by the last two days of action must now be followed up by an indefinite general strike. The NPA is in a very good position to take the leadership of the resist-

ance in France. Unlike the traditional parties of the working class, the NPA has no stake in the capitalist system, which has caused the crisis, and have vowed not to enter into coalitions and alliances with capitalist parties.

The upcoming European elections will be a test for their popularity and they look set to do very well. A recent survey among the unemployed showed that 13.6 per cent support the NPA, as opposed to 6.5 per cent support for the Front National (the French fascist party), which has fallen over the last year.

It is the task of the NPA to unite the struggles against the crisis, against mass and declining wages, to the opposition to the education reform and the scapegoating of migrants into an all out and indefinite general strike.

The NPA needs to turn its emergency programme into an action programme for such a general strike. But also the NPA needs to recognise without an evasiveness that an all out general strike will create a dual power in society - will check the power of the bosses and their state in the workplaces and on the streets.

It will become a clash between the classes from which only one side can emerge victorious. The NPA has to fight for a workers government based on mass *coordinations*, elected by the worker and youth in struggle. That is the way to make a reality of the excellent slogan seen on banners on the demonstration of 19 March - "You are the crisis, We are the solution".

The Trillion Dollar Con-Trick

The establishment newspapers were unanimous in stating that the G20 summit marked a huge breakthrough in the fight against the economic crisis. *Richard Brenner* exposes their claims

Desperate for some good news for their increasingly discredited system, capitalist newspapers rushed to tell us that the outcome of the G20 summit was a huge victory. World leaders had, it seemed, avoided a damaging conflict and agreed to a huge \$1 trillion coordinated stimulus package. Now, we were assured, concerted efforts, by the great powers and developing nations alike, were going to stop the slide from recession into depression, and get the hedge funds, tax evaders and bulging bonuses under control.

So what had the world leaders actually signed up to at the G20? And what tensions lay behind the forced smiles at the photo shoot?

Propping up the IMF

If anyone thought the G20's deal means a fresh injection of \$1 trillion to stop factory and workplace closures, create jobs, protect people from home repossessions and help desperate third world countries, they have got another thing coming.

There is no coordinated stimulus programme. In fact the \$1 trillion is spin, a headline figure created by bundling up already agreed expenditure with a complex array of loans and guarantees. And it is not to be directed to the working class and the poor.

The first big slice of the trillion is the \$500 billion extra money going to the International Monetary Fund. Almost all of this is to be loans – the large G20 member states like Japan, China and the EU powers are lending money to the IMF, which will have to be paid back. This money will itself be lent by the IMF to countries that face bankruptcy because of the economic crisis.

Lately the IMF has seen its reserves run down fast as it has orchestrated bailouts of countries like Hungary, Iceland and Pakistan whose mid-decade economic bubbles burst violently during the autumn crisis. IMF 'rescue' packages always carry a vicious sting in the tail. The recent \$7.6 bn loan to Pakistan – incurred when oil price hikes last year ran Pakistan's reserves down to [\$3.5bn] came on condition of massive cuts in benefits and conditions for Pakistan's public sector workers, the elimination all subsidies on energy, petroleum products, and fertilizer and a rise in taxes. All will hit workers small farmers and the urban poor the hardest.

The new loans to the IMF will keep it afloat and mean it remains able to bailout bust countries. The size of the injection to IMF funds reveals that world leaders expect more states to face financial collapse over the months and years ahead. The IMF's role is always to use these crises to force desperate countries to make the workers, the farmers and the poor pay the price for the crisis – not the capitalists.



World leaders might be laughing now, but will it last?

Towards a world central bank?

Another piece of the \$1 trillion jigsaw is the \$250 billion extra that the IMF is now to be allowed to issue as 'quotas' owned by countries. This measure will significantly increase – tenfold – the amount of the IMF's own currency that is issued.

From being a lender of last resort, the IMF will now also effectively be issuing meaningful sums of its own money, bringing it a big step closer to being a world central bank.

The IMF was founded in 1944 at the historic Bretton Woods conference which laid the cornerstones of the post-war economic order. At the conference British economist John Maynard Keynes argued for the establishment of a world central bank, an international clearing union to regulate currency exchange and provide a currency of last resort, and the creation of a common unit of world currency for all international trade: the Bancor. These measures were rejected by the USA. Instead its own currency – the dollar – was pegged to gold until 1971 to act as the international currency of last resort, affording it an obvious advantage. Instead of a world central bank and an international clearing union we got the IMF and the World Bank. When the dollar's value collapsed in the financial crisis of the early 70s, they ditched the gold standard but the dollar remained the world's benchmark currency.

But the Great Financial Crisis of 2007-2009 has put the dollar's world role at risk. In a desperate attempt to stave off collapsing demand at home, and in a cynical attempt to boost US exports at the expense of other exporting powers like Germany and Japan, the US Federal reserve has slashed interest rates down to almost zero over the course of the last 18 months. This

has pushed Germany and Japan into the sharpest and fastest post war recessions – but it has also pushed down the value of the dollar.

Meanwhile China is also seeing its exports collapse... and it is sitting on a huge stockpile of dollars in the form of US Treasury bonds. These are falling in value – fast. So no wonder the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao in the run up to the G20 called loudly for the creation of a new world currency to replace the dollar as the main instrument of world trade. Allowing the IMF to issue its own currency (strangely called 'Special Drawing Rights') is a step in this direction.

The G20 also agreed that the convention under which the head of the IMF is always a European and the head of the World Bank is always an American will be reviewed in two years' time.

There can be little doubt that these changes reflect America's weakening position at the world economic level – and will bring sharper conflicts between the major capitalist powers in the years ahead.

Rough trade

Another huge component of the \$1 trillion package is also not what it seems. Some \$250 billion is supposed to be invested to help world trade to recover from the heart attack that has gripped it over the last 18 months.

In fact the so called \$250 billion is not spending – it is an insurance scheme, a guarantee to companies that supply good to purchasers in other countries that they will get some money back if their purchaser goes bust or defaults on the payment.

Normally trade is secured by commercial insurers and banks who provide trade credit. But in the credit crunch the cost of this credit has

soared so high that many companies can't afford it. This is because the underlying crisis in the real economy makes it ever more likely that trading companies will collapse or default, so insurers and other lenders don't want to foot the bill.

The trade crisis is already so severe that shipping and freight companies are being driven out of business. Hong Kong shipping magnates and lawyers told the BBC on 6 April that large cargo vessels that used to earn \$150,000 a day now earn less than \$5000, which is less than it costs to operate them. Around 70 of these ships are sitting idle in the Hong Kong harbour right now.

The World Trade Organisation predicts that trade will decline by 9 percent worldwide this year.

So what the G20's \$250 billion trade credit insurance scheme amounts to is governments around the world – taxpayers – agreeing to bail out traders who don't get paid when their buyers go bust. It's not about nationalising firms to save jobs, or subsidising cheaper food and medicine. Once again it's about bailing out rich shareholders rather than workers.

At the same time, this new trade measure will do nothing to address one of the main dangers today: the rise of protectionism, where countries try to give preferential treatment to their own producers and end up taking measures to beggar their neighbours and break up world trade flows.

In 1930, the year after the Wall Street Crash, the USA introduced the Smoot-Hawley Act which put tariffs – extra taxes of 60 percent – on 3,000 different goods that were being imported from other countries. America's main trading partner at the time was Europe, who hit back with tariffs of their own, massively limiting world trade and aggravating the slump. Between 1929 and 1933, world trade contracted from nearly \$3 billion to less than \$1 billion.

Despite sugary words, there has been a real rise in protectionist measures in this crisis already. Although major states have not introduced outright tariffs Obama's stimulus plan did include a 'Buy American' clause. And France has tied \$8 billion aid to its car industry to the idea that they have to employ French rather than foreign workers. This has led Renault to threaten to shut a factory in Slovenia dumping local workers on the dole. Complaints against companies and governments to the world, European and national competition authorities are mushrooming as states and companies try to protect their home markets and shift the burden of the recession on others abroad.

The end of the 'Anglo-Saxon model'?

Before the G20, the leading EU powers France and Germany seemed to be squaring up for a fight with the USA.

French president Nicholas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel both rejected Obama and Brown's plan for a huge worldwide stimulus package of public spending, fearing that it would do little to slow or halt the recession and that it would run the risk of lowering the value of money causing soaraway inflation in a year or two's time when they expect the



Police attacked protesters during the G20 summit

economy to begin a weak recovery.

They succeeded in stopping it. As we have seen, the \$1 trillion 'stimulus' is nothing of the sort: it is little more than the repackaging of existing loans, plus a new a trade insurance scheme and money printing powers for the IMF.

Sarkozy had threatened to walk out of the summit if strict curbs were not introduced against what he called 'Anglo-Saxon' financial models like hedge funds, tax breaks for investors and investment banking. This was sheer political posturing. The measures he won at the G20 were very vague. Hedge funds – investment funds in which millionaires combine to take advantage of movements of share and commodity prices, both up and down – will now be included in the regulatory regime that proved so very effective in controlling...the banks. 'Tough new rules' (what exactly?) will be introduced on pay and bonuses for the rich executives of banks and funds. This is shutting the stable door once the horse has bolted, and ignoring the real issue for millions today: how to stop pay going down for millions of workers.

Despite the cynical claim of TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber that "This summit has delivered real progress in crucial areas", the summit's statement was a fraud, long on rhetorical pledges, short on substantive ones. The leaders of the great capitalist powers do not gather to deliberate for the welfare of the world's people – they meet to struggle with one another over which of them will bear the brunt of the devaluation of capital – the real business of a recession. It is as Lenin called

such conferences: a thieves kitchen. They can however agree on one thing: the working class and the poor in every country must be made to pay the price.

With the Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD) predicting that the whole world economy will shrink this year for the first time since the Second World War, and with the most coordinated and synchronised global recession in history, the measures announced at the G20 will have no appreciable effect in preventing the huge rise in unemployment, the cuts in pay, the rise in real food prices and the squeeze in credit which is affecting workers, poor farmers and unemployed people all over the world.

The hope of the billions of people whose living standards are directly threatened in this crisis lies not with the leaders that assembled inside the Excel Centre for the summit, but in the mobilisation of thousands on the streets outside. From the general strikes in France to the occupations of workplaces in Belfast, Enfield and Glasgow, it is direct action by the working class that is key, around the clear message: 'We Won't Pay for Their Crisis'.

We have to resist and force the bosses to pay, or make way for a better system. They are responsible for the crisis: we must be responsible for the solution. We should never forget that the depression of the 1930s led first to regional wars (China, Spain, Ethiopia) and then to a world war. But it also re-opened the potential for world socialist revolution the only real alternative to this horrific prospect.

ANTICAPITALIST PROTESTS

Angry masses confront world leaders

Protesters paralysed the City of London on April 1. Now let's build the fightback!

In the biggest weekday protests in Britain for years, thousands of protesters brought the City and central London to a standstill as world leaders gathered for the G20 summit.

From late morning onwards, protesters marched on the Bank of England and by midday 5,000 had gathered. In scenes reminiscent of the height of the anticapitalist movement in the early years of this decade, protesters were met with fierce police repression.

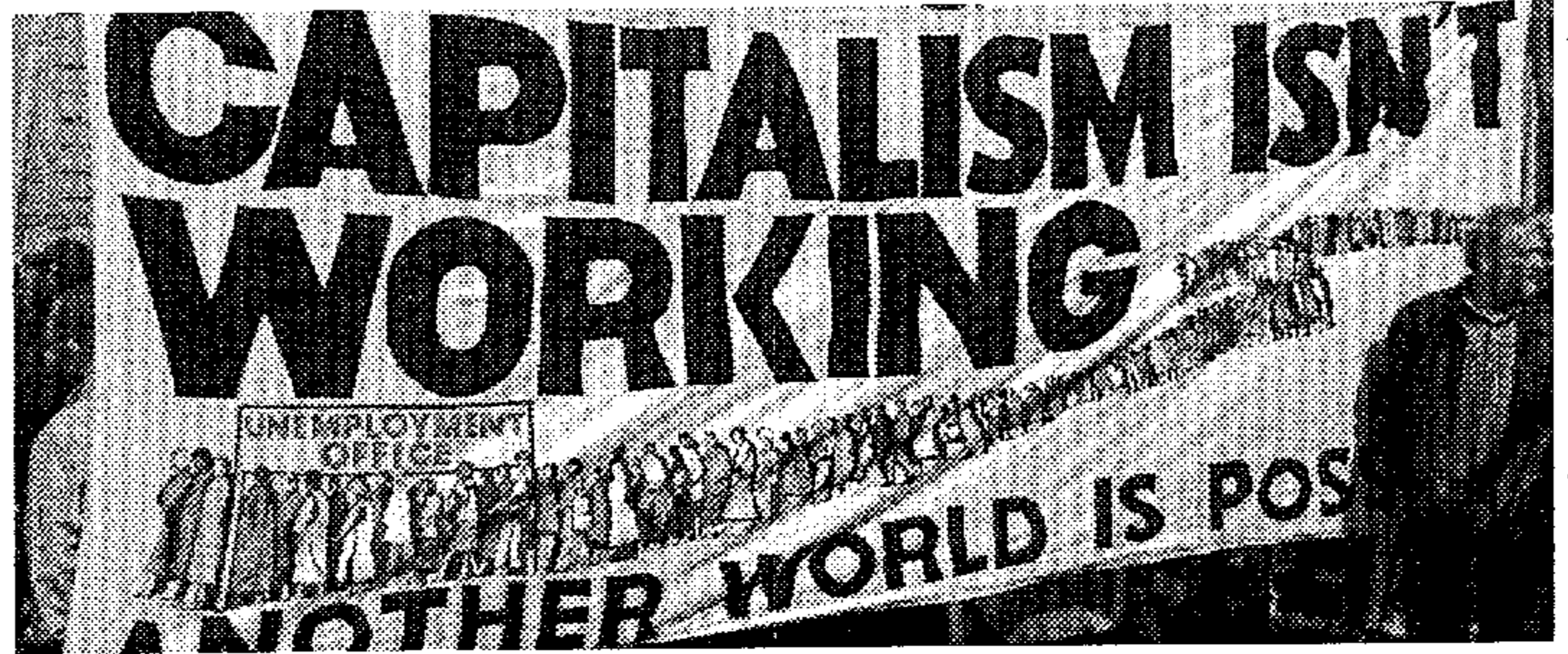
The police had been preparing for these protests for weeks, bombarding the media with reports of "violent" anarchists and "trouble makers" intent on carrying out attacks on the City institutions. What the police can't stand is a movement intent on taking direct action against the corporations and banks whose system had caused the crisis.

But their propaganda campaign failed spectacularly - the direct action was a resounding success. The Bank of England was effectively under siege with roads blocked all around it; an old office of the Royal Bank of Scotland was briefly occupied, with some protesters even scaling the rooftop.

And who were the protesters? It was not just a few thugs intent on a brawl, as the police claimed. Environmentalists, liberals, socialists, and anarchists were joined by thousands of angry working people; angry that it was their public services, their pensions, their jobs, that were being sacrificed so that the rich could stay rich; angry that corporate losses were socialised as the profits were privatised.

Clearly this turnout was not predicted by much of the socialist Left - who did not attend in large numbers. But REVOLUTION and Workers Power had lively contingents with our red flags leading the charge at the front of the demo on the Bank of England. As the Evening Standard put it, "One group waved red flags, emblazoned with the word 'Revolution'."

The reaction of the media to the protests was telling. Of course, there was the usual focus on the so called "violent trouble-makers", but there was also reluctant recognition that the basic claim of demonstrators - that capitalists were to blame for the cri-



sis an working people are being asked to pay - had a lot of merit. Even an investment banker from the City was forced to acknowledge the "legitimate concerns" of those protesting when interviewed on the BBC. Earlier in the week, a poll in The London Paper had put support for the protests at some 62 per cent.

Jeremy Paxman - not known for his sympathy for the radical left - said on Newsnight: "The media's love of sensation may have given you the impression there was a huge fight in the City of London today. There wasn't. There were protests. Most of them were good natured".

The protests at the Bank of England were not the only events in what turned into a day of resistance to capitalism. Activists on Bishopsgate set up a climate camp, while in the West End 2,000 marched from the US Embassy to Trafalgar Square. The Alternative Summit had to be merged with the anti-war rally at the end of the demo after the University of East London - where the summit was due to take place - was closed as the authorities "feared for the safety of the students".

At the end of the day, most protesters felt that it was quite a day. It was our day. Thousands of protesters sent a powerful message to the G20 leaders: "If you continue to bail out the bosses not the workers, if you would rather create mass destitution to save the market system, you will face our militant, growing and mass resistance."

But today was just a start. This is early days and we are not yet a mass movement. We must go back to our communities, back to our workplaces, and build an almighty workers' resistance to the capitalist crisis.

Man dies after police violence in London

Witnesses have reported that Ian Tomlinson, who died during the City of London demonstration was attacked by police before his death.

Tomlinson, a worker in a local store, was seen by a press photographer to be charged from behind by riot police. Another witness said that he saw the man's head hit the pavement as he was flung on to the ground.

At 7.20pm Tomlinson was seen staggering within the police cor-

don - five minutes before his time of death in front of five riot police with attack dogs - but it was left to demonstrators to help him when he collapsed, with paramedics unable to get to the scene.

This is in stark contrast to original stories from police that Tomlinson died of 'natural causes'.

We must demand that a full investigation takes place under the control of social movement organisations and demonstrators - not a police cover-up.

Eyewitness: anti-Nato demo attacked

It was clear that police repression was going to be an issue even before we stepped on the coach to protest at the Nato summit in Strasbourg on 4 April.

As we arrived at Embankment tube at 6am ready for the long journey ahead on the bus, we were photographed and searched by aggressive Met police officers.

When we got to Strasbourg the main road into the city had been closed off, forcing us to travel for hours around the city.

The demonstration itself was not allowed to march through the city centre and this was enforced by heavy policing. Protesters had to stand strong and push through police lines on all the alternative routes which were

attacked by teargas. Teargas was even used at the final rally, interrupting platform speakers who requested that the police stopped using these tactics.

As we left the rally, police even picked up rocks and threw them into the crowd, collectively punishing everyone in response to some burning buildings and smashed windows destroyed by anarchists deploying the 'black bloc' tactic.

The NATO summit along with the heavy policing of the G20 demonstrations in London shows that the very right to demonstrate is under threat. Activists must step up the struggle in defence of this and be prepared to defend themselves against police repression as the downturn continues.

United States colonialism exposed in Afghanistan

By Mark Booth

The US government has revealed its colonial colours in Afghanistan as it attempts to install yet another puppet regime. As the situation in Afghanistan grows increasingly unstable, the US government is openly interfering in the political life of the nation in order to ensure their power in Afghanistan is maintained.

After the US governments' review of its strategy in Afghanistan, the new plan is to create a "chief executive" position in the government, alongside that of President Hamid Karzai. This position would be appointed by the occupying forces in order to bypass Karzai, who the US views as increasingly unable to govern as they wish. This is despite Karzai having been US imperialism's loyal stooge for the past seven years, first appointed by the occupying forces, then elected during the occupation.

The deteriorating situation facing workers and peasants in the country and the growing insurgency have put Karzai under massive pressure to demonstrate that he is not a puppet of the US. In the past months he made several statements pleading with Obama and the new US government to change their military strategy of large-scale bombing of towns and villages, which has killed thousands of Afghan civilians since the war began, while signalling his willingness to open talks with the leaders of the insurgency, namely the Taliban, in order to secure a ceasefire.

These moves have earned the Karzai government the ire of their imperialist paymasters, who are now searching for a suitable replacement for Karzai who can bypass the president and ensure the country is run as the US wishes.

US policy in Afghanistan has never been about creating a functioning democracy where democratic rights are protected. In fact the Afghan government has done little to protect the democratic and social rights of Afghans, especially those of women. In March, in a move to win support from minority Islamist parties in the upcoming elections, Karzai signed a new law which effectively legalised rape within marriage and forces women to ask permission from their husbands before accessing healthcare, education and even going outside. This gross violation of women's rights has received only mute condemnation from Karzai's imperialist backers who through their silence demonstrate their real concern for women's fundamental rights.

From the outset, invading Afghanistan was geopolitically driven to maintain control of energy resources. Although Afghanistan itself hasn't any resources the imperialist powers need, it lies in the centre of a region rich in nat-



Anti-Nato protesters demonstrate against an Afghanistan conference in The Hague

ural gas and oil. Crucially, it is the only alternative route for transporting these resources out of the region without travelling through Iran or Russia, countries both hostile to US imperialism. US and UK corporations have been constructing a gas pipeline spanning the country since the occupation began which will act as a crucial supply route for those energy resources to be transported out of the region to the markets of the US and Western Europe. For this reason, the occupation of Afghanistan is central to the continued domination of the region by US and British imperialism.

Washington is desperate to maintain its hold on the country. Along with installing a new political puppet, the review also contained plans to divert aid and resources away from the government ministries in Kabul to the provincial and district governors, citing the increasing corruption of the central Afghan government. However, the district and local governors are little more than local warlords and elite who used their power to secure office when the new government was set up. The idea that they will be any less corrupt than the central government is farcical. Part of the corruption allegations levelled against Karzai's government is that they turn a blind eye to the drug smuggling activities of various warlords in return for their support, a necessity given the unpopularity and weakness of the central government; exactly the same will happen on a local scale as the US tries to bypass the uncooperative central government. This will lead to greater tension between the central government and the warlords in the provinces, and further destabilise the country.

In response to the review, Karzai said

"Afghanistan will never be a puppet state" and signalled his intention to resist. The reality is very different - as long as the occupying forces remain in Afghanistan, it will never be anything but a puppet regime controlled by the imperialist powers.

Another part of the review recommended increasing the size of the Afghan army to four times its present size and expanding its police force, pointing towards the further militarisation of the Afghan state and increased repression for the Afghan people as they try to resist the imperialist occupation.

The only solution is for the occupying forces to be driven out of Afghanistan and their puppet government and warlord stooges to be overthrown. Presently the resistance is led by the remnants of the Taliban. While *Workers Power* supports their justified military resistance to the imperialist occupation of their country, the Islamist regime they wish to recreate holds no solutions to the incredible poverty and oppression which has been inflicted upon the people of Afghanistan, and will only lead to further oppression.

Only a mass movement of the workers and peasants against the corrupt elite of landlords and businessmen, who have grown rich off the occupation, can resolve this by transferring the land to the peasantry, handing the factories and workplaces to those who work them, and securing real democratic and social rights for all. A mass movement aimed at driving out the occupation, which mobilises the entire people of Afghanistan against the imperialist armies and their rich Afghan stooges, can free the country from occupation.

PAKISTAN

CRISIS AND RESISTANCE

Roman Birke looks at the social explosions and the rise of political Islam of recent years and argues for the need for a strategy for proletarian revolution in Pakistan

The reinstatement of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and 60 other judges removed by former military dictator Pervez Musharraf in March 2007 marks the culmination of a long struggle by the lawyers and students movement. But as early as last year a wave of social and economic protests added to the instability, such as the struggle of Pakistan Telecommunication Workers against privatisation, last year, the struggles by textile workers against privatisation or the occupations of sugar mills in Sindh province.

The Pakistan People's Party government of President Ali Asif Zardari is preparing a new wave of privatisations. Some 22 publicly owned companies are on the list, including the Railways, the Post Office, Utility Stores, the Printing Corporation of Pakistan and the Power & Energy sector. Hundreds of thousands of their employees are likely to lose their jobs. Moreover new anti-union laws – the Industrial relations Ordinance – are being introduced to make resistance more difficult.

A rash of strikes shows that key sectors of the working class are ready to take radical actions against privatisations and other capitalist attacks. But, as with the struggles for democratic demands these struggles also show there is a real crisis of leadership of the working class and the poor.

Long march of the lawyers

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stood in the last elections with various promises to improve the social situation and to move towards democratising the country, with reinstating the judiciary as a first step. The PPP won the elections and installed a coalition government, together with the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N) of Nawaz Sharif. But they failed to implement their election promises. This can be explained by the fact that the PPP, like the PML-N, is a bourgeois party whose leaders are not only corrupt but are willing, indeed eager, to support the US's war against terror. The PPP support



Protesters pelt police with stones last month

further privatisation and throughout their history often shown that they are well integrated in the power struggles of the Pakistani elite.

Chaudhry's reinstatement

The long march of the lawyers that started on 12 March this year from Karachi and Quetta, the capitals of the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan, was a continuation of this ongoing struggle. From the beginning of the march it was clear that the government would attack the protesters. Already in Karachi, 500 people were arrested and many more were attacked by the police forces. The government was also ready to mobilise the Pakistani army against the demonstrations, banned several TV stations supportive of the marchers, and even put in place a law from British colonial times prohibiting more than four people from public gathering (Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code).

The police and armed forces also erected road blockades to stop protesters from leaving their province. Nevertheless, thousands joined the march to try to make their way to Islamabad where the final rally was supposed to take place. In Lahore, too, people took to the streets and faced massive repression. Supporters of the League for the Fifth International in Lahore described the situation, saying: "The city has been turned into a jail with police check-

points almost everywhere." But the critical question is why the Pakistani ruling class is taking massive repressive measures, mobilising the army and banning TV stations, just because of a demonstration? It can only be explained by putting the Long March into a context of the crisis-ridden character of Pakistani society.

Economic crisis

The Pakistani state is totally dependent on financial support from the imperialist heartlands, especially the US. Between 2001 and 2007 alone, the Pakistani military received more than US\$7bn in aid from the US.

Pakistan is also enmeshed in the global system, as a provider of cheap labour. It exports a large volume of textiles; between 2000 and 2006 alone, its imports more than tripled. But it cannot survive without major investment from imperialist countries. As a result, Pakistan has been massively hit by the financial and economic crisis that started in the imperialist heartlands and is particularly vulnerable to the effects of the deepening global recession.

Besides the severity of impact of the financial crisis, the Pakistani economy is in bad condition generally. The economy remains marked by uneven development, in which a large semi-feudal agrarian sector and small industrial workshops compete with large-scale industry and a quite devel-

oped finance capital sector.

Pakistan is a net-importer of oil. In the financial year 2007/08 Pakistan imported US\$5.2bn worth of petroleum but only exported US\$720m worth. As a result of the inflationary impact of the financial crisis and the oil price hike by the fourth quarter of 2008, a large share of Pakistan's foreign reserves were used up. As the foreign currency reserves plunged, the Pakistani government estimated in October 2008 that it would completely run out of foreign reserves within seven weeks. As the other imperialist powers did not provide additional financial support, they took US\$5bn from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This IMF credit led to further attacks on the working class and the peasantry; for example the subsidies for fuel, electricity and food have all been cut, further restricting these classes' access even to basic goods.

This economic crisis and the historic weakness of the Pakistani bourgeoisie mean that the military plays an important role in the economy. From road constructions, through establishing telecommunication services, to owning fuel stations or bakeries, the Pakistani military controls huge shares of the economy. Its dominant role results from its ability to directly implement its class interests through political takeover or indirect rule – as seen so often in the history of Pakistan.

Military crisis

Although the military is highly developed in technical terms, well financially supported and massively influential in politics, it also faces serious problems today. Pakistan and its neighbour Afghanistan have constituted a playground for the imperialist powers – from Britain and Tsarist Russia in the 19th Century to the US involvement in the Soviet/Afghan war and now with the “war on terror.” Pakistan was always dependent on and shaped by the world political conjuncture. When US imperialism was supporting the Islamic resistance movement against Soviet Russia, it funded various Islamic groups with the help of Pakistan’s Inter Service Intelligence (ISI). As the Bush administration turned to the “war on terror”, Pakistan was forced by threats to support it and to turn against those same Islamic groups.

Having told the army to collaborate with Islamic groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir for many years, the Pakistani ruling class and the leading generals now demand the crushing of the anti-imperialist resistance in the North West Frontier Province and especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and SWAT. This change of policy even led some prominent generals to leave the army and join Jihadist groups.

This is one of the reasons for the Pakistani army’s lack of real success in doing serious harm to anti-imperialist resistance movements in the border regions with Afghanistan. The acceptance of the implementation of Sharia law in SWAT is an expression of this failure: as the army is not capable of really crushing resistance there, they are trying the path of integration.

At the same time, the attacks by US drones on the border regions are increasing. Far from changing that strategy, the new Obama administration is increasing investment and stepping up in military capacity in the region. In his speech on the further strategic outlook of the US in Afghanistan and Pakistan he once more confirmed that his willingness to continue this path, saying that “We [the US] will insist that action be taken – one way or another – when we have intelligence about high-level terrorist targets.” He has already pledged to fund the Pakistani military with US\$3bn for the next five years.

This strategy is not surprising, as the attacks on imperialist forces are growing in Pakistan. For example, at the end of March, NATO forces in Pakistan were attacked and 12 supply containers for Afghanistan destroyed. The de facto non-existence of state structures is further accelerating the process of regional disintegration and strengthening the Taliban, who appear to offer some structure for people in the region.

So – one way or another – the Pakistani



Young and poor: waiting for food hand outs

border regions are subject to turmoil. It is key for all revolutionary forces in Pakistan to support the right of self-determination for these regions, and accept it as a necessary part of the struggle for the emancipation of the working class in Pakistan and the as a whole.

Political crisis

Since the very beginning of the PPP/PML-N coalition government the political landscape has been marked by a struggle between the PML-N on one side and, on the other, the PPP and its leaders Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari. Formally, the main conflict was on the question of reinstating the judiciary. There were several agreements made between the two parties, such as the April agreement that the judges should be reinstated within 30 days. These promises were constantly broken, leading PML-N ministers to pull out of the government.

But this conflict is only superficially about whether or not to reinstate the judges. The underlying reasons relate to the differing class bases of the two parties. While Zardari’s PPP are tied to the landowning elite, Sharif’s PML-N have stronger links to industrial capital; neither is a party of the working class and poor.

The recent social explosion triggered by the Long March added another political crisis, this time within the PPP. Two leading PPP spokesmen publicly supported the Long March and argued for the reinstatement of the judiciary, and one PPP minister resigned as she did not agree with the ban on parts of the media.

One might even speak of the development of an anti-Zardari wing inside the PPP. When Prime Minister Gilani announced Chaudhry’s reinstatement, Zardari did not publicly comment. It was obvious that there was enormous pressure exerted on him around this question – pressure coming from the streets, from US imperialism and from within the PPP.

Crisis of leadership

The crises at different levels relate to an underlying crisis of proletarian leadership. While there were massive and heroic struggles by the lawyers, the Pakistani working class has not managed to enter the scene as an independent force, but has remained largely bound to Sharif’s PML-N.

The PML-N has to be characterised as a bourgeois party that is using the struggle of the lawyers to gain more seats in the next elections. There must not be any illusions that the PML-N or Sharif would be more democratic in principle, nor more representative of the working class and poor.

In 1997, it was Sharif himself who suspended the former Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah and launched a vicious attack on the Supreme Court that was deciding a case against him. Today he faces massive corruption charges, and fears that his amnesty would be declared unlawful by Chaudry. Sharif and his brother also own some factories where workers went on strike at the end of March demanding a minimum wage, as several are paid less than £35 a month.

What is needed to take the struggles forward is an instrument that combines the fight for democratic rights (in which the working class has an intrinsic interest) and the struggle in the workplaces with a strategy for a proletarian revolution. During the Long March once again the question of power was posed – but no organisation was there to answer. Parts of the police refused to attack the demonstrations and joined hands with the protests; the government lost control over the situation and we saw heroic struggles by the protestors. As yet, there is no revolutionary party that would be able to integrate these different struggles. A supporting section of the LSI in Pakistan is fighting to build such a party, which is a burning need for the working class and poor of Pakistan today.

MADAGASCAR

Crisis in Madagascar ends in populist coup

Madagascar saw a huge general strike split the army and install a new government. But the outcome – a dictatorial capitalist government – was a defeat, writes *Simon Hardy*

At the end of March, Andry Rajoelina, the mayor of Antananarivo, was installed as the new president of Madagascar. He replaced the deposed Marc Ravalomanana, who stood down in the face of mass opposition. Since taking power in 2002, Ravalomanana had greatly opened up Madagascar to foreign investment but did little to combat the terrible poverty of a country where over 70 per cent of the population live on less than \$1 per day.

Popular anger against Ravalomanana had been growing since January, when mass protests against price rises and the growth of poverty were met with repression, including the shooting of up to 25 demonstrators.

Rajoelina, a young and charismatic self-made millionaire, whose business interests include a TV and radio station, took the lead of these protests and used his power base in the capital city's political institutions to expand his influence and power. On 31 January, he declared himself the "real leader" of Madagascar and called on Ravalomanana to resign. The president responded by sacking him as mayor.

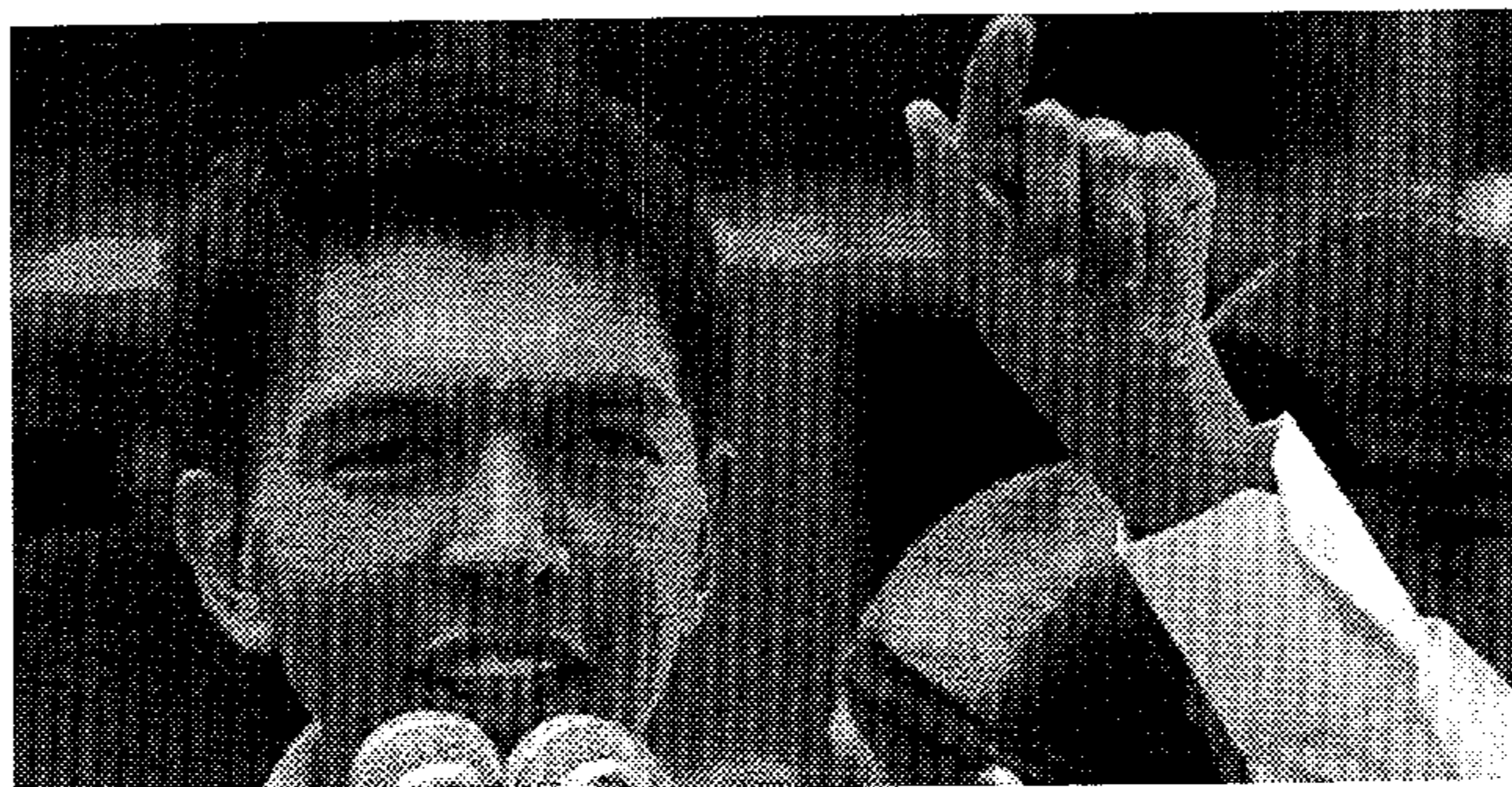
A general strike by workers split a section of the army away. Soldiers stormed the Ambohitsorohitra presidential palace, forcing Ravalomanana into hiding. By this point his government's days were numbered.

Ravalomanana resigned on 17 March after failing to transfer power to a section of the military top brass. He had announced on a private radio station that he was making the "hard decision" to transfer power to two generals and an admiral, who would be pledged to hold elections in two years. They apparently turned down the offer, knowing that many of the lower ranking officers were against the president, which meant that the military could not be relied upon to restore order.

Now Ravalomanana's supporters are retaliating, organising protests in Antananarivo against the new government. How much support they can gather now is an open question, but many will be willing to give Rajoelina the benefit of the doubt for a period of time while they wait to see if he delivers on any of his vague promises to improve people's lives.

What is occurring in Madagascar is a battle between two wings of the capitalist class. Both use populist rhetoric to mobilise sections of the working class and urban poor or peasantry behind them, as Rajoelina did very effectively in March. He must have learnt some tricks from the man he was overthrowing, who came to power in similar circumstances in 2002.

Rajoelina has now selected a transitional



Andry Rajoelina, the new president of Madagascar has suspended elections for two years

authority and promised elections in two years, the same time span the previous president had allotted to his aborted military junta to stabilise the country.

A different direction

This is only the most recent example of a process of a political event that has occurred many times in the developing world. The lack of a revolutionary workers' party meant that Madagascan workers fell in line behind a capitalist leader.

Politicians like former radio-DJ Rajoelina need to use the masses to carry out a bid for power. They play on the hopes and fears of the impoverished workers and youth to mobilise them into action, turning their justified anger against the current government into support for a different section of capitalist politicians, and using them as blunt instrument for taking power. Once installed, these capitalists carry on in the old way, using the police and the army to break up workers' protests.

The general strike, which split the army, is an excellent example of the power of the organised working class, even on a deeply impoverished island like Madagascar. The fact that the mass demonstrations and strikes were so effective, in a country with a unionisation rate of only about 8 per cent, demonstrates that in times of heightened political struggle, the actions of an organised minority within the class can draw in hundreds of thousands of others.

But these struggles were held back because the unions lacked a leadership to push the actions forward towards greater democracy, empowerment of the class, and the formation of a workers' government.

Revolutionary socialists would have called

for strike committees to be formed to organise the strike and begin to coordinate other tasks such as the distribution of food. These committees could have been coordinated with delegates meeting from across the country, creating a real base of alternative power to the bourgeois government.

We would further argue that those soldiers that broke away from the military high command should have organised democratic councils to discuss the political changes taking place, refusing to carry out orders without agreement from the rank and file.

These tactics could have led to a situation of dual power, starkly posing the question of who ruled the country. It would have allowed the working class to take advantage of the revolutionary situation resulting from a crisis in the capitalist class over its leadership.

When it comes to Rajoelina's turn to be deposed from power, the working class should not make the mistake of supporting another capitalist candidate who will deliver nothing for them, only use them in their power games.

The working class must begin to fight for its own party now, one with a revolutionary programme and socialism as its goal. Such a party is urgently needed to make the working class aware of its ability to take power and to free the masses from the endemic poverty inflicted on Madagascar by capitalism.

Illusions with Rajoelina may well remain high for the time being, but they can be broken if revolutionaries fight against his dictatorial policies – like the suspension of elections for two years – and call for immediate elections to a constituent assembly.

Chávez new crisis budget is an attack on the poor

Hugo Chávez has nationalised more companies but also produced a budget that attacks workers. Venezuelan workers should demand anti-capitalist policies, writes *Keith Spencer*

Hugo Chávez recently won the right to stand for president for more than two terms in a referendum where the Chavista movement organised thousands of "Yes" committees to deliver the vote. Now, confident in his support (he is running at 70 per cent approval in opinion polls), Chávez ordered the nationalisation of three rice-processing plants and a subsidiary of Spain's Bank of Santander. He sent troops in to take over the airports, ship ports and roads.

Chávez said: "I have entrusted myself with putting the foot down on the accelerator of the revolution, of the social and economic transformation of Venezuela."

Yet inflation is running at 30 per cent, while growth in GDP has fallen from eight per cent to just over two per cent – a dangerous combination that could shrink the economy. Chávez has often blamed inflation on speculators and last year there were cases of food hoarding, which pushed up the price of staples such as rice. Taking control of the transportation and distribution network will help crack down on speculation and illegal exports.

But will these measures be enough to stop the recession inflicting misery on the mass of Venezuelan society?

Venezuela and the global crisis

Chávez's reforms over the past 10 years have depended on high oil prices. Oil accounts for about half of the national budget and more than 90 per cent of state exports. It has paid for the misiones – the medical, educational and cheap food programmes for the masses which have made steps forward in reducing poverty and illiteracy and improving health.

Now the oil price has fallen dramatically to US\$40 per barrel. This is reflected in the new national budget that includes:

- A 6.7 per cent cut in state spending, which Chávez claims will come from cuts in luxury spending by state departments.
- An increase in VAT from nine per cent to 12 per cent.
- A 20 per cent increase in the minimum wage.
- Increases in government borrowing by 13.6 per cent of GDP.

This is a capitalist budget that increases taxes on the poor and cuts services. There is no talk of making inroads into private property, putting industries under workers' control, or increasing taxes on profits and wealth. Venezuela may have a large social wage – cheap food and fuel, free health care and edu-

cation – but the minimum wage increase is significantly lower than inflation.

The state of the working class

The global slowdown has already hit Venezuela with widespread lay-offs and disputes.

Recently there was a bitter struggle in the Mitsubishi car plant in Anzoategui State. Workers occupied the plant for two months, calling for better wages and conditions and an end to outsourcing with no loss of jobs. They were faced with violent police repression, which killed two trade unionists, and a government intent on forcing through a deal. In March, the workers accepted a deal, brokered by the Vice Minister of Popular Power and Social Security, Ricardo Dorado, which achieved some demands but failed to end outsourcing.

The same month 1,600 workers occupied a Toyota plant. Again the government stepped in to negotiate an agreement.

These two disputes typify the problems with the Chávez government. While it talks about socialism, it pursues a deal that allows Japan to drill for oil in the Orinoco Delta and forces through a settlement in the Mitsubishi occupation. This is part of a pattern, also shown last year in the struggle, which faced government inaction and even obstruction, for the successful takeover of the Sidor aluminium plant.

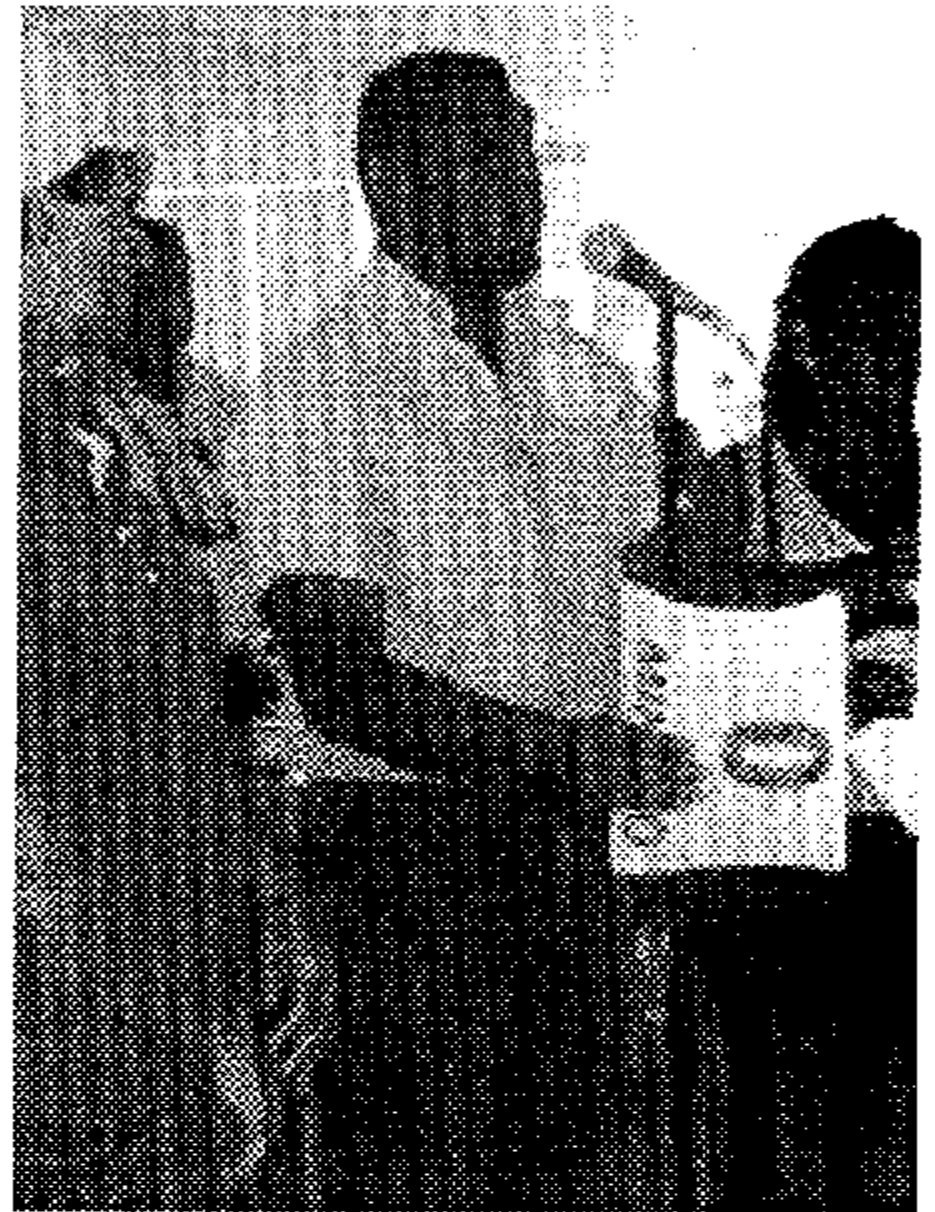
A workers' party

The Venezuelan United Socialist Party (PSUV), launched in the summer of 2006, was hailed as an instrument for the socialist transformation of society. However, bureaucratic rule has apparently withered the base of the party.

There is now talk of a re-launch, with a recruitment drive and a clean-up of the party list. This aims to incorporate of the thousands of "Yes" committees and transform them into socialist committees.

If this re-launch is a genuine attempt to incorporate the workers and poor, allows full freedom of political expression and debate about strategy tactics, and begins to organise the actions necessary to bring about socialism, then it is to be welcomed. But if the "clean up of party lists" is a purge and the incorporation of the "Yes" committees a way of weakening grassroots democracy then it must be fought, otherwise the PSUV will be a weapon against the working class in the coming struggles.

Chávez has managed a delicate balancing act between the masses and the minority capitalist class over the past 10 years. But the free market cannot exist for long along-



Mitsubishi union leader Felix Martinez (Photo: CMR-Venezuela)

side state control and the recession will greatly increase all the contradictions of the Chavista movement. It will lead to more lay-offs, sparking struggles on a greater scale and bringing workers up against the state.

The workers and poor will need to fight this by forming councils in the factories and shanty towns. These could be used to organise occupations and strikes, the people against the police and armed thugs.

But the working class must also fight for a workers' party, independent of Chávez and the bureaucracy, which may be formed from within or without the PSUV, or a combination of both.

If revolutionaries enter the "re-launched" PSUV then they must openly argue for a revolutionary party that fights to take power from the capitalists. While this may lead to expulsion, it is a strategy to gain a mass hearing for revolutionary politics. Entry work in the PSUV needs to be combined with an orientation to the trade unions leading struggles against sackings, sub-contraction and other capitalist attacks.

This party must make the working class and its allies conscious of the capitalist nature of the state and show the way forward to victory. It must fight to smash the police and to break up the army, winning its best elements away from the generals, and to nationalise the economy under workers' control, putting in place a socialist plan of production that will defeat the market and bring benefits for all.

MIDDLE EAST

Zionist far right provoke riots in northern Israel

By Marcus Halaby

On 24 March, 100 demonstrators led by far-right Israeli politicians Baruch Marzel, Michael Ben-Ari and Itamar Ben-Gvir, and protected by 2,500 police, marched through Umm al-Faum, Israel's second largest Palestinian-majority town, sparking off riots that lasted for three hours. Waving Israeli flags and demanding "loyalty" to the state from Israel's Arab citizens, the fascist demonstrators claimed to be defending the right of Israeli citizens to move freely around their own country.

The town's residents, however, saw things differently. Ahmed Agrabria, manager of the town's football team, was quoted by one news source as saying: "There is room for all of us to live in this country, but these people come here as our enemies. Many Jews come to Umm al-Faum, they eat in our restaurants, we work together. We visit them and they visit us. But those who come this way, with force, that is unacceptable." Another local resident, Muhammad Talas said: "This is a sad day for me. The police are giving shelter to the most racist person in Israel."

The march was originally intended to be held last year, but the police had previously refused to give it protection until forced to by a Supreme Court ruling. The demonstrators, mainly coming from the central region around Tel Aviv that is 98 per cent Jewish, assembled in the Arab-majority Wadi Ara region and travelled to Umm al-Faum in a bullet-proof bus of the sort normally used by Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

Marzel is the leader of the Jewish National Front, a successor to Kach, which is a banned party founded by the assassinated Brooklyn-born extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane. He advocates the imposition of Jewish religious law and the expulsion of Arab "traitors". His group is known for its chanting of "Death to the Arabs" on its demonstrations, and he has even argued in favour of assassinating radical Israeli Jewish peace activist Uri Avnery.

His previous provocation of Umm al-Faum's residents, targeted for their protests in support of the people of Gaza during Israel's murderous assault, took place during February's Knesset elections. Then, the very same Israeli Central Elections Committee that had just banned two Arab parties from standing (a measure subsequently overturned in the Israeli Supreme Court), appointed the violent racist Marzel to head a polling station in the town of 50,000 people.

On that occasion, pickets organised by local Palestinians at the town's entrances forced him to leave under police escort, only for the police to return later with Aryeh Eldad, a Knesset member for the National Union, another far-right party advocating the expulsion of Arabs. In the protests that followed,



Extremists march through Arab majority town of Umm al-Faum, northern Israel

police arrested local resident Ibrahim Mahajne and film-maker Samieh Jabbarin, a leader of Abnaa el-Balad (Sons of the Land), a small Palestinian nationalist group that advocates the one-state solution.

Israel's Palestinian minority, comprising one-fifth of Israel's citizens, has good reason to feel under siege right now, in the wake of an election that saw a historic swing to the right, with the Yisrael Beiteinu party of Avigdor Lieberman coming in third place ahead of Israel's Labor party. Lieberman, whose political platform identifies Israel's Arab citizens as a long-term threat to the state's Jewish majority and Zionist mission, has advocated handing over Umm al-Faum (among other places) to Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority, providing the state with a pretext for stripping its Arab residents of citizenship and reducing them to the same right-less status as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

The March clashes came a week after Likud leader and prime minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu announced a deal with Yisrael Beiteinu that would make Lieberman the foreign minister in a new government, and the same day that the Labor party supported its leader Ehud Barak's agreement to remain in government with Likud in his current post of defence minister. Two days previously, Netanyahu secured agreement from Shas (a religious party supported by the marginalised "Oriental" Jews) to join Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu in government, meaning that he now enjoys a relatively stable consensus around his policy of ending negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

His proposed alternative is an "economic

peace", meaning a possible relaxation of the siege and "closure" of the West Bank – which effectively keeps Palestinians imprisoned in their own towns and villages and unable to move around – and a possible re-opening of the Israeli labour market to Palestinian workers shut off from it since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000. In return, the Palestinians are expected to abandon demands for a Palestinian state and an end to the occupation.

This realignment of Israeli politics signals the abandonment of the Kadima-led government's project of "unilateral disengagement" – the idea that Israel could preserve its Zionist and Jewish-majority character by pulling out of large Palestinian population centres such as Gaza and agreeing to an Israeli controlled and dominated Palestinian "state". While it is too early to see if this will mean a return to the crude territorial expansionism that Netanyahu supported as prime minister in the late 1990s, it does follow that this change of direction will see an increase in attacks on Israel's Palestinian minority.

After all, without at least the fig-leaf of negotiations for a "two-state solution" (still the official objective of US diplomacy under President Obama), the case for demanding "one person, one vote" in a single, bi-national state for Arabs and Jews becomes a much more compelling one for the Palestinians living under siege and occupation. And in this project, the Palestinian citizens of Israel are both natural and well-placed allies – and therefore liable to become the very existential "threat" that racists like Lieberman and Marzel point to.

The Tories' war against the trade unions

It is now 25 years since the great miners' strike. In the second part of a series of articles on the strike *Jeremy Dewar* and *Dave Stockton* look at the background to the strike and its opening phase – in the face of the most massive police repression in living memory

The miners' strike of 1984/85 was the most decisive industrial struggle in Britain since the 1926 general strike. The outcome determined the balance of forces between the classes in Britain for decades to come. The lessons of this strike are burning ones for us today when faced with a historically severe capitalist crisis – lessons that every socialist and worker must learn.

The working class must recover the fighting capacity, the intransigence and the organisational creativity displayed in that year of struggle. That great battle is part of the legacy of the working class movement in this country, part of the collective memory of all fighters for socialism. Every anniversary offers an opportunity to tell the story again to a new generation of anti-capitalists and trade union militants.

The "Great Strike" was the longest mass strike in British history. Initially a battle to defend jobs and stop pit closures, it turned into one of the most decisive class struggles of the twentieth century.

For a whole year 170,000 miners plus the women of the pit villages battled against everything the Tory government and the police could throw at them.

They were vilified in the press and on TV as violent, yet it was the police, who invaded and occupied their villages, who bloodied unarmed pickets at Orgreave in Yorkshire every day for four weeks. In all, 11,312 miners were arrested, 200 imprisoned and 966 sacked for strike activities. Two miners – David Jones and Joe Green – were killed on the picket line.

The importance of this struggle becomes clear when the scale of the police operation is understood. The Tories spent an estimated £8 billion – twice as much as they spent on the Falklands War – to defeat "the enemy within", as Thatcher called the miners.

On top of this, the Tories tried to starve the miners back to work by denying them any benefits, while the judges sequestered – i.e. stole – the union's funds.

But it was not this that defeated the miners. Every assault they rebuffed with energy, humour and creativity. They organised flying pickets, soup kitchens and speaking tours. The miners' wives built a mass working class women's movement almost from scratch.

They inspired hundreds of thousands of supporters across the country – and the world – to build miners' support groups to collect money, supplies and organise solidarity action.

Twice the miners came close to defeating the



Mounted police lash out at a woman journalist at the Battle of Orgreave

government when the dockers voted to come out on strike alongside them. On the second occasion, in July, Thatcher reportedly broke down and wept on receiving the news – until the dockers' leaders did a deal and called off the strike.

So the miners' defeat was not in any way inevitable. Instead the leaderships of the Trade Union Congress and Labour Party betrayed them. It is this betrayal and how it could have been thwarted that forms the real lesson of the miners' strike.

A ruling class offensive

A Tory party, re-armed with a new and combative leadership team around Margaret Thatcher, planned the offensive against the British trade unions far in advance. The offensive had been planned by two of her closest cronies, Sir

Keith Joseph and Nicholas Ridley. Joseph wrote a paper entitled called *Solving the union problem is the key to Britain's recovery*. It was designed to shift the balance of forces decisively away from "the militants" by "changing the framework, the rules of the game".

Ridley wrote another policy document that became known as the Ridley Plan. It stated: "There should be a large and mobile squad of police equipped and prepared to uphold the law against violent picketing." It went on – "Good non-union drivers should be recruited to cross picket lines with police protection." Ridley identified the NUM as the key union which the government needed to take on and crush if the legacy of industrial militancy stretching back to the 1960s and 1970s was to be finally broken.

Taming the unions was central to Thatch-

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er's project of returning British capitalism to higher profitability levels. This meant allowing – even encouraging – the industrial crisis, which began in 1979 and went on until 1982, to turn into a slump and do maximum damage in terms of workers jobs, letting failing companies go to the wall, and refusing any sort of state intervention, such as had taken place in the 1960s and 1970s. Older industries making low levels of profit, such as steel, cars and coal, were pressured to undergo massive closure programmes with consequent job losses. Industrial Britain was to be turned into a rust-belt, its communities blighted by mass unemployment with all the subsequent social ills.

This would have the double benefit for Britain's capitalists of taking out many of the best organised and most militant sections of the trade union movement, then over 13.3 million strong and some 55 per cent of the labour force. This militancy had cost the bosses dear in terms of concessions, especially in the 1972-74 period, ending with the electoral downfall of Ted Heath's Tory government during the second miner's strike. But if British trade unionism was a giant in 1979, it was one with feet of clay, as the next few years were to prove. The militancy of the first half of the 1970s had been based on the growth of powerful workplace and rank and file organisations.

In the car factories there had been the growth of a shop stewards movement and a wave of unofficial, wildcat strikes. In the mines it was pit level and regional organisations like the South Yorkshire panel of the NUM and the Barnsley Miners Forums, with young leaders like Arthur Scargill in the forefront. But the second half of the 1970s – under a Labour government – saw the incorporation of much of this rank and file controlled shop stewards democracy into participation schemes at workplace level, turning stewards effectively into union full-timers. The election of a number of left union leaders, while it was a product of this radicalisation, also helped bring it to an end. Communist Party-dominated union organisations, called Broad Lefts, elected leaders like Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones who formed a conservative layer of right wingers.

The Labour Left around Tony Benn was totally behind this. In fact, it undermined the fighting power of union grassroots militants by involving them in a permanent negotiation process in which jobs were lost and real wages allowed to fall, a deal known as the "Social Contract". If the unions were much bigger at the start of the 1980s, they were not as democratic and nowhere near as fighting fit as they had been a decade before.

The new Tory government rudely put

a stop to all the hobnobbing between union leaders, management and government ministers. Instead of class collaboration, it pursued a strategy of class war. To give a lead to private sector bosses the government set out to smash some of the most powerful organisations of the working class movement – biding their time before taking on the union which, in the words of 1960s Tory PM Harold Macmillan, was the "brigade of guards" of the workers movement – the NUM.

The Ridley Plan was followed to the letter. From 1979 roughly every two years a new wave of anti-trade union laws were introduced and tested out. The police force was re-equipped to take on mass pickets with longer batons and helmets. The first Trade Union Act outlawed secondary strikes and picketing, i.e. action in solidarity with other workers. It pushed for secret ballots as a way of undermining union democracy. It limited pickets to only six people. The TUC called one day of protest action and 250,000 responded with demonstrations in 130 towns and cities. Unfortunately this proved to be the end, not the beginning, of their campaign.

In October 1981, the government announced legislation outlawing unions from engaging in political action and giving the courts power to sequester unions' assets for acts by their members declared unlawful by the courts, unless the unions denounced them and ordered their cessation. This time the TUC called no action at all merely promising "non-cooperation" with the act and "support" to any union attacked. In 1980 the Social Security Act slashed payments to strikers' families in a further act to undermine effective action.

The Tories installed "hit-men" managers to attack the unions and carry through huge job reduction plans. One was Michael Edwardes in British Leyland, nationalised in the 1970s. He led a campaign which targeted union organisers at the giant Longbridge plant in Birmingham, sacking people like Eric Robinson, a Communist Party member and active trade unionist with little resistance from the workforce.

In early 1980 a 13-week strike in the nationalised steel industry broke out over wages and plans by employers to make 52,000 redundancies. After militant mass picketing, such as the fierce battles at Hadfields in Sheffield – the right-wing ISTC union leadership crumpled and settled for a wage increase but let the closures and redundancies rip through the industry. An important reason for the steel workers defeat was the lack of solidarity from other unions and the TUC.

Private employers who took on the unions were supported by massive police intervention, for instance at *The Stockport Messenger*, whose anti-union owner Eddie Shah in 1983 employed non-union

labour. The new anti-union laws – which now banned the closed shop – were invoked to break the resistance of powerful print union, the National Graphical Association (NGA). The High Court fined the union a total of £250,000, seizing all of its assets. But the TUC refused to resist and the NGA went down to defeat. The High Court then awarded Shah a further £250,000 in damages from the unions' coffers.

In 1980, civil servants and the health workers struck but were also defeated. In 1982 it was the turn of the train drivers. Here the TUC intervened not to support their union ASLEF, but to force it to surrender. The only apparently bright spot was that in February 1981 a premature attack on the miners was repulsed by an eruption of flying pickets. The Tories were not ready and made a tactical retreat.

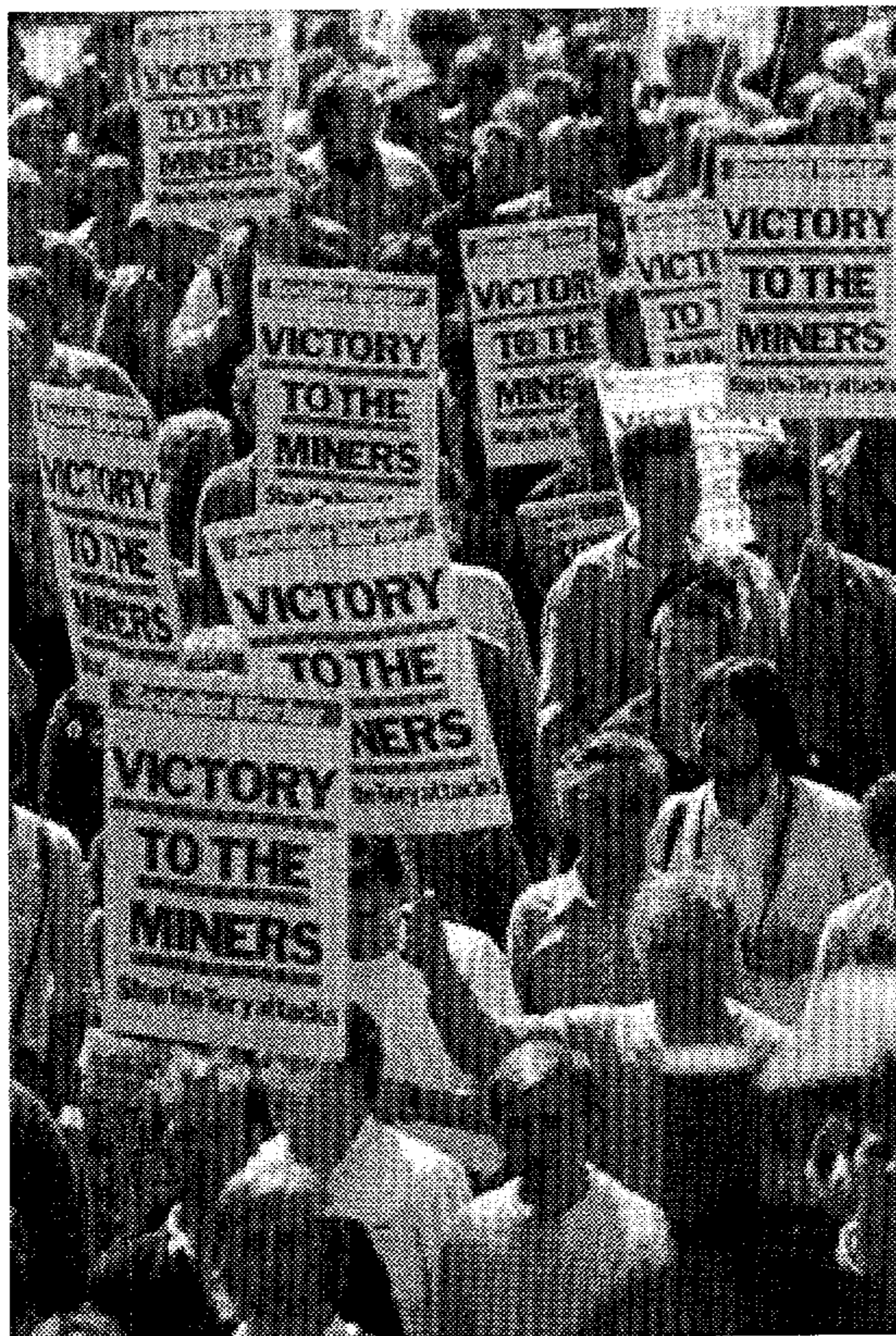
In 1981, too, the black youth of the inner cities erupted in a series of uprisings. For the first time the scale and training of the new paramilitary riot squads became clear. By 1984 the Tories had at their disposal some 11,000 trained riot police. In addition 58 million tonnes of coal stocks were systematically accumulated.

Last but not least, in January 1984, Thatcher simply ordered 7,000 workers at GCHQ, the governments' monitoring and communications centre in Cheltenham, to resign their union membership on pain of dismissal. The CPSA, their union, protested and demonstrated. So did the TUC, but Thatcher simply treated their protests with contempt. The TUC once again took no action, despite the outrage of the working class at the obvious violation of its most basic of rights – the right to strike.

The strike starts

The new Coal Board chairman Ian MacGregor, a hatchet man brought in by Thatcher to wage war on the miners, triggered the strike by two announcements in early March 1984. The first was to close Cortonwood colliery within four weeks on the grounds that it was "uneconomic". This was a blatant provocation since Cortonwood came only 92nd on the NCB's list of less profitable mines. But it was in the centre of the militant South Yorkshire area. The second was MacGregor's aside that 20 pit closures were in the offing, making 25,000 miners redundant. The writing was on the wall if the miners did not fight back.

From the first day it was clear that this was a battle that would involve the whole of the labour movement. As *Workers Power* said at the time: "This strike will now end in a major victory for one class or another. That is beyond a shadow of a doubt. We must strain every nerve and muscle to make sure it is the millions of workers rather than the hand-



ful of parasites who win. Into battle, shoulder to shoulder, with the miners!" (Workers Power 52 March 22 1984)

In the face of attempts by the gutter press to turn women against the strike, the women of the mining communities built a mass working class women's movement from scratch. (See article in WP333)

Despite the systematic preparations of the Tories, compared to the pitiful unpreparedness of the rest of the union movement, the defeat of the miners was not inevitable. A massive base of sympathy and support existed. This was demonstrated at various points in the strike not only by the hundreds of miners support committees that sprung up in every major town and city raising huge amounts of money and supplies they raised to keep the strikers going, but also by the strikes and blacking by railworkers, dockers, and by widespread international solidarity actions, too.

Despite this the miners, and with them the entire working class, lost the battle.

Why? First, the leaders of the labour movement – terrified of breaking the law – failed to mobilise the unions in solidarity with the miners. In some cases, TU leaders, such as Frank Chapple and Eric Hammond of the electricians union EETPU, openly refused help to the miners. In other cases, Lefts like Ray Buckton of ASLEF and Jimmy Knapp of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) deceitfully did the same thing by settling their disputes. Second, the miners' leaders, despite their much greater militancy and will to win, failed to appeal to the rank and file of the other unions over the heads of their misleaders. They did so out of respect for the *esprit de corps* of the trade union bureaucracy and its golden rule of non-interference in each other's unions.

Third, the main forces of the socialist left, mesmerised by Arthur Scargill's militancy and the unbounded confidence most miners placed in him, did not warn of the dangers of his strategy, did not try to organise at a rank and file level and

in short did not offer a strategy for victory either.

Within two days of Cortonwood coming out, the whole of Yorkshire was on strike. Flying pickets were sent to other areas and Scotland, South Wales, Kent, the North East and North Derbyshire were soon on all out strike. Against the instructions of Yorkshire officials on 12 March, 250 flying pickets from Armthorpe, Rossington and Hatfield went to pits in Nottingham, Haworth, Ollerton, Bevercoates, and Thoresby. But soon the strike had its first martyr. On 14 March, a 24-year old Yorkshire miner David Jones was killed during a mass picket of the night shift at Ollerton. Throughout the Midlands, however, the response was very patchy.

Worried by this huge display of grassroots militancy, the NUM executive began calling for a national ballot as a way of avoiding a fight. The NUM rulebook laid it down that there had to be a 55 per cent majority for a strike to take place. In two previous ballots since becoming president in 1981, Scargill had won a majority of action on wages and pit closures but short of 55 per cent and as a result no strikes had taken place. He and his supporters were very wary of a national ballot. And indeed with a rolling strike underway, a return to work in order to have a ballot would have been a disaster. The momentum of the struggle would have been lost and pits would have been closed during the ballot.

The rolling strike, bringing out each area and then sanctioning the action and coordinating it nationally via the executive was, under the circumstances, the best way to go forward. Nevertheless it also seemed natural to most miners that a national strike needed a national decision. Yet the NUM executive refused to call a national strike. Scargill and his two closest allies in the NUM, Peter Heathfield and Mick McGahey (a left Labour Party and a Communist Party member respectively), were trapped by their adherence to the NUM rulebook. In March and for half of April they left it to the Nottinghamshire area leadership, who were telling their members to cross Yorkshire miners' picket lines and promising an area secret ballot and a national ballot before they would have to strike.

Based on Rule 41 of the NUM rulebook, Scargill and co recognised the strikes underway but announced that it was up to the regions themselves whether or not to strike. At grassroots level in striking areas the militants accepted this believing they would be able to picket out the non-striking areas. However, the combination of a massive police presence and a nucleus of scab organisers ensured this did not happen. But there was an alternative. It meant using the weapon of workers' democracy – the mass pithead meeting – against the Nottinghamshire

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right-wing leaders. But Scargill, Heathfield and McGahey's strategy gave these right-wing leaders in the non-striking areas six weeks to organise against strike action and to conduct their own regional ballots. This was a fatally misjudged tactic. On 5 April, three quarters of Nottinghamshire miners voted not to strike. As long as it remained a strike by regions, Midlands miners could believe that they were not scabbing because their region had not called them out.

At the time Workers Power argued: "The NEC must organise for pit head meetings to be held in every colliery in every coalfield. They must hear speakers from the areas that are immediately under MacGregor's axe. They should hear from workers taking action in support of the miners. All NEC members, and the national president in particular should address mass rallies – most vitally in the Midlands – to urge maximum support for the NEC's call [for a national strike] ... At pithead meetings a show of hands should precede the constitutionally prescribed ballot. These should be organised in the shortest possible time. Days not weeks." (5 April 1984).

It was a fatal delay by the left-dominated executive; one that allowed the lines of division inside the NUM itself to harden. Had the executive called a national strike from the outset it would have deprived the Right of this opportunity and encouraged the strong minority of NUM loyalists in the "moderate" areas, especially Nottinghamshire, to work to win the majority. If a vote had been taken by a show of hands at mass meetings, after hearing the arguments, including from delegates of the areas facing massive closures, the possibility of a ballot vote for solidarity with them would have been much greater and the likelihood of obeying the national strike call even greater still. This was particularly important through March and April when the entire strike was dominated by the question of whether to ballot.

But the Left leaders were afraid to challenge the federalism of the NUM. The NUM was born out of a series of regional unions as the Miners Federation of Great Britain. Each had its own regional entrenched bureaucracy, jealous of their own power base and operating for much of the time like separate unions. So, leaders like Jack Jones in Leicester called on his members to cross picket lines, while Ray Chadburn in Nottinghamshire urged his men to vote no to a strike in a regional ballot.

This proved to be Scargill's first fatal mistake. In the battle for a national strike it meant that over a month was lost. And it was a critical month for it allowed the right-wing, with unprecedented media support, to whip up hysteria over

"democracy" and the ballot. Not until 19 April did the NUM leadership convene a national delegate conference which finally declared the strike national and ordered the Nottinghamshire miners and others to stop work. Once the union's conference had made its decision it was necessary to enforce it.

After the conference decision, the Yorkshire militants fantastically to calls for mass picketing at a number of key Nottinghamshire pits, to encourage the Nottinghamshire striking minority. This heroic effort culminated in the huge national rally held – 40,000 strong – in Mansfield on 14 May. But the belief that Yorkshire pickets could, as they had so often done before, picket out the majority of the Nottinghamshire miners was a delusion. The relationship of forces with the police had changed. By the end of the first week of the picketing, there were over 20,000 police from 43 different forces available to police picket lines and patrol the mining communities.

Within Nottinghamshire alone 10,000 police were mobilised not only to protect those who wanted to scab but to terrorise the sizable minority of Nottinghamshire miners who wanted to strike. An infamous incident was the savage attack by police in Blidworth on the night of 18 May when striking Nottinghamshire miners' homes were raided in search for Yorkshire pickets they were putting up. Police did all they could to terrorise the families of strikers, assaulting miners wives and girlfriends as they searched their homes.

Michael Havers, the Attorney General, outlined the strategy to prevent flying pickets from entering the no-go zones: "Police have the power to stop their (pickets') vehicles on the road and turn them away. Anyone not complying would be committing a criminal offence." Over 167,000 pickets and strike supporters were prevented from entering Nottingham.

The police even mass arrested pickets trying to get to the non-striking areas – and the courts had been lined up to give bail conditions which forbade miners from leaving their home area on pain of imprisonment.

By the end of March, the National Reporting Centre had deployed sufficient forces to make Nottinghamshire a no-go area for pickets, with road blocks, mobile picket busting squads and massed ranks of police at working collieries to batter anyone that did get through the net.

Added to the police occupation of the county's pit villages the process of organised scab-herding now really began in earnest. David Hart, a right-wing Tory businessman and friend of Thatcher, poured money into help them organise. Hart, with the aid of the *Daily Mail*, set up the Nottingham Working Miners Committee with a scab called Chris

Butcher – who called himself Silver Birch. It went on to become a full-scale yellow union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM – which miners renamed 'Under Direct Management').

Over the course of the next months the Tories were not only able to use the 58 million tonnes of coal reserves at the power stations to keep the country free of power cuts, but the Midlands scabs kept the coal coming, too.

After a month and a half on strike with an impasse in the Midlands, the struggle was obliged to take a new turn in May. From shutting down the coalfields the miners turned their attention to shutting down the rest of British industry. Thousands of young miners set off for the power stations, the steel mills, the coking plants, and rail depots – consciously defying the Tories' laws on picketing – their numbers swelled by workers from other industries, by unemployed youth and students, mobilised by the growing miners support committees.

At this point it was clear that widespread solidarity action was now the key to victory. The Tories had the coal. But if they couldn't move it or burn it in the power stations or steel mills, what good would it do them? Everything now depended on the response of trade unionists in these industries and in the wider labour movement. This brought to the fore the question of how to get solidarity strike action, how to shut down industries that used coal and how to make mass picketing effective against a militarised national police force. Was it by private negotiations with the often right-wing leaders of the unions in these key sectors or was it by placing demands on them publicly, accompanied by concentrating on winning their rank and file in the power stations and the steel mills?

Above all the issue had to be dealt with by the leaders of the unions and the Labour Party, long on words of support but short on pledges to take action. By the middle of May, although Scargill and the NUM denied it, it was plain that the miners would not win unless other forces in the working class movement struck alongside them. The often shouted slogan of "The miners united will never be defeated!" reflected the inadequate strategy of many miners and their leaders at this point.

But for other unions to move into struggle the question of defying the anti-union laws was now moving centre stage. The courts were beginning to hear cases against the NUM regions and to threaten fines and sequestration of funds. This raised not only the issue of defiance – something the NUM was certain to do – but of a general strike to break the anti-union laws.

How these issues were addressed will be covered in the forthcoming parts of this series

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 organisation.

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 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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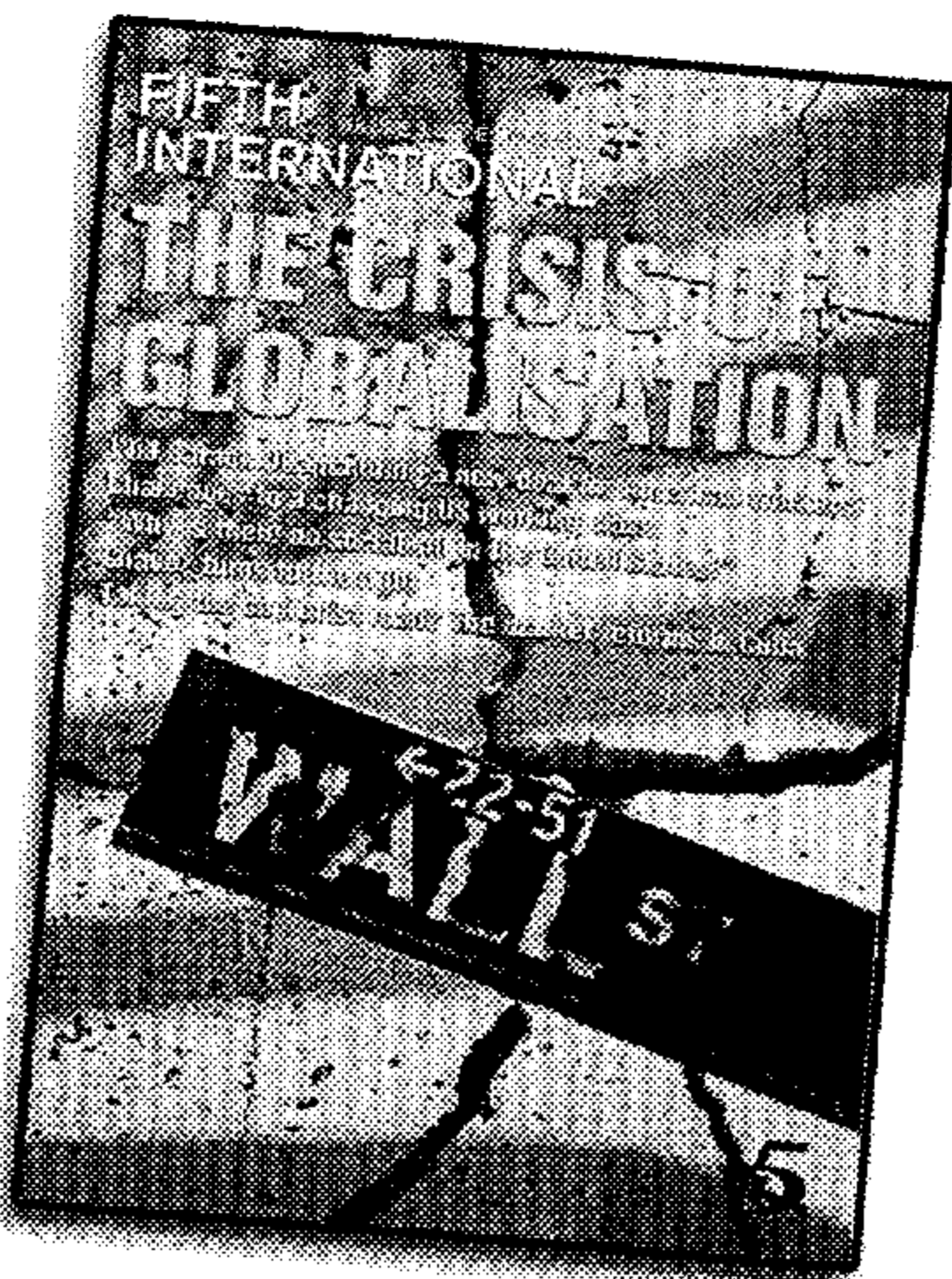
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From occupations to workers' control

By Jeremy Dewar

The past six months have seen more factory occupations than in the last six years. In November, workers at Calcast car parts factory in Derry, Northern Ireland occupied their plant for two days, winning an extra £250,000 in redundancy payments. Then in January, hundreds of workers at Waterford Crystal in Ireland reacted to their factory's closure by occupying it for two months.

In the past few weeks, workers have occupied their workplaces at Prisme in Dundee and Visteon in Belfast, Enfield and Basildon.

And it's not just in Britain. In Chicago, 250 workers at Republic Windows and Doors won US\$6,000 each after a five-day occupation last December. A few months later, 300 Canadian workers won C\$5,000 each after a sit-in at two factories supplying parts to Chrysler.

Most spectacularly, French workers have started "boss-napping", holding their bosses hostage at Sony France and 3M to add urgency to their sit-ins.

These disputes give hope to millions fearing for their livelihoods. What a contrast to those union officials, who announce job losses for the bosses saying that nothing can be done because of the recession.

Private property and the state

The occupation tactic is doubly important in Britain because the anti-trade union laws allow bosses to sack workers or shut the gates without warning, while we need weeks of notice and ballots before we can strike.

Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky argued that during crises, workers must use different tactics to the normal everyday procedures of trade unionism, and should be "on guard against routine handling of a situation as against a plague".

"Sit down strikes [...] go beyond the limits of "normal" capitalist procedure. Independently of the demands of the strikers, the temporary seizure of factories deals a blow to the idol, capitalist property. Every sit-down strike poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss of the factory: the capitalist or the workers?" (All quotes from *The Transitional Programme*, 1938)

The key to winning the maximum in these circumstances is to ensure that the struggle spreads not only to workers in the same industry – factories in the same company, across the

country and indeed internationally, but to all workers facing the effects of the crisis. If they rally to the occupiers, it makes intervention by the courts and the police more difficult and dangerous for the bosses. They will be frightened of setting off an explosion of mass anger.

Occupations must become organising centres of struggle, opening their doors to others fighting cuts and closures and spreading the action. Mass demonstrations and rallies must take place to the occupied plants, while meetings inside can help turn a trade dispute into a class struggle, where families, friends and other workers can play an active role – publicising and winning support for their own demands.

Workers can get on the company's computers to find out where the money from the "good" times has gone, and what the bosses' plans are.

However, it would be a grave mistake to imagine that the bosses will simply sink into resignation. As Trotsky warned:

"The sharpening of the proletariat's struggle means the sharpening of the methods of counterattack on the part of capital... Woe to the revolutionary organisations, woe to the proletariat if it is caught unawares!"

The bosses will cut off water, gas and electricity and padlock fire escapes to lay siege on the sit-ins. The moment the workers' guard is down, they will send in the riot police to violently reclaim the premises. Workers should call on other workers to break the siege by turning utility supplies back on, and should organise guards to raise the alarm and repel intruders.

The bosses will use the anti-union and criminal justice laws to fine and jail occupation leaders. The moment this happens, we should demand the union calls all its members out and the TUC calls an immediate general strike. The work done to spread the action and involve the local working class in solidarity can lay the ground for such action – even in the teeth of opposition from the union bureaucracy.

This is what happened when the Tory government jailed five dockers in 1972. A rolling national strike from below finally forced the TUC to call a general strike. The threat and the spread of strikes from below was enough to frighten government into freeing the dockers.

But once occupied, what should be the

future of the plant? Some of the recent occupations are for increased redundancy payments. But, even an extra £5,000-6,000 in your pocket, will not last long if you join an ever-lengthening dole queue. In a few months' time, workers will be back where they started.

Another blind alley – one particularly favoured by the trade union officials – is the search for a capitalist buyer for the enterprise. This is almost certain to entail the acceptance of massive lay-offs by the new owner or demoralisation and defeat if the deal collapses. This is what happened to the Waterford Crystal workers.

Another danger is the temptation to turn a sit-in into a work-in; to carry on production without the bosses. In certain conditions – with supplies and outlets for sale – this is a possibility for a short period of time. Occupied factories in Argentina and Venezuela have, since 2002, gone down this route. But most closed, as markets collapsed; in those that continued, workers were forced into exploiting themselves. Trying to keep bankrupt firms going within capitalism is not the solution.

The alternative is to turn step up the anti-capitalist potential in a wave of occupations by fighting for their nationalisation under workers' control – with no compensation to the former owners.

Of course governments will be reluctant to do this, despite having effectively nationalised the bank wholesale. But when faced with a rising tide of sit-in strikes, as happened in France in 1936 and again in 1968, in the US in 1937 and Poland in 1981, the bosses can make massive concessions. But they take an enormous risk in doing so, as Trotsky pointed out:

"Sit-down strikes do not yet mean the seizure of factories... but they are a decisive step towards such seizures. The present crisis can sharpen the class struggle to an extreme point and bring near the moment of denouement. But that does not mean that a revolutionary situation comes at one stroke. Actually, its approach is signalled by a continuous series of convulsions. One of these is the wave of sit-down strikes."

While communists must always point out the next steps in the struggle, it is this understanding of the anti-capitalist logic of workplace occupations that we seek to spread, so that these courageous actions can play their role in preparing a final showdown with capital.