

workers power

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AS LABOUR IS PUNISHED FOR THE POLITICS OF GREED WE NEED A NEW PARTY

- **Anticapitalist**
- **Internationalist**
- **Working class**

Inside:

- **Labour in historic crisis**
- **Strikes loom in post and rail**
- **Solidarity needed with Tamils in Sri Lanka**
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- **How to fight the BNP**
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**League for the
Fifth International**

Labour Party in Crisis

By Billy McKean and Dave Stockton

Labour is reeling from its defeats in the elections for English county councils and the European Parliament. In the EU polls north of the border they came second to the Scottish Nationalists and in Wales they lost for the first time to the Tories. The collapse of the Labour vote in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside let in two fascist MEPs. This comes on top of the MPs expenses scandal and the string of resignations by Labour ministers caught with their fingers in the till.

So far, six cabinet and three non-executive ministers have resigned. On the eve of the European and county council elections, Hazel Blears flounced out of office in a rage, sporting a "rocking the boat" brooch to show her disdain for Brown. In fact she was showing her utter contempt for the Labour Party membership as a whole, putting her own position before the fortunes of her party. By the time James Purnell stormed out 24 hours later in an attempt to provoke a pro-Miliband palace coup, the careerist war between Blairite and Brownite ministers was more reminiscent of the dog-eat-dog behaviour of senior bankers than of a supposedly working class party.

It is in this fetid atmosphere that Brown has sought to shore up support with appointments of several Labour loyalists drawn from the unions. Brown knows his last throw of the dice depends on the thousands of trade union members who still account for the bulk of the official Labour Party membership and provide its funds.

But politically he will continue to row to the 'centre', in a vain attempt to win back the middle class vote. But even to win the "sympathy" of fickle middleclass voters, Labour always needed the bedrock strength of its working class

base. Blair and Brown's common "project" back in 1995 was to "triangulate" - which meant taking Labour's solid vote from the working class in the public and private sector for granted, and then tailor their policies to the previously Tory middle classes.

That explained the emphasis on "choice" in education and the health service - which meant bringing big business into these areas of social provision, taking them out of local council or direct central government control so that unequal levels of "investment" could produce "successful" schools and hospitals ready to be cherry picked by the professional middle classes.

Meanwhile Labour's working class base saw the continued decline of industry, continued sell off of council houses, continued privatisations and increasingly middle class Labour ministers and MPs pocketing inflated salaries and expenses and showing not an ounce of sympathy for the problems faced by ordinary people.

No wonder 1.4 million fewer voters supported Labour in the European elections than five years ago. Core Labour supporters feel completely let down by their party and many angrily abstained in protest.

Workers Power has no illusions in the working class credentials of a government that for over twelve years bombed and burned its way from Belgrade to Baghdad, which brought big business and the market into our schools and hospitals and even now is still trying to privatise Royal Mail.

But Labour MPs like John McDonnell and trade union leaders like Derek Simpson and Dave Prentis do believe that Labour can be recaptured for the working class. They think that, at the eleventh hour, Gordon Brown could adopt pro-working class policies. We do not. However - with the party totally dependent on the big union's funds and on left loyalist for survival - the union leaders ought at least to pluck up

their courage and publicly demand a change of policy from Brown. Behind the scenes diplomacy and pleading is 100 per cent certain to yield no results. The unions have paid millions to Labour over the years, but in this case he who pays the piper has not called the tune. So the unions should demand:

- The repeal of all the anti-union laws that strangle effective trade unionism.
- A huge levy on the giant corporations and banks and the private wealth of the rich to fund a programme of building, repair and equipping of schools, hospitals, and council housing.
- The nationalisation of all firms declaring redundancies or plant closures, especially the collapsing car and components industry and an end to job losses
- An end to public service cuts and retrenchments, and end to all privatisation and public-private partnership schemes.

We do not believe that either Gordon Brown of the Labour Left or the union leaders will do this. Why? Because Brown is a bought and sold agent of the bankers. As for John McDonnell and Derek Simpson, we do not believe they have the courage to face up to Brown or even to attack his leadership.

We have argued for the last five years that the time is ripe for a new mass working class party. Now it appears at long last that Bob Crow of the RMT union and the Socialist Workers Party have come round to this view too. We believe other unions should break from Labour and put their financial and human resources at the service of this goal, and that the socialist organisations should come together in building this new party. As Workers Power has been arguing along these lines for five years, we will join any initiative that seriously moves in this direction and so should every militant in the labour movement.

We need gay pride in Doncaster!

A member of the far right English democrats Party has been elected mayor of Doncaster. He lost no time in implementing his reactionary agenda and immediately announced he was axing funding for gay pride. The disgusting right wing paper the Star responded with the headline 'Gays Feel the Pinch' and added in language worthy of any fascist "Crusade begins against PC madness."

Let's show this despicable demagogue what the movement for emancipation and freedom is really made of. Lets call an absolutely massive protest for sexual freedom in Doncaster and mobilise lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people, socialists, trade unionists, women's liberationists and everyone who believes in democracy and freedom in a massive march through Doncaster.

This kind of anti-gay language should be a relic of the dark ages, and the fact that the English Democrats want to turn back the clock is a worrying sign. Let's flaunt our sexuality and lets fight back!

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The EU elections and the crisis of European capitalism
The EU elections will take the discourse to the national level. Parliament will be the arena for the struggle of a developing working class and sharp attacks on the working class will be the result. We have to be clear about the working class in these elections.

Falling profit rates in Marxist Crisis Theory
The Marxist theory of the economic crisis of the world system, which is the central theme of the Marxist theory of the economic crisis.

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EDITORIAL

Build a new workers party - now

The Labour Party is in a deep crisis. The rats are deserting the sinking ship as, one after another, selfish ministers cut and run.

They've done nothing to bail out our jobs, as scores of thousands are thrown on the dole in manufacturing, the car industry, the oil industry, construction, insurance and banking. But they gave hundreds of billions to the bankers - and millions to themselves in dodgy expenses.

And they dare to call themselves the party of the working class.

No wonder Labour's share of the vote is down to a historic low of 23 percent - less than one in four chose Labour at the council elections. Millions of traditional Labour voters up and down the country are looking for an alternative.

Votes went to the Tories, but they are even worse than Labour, a party of the super-rich through and through. Some voted for hard right wingers like UKIP and even the fascists of the BNP. Some just stayed at home.

The answer is obvious. Labour doesn't represent the working class. Their leaders have even stripped away the right of the party conference to change its policies.

So it's time for a new workers' party.

Support for Labour has declined since 1997, because again and again they have betrayed the millions of working class people that voted for them.

Blair led the way, selling off more of the NHS to big business than even Thatcher ever dared in the 1980s. In education, they did the same, handing our children's upbringing over to profiteers in the city academies. Council housing has continued to be sold off and to run down.

Our civil liberties have been taken away. Innocent people can be held over a month without charge under the Terrorism Act. Your DNA can be held for years even if you never committed an offence. Peaceful protesters get harassed, spied on and beaten by the police.

A constant media attack has been launched on the Muslim population, encouraged by Labour's spin doctors, trying to make them afraid to speak out against Labour's wars for fear of being branded terrorists.

And Labour's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have killed over one million innocent people, according to independent medical estimates.

All these things provoked one

member to leave Labour every twenty minutes in 2006, as the party abandoned everything it had once seemed to stand for.

Hopes that Gordon Brown would be better were soon dashed. Brown has overseen the biggest economic crisis since the 1930s - and spent hundreds of billions on banks who squandered it on huge bonuses for bosses, whilst the rest of us are still suffering wage cuts, job losses and unemployment.

The Tories will be even worse. They have already said they will make savage cuts to public spending, covering the debt incurred by the bank bailout by starving schools, hospitals and other essential services of funds.

Labour, Tory, Lib-Dem, UKIP all agree on one thing. The working class - British and foreign - must be made to pay the price for the economic crisis. But we didn't cause the crisis - the rich capitalists did. So we need a party that makes them pay, not us.

We need a new working class party, so that at the next election the choice is not just between the official discredited parties of the establishment and the expenses scandal. We need a new party so that there is a progressive, anti-racist, pro-working class alternative to the dangerous divisive arguments of UKIP and the outright racism of the brutal BNP.

In the European elections, Bob Crow and his RMT transport union launched a new electoral challenge, jointly with the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. This is important and shows that forces exist that could build a challenge to Labour.

But the name they chose for their electoral platform speaks volumes. They called it No 2 EU, stressing opposition to foreign governments, foreign bosses and even the free movement of foreign labour. The danger is that this plays along with the divisive nationalism that is building up strength in Britain today. Instead of putting the blame where it belongs, at the door of the rich bankers, capitalists and government in Britain, it diverts attention away from home. It leads to dangerous divisions in the working class, like the 'British Jobs for British Workers' strikes in construction, which targeted not the bosses who are sacking workers, but foreign workers' jobs.

The RMT and their backers look likely to be holding a conference after the election to discuss setting up a

new party. Workers and campaigners, socialists, antiwar activists and anti-racists should attend the conference and back efforts to set up a new working class party, while opposing nationalism and all attempts to blame foreign workers. Instead of fighting only for British jobs, it would fight for jobs and equal pay for workers of all nationalities, breaking down undercutting by levelling up pay, and breaking down hatred by mutual solidarity of all workers. It would actively fight against racism and the fascist BNP, and it would support the free movement of mworkers.

Building it is a job for all of us, and not in the distant future -right now.

Who could be drawn into the project of creating a new party? We can start with all those workers already in struggle with the employers and this rotten bosses' government.

Rail workers, post workers and construction workers who are balloting for action against job cuts, attacks on union agreements and privatisation; The Visteon and Prisme workers who occupied their plants rather than let bosses sack them without decent redundancy pay; Residents and workers in Lambeth fighting their council's cuts and rent rises; Linamar workers preparing for all out action in defence of their sacked convenor; Young people campaigning against the British National Party who are filling the void of despair left by the mainstream parties; Students fighting education cuts and for solidarity with the people of Gaza; The unemployed and the youth in danger of becoming a 'lost generation'; All of us who are sick and tired of the greed and corruption of the current system.

The socialist groups should back this fight for a new party. In particular, the largest of the socialist groups, the Socialist Workers Party, is rumoured to be on the verge of changing its policy and issuing a call for a new political party. This would be a big step forward - so long as it openly opposes those who want to foist a divisive nationalist policy on the new party, and as long as it takes as its model not a Labour Party Mark 2 under the control of union leaders, but a democratic party like the New Anticapitalist Party in France, within which revolutionary socialists would be able to mount an argument in favour of overthrowing the capitalist system for good.

If you agree, contact Workers Power and join us in the fight for a new anti-capitalist party!

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EURO ELECTIONS

Europe moves right and social democratic vote collapses

By Simon Hardy

Across Europe conservatives, nationalists and fascists are celebrating election wins. The Social-Democratic, Socialist and Labour parties are reeling after their electoral support plummeted.

The Social Democrats in Germany scored just 21 per cent of the vote. The sense of despondency was summed up by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the SPD foreign minister, who said: "This is a disappointing election result – there's no talking around it." In France the Socialist Party's vote fell from 28 per cent to just 16 per cent.

However, despite the collapse of these so-called "centre left" parties, in a number of countries more left wing parties, which had been involved in the recent anti-capitalist struggles in the workplaces and on the streets, like the mass strikes in France and the street protests in Greece, connected with workers' and young people's desire for radical change and did reasonably well.

Overall, people used the European elections to punish the social democrats for governing on behalf of the rich and carrying out a series of "neoliberal reforms" like privatisation and welfare cuts. The social democratic parties were all, like Labour in the UK, created by the working class, but act in the interests of the capitalists. Their working class base has now, across the board, punished them.

There is an urgent need for new working class parties to turn the tide, as part of a genuine working class fightback against the economic crisis. Without this the next few years will see the situation deteriorate further for workers and progressive forces as the right makes gains.

The rise of the right

The massive success of some of the right wing parties was a direct result of this erosion of support for the social democrats.

In Spain, the right wing Peoples' Party won the election, beating the governing Spanish Socialist Party. The conservatives also won 10 seats in Portugal, defeating the Social Democrats, who are also in government.

In Austria the Social Democratic Party's support fell to only 28 per cent and the far right Freedom Party massively increased its vote.

The governing social democratic parties have been punished for their defence of capitalism, as people moved to the right, seduced by the bosses' claims to be more decisive, or abstained.

But it would be wrong to say that people only voted against incumbent governments as a mere protest. In countries where the Social Democracy is in opposition, the right

wing still achieved spectacular results.

In Germany, which has the highest proportion of seats in the EU parliament, Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats scored a stunning victory over the Social Democrats, who are participating in a coalition government with Merkel.

In France, Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP won a significant victory, a right wing advance echoed in Italy by the corrupt Silvio Berlusconi's party, as well as the Northern Leagues, which polled 10 per cent of the vote.

In the Netherlands, Islamophobic politician Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom) came second in the election with 17 per cent. In Hungary the fascist party Jobbik, which openly parades around in uniforms under the slogan "Hungary belongs to the Hungarians", had three MEPs elected. Its paramilitary Hungarian Guard has staged provocative demonstrations in Roma villages, and the head of the police trade union was one of its main candidates.

In Belgium the centre right won out over the left and the far right, with the fascist Vlaams Bloc suffering significant losses. The leader Filip Dewinter consoled himself by saying: "Flanders has lurched to the right. The left is losing."

What about the radical left?

The votes of the Europe's newer left parties were mixed. In Germany the Left Party (Die Linke) got 7.5 per cent and won eight seats, a very good result. In France, the Front de Gauche (Left Front) got 6.3 per cent, giving them five seats. The Front de Gauche's main component is the newly created Parti De Gauche (Left Party), a left wing split from the Socialist Party which was set up shortly after the launch of the radical Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (New Anticapitalist Party) in a blatant attempt to try and block its growth. Despite this, the NPA still got 4.9 per cent, but it was not enough for them to get anyone elected. The vote for the Left Bloc in Portugal was significant, around 10 per cent. And the Committee for a Workers International were riding high after its Irish Section, the Socialist Party, won a big victory, getting Joe Higgins elected in Ireland. Higgins beat the ruling Fianna Fail party to secure his seat, part of a wider trend that saw FF and their coalition partners the Greens do quite badly. The shift to the left by the Irish workers was greeted by Kieran Allen from the SWP who said: "The radical left must now enter discussions to form either an alliance or broad radical left party, where different tendencies can coexist." Such a call for a party must be welcomed by socialists, workers and youth, who should press for a new workers' party and a democratic debate over its programme and strategy.

However, socialists must beware. The rea-

son for the collapse of social democracy was that it ruled in partnership with the capitalists. The Parti de Gauche in France and Die Linke in Germany are left reformist parties that have refused to rule out serving in capitalist governments; in Die Linke's case it has already pushed through neoliberal policies in Berlin, where it has served in a capitalist coalition with the SPD in the regional government. These parties will become compromised in the eyes of the working class in the same way that the traditional social democratic parties have – whether it is in one year or 10.

We need anticapitalist workers' parties that, from the beginning, make it clear that they will not serve on behalf of the capitalists or in coalition governments with capitalist parties, but which fight instead for working class power, for complete independence from the capitalists, for workers' governments based on workers' organisations alone. The NPA is a more important development than Die Linke in this respect, having gone some way towards ruling out coalition with capitalists, and points the way forward for other such projects in Europe. In the aftermath of its disappointment at being denied seats in Strasbourg, the NPA should reject the siren call of those who would have it make an unprincipled alliance with the Parti de Gauche.

Where do we go from here?

In a time of economic crisis, wouldn't we expect workers to vote for their own parties to defend them? The reality is that social democracy in Europe is in crisis. Its support has crumbled and it can find no way out. People are increasingly angry at the system, the growing poverty, the feeling of alienation, the hatred of the capitalist elites creaming money out of the crisis.

The problem is that, because no serious socialist alternative is being presented, one which can seriously fight back against the economic crisis, the right is surging ahead, taking advantage of the confusion caused by the social democrats' betrayals. Social Democrats are wedded to capitalism itself, so they, along with the trade union leaders that back them, cannot pose a challenge to the system.

Millions of workers across Europe voted for parties to the left of the traditional social democratic parties. This represents an important base to build on – despite the gains of the right. Instead, we need to bring together the anticapitalist parties of Europe in a new coordination, rejecting coalition with the capitalists, hammering out a programme of action, linking resistance to the crisis with the fight for working class governments and the need for revolution. This means a new, international party, fighting for a Socialist United States of Europe.

Labour suffers historic defeat as working class abandons party

- **Tories main winners as Labour vote collapses**
- **Fascist BNP makes significant gains, winning two MEPs for the first time**
- **Anti-Europe, anti-immigration UKIP takes second spot**
- **Sharp decline in turnout shows voters disillusioned with mainstream politics**
- **Opportunity for new anticapitalist alternative if formed for next general election**

By Luke Cooper

The big story of the 2009 European and local elections is the electoral annihilation of the Labour Party. Taking just 15 per cent of the vote in the European elections, they slumped into third place behind UKIP. Just days earlier, they lost control of all four of the counties they were defending in the English counties elections; returning just 170 councillors compared to the Tories' haul of 1,531, and getting a historic low for council elections of just 23 per cent.

While the Tories celebrated turning the English counties blue, even taking councils off the Lib Dems in the south west as well, the European elections are perhaps a better indicator of the anger and indignation so many people feel with the three main parties, as none could claim a big victory. The Tories' could point to an increase in their share of the vote of one per cent compared to five years ago, but they came away with fewer votes than they had last time - 4.2 million, down from 4.4 million. They owe their increased share of the vote to a sharp fall in turnout. But while the Tories appeared to have got their core middle class base out, Labour's working class base collapsed; their share of the vote was down seven per cent, a huge loss of 1.3 million voters compared to 2004.

So Labour suffered the humiliation of being pushed into third place, by the far right, anti-Europe, anti-immigration party UKIP, who gained a further two MEPs on top of those they won at their breakthrough election in 2004. But again, UKIP has benefited from the collapse in Labour's turnout, rather than an influx of new voters behind them - their share of the vote only increased by 0.3 per cent while they actually lost around 150,000 voters who had supported them in 2004.

Perhaps these deserted to the fascist BNP, who were clearly one of the big gainers in this election. The BNP returned two MEPs for the first time, winning not far off a million votes, an increase of around 150,000 from last time, and 6.5 per cent of the vote nationally. Leader Nick Griffin won a seat in the North West, while ex-National Front leader Andrew Brons won a seat in Yorkshire and Humber-side. But Griffin himself did not make big gains in terms of the numbers of actual votes won, which actually fell when compared to his total five years ago.

Minor parties' gains show mood for alternative

Many had predicted that minor parties would be the main beneficiaries of the political crisis over expenses, in which each of the mainstream parties was equally implicated, and the results appear to have borne out that prediction. Not just the BNP, but other minor parties like the Green Party (who added 200,000 voters to their 2004 result), the far right English Democrats (who doubled their vote and won the mayoralty of Doncaster), and the Christian Alliance (who scored a high vote in some parts of London, especially among devout immigrant communities), all saw sharp rises in their vote.

But even once these are added up, it can't account for the huge loss in support suffered by the Labour Party. It seems that many Labour voters opted to simply stay at home rather than come out and vote, accounting for the drop in turnout to just over 30 per cent.

And indeed if Labour voters were furious with the government for doing nothing to stop the jobs massacre, for a decade of privatisation in public services, for their latest attacks on the unemployed in the midst of spiralling unemployment, who did they have to turn to in these elections - in short, where was the left?

Where was the left?

Bob Crow's No2EU campaign, formed around two months prior to the campaign, is likely to be satisfied with its result - given the short time the campaign had to get off the ground. It scored just over 150,000 votes nationally, coming away with around 1 per cent. Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) did marginally better at just over 1 per cent. Taken together that gives a vote for the radical left of around 2 per cent.

The mere fact that the SLP - a tiny Stalinist party with very few activists - did better than Bob Crow's new alliance shows that Crow's opportunist tactic of pitching a new working class initiative around opposition to the EU and dropping such key questions as socialism failed to pick up additional support.

After all, at least Scargill's party calls itself socialist, which is doubtless the main reason people put a cross next to it on the ballot paper. No2EU's attempt to steal ground from UKIP failed. Even if it had been more successful, the fact is they would have picked up votes for the wrong reasons - opposition to the bosses, institutions and even the free movement of the peoples of Europe, rather than opposition

to our own bosses carrying out attacks on workers here.

Following the election, Bob Crow was reported on the BBC as calling for urgent discussions with the socialist organisations on a united left challenge to Labour. While, the No2EU press release quoted him as saying, "We now need urgent discussions with political parties, campaigns and our colleagues in other unions like the CWU to develop a political and industrial response to this crisis."

In response, all socialists should welcome any moves to a new party by Bob Crow and other union leaders. But we must fight to inject internationalist, anticapitalist and working class politics into it, and to drop the nationalist policies that No2EU has put forward so far. We need a new party that challenges capitalism and refuses to strike alliances with our own bosses. We need a new party that defends every job, fights for jobs for all and refuses to play into the bosses' hands by targeting migrant workers as the problem. We need a new party that identifies that crisis ridden capitalist system as the problem and socialist revolution as the solution.

Only by fighting for a new anticapitalist party can we hope to offer an alternative pole of attraction to the BNP. Their growth in these elections and the widespread disenchantment with all parties of the political establishment underlines a point often made by socialist activists: in times of social and political crisis such as ours the centre ground of politics doesn't hold, and society polarises between left and right. But as it stands we don't have a clear left pole.

Of course, many will want to start a renewed fight back against the BNP right away and won't want to wait until the left 'gets its act together' and builds a new party. Quite right; but let's do the two things together.

The fight for a new workers' party must go hand in hand with anti-fascist campaigning against the BNP. On every estate where the BNP are making inroads, we must get out there and fight to organise campaigns and movements that give progressive, working class solutions to the terrible poverty, lack of housing, and mass unemployment, which the BNP are exploiting to peddle their hateful lies.

But without a new working class party, all the antifascist campaigning in the world won't be enough. The right are capitalising on the failure of mainstream capitalist politics. An anticapitalist party is not an optional extra - it's the answer.

WORKPLACE

The silent jobs massacre

The scale of job losses and the prospect of worse to come are only matched by the union leaders' near total inaction and Labour and the media's silence. But, *Jeremy Dewar* argues, even now there is a way for workers to stop the cuts

According to the latest official figures, 2.22 million workers - 7.1 per cent of the workforce - are unemployed across Britain. Over a quarter of a million lost their jobs in the first three months of 2009, the fastest rate of redundancies since 1980. But even these figures do not tell the full story of human misery.

First, they only cover the period to March. Since then Lloyds has announced 1,155 job cuts - despite the company being 43 per cent government owned; BT says 15,000 jobs - 10 per cent of the total - will go this year, on top of 15,000 redundancies last year; retailers Clinton Cards (2,000 jobs), Bay Trading (1,230) and Cruise (30) have all promised cuts; insurance giant Aviva plans to axe 1,100 permanent and 590 temporary posts before the year's out; and privatised defence research group QinetiQ has called for 400 jobs to be sacrificed.

Second, the decimation of manufacturing continues apace. Earlier this year, 850 agency workers were given the push at BMW's Cowley plant - with the connivance of their union Unite. Honda car workers returned to work having suffered a four-month lay-off and 3 per cent pay cut; but even this sacrifice has not stopped the company chopping 1,300 jobs.

Meanwhile 5,500 jobs at Vauxhall hang in the balance following the bankruptcy of parent company General Motors, while van maker LDV's rescue package has collapsed, leaving 850 workers staring down the barrel of the unemployment gun. These job losses will have an enormous knock-on effect as suppliers are forced to close. As LDV management has said, "Around 4,000 [further] British jobs are at risk with over 1,000 in the Midlands region and many around Washwood Heath, which is already one of the highest unemployment areas in the country."

Third, the headline figures hide greater concentrations of joblessness. Behind the 7.1 per cent average rate, the West Midlands (9.3



The latest job figures indicate more people thrown on the scrap heap by the British bosses

per cent), North east (8.3 per cent and London 8.2 per cent) are even harder hit. As we have shown before, women also suffer severely in recessions, one because they are considered less well-trained and more expendable by penny-pinching bosses, and two because public service cuts - in the NHS, education, etc. - will place more women on the dole, while simultaneously demanding they take up the slack for free.

The plight of black and Asian workers is similar: a higher rate of unemployment to begin with and likely to be disproportionately affected by the cuts.

Former monetary policy committee member, economist David Blanchflower, has warned of a "lost generation" of young workers: "We're talking about nearly 900,000 [unemployed - i.e. 16 per cent] under 25-year-olds now and when the class of 2009 graduates, there will be more than a million." In fact 600,000 students leave school this summer; so, with most employers implementing a recruitment freeze, we are looking at 1.5 million youth out of work.

Labour's response here has been pitiful. A mere 35,000 new appren-

ticeships have been announced and these, according to *The Guardian*, "are likely to be awarded to able and middle-class young people rather than those who are most in need of them, while the raising of the school leaving age to 18 is likely to postpone rather than solve the problem".

For capitalists and their academics like Blanchflower, the fear is of an untrained, disaffected and undisciplined generation of workers dampening the eventual recovery. But for socialists, the challenge is to organise young workers to fight for their right to work and, in the process, to transform the unions into militant and democratic organisations.

Finally, we are only at the beginning of the massacre. *The Economist* explained:

"In the early 1980s the jobless rate rose from 5.5 per cent of the labour force before the recession to 11.9 per cent three years after it had ended... the unemployment rate, which has already gone up from 5.4 per cent in spring 2008 to 7.1 per cent, will carry on rising and end a lot higher, almost certainly above 10 per cent," adding, "unemployment tends to rise especially steeply

as a result of recessions linked to financial crises, according to recent research from the IMF."

In other words, unemployment will rise to at least 3.13 million - if this is a "normal" recession, which is very unlikely. For example, while public sector job cuts have barely kicked in, they will dwarf anything Margaret Thatcher introduced. Chancellor Alistair Darling announced £6bn p/a cuts to running costs in 2010, rising annually to £9bn in 2014 on top of a £22bn cut in investment programmes.

And this is contingent on a fantasy projection of 3.5 per cent growth in 2011. Moreover, if David Cameron's Tories are elected, he has promised to accelerate the cuts.

Already, local government budgets threaten 50,000 job cuts this year, the civil service wants to cut 25,000 jobs in tax offices, 10,000 in the courts and 4,000 in the land registry, Royal Mail is slashing up to 50,000 posts and the NHS, schools and colleges countless more.

Leaders' treachery

The leaders of the official labour movement have betrayed the fight to save jobs. The Labour government has spent £1.4 trillion propping up the banking system but claims it can do nothing to save workers' livelihoods. Even where it has effectively nationalised Northern Rock, Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds, it has used its position to push through thousands of redundancies.

Worse, the odious former Works and Pensions minister James Purnell's welfare reforms will force single parents to look for work once their youngest is seven years old, push 1m disability claimants into low-paid jobs and force youth to work for their dole after six months.

The major union leaders, meanwhile, have singularly failed to use their increased weight within the Labour Party to push for nationalisation of firms declaring redundancies. On the contrary, they have promoted government subsidies and capitalist buyouts, promising in advance to help push

London tube strike - build for all out action to win!

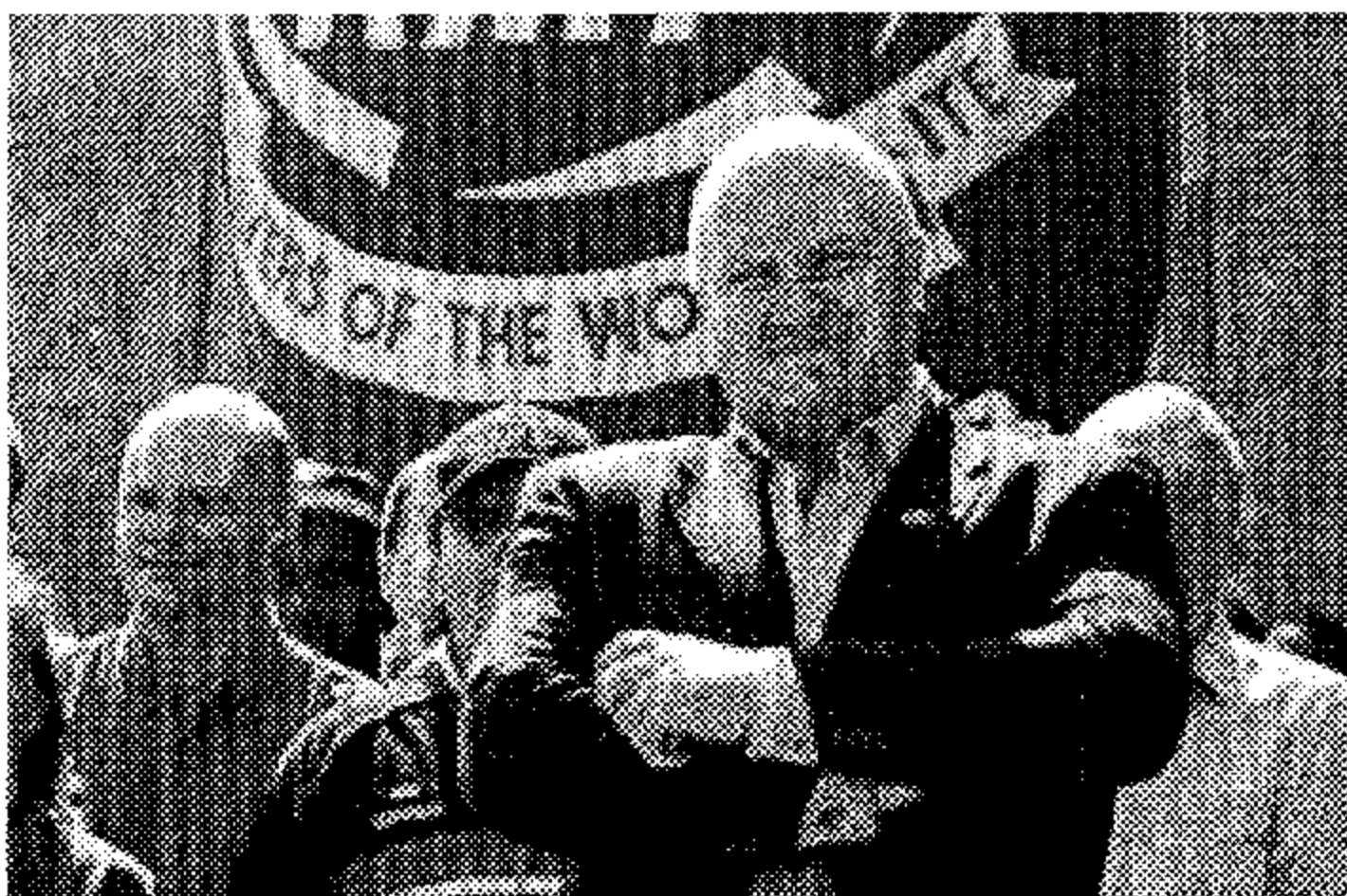
London Mayor Boris Johnson promised to smash the RMT before his election. Now the first strike has been called of members across the London underground. **Luke Cooper** explains what is at stake

Thousands of workers on the London Underground are set to strike in what could be a major battle in the fight to make the bosses' pay for the crisis in the system.

London Mayor Boris Johnson, an Old Etonian and Tory Grandee if ever there was one, has declared war on the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT), which organises most of the London Underground workers. Johnson has wanted the scalp of the RMT even prior to his election, when he openly talked about banning strikes on the tube.

Now he is attempting to push through 1,000 job losses on the tube and 3,000 on Transport for London, as part of £2.6bn cuts programme. But that's not all; Johnson also wants the RMT to accept a five-year deal in order to stop the union using its bargaining power around the time of the London Olympics.

And how much will workers get in return for tying their hands? A derisory 1 per cent this year followed by the rate of inflation (RPI) plus half a per cent for the next four years! But while deflation is the dominant trend in the economy, this would mean a pay cut - whereas the return of inflationary



RMT leader Bob Crow on a picket line with his members

pressures would be sure to see tube bosses tear up the agreement.

As Workers Power went to press, RMT negotiators announced the threat of action had been enough for tube bosses to offer some - albeit minuscule - concessions, and drop the demand for a five year pay deal, tabling either a two year deal at a derisory one per cent followed by RPI plus 0.5 per cent next year or, alternatively, 1.5 per cent this year. Bosses even had the cheek to call the extra 0.5 per cent a "premium" for accepting a four-year deal - some premium!

That they are making concessions at all shows the power of the RMT; the last time tube workers went on strike in 2007 their actions cost business £48m a day. While these are the Chamber of London's figures and probably exaggerated, it is nevertheless clear that tube workers have tremendous power when striking together.

But it's telling that Transport for London have refused to discuss any of the issues in dispute - in particular, the massive planned job losses. There must be no compromise on the jobs losses - compulsory

redundancies or voluntary, which leave remaining workers doing twice the work. These should be non-negotiable red lines.

We have seen in other sectors, like the civil service, how disastrous it can be when unions accept so-called "efficiency savings" (i.e. cuts) in return for pay rises, which rarely come once bosses know that the union can be pushed around.

Now is not the time for compromise or concession at all. Tube workers have shown their willingness to fight with 85 per cent of workers voting to strike. But more will be needed to force the hand of Boris Johnson. RMT will kick off the action with a 48-hour strike starting at 7pm on 9 June and has promised more strike days - this is positive. They should also organise an intermittent work-to-rule in order to keep up the momentum.

But the surest and quickest way to win is to go all-out indefinite. Many workers are watching the RMT strike, looking to see if such a well-organised section can show the way in the fight against the jobs massacre ripping through the economy. RMT workers certainly have the industrial muscle and strength of organisation - now all is needed is decisive, militant action.

through job cuts.

So long as these traitors continue to affiliate our unions to Labour, we demand they at least call on Labour to do something for their money:

- Impose a legal maximum working week of 35 hours, without loss of pay, to soak up unemployment
- Nationalise without compensation every company making redundancies, and recognise workers' control of these enterprises
- Nationalise all the banks so their resources can be used to implement a programme of public works - housing, healthcare, education, green projects, etc.
- Abolish all the anti-union laws and legislate for the right to strike.

Fight for the right to work

On top of this, every union should be fighting for the right to work - through strikes and occupations. But although there have been some notable fightbacks this year - not least at Visteon - they have not been enough. Despite the fastest rate of growth in unemployment for decades, there have been only 34,000 days of official strike action in the past six months: the lowest number on record.

This is down to a deep crisis of leadership in our movement. The failure to provide a fighting lead by Tony Woodley, Derek Simpson and co. translates into shop stewards lacking the confidence to call for timely and decisive action, which leads to workers accepting that

"nothing can be done". The more militant union leaders, like Mark Serwotka of the PCS and Bob Crow of the RMT, fail to mount a public challenge to the right-wing union leaders and appeal over their heads for united action against job cuts from across the union movement.

The key to turning this around is to organise trade union activists in a rank and file movement, which can mobilise workers for strikes and occupations - with the trade union leaders where possible, without them where necessary. The Fight for the Right to Work conference, which the Socialist Workers Party has organised, could begin this fight back. Workers Power supporters will argue at the conference for:

- Immediate and sustained strike

action against all job cuts and occupations to stop all closures

- Don't wait until it's too late: If they sack us without notice, we strike without a ballot
 - Defiance of the anti-union laws - if the bosses use the laws against our unions, solidarity strikes can make the law unworkable, like in the 1970s
 - Action committees in every town to coordinate resistance from below
 - The TUC should call a one-day general strike with mass demonstrations in every city to protest against job losses and to launch a nation-wide campaign of industrial action in defence of every job.
- For more on the Fight for the Right to Work conference see www.righttowork.org.uk

CAR INDUSTRY

Global crisis brings Britain's car industry to a shuddering halt

General Motors is bankrupt. The largest industrial failure in US history. The 5,000 workers at Vauxhall, GM's UK subsidiary, may have to wait months before discovering how many will lose their jobs. *Dave Stockton* looks at the car industry crisis

The protracted collapse of GM reached its conclusion on 1 June when it finally filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Also involved were subsidiaries Opel (Germany) and Vauxhall (Britain). The German government has already negotiated a loan of € 1.5bn to Opel, in order to facilitate its takeover by Magna International Inc., a Canadian auto parts supplier. The fate awaiting Opel's workforce is still far from clear but it will almost certainly include serious job losses.

Vauxhall Motors, whose brand is the second most popular in the UK, has its largest factory in Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, and their headquarters and design and development centre in Luton, which also produces vans.

The British government abstained from talks over the future of GM Europe. Business Secretary Peter Mandelson has done little other than hint that the Magna deal will "involve change", claiming "excess capacity" at Vauxhall. There have been grumblings from Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson of Unite – but not even the threat of a fight to prevent closure or mass layoffs.

Under Germany's GM Europe brokerage Magna will take a 20 per cent stake, with Sberbank – Russia's largest state controlled bank – holding 35 per cent. Sberbank is backed by oligarch Oleg Deripaska; reputed to be Russia's richest man prior to the credit crunch. Intriguingly, Mandelson is known to have holidayed on Deripaska's luxury yacht at Corfu in September 2008.

It is incredible that Mandelson dares place any confidence in this oligarch over Vauxhall. It was Deripaska's company, after all, that allowed Birmingham based van-maker LDV to collapse last December, despite the offer of a £5 million handout from Mandelson's department. Cautioning Mandelson, an unnamed Whitehall source asked:



Vauxhall workers on Unite march for jobs May 2009

"How can we deal with a man who has just gone and dumped LDV? He's had financial problems, so where has the money come from?"

Production has been suspended since December 2008 at LDV's 450-strong factory in Birmingham, and now looks doomed following the government's refusal of a £60 million loan to facilitate a management buyout.

Even relatively successful companies like BMW, with their popular Mini line, have made savage cuts in their workforce. Taking advantage of Mandelson's failure to implement last year's EU Agency Workers Directive, which would have offered the same protection to agency workers as full-time staff (statutory redundancy pay and notice period), on 16 February BMW announced the retrenchment of 850 agency employees at its Cowley plant in Oxford, allowing them only one hour's notice and no redundancy pay.

Nissan Motors UK, whose plant

in Sunderland has the highest productivity of any car plant in Europe, is to shed 1,200 jobs out of 4,500 workers. Toyota too, has threatened to cut jobs in the hundreds; it has 3,893 workers at its plant in Burnaston, Derbyshire and 572 at an engine plant in Deeside, Flintshire.

Honda's factory in Swindon closed at the end of January and restarted production on 1 June. Four hundred and ninety workers endured 60 per cent pay for two months and found a quarter of all jobs slashed on their return. Having overseen a forced pay cut of between 3 and 5 per cent, Unite regional officer Jim D'Avila made the ridiculous remark that, "in true solidarity, the workers at Honda are standing together in difficult times to protect hundreds of jobs."

With the notable exception of the fight back at ex-Ford Visteon components factories in Belfast, Enfield and Basildon, and the decision of workers at the ex-Ford Linamar factory to strike in support of

sacked convenor Rob Williams, so far there has been little active resistance to the wave of mass redundancies across the car industry. While workers are naturally worried about the potential collapse of their company or industry, at the heart of this crisis of inaction lies the complete abstention from struggle of national union leaders and even local officials.

Neither the TGWU nor Amicus wing of Unite has as yet engaged in fighting talk, although there is of course much 'sympathetic' verbiage with every new round of sackings. Nor have any hard demands been placed on Gordon Brown, despite the millions of pounds of union members' money gladly accepted by the Labour Party. The bureaucrats' criticisms have, however, been levelled at the easy target of unrepentant neoliberal Lord Mandelson – "We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" – for not being active enough in the negotiations; TGWU leader Woodley pleaded with him to "negotiate for Britain and British jobs".

It is now abundantly clear that Visteon and Linamar show the way. Fail to fight and you will get nothing; do not wait until the receivers move in, instead occupy the plant and transform it into a fortress for resistance. Open the company files and computer databases like the Visteon workers did, revealing how Ford had deliberately made loss makers of them by farming them out to Visteon. We can expect to hear similar stories in future.

There is no need to stop at occupation. Car workers can demand the complete and uncompensated nationalisation of the bankrupt companies, placing immediate control in the hands of the workforce, as well as the creation of an alliance with fellow car workers in Europe, the USA and Japan. We shouldn't pay for their crisis – we should unite and fight instead for a solution based on social ownership and a democratically planned economy.

FIGHTBACK

Post: strike while the iron's hot

By a CWU postal rep

Postal workers face a two-pronged assault - part-privatisation and massive office closures and job losses - thanks to the Labour Party, which the Communications Workers Union (CWU) supports financially to the tune of £1m a year.

In the last few months, Royal Mail disputes have sprung up across the country in response, centred on the CWU London Division's massive vote for strikes. If these disputes are quickly turned into a national strike, we can defeat these attacks.

For a national strike

Royal Mail management has refused to talk to the CWU since last autumn. Instead they have ignored previous agreements, cut jobs, closed offices and undermined our conditions, causing a massive wave of anger.

Meanwhile, Labour has pushed the part-privatisation of Royal Mail, installing a new union-busting management and aiming to sell a minority stake to private investors - an act that will inevitably lead to full privatisation, as competitors demand an end to "government interference". They

face increasing opposition from the CWU, 149 Labour MPs who have come out against privatisation, and the public - a CWU poll found 75 per cent oppose the government's plan.

With Labour's meltdown in the June elections, ministers have started hinting they may compromise or even drop privatisation altogether. But the promotion of mail privatisation architect Lord Mandelson in the cabinet reshuffle, we shouldn't bet on it. That said we have never been in a better situation to force the government into full retreat.

London postal workers have voted to strike by a massive 91 per cent majority in a remarkable result; not a single one of the 154 offices balloted voting against. Meanwhile, several offices in Scotland and elsewhere took strike action in May. CWU head office is inundated with up to a hundred requests for industrial ballots.

Working class anger at unemployment, cuts and political corruption has created a favourable background for our action. There is even the possibility of linking up with other strikers, like the London tube workers. And of course our action could inspire many others.

All postal workers are under attack, so we should be sure to strike together as a whole. A national strike would not only hammer Royal Mail's bullying bosses, but also make privatisation unworkable. It would ratchet up the pressure on Labour and make private investors in line for a slice of the company think twice.

A "credible alternative"?

Yet so far the CWU leadership - Billy Hayes, Dave Ward and the postal executive - has held us back from fighting. They have offered negotiations, which Royal Mail has ignored, preferring to press ahead with closures and cuts. They have suspended strikes, such as the planned December mail centre action, supposedly for fear of alienating the public and MPs.

In reality the public supports us and, as for the MPs, the expenses scandal shows they are more concerned with feathering their own nests than with our jobs. Do we really need to trim our action to curry favour with these chisellers?

But with some Labour ministers now hinting that privatisation could be dropped, the postal executive has tabled A Credible CWU Alternative. This 'alternative' would see the union sign up to job cuts, closures,

'more flexible delivery spans' and a publicly-owned but profit-driven Royal Mail. Not much of an alternative, is it? Under no condition should we hold back for a rotten compromise that would still see massive job losses and worsening conditions.

Instead, at this month's CWU conference postal workers should demand a national strike against cuts, closures and privatisation, one that swiftly escalates to all-out action if the bosses and Labour do not back down. Past experience shows, however, that victory will depend on a network of activists, reps and branches that understand the need for a decisive showdown.

This would represent a real alternative - an alternative leadership - that could direct the strike if the CWU officials surrender or unofficial action becomes necessary. If Royal Mail or the government got the courts to ban our strikes, as they did in 2007, we could demand - and in the current climate receive - solidarity strike action.

Workers everywhere are being asked to pay the price of the capitalist crisis. The battle against privatisation and cuts in Royal Mail could light the fuse to a mass movement of resistance.

Unite: Linamar on strike - 20,000 construction workers to follow

By Jeremy Dewar

In a significant stepping up of the struggle, workers at Linamar car components firm have voted for all-out indefinite strike in support of their victimised convenor, Rob Williams, while their union Unite has launched a ballot of 20,000 construction workers in defence of national terms and conditions.

These strikes, along with those on the tube and in the post, could transform the industrial - and political - situation in Britain.

Linamar sacked Rob on 6 May because he was organising solidarity for the Visteon occupations in Belfast and Enfield. He had broken no laws, no company rules; it was

blatant victimisation. Rob's fellow workmates recognised this was over who could choose their representative: management or themselves. Despite Linamar threatening to sack any worker who went on strike, they voted by 139 to 19 on an 88 per cent turnout for all-out indefinite action.

On the same day this result was announced, 5 June, a national meeting of Unite engineering construction stewards agreed in Manchester to ballot 20,000 members for national strike action.

Talks to update and renew the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI - the "blue book") have broken down. Unite's national officer, Tom Hardacre, said:

"Construction employers have rejected reasonable and just demands which would have delivered long term stability and fairness in an industry that has been plagued by instability and numerous injustices. We now have no other choice but to ballot our members for official industrial action. A 'yes' vote will disrupt many of the UK's major construction projects and petrochemical sites."

Recent unofficial strikes at power construction sites have focused around demands that jobs be offered first to British workers before others are taken on. But Unite's goals in this dispute are different: "an equalisation of benefits for non-UK and UK workers, a comprehen-

sive auditing procedure to ensure employers keep to the national agreement [and] for all workers on construction projects to have the correct competencies for doing the job."

Unite activists should build for the biggest possible yes vote for strike action. This is also a chance to now go out and recruit as many construction members as possible - especially among foreign workers so they can join the action. At the same time, they should keep up their best traditions and get ready to extend the strikes - unofficially if necessary. And if Linamar tries to sack strikers, or if the antiunion lass are used - the whole of Unite should walk out in protest.

EPIDEMIC

Swine flu risk aggravated by corporate profiteering

By Joy Macready

Swine flu swept across the world in less than one month, with confirmed cases cropping up in 65 countries within just 30 days. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has confirmed 15,510 cases and 99 deaths, 77 of these in Mexico.

The world reacted with panic to the latest flu epidemic, human-to-human transmission cases have been recorded in multiple regions. Surgical masks flew off the shelves, while governments launched massive public health campaigns, such as the UK's "Catch it. Bin it. Kill it." campaign.

"Ground zero" for swine flu has been traced back to La Gloria, a small town of around 3000 people in the eastern state of Veracruz, Mexico. Twelve miles out of town is a vast intensive pig "facility" operated by Granjas Carroll, a subsidiary of the world's biggest pork producer, Smithfield. Both Smithfield and the Mexican government rapidly denied any causal links. Yet 60 per cent of the town's population was ill in March with flu-like symptoms and one of the world's first confirmed cases was from this town.

We live in a globalised economy - the current synchronised economic crisis is proof of that. In this age of global trade and travel, the swine flu outbreak has proven itself



Working class people in Mexico suffered worst in the outbreak

a global illness. Within 24 hours of each other, two young boys were diagnosed with swine flu - a third-grader from Ohio and a five-year old from La Gloria - living 1700 miles apart. The movement of goods and labour across the globe, the drive to urbanisation and the increasingly concentrated methods of food production have all played a part in the disease's spread.

Factory farming, which has grown enormously over the last few decades is a direct result of capitalism's drive to competition, where the small farms get driven out of business because they cannot compete in price with the big multinationals. In 1965 there were more than a million farms raising 53 million hogs. There are only 65,000

facilities that rear an enormous 65 million hogs today.

Factory farmed pigs, whose immune systems are suppressed by the stress of crowding and fast feeding, are perfect disease incubators for airborne flu. They are fed a steady diet of drugs to keep them alive in these unsanitary, stressful conditions, which increases the chance that drug-resistant superbugs will develop.

It is not surprising that most of the deaths happened Mexico and the US, both countries with poor healthcare provision, especially for the less well off. Many deaths could have been avoided if proper medical attention was given at the onset of the virus but, due to their poverty, many people cannot afford to

visit clinics or hospitals, causing the disease to spread further.

By subordinating food production and medicine to the market, capitalism puts millions in danger.

Medicine and private profit

Multinational pharmaceutical companies are making a killing from the sale of anti flu tablets like Tamiflu.

Supplies to some countries are at risk because rich people are buying up the tablets on the private market. There is a danger that new resistant strains of flu could emerge because people are taking the tablets even when they don't have the illness.

Research into new cures is hampered because the rival companies do not share information and discoveries with their competitors.

People must be put firmly before profit. All drug companies should be nationalised and business secrecy should be abolished. The private market in vital drugs should be suppressed and masses of the necessary medicines should be made available to health services to be distributed immediately in case of need.

Poor countries should be gifted all necessary quantities of the medicines.

Companies should be forced to make their research public so that new discoveries can be made with the maximum speed in a true global collaboration.

Lambeth housing in crisis

By a Lambeth Unison steward

The Labour controlled authority in Lambeth, south London has raised rents by 25 per cent this year. It is also auctioning off empty properties, even though most need just minimal repairs. Added to this, the council is trying to hive off the Ashmole estate, which has only recently voted against privatisation.

The housing department itself was turned into an Arms Length

Management Organisation (Almo). Now the Almo, called Lambeth Living, has announced a 20 per cent cut in the workforce - with up to one in three going in some departments. On top of this, it has also put out to tender the emergency repairs unit, the concierge service and the north Lambeth cleaners.

The First Call repair service is much-loved - in complete contrast to private contractors Morrison and Connaught, which milk the system by coming out without the right

equipment or parts, then returning to do a rush job and finally fixing the problem properly; each time logging a different job, so getting paid three times!

Last month Lambeth Activists, a left caucus on Unison members, organised a public meeting with Defend Council Housing and the Tenants Council. Over 60 angry workers and residents attended and organised a successful march through brixton on the slogans of "No selling our homes", "No job cuts" and "No privatisation". Now

we have turned our attention to winning the ballot against stock transfer on the Ashmole.

The council will try to drive a wedge between workers and tenants, so it is vital we set up a joint action committee to support the unions when strike action becomes necessary, and to support a rent strike, when the tenants decide on that course of action.

Workers Power members will be leafleting the the Ashmole estate to campaign for a no vote, if you want to help out then call us.

Obama's speech in Cairo

Did Obama's speech in Cairo signal an end to America's imperialist policy in the Middle East?

Marcus Halaby reads between the lines

United States President Obama's recent speech in Cairo has been hailed as a hand of friendship stretched out to the Muslim world, seeking a "new beginning" based on mutual interests and respect. But, stripping away the words and looking at the policies, it is clear that this is not a new beginning, but in fact a return to the pre-Bush policies of US imperialism. In short, maintaining the status quo of US domination of the region and attempting to co-opt more 'friendly Arabs' into the orbit of US influence.

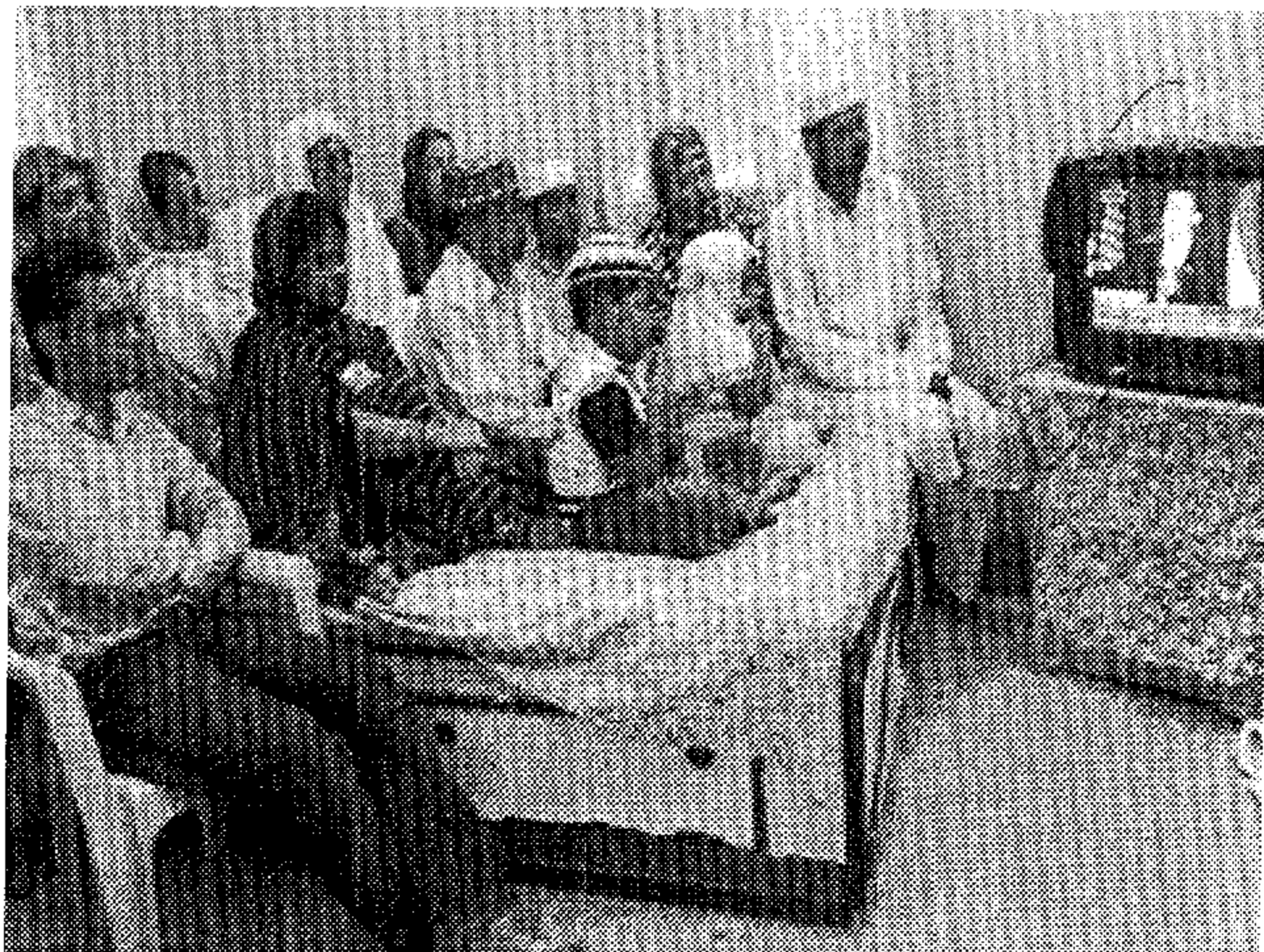
Peppered with flattering references to the Qur'an, to Islam as a religion of peace, to the contributions of American Muslims, and the debt owed by civilisation to Islam, it begins by calling for a rejection of crude stereotypes of Muslims, and with them the "stereotype" of the US as a "self-interested empire". Obama is positioning the US as a country with high-minded idealism, spreading universal values – before placing the onus on Muslim countries and communities not to tolerate "violent extremists".

Calling the war in Afghanistan a war of necessity (as opposed to the "war of choice" fought in Iraq), he presents terrorism, 9/11 and the threat posed by al-Qaeda as justifications for that country's continued occupation – but goes on to claim that Iraqis are better for the overthrow of Saddam, repeating his pledge to withdraw from Iraq, and promising to make more use of diplomacy in future conflicts.

Identifying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a source of tension between the US and Muslims worldwide, he cites the Holocaust and makes it clear that US ties with Israel are "unbreakable". While his reference to the Palestinians suffering for "sixty years" in pursuit of a homeland (implicitly acknowledging the ethnic cleansing of 1948 as the beginning of the conflict) is new, as is his description of their situation as an "occupation", it remains to be seen what actions will result from this. Calls for the Palestinians to have a "state of their own" alongside Israel have been part of US diplomacy's stock-in-trade for at least a decade.

Nor is his apparently "open" attitude towards Hamas a new thing, tied as it is to the old pre-conditions that Hamas should "abandon violence", respect previous rotten deals with Israel signed by the Palestinian Authority, and accept Israel's "right to exist". Lecturing the Palestinians on non-violence, he claims that violence did not win "full and equal rights" for black people in the US – without mentioning that it took a civil war to abolish slavery and grant them the (formal) right to vote.

More importantly, what does he mean by saying that he does not accept the legitimacy of "continued Israeli settlements"? Will he stop funding them with US taxpayers' money? Does



An muslim family watches a live broadcast of Obama's speech in Cairo

he want them dismantled, or just see their expansion frozen? Faced with a new Israeli government that has effectively abandoned a negotiated settlement for "two states", there are two options open to him. Will he threaten to withhold aid and loan guarantees, as Bush Senior did to Yitzhak Shamir's government in the early 1990s, or will he look the other way, as Clinton did the last time Netanyahu was Israeli prime minister?

It is with regard to Iran that his much-vaunted promise of "change" comes through, calling for talks without preconditions and accepting Iran's right to a "peaceful" nuclear energy programme. He even acknowledged, for the first time ever, the US's role in overthrowing the democratically elected Mosaddeq government in the 1950s. But his calls to prevent a "nuclear arms race" in the region ring hollow when he does not even mention Israel's nuclear weapons, and its defiance of any international inspections.

Obama's words on democracy, on the other hand, will probably bring a sigh of relief to dictatorial US allies like Egypt's Mubarak and Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy. Observing that "no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other", he says only that governments that protect democratic rights are "ultimately more stable" – and commits himself to governments that "reflect the will of the people" – precisely the claim that every rotten Arab dictatorship makes for itself. More sinister is his statement that "elections alone do not make true democracy". Intended as a dig at his

ally Egypt could this be used to isolate and attack Lebanon if Hezbollah and its allies win this month's elections, just as the Palestinians were when they elected Hamas?

His statements on promoting religious freedom are really a rebuke of France and other European countries, emphasising his own country's lack of interest in restricting the right of Muslim women to wear the hijab, while his mention of the Arab world's Christian minorities (specifically the Lebanese Maronites and the Egyptian Copts) is of a piece with the West's traditional use of these minorities' interests as an occasional pretext for intervention. Similarly his talk of promoting women's education and economic development is really a sign that the US will continue to use NGOs as a means of fostering a friendly local elite.

In summary, then, Obama's speech does signal change – but only because his predecessor's style was itself a dramatic break from the past. It marks a return to the methods of Clinton and Bush Senior in enlisting the collaboration of Arab and Muslim regimes – albeit in a changed world where US troops occupy Iraq and will occupy Afghanistan for some time to come. It might give the corrupt regimes some comfort that they will be consulted for their support in future US adventures – but will not put an end to the imperialist domination that keeps provoking resistance. For all his fine words, no-one should be fooled that the US will not continue to support Israel, the Arab dictatorships and the crushing of popular movements.

SOUTH-ASIA

Eelam drowned in blood - Tamil people need solidarity

The 25 year struggle of the Tamil Tigers has ended in a bloodbath – but the need for international solidarity is still urgent, writes *Simon Hardy*

The Tamil people have been massacred, driven from their homes and herded into concentration camps. With the Sri Lankan government crowing in victory, and the hypocritical Western governments who backed them all the way now trying to distance themselves, there is an urgent need for all those who believe in democratic rights and socialism around the world to rally to the defence of the Tamil people and to mount a mass campaign to isolate the murderous Sri Lankan regime.

The Times has reported that sources working with UN aid agencies claim around 20,000 civilians have been killed in the last few months, while the Sri Lankan army places the death toll at a much more modest 5,000. Whatever the figure, it is clear that the Sri Lankan army closed in on the Tamil homeland, Tamil Eelam, encircled it in a ring of tanks, artillery and bombers, and pounded the densely-populated areas until every last fighter of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was slaughtered – along with huge numbers of civilians, including thousands of defenceless children. They then paraded the dead body of LTTE leader Prabhakaran on television, who had come to represent everything the Sri Lankan state hated about the Tamil independence struggle.

The civilians who survived the bombardment are now being held in concentration camps, with around 300,000 packed into five major camps in Vavuniya district. The army keeps watch over these refugees, who are kept behind barbed wire and living in miserable conditions in tents, while keeping aid workers out. It was not until United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited that the army lifted some restrictions and allowed more aid in.

Every Tamil family has lost someone, had a relative killed, displaced or terrorised by the army. The cause of Tamil national rights has been suppressed in the most brutal way imaginable.



Protest in solidarity with the Tamil people, London 2009

This victory will not bring lasting justice or peace. A police state will be maintained over the Tamils, all of whom are now suspected either of being LTTE members or of supporting the Tigers.

This is what the defeat of a national liberation movement looks like. For all the crowing by reactionary governments across the world about the “end of Tiger Terrorism”, the real victims now will be the Tamil people, deprived of their rights and systematically oppressed under Sinhala chauvinist rule.

The violence of the bombardment brought out hundreds of thousands of Tamils around the world, including in London, where demonstrations reached over 200,000 people, mostly from the Tamil diaspora. These protests were directed at governments, demanding that they take action to stop the genocide.

The Tamils gathering in London did so in the full knowledge of the role that British imperialism has played in the tragedy of Sri Lanka. After granting some Tamils marginal privileges as their civil servants and assistants in Sri Lanka under British colonial rule, post-independence in 1948 the Sinhala majority turned on them, starting the cycle of oppression which continues to this day.

Britain's hypocrisy

As a result of the huge and militant demonstrations in London for the last two months, the British government was forced to put on an act of heading international calls for

a ceasefire. It sent foreign secretary David Miliband to Colombo - he achieved nothing. The fact that Sinhalese chauvinists burned an effigy of Miliband should not fool anyone that the British government had sided with the Tamils' right to self-determination. They have not. Their only concern was to get the Tamil resistance to surrender as quickly as possible.

Up to the final offensive Britain staunchly supported Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapakse's war of reconquest as part of the “war on terror”. It has maintained the EU and the US line that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is a terrorist organisation, denying the legitimacy of the Tamil struggle for self-determination.

In 2006 Tony Blair and in 2008 Gordon Brown invited Rajapakse to London for cordial talks. This was after he had already broken off the previous period of truce with the LTTE and was plainly set on reconquering the districts in the north that had been under de facto LTTE rule for nearly 20 years.

Between 2006 and 2008, Britain sold £12 million worth of British arms including components for military aircraft and machine guns were sold to Sri Lanka. When Rajapakse drove hundreds of thousands of refugees from their homes and into concentration camps they uttered no word of protest. British imperialism is at the root cause of the conflict, and it is right that it should be held to account.

So what can Tamils in Britain do now, since their hopes in the British and US governments proved unfounded? The answer must be to turn to the working class and anti-war movements, to the youth who have supported the Palestinian cause.

Together we can launch a campaign to demand that the whole cynical charade that the Tamil struggle is part of the “war on terror” be dropped, that the LTTE be declassified as a terrorist organisation, that all military aid to the Sri Lankan military be stopped, that the media should fully expose the genocidal massacres in the Tamil regions, that around the world progressive people should positively support the fight of Tamils for self-determination, up to and including having their own separate state if that is what they want.

Despite their heroism in leading the struggle for national liberation, and their bravery in the face of death, there are political criticisms that must be raised of the Tigers' overall strategy of guerrilla warfare. This strategy, focused on an armed force operating mainly in the countryside, and entirely without socialist demands appealing to the mass of the workers and poor, was not sufficient to win mass support from the one section of Sri Lankan society that could have guaranteed Tamil freedom: the organised working class. A programme of struggle that united the Tamils' democratic demands with a fight against super-exploitation in the factories, plantations and agricultural estates could have won workers and peasants – Tamil and Sinhala together – to take action alongside the Tamil resistance, in a fight against their common enemy, the Sri Lankan capitalist class and its state.

The defeat of the Tamil national movement is bitter, but the struggle goes on. Our sister organisation, the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka, is fighting to build a new party of Tamil and Sinhala workers, with the aim of building mass resistance to Rajapakse's murderous government and a new revolutionary movement against exploitation and war.

SOUTH-ASIA

Pakistan: a country heading towards disaster

By Workers Power Pakistan

In the last few weeks, sections of the media, government, various NGOs and some on the Left have succeeded in creating a climate of terror in Pakistan's middle class. Many are gripped with fear about the Taliban's imminent takeover. The media has played a big part in spreading fear to bolster support for the government's assault. But if there is a real danger of Talibanisation in this country, it is caused by the senseless and dangerous pursuit of the war on terror by the government.

The peace deal in Swat is finished. Since 26 April military operations have started on the orders of the Obama administration. The Pakistan army is using warplanes and heavy artillery against civilian areas in the name of fighting the Taliban. This military operation has already killed hundreds of people and UN and Unicef estimates put the number of displaced at between 2.4 and 3 million. Carpet bombing of villages and "tribal areas" continues daily.

This conflict in Pakistan is part of the wider imperialist war on terror, and the Pakistani army are the agents of US imperialism. The ink was barely dry on the peace deal struck between the government and the rebels when the US leaned on the PPP government to carry on the fighting. The US administration, whether it is under Bush or Obama is pursuing the same agenda, and it has led to all out civil war in Pakistan.

As a result of the government's war, ethnic tensions are running high. The Pashtun people are suffering discrimination and attacks in other provinces, such as Sindh, because of the war against them in Swat.

The military is targeting people who are trying to move to the safe areas. One person described how the village of Kalpani had seen huge exchanges of firing and shelling between the military and the Islamists. The situation is so bad that dogs are eating the corpses left lying in the fields. Nobody dares to go outside their home to collect them for fear of



Some of the 3 million refugees from the Swat Valley queue for food

being shot. A Taliban militant fired one single shot on a military vehicle, but in return the military gunship helicopters devastated large parts of the village.

The artillery bombardment is leading to huge numbers of civilian deaths, homelessness and displacement which only strengthen the Taliban and other militant Islamist forces. In addition to providing a huge pool of recruitment for Taliban fighters, the government has unleashed a massive humanitarian crisis and it is the Islamists who are feeding the refugees from it.

Journalists are not allowed to enter the area. The local journalists are not in a position to speak the truth either. Information is only partial and people rely on refugees to tell us what is really happening. Pakistan feels like it is decaying all around.

In this situation liberals and a section of the Left are looking to the Pakistani state and the military to defend us from "Talibanisation". This is the same military which until

recently held the country in the grip of a dictatorship. These people have no interest in democracy – they fight the Taliban because the US commands them to. The military is no friend of liberal democracy or workers and women's rights. If the government was really serious about preventing the spread of the Taliban then why did President Asif Ali Zardari ratify the decision of the parliament to introduce Sharia law into Swat in exchange for the Taliban laying down their weapons?

The calls to defend democracy ring hollow. Democracy in Pakistan is a fraud. Since partition we have always hung in the balance between dictatorship and civilian rule. The growth of militant Islam is because of the desperation of ordinary people to take control of their own lives from the corrupt politicians and the army. Of course they are mistaken, an Islamic state in Pakistan along the lines of the Taliban's Afghanistan or Iran today would be a disaster. But desperation breeds desperate thoughts.

Workers Power Pakistan not only opposes the military operation, we also argue that this is not in reality a war for democracy against the Taliban. This is a war by imperialism and its agents to dominate the area and smash any political forces that do not fit their "Washington consensus". Of course we condemn the acts of terrorism by the Taliban, the attacks on women's rights, minorities and other sections of society. We argue that the Taliban are not consistent anti-imperialist fighters, and that in fact they represent a reactionary programme of social oppression. Only the working class can be truly anti imperialist in its politics and methods of struggle, since the working class in power would remove the market mechanisms from Pakistan which bind it to the imperialist world order.

We have to mobilise working class people and the poor against imperialism. In doing so we put forward our socialist viewpoint clearly and we politically fight the Taliban's vision and goals. A socialist revolution against capitalism and landlordism in Pakistan would emancipate ordinary people from their daily oppression and undermine the conditions which allow for the Taliban's growth. We are in favour of an eruption of class struggle in the poorer tribal areas to divide the villages along class lines, to win the peasants and the poor to the side of a progressive outcome of the present crisis.

Socialists can not be neutral in the fight against the people of the Swat region. We demand the end of the military operation and the withdrawal of the army from the area. The Left in Pakistan needs to stop siding with the military and directing all of its criticism on the Taliban, because it means that they cannot develop a programme of struggle against the most serious enemy – the capitalists, the landowners, the military. Pakistan is faced with a choice of socialism or barbarism. The Pakistani workers and youth need to begin a fight for a revolutionary overthrow of the current government and social order to stop the unfolding catastrophe.

INDIAN ELECTIONS

Communist Party in India punished for capitalist policies

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) lost many seats in the recent elections. *Mark Booth* looks at what lies behind this and shows how India's workers and peasants need a new leadership

After recent elections in 'the world's biggest democracy', Western leaders and media welcomed the return to power of the ruling establishment's Congress party. The right-wing Hindu chauvinists of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suffered its worst result since 1991. But India's Communist parties also lost many seats.

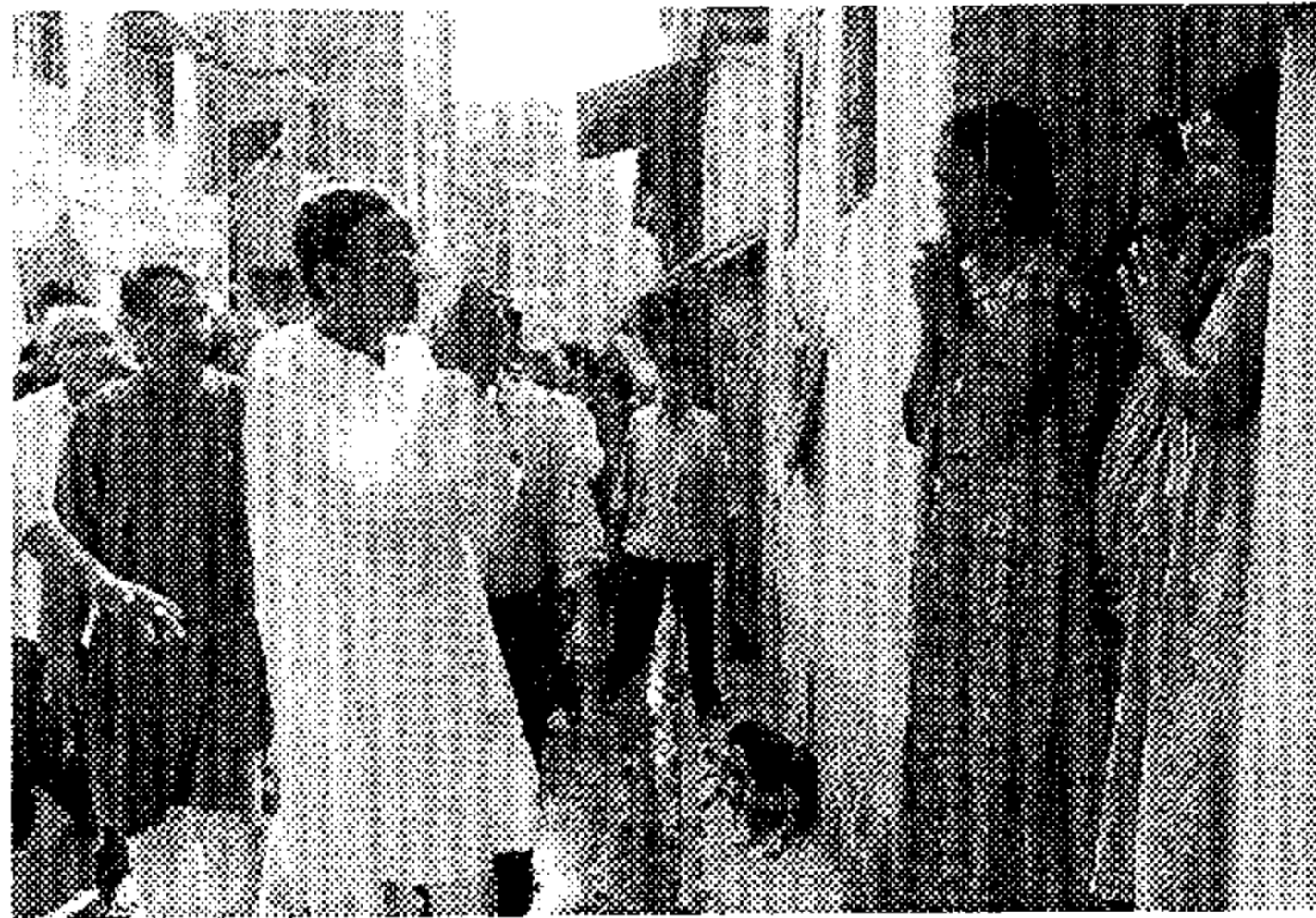
The main reason for Western approval of the Indian election result is that they believe that Congress, under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, will continue with the process of "reform" - privatisation and opening up India to world finance capital. There they are right.

At the same time they think Singh can keep the peace between the vast country's caste, national and religious communities better than the Hindu communalist BJP-led coalition, which has always inflamed tensions with the country's huge Muslim minority.

In addition Congress has suggested a series of limited reforms to meet the seething discontent in India's countryside, where Maoist guerrillas have spread a rural insurgency to wide areas over the past decade. For the US, its new ally India is vital as a counterweight to its potential rival China. The new government was seen as the best option at a time when the world economic crisis is affecting India more severely than the capitalists had previously expected.

While the elections have strengthened Congress in the directly elected house of the Indian parliament (the Lok Sabha), they have weakened the Left Front of Stalinist parties, made up of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India (CPI) and several smaller left parties. They have seen their number of parliamentary deputies slashed to an all time low of 24 (CPI-M with 16, CPI with 4). So have the Indian masses abandoned both the left and the hardline Hindu right and opted for the centre ground?

In fact the picture is more complex than this. At the same time as the Communist parties lost seats in key areas, overall the CPI-M's share



Mohammed Selim from the CPI (M) campaigning in West Bengal - he failed to win a seat

of the vote fell only marginally from 5.66 percent in 2004 to 5.33 percent, while the CPI increased its overall share of the vote slightly from 1.41 to 1.43 per cent. So why the resounding losses of seats?

The answer is simple. The CPI-M and its allies are being punished by the workers and peasants in the states of West Bengal and Kerala where they held power, because they implemented vicious anti-working class policies. But outside those areas, where they are in opposition, workers and peasants have rallied to the Communist parties under the impact of the crisis, hoping that these mass parties will give a lead to their resistance.

The Left Front

In 2004 the capitalist Congress-United Progressive Alliance coalition list swept the BJP from power. The CPI-M led Left Front, as part of the UPA government, provided left camouflage for Congress with its Common Minimum Programme, a list of basic social-democratic reforms meant to ameliorate the intense suffering of the Indian peoples. Meanwhile Congress continued with the same policy of neo-liberal reforms and accommodation to US imperialism and the world market as its BJP predecessor.

While at national level the Left Front criticised the worst of these neo-liberal policies, where they held power in the state of West Bengal

and in Kerala they vigorously implemented them, claiming that they were the only means for "development". The CPI-M promoted West Bengal as a site for the development of Chinese style Special Economic Zones where Western capital could invest and return lucrative profits from cheap unprotected labour. Land was forcibly purchased for the private developers; peasants were brutally driven from the land.

This policy came to a head in West Bengal in 2007 when, in the town of Nandigram, thousands of peasants rose up against the sell-off of their land by the CPI-M led government to build a car factory for Tata, India's largest car manufacturing corporation. They drove the CPI-M and its representatives out of the town. In response the CPI-M sent in the police and army, aided by CPI-M party thugs, to smash the peasants' resistance. Scores were killed and hundreds wounded. Dragging the name of Marxism through the mud, in the aftermath CPI-M 'cadres' went wild, savagely beating villagers and raping women.

In 2008 once again this happened in the town of Singur, when peasants protesting at the sell-off of their lands were viciously attacked by the police and army, resulting in dozens more dead and injured.

It is therefore no surprise that the vote for the Left Front in West

Bengal fell from 50.72 percent in 2004 to 43.3 percent in 2009. In Kerala the vote fell from 39.41 percent in 2004 to 37.92 percent in 2009. Nevertheless their vote rose substantially in several other states, offsetting the major fall in their votes in the key states where the Left Front had held power.

The election was not a rejection of left or anticapitalist policies. Indeed the vote showed large sections of the population still opposed to the neo-liberal pro-privatisation policies pursued by the Indian ruling-class and a rejection of the poisonous dead end of Hindu chauvinism represented by the BJP. The Left Front suffered wherever it identified itself with neoliberal policies, i.e. in the states where it governed. In states where the left parties were in opposition their vote rose, reflecting the growing radicalisation of sections of the masses as they are further impoverished by the economic crisis.

The biggest problem that workers and the rural poor faced at the ballot box was the lack of a consistent working-class political alternative. This vote was not a defeat for the Left but for the Stalinist reformist policy of taking office as junior partners with the main party of the Indian capitalists and then carrying out neoliberal "reforms". What the Indian masses need is a revolutionary workers' party; one which stands in elections to win workers to a programme of action and intransigently opposes all the capitalist parties.

But above all it must be a party of the class struggle, fighting alongside workers against Indian and foreign capitalists, fighting alongside peasants defending their land from SEZs or the landlords, fighting alongside women, indigenous peoples and Dalits for democratic rights. Its action programme must link all these struggles to the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state and the creation of one where power lies in the hands of workers' and peasants' councils. In short India needs a party not based on the ideas and practice of Stalin or Mao but on those of Lenin and Trotsky.

NORTH KOREA

Down with US threats to North Korea

By John Boyman, Workers Power USA

Tensions throughout Asia – particularly on the Korean Peninsula – have dramatically escalated. The eyes of the world now turn hesitantly away from developments in Central Asia and the Middle East towards the rapidly deteriorating situation between US imperialism and North Korea. The potential for the renewal of fighting and, with it, the makings of a new arms race between North and South Korea, China, and Japan, could send this historically volatile region of the world to a breaking point.

The current flaring of hostilities began in April 2009 when the United States and Japan pushed for sanctions against the North Korean regime following what they dubbed, “a cover for a long-range missile test.” Speaking in Prague during his European visit, Obama denounced North Korea for renewing its weapons program, even saying North Korea’s “violations must be punished.”

Russia and China, North Korea’s main trading partners, urged the UN to show restraint. On 13 April the UN Security Council condemned the rocket launch and pushed for the expansion of already existing sanctions on this deeply impoverished country.

In response the North Korean Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the vote of the UN Security Council to expand sanctions and vowed to never again return to the “six-party talks.” They told International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to leave the country and threatened another nuclear detonation if the UN did not. No apology came and, as a result, this past week North Korea made good on its promise to detonate a nuclear device in defiance of the UN Security Council.

Condemnation echoed from all corners of the world – even from historical allies like China and Russia. The South Korean government promptly joined the US-sponsored “Proliferation Security Initiative” (PSI) which allows for sea-faring vessels to be searched under the pretext that they can potentially harbour nuclear warheads. This was, according to the North Korean regime, tantamount to a declaration of war.

By the end of May, North Korean officials formally declared that they were no longer bound by the agreements laid out in the 1953 armistice that “ended” the war on the Korean Peninsula. Officials overtly stated that if South Korean or American forces stopped and searched any North Korean vessel, then North Korea would defend itself. A spokesman for the North Korean Army said “Any hostile act against our peaceful vessels, including search and seizure, will be considered an unpardonable infringement on our sovereignty.”

The imperialist armies of the United States



and its ally in the region – Japan – are formally gearing up for a possible confrontation with North Korea. It was reported that at the end of May, 12 F-22 fighter jets landed at a US Army base on the island of Okinawa.

But these are the kind of actions that drive North Korea to expand their stockpiles of nuclear warheads. The ruling Stalinist clique knows full well that the only thing keeping the imperialists at bay is their potential threat that the US will be faced with a formidable nuclear arsenal. That is why they are developing these weapons: it is for their own self-preservation.

The US imperialists, on the other hand, would enjoy nothing more than to rid the world of the North Korean regime, and finally reopen that country up to capital investment – all in the name of more profits. That is why North Korea was labelled part of the Axis of Evil by the previous US administration. Therefore, they are playing up the “dangers” of a nuclear North Korea to justify both their military aid to Japan, and keeping 28,000 troops in South Korea and other US Military bases throughout the Pacific Rim. The breaking up of the post-capitalist, albeit bureaucratically planned, property relations in North Korea is what the United States desires above anything else.

The calls from the UN Security Council for North Korea to abandon its nuclear program are entirely hypocritical. After all, all these countries, particularly the United States, are allowed to have stockpiles of nuclear weapons. But who granted them that right? Clearly ‘might’ makes right – if you are in the nuclear club you can keep your weapons, threatening anyone you do not like with them (like Rumsfeld’s low-grade nuclear Bunker Busters in Iraq)

But the moment a country like North Korea or a semi-colonial country (for instance Iran) tries to develop nuclear weapons for their own protection, the entire imperialist world order

goes into a frenzy. And they must: for their whole system is based on the subordination of the workers and peasants of the majority of the world to the rule of finance capital – to their multinationals and investment banks. If one country is allowed to “get out,” then others will one day wish to do the same.

The North Koreans have the right to develop nuclear weapons if they feel the need to do so to resist imperialist aggression. The consequences of the re-introduction of capitalism on the workers and peasants of North Korea would be catastrophic. As socialists we are for the defeat of US and Japanese imperialism and the defence of the planned economy.

We reject any attempt at regime change by the imperialists. But as Trotskyists we are not blind to the horrors of the regime. The Stalinist dictators in North Korea preside over a monstrous bureaucratic regime, one that oppresses its largely peasant population. The League for the Fifth International is committed to building a revolutionary party in North Korea to overthrow the regime and replace it with genuine workers and peasants power – a struggle for political revolution.

In the event of invasion by either one or more imperial powers against North Korea, we demand that the North Korean government set the workers and peasants into motion to defend themselves against imperialist slaughter. The workers and peasants have to right to arm themselves and organise their own methods of resistance against potential invaders. This would form an important counter-weight to the state controlled army and secret police.

At the same time, the US must remove all troops from South Korea and close every single military base it has erected in Asia since the end of the Second World War. These forces only serve to perpetuate the hegemonic power US imperialism wields over the workers and peasants of Asia.

DEBATE

The Socialist Party: capitulating to nationalism

Chris Brennan, who left the Socialist Party over its response to the Lindsey Oil Refinery strike which demanded 'British Jobs for British Workers', looks at how the organisation has tried to cover up for the poison of nationalism in the working class movement

In February and March of this year wildcat strikes spread rapidly across the construction industry, protesting against the use of migrant labour at the Lindsey Oil Refinery and demanding 'British jobs for British workers'. How did the left respond to this outbreak of chauvinism in the labour movement? While some groups and activists took a principled stance, the Socialist Party supported the strikes, played down their nationalist goals, and was even in the leadership of the movement at Lindsey.

Over the last decade, the main establishment parties have been steadily escalating their campaign against asylum seekers and migrant workers, in a cynical attempt to avoid being outflanked by the parties of the far right, UKIP and the fascist British National Party (BNP). The Tories have attacked immigrants for everything from the lack of affordable homes to an undermining of British values, while Labour's best known attack was made by none other than Gordon Brown with his now infamous pledge of 'British Jobs for British Workers' (BJ4BW). This nationalistic rhetoric has found resonance in sections of the trade union bureaucracy. Derek Simpson, for example, leader of the Amicus section of Britain's largest union, Unite, notably posed with page three models in the viciously racist and anti immigrant *Daily Star* under the banner of BJ4BW.

The reason 'labour lieutenants of capital' like Simpson make these arguments is that it costs nothing to blame another section of workers, like migrants, in comparison to the pressures and risks that working class struggle – addressing the needs of all workers – involves. Simpson can oversee 850 jobs destroyed by BMW at their Cowley plant without lifting a finger, as part of his strategy of securing an alliance with British bosses by way of requests for the



Bob Crow (RMT), Rob Griffiths (CPB) and Dave Nellist (SP) at recent No2EU platform

government to defend 'British manufacturing' and 'British jobs'. This strategy not only violates basic internationalist principles – that we should unite with all workers regardless of their nationality – but also turns the trade unions into a pillar of support for the manufacturing bosses they should be fighting. It is also completely failing to protect jobs (as Jeremy Dewar points out on page 8), with unemployment in manufacturing skyrocketing, while official strike figures for the last six months have collapsed to a historically low level.

Those strikes that did take place in construction have, under Simpson's influence but not his alone, targeted the wrong people: migrant workers, not the bosses. On 28 January over 1,000 construction workers downed tools at the Lindsey Oil Refinery in North Lincolnshire, in defiance of the anti union laws, which demand ballots and cooling off periods between strikes. Keith Gibson of the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SP) was elected to the strike committee and through him the SP came to play a leading role in the strike.

The SP's newspaper *The Socialist* on 1st February gives us Gibson's detailed insider's account of the dispute and what led up to it.

He states that the British contractor, Shaws, had lost the part of its contract at the Lindsey Oil Refinery (LOR) for work on a de-sulphurisation plant to an Italian company, IREM. Shaws notified its workforce in December that there would be lay-offs. Unite shop stewards were concerned that the National Agreement for the Engineering and Construction Industry (NAECI or the 'blue book') would not cover the new workers. This collective agreement lays down basic, shift and overtime pay rates, plus proficiency payments, travel and accommodation allowances, pension contributions, sickness and accident benefits, etc. The union demanded access to Italian workers for trade union representatives, negotiations proceeded and Gibson did not indicate that there was any breakdown due to a refusal by IREM management to agree to apply equivalent pay and conditions for the Italian workers.

Labour MP for Cleethorpes, Shona McIsaac, for one, confirmed the unions had been "happy" to negotiate with IREM before the strike broke out. She said, "I had a meeting shortly after Christmas at Lindsey. We knew about IREM having the contract and at that time the unions were happily negotiat-

ing with them over terms and conditions, including the Italian workers having a tea break... The unions also knew that IREM was planning to recruit British workers as part of the contract to work alongside the Italians – they knew there was no plan to exclude British workers... But when the unions took the deal to their members it was rejected and the unofficial walkout began.

After that some union leaders started making claims about British workers' conditions being undercut by these contracts."

So, the Italian workers were paid the same as British workers and did not undermine the collective national agreements. What was the basis of the strike then? Keith Gibson of the SP explains that, "...on Wednesday 28th January 2009, Shaws' workforce were told by the Stewards that IREM had stated they would not be employing British labour. The entire LOR workforce, from all subcontracting companies, met and voted unanimously to take immediate unofficial strike action."

The strike started as soon as the stewards reported that British labour would not be employed and for that reason alone. This was the point at which Union Jacks and 'British Jobs for British Workers' placards began to be a visible presence on site. Shop

steward Kenny Ward summed up the strike's aim very clearly: "There are thousands in this country that are victims to this discrimination, this victimisation of the British worker." The demand of the strike was for at least a parity of "one for one", i.e. one British worker for each migrant employed. It is on that basis – the attempt to dump the costs of unemployment onto Italian workers, not British, French or Italian bosses – that no Marxist organisation worthy of the name could support the strike.

The Socialist Party's defence

The SP justified their support for the strikes for two principal reasons. The first was the undermining of the national union agreement. As *The Socialist* stated on 4 February ('Firm strike leadership gains results'): "... fundamentally this struggle is aimed against the 'race to the bottom', at maintaining trade union-organised conditions and wages on these huge building sites." But, as we have shown above, this has no basis in fact. The second, more disgraceful, argument put forward by the SP is that the strike was about 'fairness' and against the exclusion of 'local labour'. Let us quote the SP leaflet put out as the nationalist demonstrations spread across the North and the Midlands: "This worker solidarity is against the 'conscious blacking' of British construction workers by company bosses who refuse to recruit skilled British labour in the U.K."

This simply apes Unite leader Derek Simpson, who told the BBC: "It will occur again, and I'm sure it will occur in other countries as well unless there's a realisation that you can't just use the freedom of labour to the exclusion of indigenous labour." To base a strategy for resisting job losses and unemployment on a nationalist appeal for preference, as this is what talk of 'local labour' means in practice, is to concede to the idea, put forward day in day out in the tabloids and by the pro-bosses political parties, that there are too many workers in the UK from abroad and that if somehow they were no longer here then jobs would be easier to come by. Yet this is another of the excuses offered by the SP to explain away their support for a thoroughly reactionary strike.

Economism

The outcome of Lindsey was a defeat for the working class. The 4 February settlement saw 104 of 195 jobs go to British workers. This followed the rejection of an offer of 25% of the jobs for British workers the previous day. Bernard McAuley, Unite's chief negotiator, told the Guardian: "We've made sure that no Italians have been made redundant, we've got jobs for 102 British people." While no Italian or Portuguese workers already on site were made redundant, the jobs were reallocated from those that had

already gone to contracted IREM workers. Only around 100 of the projected 300 were already working at the refinery. – The SP, however, maintained that the strike was "...an inspirational struggle against the 'race to the bottom'... Not since the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s was there a strike wave like it. The result of the strike was a massive victory for those who took part and it gave heart to tens of thousands of others who saw that it is possible to fight back against the growing threat of unemployment."

This wholly exaggerated assessment of the strike wave reveals that the SP adopted a highly economic approach to the strike. Treating it just as a trade union dispute, with a section of trade unionised workers defending their jobs and position, they failed to see the reactionary political significance of a strike against the use of foreign labour. While in the short term, this won a section of unionised workers 105 jobs, it did so only at the expense of another section of workers, and the reactionary content of the strike undermines the fighting position of the class as a whole. If we are divided along national and ethnic lines, we will never be able to fight in the interests of the whole class against the bosses, demanding jobs for all.

The position of the SP was a classic example of what Lenin called 'economism' or 'tailism'. Lenin had attacked the Russian Marxists, 'the economists', who equated trade union consciousness with socialist consciousness. Lenin argued that the former would develop naturally owing to the conditions of capitalist society, which would create a spontaneous tendency for workers to pursue a struggle for higher wages, for better working conditions, and so on. Socialist consciousness was more than this though. Socialists saw the trade union struggle as only one part of a struggle against capitalism and for a new society based on the principle of working class power. Whereas there was a spontaneous tendency towards trade union consciousness, winning workers to socialism required a conscious struggle to raise their horizons beyond the limited confines of the economic struggle against this or that employer. To equate these two forms of consciousness would, in reality, mean limiting Marxist agitation to the struggle for the immediate improvement workers' conditions alone – the conclusion 'the economists' in Russian Marxism drew. Opportunism was at the core of economism; rather than challenge the bourgeois prejudices of workers, the economists chose instead to tail their existing ideas, and adapting the socialist programme to what they would readily accept.

In the LOR strike the Socialist Party adopted this exact same method. Rather than putting forward a socialist and ant-

icapitalist perspective, including defending the rights of migrant workers to take up their jobs, the SP capitulated to the existing, reactionary ideas of a set of workers. Ultimately, the SP failed to fight for jobs for all the workers – migrant and so-called 'indigenous'. They simply lauded the scope and breadth of the struggle and called on it to spread further into a national protest movement. The strike had exposed a particular type of craft trade unionism, where a section of unionised workers defend their section interests, at the expense of other workers – denying, for example, jobs, social rights and entry into the workplace of migrants or less skilled labourers. The SP in classic economic fashion mistook this craft trade union consciousness for socialist consciousness. Forgetting that socialists should not just be trade unionists, but, in accordance with our broader anticapitalist perspectives and goals, should also be tribunes of the oppressed and marginalised, the SP were blind to the reactionary goals and implications of the strikes for 'British jobs', seeing them as simply trade union struggles and somehow intrinsically socialist because of this.

Opportunism

The SP went onto the offensive after being stung by criticism of the strikes from other socialists, notably Workers Power and the Socialist Workers Party. A set of demands were agreed by the strike committee in the heat of the strike at the behest of Keith Gibson and the SP on 2 February:

- No victimisation of workers taking solidarity action.
- All workers in the UK to be covered by the NAECI agreement.
- Union-controlled registering of unemployed and local skilled union members with nominating rights as work becomes available.
- Government and employer investment in proper training/apprenticeships for the new generation of construction workers. Fight for a future for young people.
- All immigrant labour to be unionised.
- Trade union assistance for immigrant workers, via interpreters, to give right of access to trade union advice – to promote active, integrated trade union members.
- Build links with construction trade unions on the continent.

These were certainly good trade union demands. The problem is that they were not the real aims of the strike and no wonder then that they did not form part of the agreement that ended the strike. Moreover, the seven demands evaded all mention of the central claim – more jobs for British workers on the contract – and neither did they contain any statement about what this would mean for IREM's Italian workforce. This did not

THE SOCIALIST PARTY: CAPITULATING TO NATIONALISM

stop the SP going out of its way to downplay the central nationalist aims, concretised in the jobs settlement. Speaking of the nationalist manifestations at LOR the SP states "...But it seems that, since the strike, the SWP and some other groups on the left are doing their level best to undermine its achievements by focusing on the issue of 'British jobs for British workers' (BJ4BW)." Rather than answer the criticisms that union jacks and nationalism were prevalent throughout the strike, the SP have consistently claimed that LOR was, "a victory for the workers of all nations, won in spite of the EU-loaded dice and the anti-union laws," which "set a benchmark not only for militant trade unionism but for the role of conscious socialist intervention". Opposition to the strike was even dismissed by the SP as "...betraying a lack of imagination." This much is true – it is indeed very imaginative to be able to contort 104 jobs taken from Italian workers as in any way a blow against nationalism or a victory for the international working class!

Nationalist solidarity spreads

As mobs marched through Staythorpe in Nottinghamshire chanting, 'What do we want – Foreigners out; When do we want it – now!', the SP had this to say: "In the case of the Isle of Grain, and the Staythorpe site in Newark as well, the jobs were advertised in local job centres but not a single local worker applying for them ever got an interview...the jobs had already been filled by overseas contractors... It was a ruse by the bosses to get around equal opportunity employment laws, and everybody knew this. That is why there was so much anger, sometimes unfortunately and completely wrongly aimed at the overseas workers by a few." This caveat, that the workers should not be openly nationalist, is a rather weak cover for the rest of the argument. As socialists we begin from the position that workers, regardless of nationality, have a right to work. This should and can be secured by a united struggle for jobs for all.

Peter Taaffe, General Secretary of the Socialist Party has condemned all those "on the fringes of the labour movement" who refused to support the strike wave. Perhaps he has forgotten his non-SP allies in PCS Left Unity. As Public and Commercial Services Union leader Mark Serwotka said, "British jobs for British workers is not only a reactionary slogan, it is potentially racist. I saw people on the TV saying, 'I don't want to work with those Eye-ties' and hurling abuse at the ship where they were living. But I was the only trade union leader to publicly oppose the slogan."

This reformist union leader displays a greater awareness of the dangers of nationalism than the alleged Marxists

of the Socialist Party.

The Olympics Site: too many foreign workers?

On 8 May over 400 construction workers gathered outside the Olympics construction site in Stratford, East London. Lindsey workers led the demonstrations with Keith Gibson at the helm. Most were members of the GMB and Unite unions demanding a share of jobs for local workers. But there were also concerns about whether non-unionised labour was used on the site, and whether the national union agreement was being observed. Many on the demonstrations also went to great lengths to deny media reports they were objecting to the use of migrant labour. But Keith Gibson said that "The protest is about the EU legislation with regards to social dumping of European workers throughout Europe in different parts of the country." Neither GMB nor Unite support or ratify with evidence his further claim that, "They (the bosses) are not obeying the pay and conditions that the agreements will work under."

The bosses certainly denied non-union labour was being used. The Olympic Delivery manager told the BBC the issue on the Olympic site is not the union rates for skilled workers: "There are high levels of direct employment on the Olympic Park and we have a positive agreement with the unions representing construction workers on site which includes national wage rates." Of course, bosses should never be believed. But the problem was that the unions organising the protests did not also represent workers on the site, and there was no attempt made to involve those workers in the protests. This could have quickly clarified the true picture: how much were they being paid and was this in accordance with existing national agreements? Again, the nationalist goal of the defence of 'British jobs' and against immigration appeared to be the chief concern of many protesters. Phil Willis of Unite stated, "The more skilled labour they bring in [to Britain] it's going to deny our apprentices because they won't need them." Again, here as elsewhere, the SP have not clarified the goals and aims of the strike but at best only exacerbated the confusion and failed to challenge chauvinistic prejudices behind the demand for 'British jobs for British workers'.

South Hook strike – nationalism gets you 40 jobs

The apogee of this nationalist approach by sections of the working class was the 'victory' in Wales. Following unofficial strike action by workers and complaints from the GMB and Unite unions, the Dutch-based employer Hertel agreed to withdraw 40 Poles and replace them with UK staff at the terminal owned by ExxonMobil and Total at South Hook in

South Wales. GMB stewards and officials did not challenge the bosses' claim that Polish workers were on the union rates. This agreement followed threats by Paul Kenny, the demagogue leading the GMB union, that he would call other workers out on strike unless local workers were employed first.

Once again the SP echoed the demand for British workers to come first: "Workers at South Hook are not opposed to laggards from Poland getting work on the site as long as local laggards are given the opportunity of the work first under the union agreement and then foreign workers can be employed on the same pay and conditions." (SP statement on 20 May)

What this strike wave has exemplified is the failure of the SP's politics. No attempt was made to undermine Simpson by linking his nationalism to his inaction at Cowley and elsewhere. When the strike started, socialists had a duty to fight for a radically different perspective. In addition to the demands of the LOR strike committee, there should have been a condemnation of the slogan 'British jobs, for British workers' and a defence of the Italian workers' right to take up their jobs at the plant. This could have given the strike an internationalist character, and sparked a militant movement for jobs for all. Socialists may well have lost the argument, but by taking a principled stand, and taking the internationalists' arguments on to picket lines as the strike developed, we would have been in far stronger position for the future: for it would have laid the basis for a stronger, more united, movement of all workers fighting mass unemployment. Not a movement divided along national lines, fighting amongst ourselves for a dwindling number of jobs.

Left Nationalism – No2EU

With the bosses' system sinking into a deep recession and governments everywhere facing a crisis of legitimacy, the 4 June European Union elections offered an open door to a serious working class alternative. But the No2EU slate was not and could not have been that alternative. The decision by Bob Crow, General Secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, to establish a new electoral alliance to contest the European elections is a direct continuation of the nationalist strike and demonstration movement in a political form. At a time of global economic crisis, when bosses across the world are attacking the working class, the No2EU platform chose to focus almost exclusively on the bosses in Europe, letting the British capitalists off the hook. Whilst some of its criticisms of the EU were correct – for example, the reactionary, anti-union judgements of the ECJ and its attacks on the neoliberal Lisbon Treaty – it not only ignored the fact that Britain has been, since Thatch-

er, in the 'vanguard' of neoliberal states, but also included calls to defend 'British' industry. This could be nothing less, given British industry is nearly wholly privately owned by capitalists, than a call for manufacturing workers to strike alliances with the very bosses who are sacking them.

When it comes to immigration, No2EU states that "To ferry workers across Europe to carry out jobs that local workers can be trained to perform is an environmental, economic and social nonsense." As Natalie Silverstein has highlighted, however, the "fact that workers from one European country can move to any other, can bring their dependent relatives with them, and, at least in theory, cannot be discriminated against in relation to "native" workers, is undoubtedly something progressive and beneficial that socialists and trade unionists ought to support." (See article Viking, Laval and all that – are the arguments of No2EU justified? on www.workerspower.com).

The Socialist Party was quick to support No2EU and clearly hoped it could lay the basis for a new workers' party. Clive Heemskerk of the SP wrote, "The Socialist Party supports and is part of the No2EU - Yes to Democracy coalition. We recognise that many problems, from the economic crisis to planet-threatening global warming, can only be solved at an international level. If society remains organised as it is today, on a capitalist basis, divided into competing nations, the prospects for humanity will be bleak indeed. Fundamental change is necessary, based on democratic public ownership of the major companies that dominate the globe. We need a socialist Europe, not a bosses' EU. Backing the trade union-initiated No2EU – Yes to Democracy campaign in June's election is the first step towards building a force that can unite with workers in Europe and across the world to fight for a better future." (*The Socialist*, 15 April 2009)

This approach, describing in entirely normative terms (how something should be) what we would expect a fighting socialist party to look like, without acknowledging that the No2EU campaign makes no such internationalist or socialist arguments, shows both an enormous leap of political faith and a willingness to take a reactionary detour along the road to a mass workers' party. The No2EU platform makes no mention of either socialism or the working class. Socialism is something not even implied by its very limited policies. This perhaps wouldn't be a problem, if the Socialist Party was determined to fight for internationalist and socialist politics in the No2EU alliance, but, again, it was more concerned to provide left cover for nationalism than to actively challenge it.

At the same time, it has to be said, that the SP share, in their own politics, some

of the wrong positions of No2EU – in particular, the confusion over the free movement of labour that is at the heart of the campaign. As Dave Nellist put it in a recent interview in the *Weekly Worker*, 21 May: "I've always believed that part of socialism is the right to live, work, love wherever you want to be. However, if you put a practical example in front of me, which is the IREM multinational at Lindsey, then I come down on the side of the strikers who want to enforce common trade union levels of pay and conditions on whoever works there – as opposed to the right of IREM to use the free movement of capital and labour to make the biggest possible profit." So, rather than argue for the unionisation of workers entering the UK and for a trans-EU minimum wage and union agreements to be enforced by all European unions – the communist approach – Nellist ends up counter-posing the free movement of labour to the defence of trade union agreements.

The New Party

We must not make the error of seeing the Socialist Party, or its sister sections in the Committee for a Workers International, as one big morass of capitulators to nationalism. There has been opposition to the degeneration of the SP from within the SP itself. In South Wales, Socialist Party comrades have refused to hand out No2EU leaflets and have instead insisted that only SP leaflets are used in the campaign. This is a conscious effort on the part of a minority of SP members to limit the damage of nationalism by handing out the much better and less overtly nationalist SP leaflets. The question now at hand for those SP members who are rightly concerned with the capitulation to nationalism by their leadership is whether the new turn is simply an aberration or flows quite naturally from the politics and method of the SP.

If the No2 EU – Yes to Democracy alliance becomes a new party formation after the Euro elections then the SP have already abandoned any notion of fighting for it to abandon its nationalism and adopt a revolutionary socialist programme. Indeed, as was shown over recent years in their approach to their Campaign for a New Workers' Party, they have always seen political accommodation to the reformist politics of sections of the trade union bureaucracy to create a new reformist party in the here and now as a precondition for any future development of a revolutionary party. Such schematism is, as Trotsky once said, "the lifeblood of opportunism", for it results in the fight for revolutionary politics being put off to some unspecified point in the future where it will suddenly become 'operable'. Of course, Marxists should unite with reformists to build a new party – and place no conditions or

obstacles in the way of this unity – but we must also be clear from the outset that our aim is the speediest possible formation of a revolutionary communist party, to lead both electoral campaigns and the class struggle in the streets and workplaces. This means fighting for the new party to adopt a revolutionary programme from the outset, as this is the only way to ensure that the party will consistently represent the working class.

This is, indeed, a fundamental problem with the political tradition (often known as the 'Militant' or 'Grant' tradition, after its founder Ted Grant) from which the SP emerged in the 1990s. Grant founded the Militant Tendency as 'entryists of a special type' – the tactic of building up organisational influence without fighting openly for a revolutionary policy – in the Labour Party. This strategy was based upon Grant's conviction that any great upsurge would result in an influx of the masses into their traditional political parties, where they would find the leadership of Militant who had been slowly preparing over many years, even decades. Even when Labour purged Militant in the 80s and 90s Grant still clung to this perspective, believing they had to remain in the party that workers would inevitably return to en masse at some point in the future.

The SP has broken with this tradition only superficially. While they don't see the Labour Party as playing the role Grant envisaged for it, they now apportion essentially the same role for the new reformist workers' party they hope to form with the trade union bureaucracy (a Labour Party mark II, in all but name). Grant once said "due to the process of struggle itself, the broad consciousness of the masses moves in the direction of socialism." (Ted Grant, *Militant's British Perspective*, 1979) This was always a one-sided generalisation that encapsulated the problem with his method. Grant failed to see that the class struggle only creates the potential for the development of socialist consciousness: it is active revolutionary intervention that realises the potential.

The LOR dispute provides negative confirmation of just this point. It reminds us that the trade union struggle creates both progressive and reactionary outbursts. If socialists are unable to provide internationalist leadership and are not willing, where necessary, to stand against the stream, then they will never be consistent and principled fighters for revolutionary politics. As the jobs massacre rips through the economy, as Labour lurches into its deepest political crisis in a generation, Marxists need a revolutionary strategy for the crisis. The opportunist and economic method of the SP is incapable of developing this. It is these fundamental problems of method we urge all SP members, alarmed by the turn of the last period, to critically reassess.

THE GREAT MINERS STRIKE 1984-5

Turning point - The Battle of Orgreave

In the third part of our series on the miners' strike, we look at the search for solidarity action in the first phase up to battle of Orgreave and the harrowing attacks on miners by Thatcher's new semi-militarised police.

Anyone who looked at the situation in Britain in 1984 should have been able to see that it would not be possible simply to repeat the tactics that had brought the miners their famous victories in 1972 and 1974. In the intervening ten years, Thatcher had come to power determined to break the back of Britain's industrial working class and had already won some important scalps – on occasion she had already been shamefully aided and abetted by the union leaders.

Thatcher's offensive against the unions

In 1982, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) ordered the train drivers' union, ASLEF, to suspend its industrial action, accept a rotten sell out hatched between the TUC leader, Len Murray, and British Rail or else face being cast out of the TUC.

In 1983, the print union, the NGA, went into dispute at the Stockport Messenger, a small printing plant run by a pioneer Thatcherite union-busting employer, Eddy Shah. The police were vicious against the pickets and the bosses used every weapon the anti-union laws had given them. The TUC, at first, huffed and puffed about support but then it caved in and ordered the NGA to surrender, prompting Thatcher, in words heavy with sarcasm, to say of Len Murray, "I welcome the gracious action of the General Secretary of the TUC." Later, Murray claimed, quite possibly truthfully, that the NGA leaders themselves had pleaded with him to find them a way out of the strike.

In early 1984, Thatcher launched another vicious provocation and banned trade unions at the government's listening station, GCHQ, on the grounds of "national security". The workers there voted to fight but, again, the TUC surrendered without a blow being struck, and the first major attempt



Miners retreat in the face of a sustained police attack at the battle of Orgreave

to forcibly de-unionise an entire workforce succeeded. No wonder then, that Arthur Scargill and militant miners were determined not to let the TUC get any sort of control over the strike.

As the section of British workers most educated in their own union's history, they also remembered the strike of 1926, when the TUC, having called off the general strike after nine days, left the miners to go down to defeat after fighting alone for a further six months. They rightly feared that the TUC would intervene in the strike only to rob them of the fruits of victory. The influential bosses' magazine, *The Economist*, showed that it, too, had the same measure of Murray and Co:

"Already the TUC has offered Mr Scargill its collective embrace. Thus do the trade union barons declare their interests in a strike, so as to manipulate the eventual settlement. In the 1982 rail strike they offered themselves as honest

brokers – enforcing a settlement on the train drivers by threatening withdrawal of collective support... Mediation of this kind would be a second best outcome to a straight defeat of Mr Scargill, which should be tried first." (21 April 1984)

When Scargill told the TUC to keep its nose out, this had total support from the most militant rank and file miners. As one, Robert from South Wales, told *Workers Power*, "You can forget the TUC and Len Murray."

Such sentiments were, of course, understandable but they were still mistaken. It was right to deny the TUC any negotiating rights on behalf of the miners: that would have ensured defeat. However, not putting the TUC on the spot, demanding they organise solidarity action with the miners, held back the miners' strike and made much harder a class wide response to Thatcher's offensive. To achieve this, the miners needed a twin-track approach. On the one hand, they

needed to issue a direct appeal to the rank and file of every other union, especially those under the threat of imminent job losses themselves, to build a common front of struggle around common goals. On the other, it was necessary to demand the TUC organise solidarity action.

Every union leader should have been forced to show their hand: were they with the miners or not? If they were, then they must deliver not just money to the miners' strike fund but action to bring victory. Certain unions were critical for the solidarity effort. Workers in the power stations were facing closures and privatisation themselves. But they had hard right-wing union leaders in Eric Hammond of the Electrical, Electronic, Plumbing and Telecommunications Union (EEPTU) and John Lyons of the Electrical Power Engineers' Association blocking the road to struggle. The rail workers, a huge part of whose jobs depended on

transporting coal, were also under attack by the Tories. They, on the other hand, had prominent TUC lefts as leaders: Ray Buckton of Aslef and Jimmy Knapp of the NUR. The TGWU which also had a left general secretary Moss Evans, could have stopped many of the lorries that were being used to move scab coal. The steel workers, also facing massive closures, could have been drawn into action to defend their own jobs, but they had a right-wing leader in ISTC general secretary Bill Sirs.

The struggle for solidarity

Many rank and file militants in these industries took great risks to give solidarity to the miners, observing picket lines and escalating local disputes. Rank and file organisation within and between the unions could have spread the action to mass proportions. John Lyons and Eric Hammond, could have been isolated and defeated. The failure to do this led to a repetition of the very problem that had led to the Notts and other Midlands miners not joining the strike. The more hesitant, less spontaneously sympathetic workers in these other industries could claim that they had received no instructions from their unions to honour miners' picket lines and industry could carry on functioning, protected by the growing militarised police presence at every potential target of the flying pickets.

Once again, Scargill placed his reliance on the left bureaucracy – rail union leaders Ray Buckton and Jimmy Knapp – to get solidarity for the miners. The NUM contacted other unions and asked them not to touch scab coal. Pickets were dispatched to key coking plants and to the major blast furnaces of what was left of the British steel industry. The "Triple Alliance" – the coal, steel and rail unions – was summoned and its leaders all solemnly swore to support the miners. In contrast, apart from a weekly phone conversation between Len Murray and Peter Heathfield of the NUM, the TUC was kept out of the whole struggle. This was fine by them, as the TUC's own minutes smugly recorded in May:

"The general council should be content to wish the NUM well in their struggle and leave it at that unless the NUM made a special request."

Scargill hoped that the NUM itself could get the key unions to stop touching coal. The danger was already evident here, but it took revolutionary communists with an understanding of the bureaucratic caste at the head of the unions to see it, and say it openly without equivocation. It meant, of course, sometimes heated arguments with the very best and most militant miners, those influenced by Scargill. In the same paper in which a miner told us to "forget the TUC", Workers Power warned:

"Whilst we need to build class wide action from below we shouldn't let the TUC get away with total inactivity... If we let them get away with doing nothing they will be free to 'intervene' at the first difficult turn of events or whenever they see a weak spot in the struggle." (2 May 1984)

Our warning proved all too accurate. In the first place, the Triple Alliance proved to be as much of a broken reed as its historic predecessor in the 1920s. Within hours of the steel union, declaring its solemn support for the miners, Bill Sirs, announced to the press that it was vital to keep steel production going, even if this meant using scab coal. The steel workers, he insisted were not going to be "sacrificed on someone else's altar."

This should have sparked a call to arms for steel workers to rise up against Sirs, and build a common front to save the interlinked industries, coal and steel, and for the other union leaders to call Sirs to account within the TUC for sabotaging a struggle vital to all the unions. But Scargill did not launch a public fight against Sirs.

Worse, the regional NUM bureaucracies actively sought local deals with ISTC branches at the key plants of Ravenscraig in Scotland, Scunthorpe in Lincolnshire (supplied by coal from South Yorkshire), and Port Talbot and Llanwern in South Wales. The problem was that the NUM confined its proposal to asking steel workers to support the miners. But steel workers had been through a major strike four years earlier, and been defeated. Closing down the steel works for lack of coal threatened their own jobs. Only a clear commitment by miners to unite with steel workers in a common fight to defend the jobs in both industries could have overcome this fear. Such an appeal could have been an inspirational alliance in defence of jobs.

The exact opposite happened. The NUM regional officials in Yorkshire, Scotland and South Wales, struck deals with the steel union to exempt their plants from the call not to use coal. Pickets were called off the steel plants and steel production continued. In Scotland, Communist Party member Mick McGahey announced that the exemption for Ravenscraig was "in the interests of Scotland's industrial future." This typical reformist (in this case of the Stalinist variety) position of putting the national interest before the class struggle, saved neither the Scottish pits nor Ravenscraig, which was closed in 1992, but it did have a terrible effect on the strike. It meant that the key target industry that the NUM had tried to close down, in order to make the strike bite during the spring, when power cuts would be unlikely, failed at the first attempt.

While Scargill himself was furious that the exemptions had been granted, his respect for the federal rules of the NUM

meant that he was unable to challenge McGahey in Scotland, Emlyn Williams in South Wales or Jack Taylor in Yorkshire, for their truly fatal error. Despite some later attempts to close the plants by mass picketing, the damage of this concession was done and the blast furnaces were getting as much coal as they needed to keep going.

The rail unions did deliver far better solidarity action, with rank and file workers stopping trains carrying coal from the pitheads or from the scab areas. Hardly any coal moved by rail (or by sea, with the Seafarers' union playing an honourable role too) throughout the strike. Particular tribute should be paid to the ASLEF and NUR workers at Coalville, in the heart of Leicestershire, where NUM strikers numbered precisely thirty, the heroic "Dirty Thirty" as they came to be known. At the Coalville freight depot, the rail workers were asked by their unions not to move coal trains on 4 April 1984. They didn't. No scab coal moved. The workers were then faced with bribery, intimidation, the shipping in of scabs and victimisation. They stood absolutely firm throughout the strike.

What a contrast with their union leaders! Ray Buckton of ASLEF was a case in point. This "left winger" was chair of the TUC during the strike. He had a duty not only to support the miners but also to back up his own members who were loyally taking action to stop scab coal. Instead, limiting himself to the famous TUC line that they had not been asked by the NUM for help, this 'left' declared, "We cannot say, what help, if any, we can offer." The rail union leaders, who had accepted a higher wage rise on behalf of their members, which everyone recognised as a Tory bribe to head off solidarity action with the miners, refused to call their members out. They left the rank and file rail workers to stand alone against an offensive that would ultimately culminate in the loss of thousands of rail jobs and the privatisation of the network. Meanwhile, the Tories compensated for the rank and file rail workers' actions by deploying thousands of lorries, run by anti-union small businessmen, to transport coal.

The Battle of Orgreave

Faced with the failure to get action from the steel workers or the power workers, and with the Tories' use of the private road hauliers to move coal, Arthur Scargill changed his strategy. He recognised now that he would have to close the coking plants that supplied the steel industries' furnaces. He actively sought a major confrontation. After all, this had worked in 1972 when flying pickets from Yorkshire, with the support of thousands of Birmingham engineers and car workers, had, famously, closed the gates at the Saltley coking plant in the

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West Midlands. It might work again. And so began the struggle to close down the Orgreave coking plant outside Sheffield. It had been drafted in to supply Scunthorpe when the steel plant's supplies ran low and the poor quality of the coal it was getting caused an explosion in one of the furnaces.

The battle of Orgreave supplied some of the most memorable scenes of the Great Strike. Thousands of young miners, under the direct generalship of Scargill, who was arrested and injured during the struggle to close the plant, hurled themselves repeatedly at the massed ranks of police, ten lines deep and backed up by heavily armed snatch squads and cavalry squadrons brought from all over the country. This shows, for all his errors and mistakes, how far removed Scargill was from the normal union leader – he was actually willing to fight.

Police violence exceeded anything that had gone before. Yet, for four weeks in May and June, thousands of miners and their supporters kept coming back to the little lane, flanked by hedges and cornfields, which led to the plant. No amount of injuries or arrests could stop them coming. Their physical bravery was breathtaking. At Scargill's signal, the cry of "here we go" would rise to a crescendo followed by a charge right into the police ranks. Time and again beaten back, with blood streaming from head wounds, the miners would regroup and try again. No one held back. No one hesitated. However, there were two missing elements in Scargill's strategy to win the battle of Orgreave, and thus turn the tide in the strike. The first was recognition of the new reality of state violence and preparation to counter it. The second was a political strategy to use the battle to spread the strike, to actively campaign for solidarity strike action, starting in South Yorkshire but spreading nationally.

Organised defence squads

The police were no longer a thin blue line willing to engage in a bit of good humoured push and shove with pickets, as they had been in the early 1970s. They had been transformed into a paramilitary organisation for the express purpose of smashing mass pickets. The pickets could no longer dislodge them by superior weight of numbers. It was essential to advance new methods of struggle, to train organised picket defence squads, disciplined and well equipped, willing and able to meet the systematic violence of the police with equally systematic resistance. There was no other way to physically break through. It was also the only means of putting an end to the huge number of injuries and arrests being suffered every day. For every extra picket and support-

er we could bring down to the lane, the police could outflank us thanks to their military organisation and discipline.

Workers Power argued this at the time – and with direct involvement in the fighting, we were not lecturing miners from cosy armchairs miles away:

"Instead of disorganised charges at impenetrable police lines, we need our own wedges of the toughest, best trained, probably younger pickets who know that their job is not just to push but to carve a way through police lines. Backed up by the mass of pickets these squads can break the police lines and defend pickets against police snatch squads. None of this is 'fantastic' or 'impossible'. The fact that pickets have used telegraph poles against the police shows that the will to fight is there. Revolutionaries need to argue for the organisation of that will into a fighting force – specially trained workers' defence squads." (*Workers Power*, 6 June 1984)

This call certainly had a resonance amongst rank and file miners, who did fight for measures to actually implement defence organisation, especially in the Doncaster area. Militants from the Hatfield Main, Armthorpe and Goldthorpe pits proposed measures for the issuing of protective headgear, sturdy placards and better organisation on the picket line. Their resolution, which stated that "a body of pickets equipped in such a fashion would lift the morale of our men no end", showed how far militant miners had moved in just three months of bitter class struggle. They were actively fighting for revolutionary methods in the situations in which they found themselves. Typically, the left Labour and Communist Party dominated Yorkshire Area Strike Committee – the regional bureaucracy – "noted" these proposals and did nothing to implement them.

The same criticisms apply to the second, and even more important condition for victory at Orgreave: strike action by other workers. Picketing alone, however mass it might have been, could not have brought victory on its own. In fact, Arthur Scargill's victory at Saltley Gate, on 10 February 1972, recognised by all sides as the decisive moment in the miners' victory, provided the crucial lesson. It was solidarity strike action by other workers that had turned the tide. For ten days, at Saltley, the police had stopped the miners' pickets closing the plant. Then 40,000 Birmingham engineering workers went on strike and 10,000 of them marched to Saltley. When the police saw them coming they panicked and the inspector running the show screamed to his fellow officers the very slogan of the picket line – "Close the gates!" Mass solidarity action brought victory.

The mass picket and the heroic battle at Orgreave were essential but primarily as a detonator of similar working class

solidarity. Orgreave stood on the outskirts of Sheffield. The Communist Party controlled the shop stewards' committees of virtually every major plant in the town. There was a living tradition of solidarity and struggle. There was every possibility that workers would respond to the call for strike action in support of people they saw every day on the television being terrorised by police thugs. And they could have marched en masse to help the miners close Orgreave once and for all.

Workers Power members in the city fought for this perspective, trying to get the Trades Council to issue the call. When it passed even a half-hearted resolution we used that to leaflet all the key factories in the town. But the Communist Party resolutely blocked the call for action. Scargill failed to come into the city and issue such a call, indeed, no major rallies were held in the city during the month long battle. Predictably, the Yorkshire leadership, having already negotiated the continued production of steel at Scunthorpe on the grounds that keeping industry going would save jobs (it didn't, it cost thousands of jobs shortly afterwards) made no appeal to the South Yorkshire labour movement to strike.

The result was that the miners were left to fight alone, apart from the individuals or small groups of militants who went out to help them. The battle of Orgreave failed to achieve its objectives. It did not shut down coke production, or stop the movement of coal and coke, and steel production continued. Worse still, it opened up a new phase of policing the strike, the Yorkshire miners were thrown onto the defensive. The first instances of scabbing occurred in South Yorkshire and pickets had to turn their attention to their own pits.

At the same time, there was police invasion of the pit villages themselves and a veritable occupation by a militarised police force. From the summer of 1984, the pit villages started to look like the streets of Northern Ireland's cities, as heavily armoured vans and shield bearing snatch squads took up positions in the communities. Their aim was to intimidate the miners, their families and their supporters, but these brutal tactics failed. The occupation of the villages met with constant and determined physical opposition, but it had to be recognised that the miners were now on the defensive. The search for victory now shifted to the search for solidarity action from key sectors of workers who were also under threat from the Tories.

This article is an extract from a longer piece by Mark Hoskisson, published in *Fifth International* (May 2004). In 1984 Mark was on the editorial board of *Workers Power* and was directly involved in many of the events he narrates.

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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Stopping the British National Party

By John Bowman

The BNP's electoral breakthrough at the European elections, gaining them two seats, represents a real and growing danger in these times of economic crisis.

Their two MEPs will give the party a new wave of funding for their political activities, with large salaries and expense allowances. More than this, it gives them further publicity and profile in preparation for the UK general elections, which must be called within a year.

The BNP use elections for publicity, but for the eventual aim of building a violent racist movement on the streets, to break up unions and other working class organisations, deport black and Asian people and prepare Britain for wars of conquest.

Party leader Nick Griffin explained in 1995 that the BNP are an organisation that backs up its slogan 'rights for whites' with 'well aimed boots and fists'. It is this strategy that makes the BNP different from other parties that stand in elections. The BNP is a fascist party – and in these elections they have scored 940,000 votes. That makes them a threat that needs to be dealt with by the working class – black and white.

So why did a fascist party that bans non-whites from membership, that calls for repatriation of non-white people out of the country and that has clear and well-publicised neo-Nazi links gain so many votes?

The answer is simple – mass disillusionment with Labour and the ruling elite in business and government who are letting living standards plummet for millions in the economic crisis while the rich get richer. And the right wing media like the Express and Star have blamed migrants for unemployment – which is actually caused not by migrants but by bosses – and the trade union and Labour leaders have failed to answer these lies.

So the BNP has had some success making foreigners and black people scapegoats for the anger so many feel. They blame them for everything from the lack of social housing to high unemployment – but they link this to strong anti-establishment rhetoric against the 'elite'. This is not socialism – it is just fakery. But it can work, and some people mistakenly see a vote for the BNP as a point scored against the parties that have

caused them so much suffering in the past – Labour and the Tories. The BNP deliberately play on this.

Andrew Brons, one of the BNP's newly elected MEPs, said in his acceptance speech, that he knew his election wasn't 'universally popular' and attacked the 'onslaught' on the BNP by the media and mainstream political parties. Griffin heralded his election as a triumph against the 'ruling elite'. The BNP's racism is only surpassed by their opportunism – their anti-establishment rhetoric was matched by a real toning down of the full reality of their racist policies in their victory speeches.

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That hundreds of thousands of people are driven to putting a cross by candidates such as Griffin and Bron in elections is a sign of serious discontent and anger at the establishment. In 1930, Leon Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary, wrote that 'if communism is the party of revolutionary hope, then fascism, as a mass movement, is the party of counter-revolutionary despair'. These words ring as true today as they did then with the recession of 2008-09 continuing to deepen with job cuts, pay cuts, unemployment and a deteriorating standard of life for millions of people.

The BNP have raised Gordon Brown's slogan 'British jobs for British workers', fighting for 'British workers first' as their goal. The BNP have put this issue to the forefront of the campaigning – with the slogan

even listed next to their name on the ballot paper. To stop the BNP we need to show how dividing workers on national lines weakens our resistance to the bosses and doesn't save jobs. The way to protect jobs is a united fight by all workers – and to level up foreign workers' pay to equal other workers, preventing undercutting.

Another important factor is to mobilise the victims of BNP racism into a united fight back, Muslims, Asian and black people. Our rallying slogan must be "black and white unite and fight."

If we are to really undermine the BNP's support and rally former Labour voters to a progressive solution, we need our own party of revolutionary hope here in Britain. We need an anti-establishment party of the Left – a genuine anti-capitalist, internationalist party which doesn't just challenge Labour and the Tories but challenges the whole system of greed and misery which is pushing people into the arms of reaction.

Such a party would be able to put forward radical policies that would really improve peoples' lives. It would argue to tackle unemployment through massive investment in transport, schools and hospitals to be paid for by heavily taxing the rich. A new party would be able not only to criticise and expose the BNP's racist, anti-working class policies but would be able to put forward real socialist alternatives and drive a wedge between the BNP and their supporters. It would be an activist party that gives a lead to the resistance and hope in the here and now.

At some stage the BNP will move on from its current phase of seeking mass support through respectable electioneering and will start to assert itself on the streets, like the national front tried to do in the 1970s. When this happens, the answer will be Trotsky's policy: a united front of the working class organisations to confront them everywhere, and mass popular defence organisations to drive them off the streets. But right now, the fascists in Britain are at the stage of emerging from a fringe sect into a well-known national political party. They have created a strong pole on the far right wing of the political spectrum – to answer them we need a strong pole on the left. Again in Trotsky's words, in the fight against fascism three things are necessary: "a party, a party and a party."