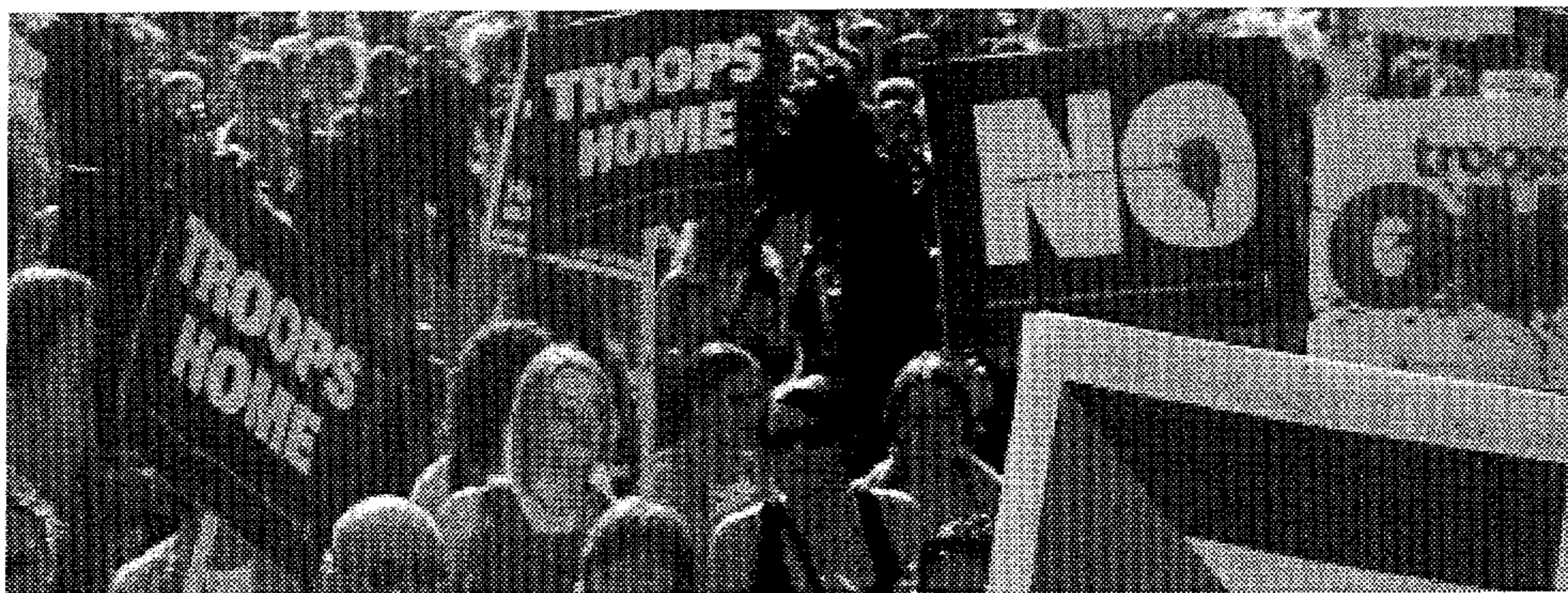


workers power

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

THIS IS NOT OUR WAR



TROOPS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN!

Inside:

- **Victory to the post workers!**
- **The bosses' great cuts robbery**
- **German Left Party gains**
- **Call for a New Anticapitalist Party**
- **Smash the English Defence League**



**League for the
Fifth International**

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ireland: Lisbon treaty passed

The second Lisbon Treaty referendum was passed by a decisive margin following a campaign of financial and political blackmail led by a grand alliance of establishment parties, big business, the media and trade union leaders.

The Yes side played on people's fears about the impact of a second No vote, linking the rejection of the Treaty last year to the deep crisis that engulfed Ireland's open economy. The scare-mongering worked. It's clear people voted for the Treaty not because they were convinced of its content, but because they are scared of further economic calamity and unemployment.

The absence of a strong left in the referendum campaign was clearly felt in the trade union movement where the majority of leaders echoed government lies about workplace rights being strengthened. The Socialist MEP Joe Higgins highlighted the anti-worker nature of the Treaty but failed to use the referendum to call for coordinated action against cutbacks and militarism.

A No vote would have delivered a temporary blow against the EU ruling class but this clearly wasn't enough. The fight against EU imperialism needs the working class itself to fight ruling class attacks and struggle for a United Socialist States of Europe.

Irish bosses' chopping board

The victory of the capitalist parties' 'Yes' vote campaign for the Lisbon Treaty highlight the dangers of an emboldened government in the South committed to privatisation, cutbacks and taxation of the working class.

The government's NAMA ('Bad Bank') bail-out plan has already committed 54 billion of taxpayers' money to relieve the banks of 'toxic loans', while the 'Bord Snip' report (which literally means 'Chopping Board!') has proposed a 5 billion cuts package in public services; including cutting 17,000 public sector jobs and slashing social welfare and funding for the health service.

So on 30 September nearly 15,000 people marched against the planned 'Bord Snip' cut backs which will see the loss of up to 6,500 community sector jobs. This fantastic show of strength should be built on by forming action committees in local areas, bringing together representatives of different organisations affected by the cuts and building a forceful campaign of resistance before next December's budget. In Ireland as in Britain, we must fight to make sure the bosses, not social welfare, pay for the crisis.

No rest for Calais migrants

Most of the immigrants arrested at Calais on 22 September after their camp was attacked by riot police could be sent to Greece. Under the fortress Europe policies of the EU, asylum seekers are supposed to make a claim at the first country in the EU that they come to. Greece is the first for many arriving from the Middle East or central Asia, so the UK and French home secretaries want the migrants, mainly Afghan and Iraqi, sent there.

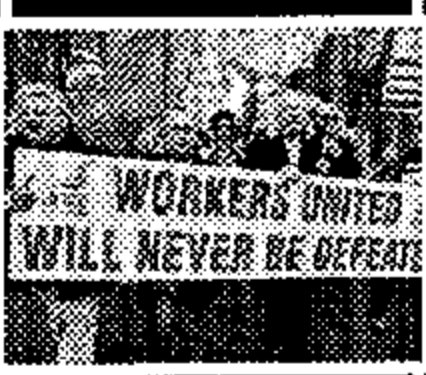
But the immigration and asylum procedures in Greece are barbaric. Bill Frelick from Human Rights Watch explained that "Greece denies 99.5 percent of all asylum claims, has recently eliminated its appeals procedure, and detains migrants in deplorable conditions." Out of 20,000 applicants in 2008 only 379 were granted asylum. Recently there have been riots on the Greek islands where overcrowded refugee camps are located. Worse still, the Greek police also use bulldozers to destroy makeshift refugee camps.

Is this how Europe should treat people fleeing wars that its own member states have caused?

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EDITORIAL

IN THIS ISSUE

This is not our war

America and Britain are losing the bloody war in Afghanistan – and it's official. US general Stanley McChrystal, who leads the occupation troops, told a London audience this month that the situation was "serious and deteriorating".

McChrystal is publicly campaigning for a "surge" of up to 40,000 more US soldiers, while Tory leader David Cameron has called for 2,000 more British troops to join the 9,000 already there.

This won't please military families, as the death toll mounts daily. As we go to press, 1,432 Western troops have died in the eight-year war, 219 of them British. This year has been by far the bloodiest with 395 killed (90 of them British).

Though the government and media are keen to release the names and chillingly young ages of the dead, they are silent about the wounded – estimated to be four times the number. The fate of these forgotten soldiers is all too often to be ignored and denied compensation.

Meanwhile, the long-suffering Afghan people are facing a long-drawn out massacre. Medical charity Medicins sans Frontiers says nearly 4000 civilians have been killed, and the UN says casualties jumped 39 percent last year alone and some 1013 were killed in first six months of this year.

A cynical campaign to "support our troops" is being orchestrated from above – with huge media support for the 'Help for Heroes' campaign and a series of homecoming marches welcoming returning

troops. The relentless media campaign is because the politicians and generals know the 57 per cent of Americans and 69 per cent of Britons oppose the war. Yet still there is no end in sight.

General McChrystal pretty well admits it. He reckons that it would take until 2013 to train Afghan forces to fight against the resistance alone, and US withdrawal "will be much later than 2013". That means a lot more military funerals back home.

To minimize Nato losses, McChrystal has turned to drones, unmanned aircraft, to deliver deadly strikes on Afghan and Pakistani villages. One of the most devastating of these blind blows hit Bala Boluk in May, killing 147 civilians, including 95 children. Weddings and funerals are often targeted, as the occupiers fear any large gatherings.

The recent election has exposed how meager the support is for the Afghan government of US puppet Hamid Karzai. All candidates were vetted by the occupation forces. No wonder there was such a massive boycott of the ballot by Afghans, with the turnout down to between 10 and 35 per cent, from 70 per cent in 2004.

And there was widespread fraud. A secretly recorded video showed Karzai supporters marking and stuffing ballot papers, joking, "We should at least include a few for [the opposition], don't you think?"

And this is the 'democracy' Britain is supposed to be fighting for! This summer Karzai ruled that husbands are entitled to rape their wives if they deny them sex for four days, to starve them and to

keep them locked up at home. So much for Britain's crusade to 'liberate' Afghan women.

It is vital that we redouble our efforts to get the troops out now. More helicopters and armoured vehicles will not save lives – they will aid the killing of Afghans and fuel the growing insurgency. Instead, the £4.6 billion now being wasted on occupying Afghanistan and Iraq should be spent building schools, hospitals, housing – and repairing the damage done.

Would this mean Britain losing the war? Yes, it would. But this war is not our war, not even the rank and file soldiers' war. It is being fought by a rich and privileged US and British ruling class for control of oil and gas pipelines and for strategic control of south-central Asia.

Would this mean the Taliban returning to power? Only if they remain the only force leading resistance to the Western occupation. But socialists in Afghanistan are also beginning to organise against the occupation – as the joint statement between Workers Power and Afghan socialists signed on 3 July shows (see fifthinternational.org).

Socialists call for the victory of the resistance because, as the recent election farce shows, the Afghan people will never be free to choose their own destiny until the occupation is defeated. But if they can come to the head of that resistance, socialists can help not only to defeat the occupation but to challenge the Taliban for leadership of the Afghan people.

• **Join the demonstration on 24 October in London. Assemble 12 noon Hyde Park. Called by Stop the War Coalition.**

Urgent need for new party

All three of the major political parties at their party conferences want huge cuts.

The government handed £1.3 trillion to the bankers – now they want workers to pay the price. At Labour's Brighton conference Gordon Brown backed slashing spending on education and holding down public sector pay.

The Tories say this is not enough: they want benefits to be slashed and swingeing cuts in

spending on hospitals and schools. Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg says Britain needs 'savage' cuts.

But why should we pay for the bankers' crisis? Instead of cutting our children's education, our older people's pensions, and jobs that are the lifeblood of our communities, the assets of the banks and corporations should be confiscated and the super-rich bosses should be made to pay through swingeing tax rises.

That's why we need a new party of the working class in Britain today. The trade unions that are resisting government and bosses' attacks and the socialist groups should come together in a new party: one that blames the capitalists for their crisis and fights to make them pay for it.

Sign the Call for a New Anti-capitalist Party and back Anticapitalist candidates at the next election: see pages 12 and 13.

4 *Richard Brenner* looks at Labour's cuts. *Kam Kumar* defends teenage mums

5 *Mark Booth* rallies antifasts to smash the English Defence League and BNP

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LABOUR

As Brown prepares massive cuts, it's time to break with Labour

By Richard Brenner

Gordon Brown was hoping to fight the next election on a "save jobs" ticket by attacking Tory plans for cuts.

But the capitalists launched a massive campaign to force him not to do it.

First they got the Tories to run a huge campaign proving that Labour too was planning massive cuts. This wasn't hard to do: the evidence was already there of savage cuts planned in schools, health and civil service jobs (see pages 8 and 9).

Then the international and UK bosses' organisations raised a clamour for even more cuts. They pointed to the cost of the UK's bank bailout plan – £1.5 trillion. They pointed out that soaring unemployment means less money raised in tax and more spent on benefits. And they demanded loudly and unceasingly that the government "tell the truth" about the "unavoidable scale of cuts needed" to "balance the books".

The International Monetary Fund, fresh from putting third world countries on starvation rations and making them sell off their assets to private investors in return for loans, demanded that

Britain slash the NHS to halt spiralling government debt. And David Nicholson, the NHS chief executive for England, said the service must make savings of £15 billion to £20 billion (\$24 billion to \$32 billion) in the coming years – the sharpest cut in its history.

So now Brown and Darling have promised they will make the reductions demanded and education minister Ed Balls rushed out plans to cut £2 billion from schools.

Labour is still trying to present itself as the guardians of the workers, but they are lying and millions of working class people can see it.

The leaders of the big unions are desperately trying to convince their members that funding Labour to the tune of millions and voting for the discredited party at the next election is the only realistic option. Postal workers' union leader Billy Hayes stood up at Labour's conference and called on the party to protect the postal workers' pension fund, ripped off by successive Tory and Labour governments who let the bosses take a 13 year break from paying pension contributions. Workers carried on paying in – and now they are being asked to take a cut to fill the massive hole.

Hayes' proposal amounted to very

little – there were no concrete steps the party had to take, there was no threat to withhold money or votes to back his claim up. The party conference voted it through – but as everyone knows, its resolutions are not binding on the Labour leadership (none of whom even bothered to be there in the hall to listen to the postal workers' pleas).

Millions of workers are quite rightly turning away from Labour, as the European elections showed. All across the world workers are turning away from their traditional parties because they have done the bosses' dirty work (see pages 16 and 17). But many diehard Labour supporters are counting on a Tory victory to bring new activists and new trade unionists back into the party, there to campaign to get a new generation of Labour MPs elected who will sell them out all over again.

At the Labour conference the muttering from constituency delegates was all about how, under the Tories, people would be so shocked by the attacks they will face from Cameron and Osborne that they will return to Labour. At the Convention of the Left in Brighton, just before the start of conference, it was clear this was what John McDonnell and the Labour Representation Committee are

counting on too.

But there is an alternative to this counsel of despair. It is to link up the struggles that are already taking place and that are on the cards in the months ahead – to link up the strikes in the post and on the bins, in workplaces across the country. By building joint solidarity committees or committees of action (see back page) we can unite the strikes, putting them under the control of the strikers themselves, so they can't be sold out by the pro-Labour union leaders. And we can raise the call for a new workers' party – an anticapitalist party (see pages 12-13).

The time to launch this is now – while Labour is still in government, still showing its true face as the bosses' agents. Once Labour is in opposition, it will turn left in words and the union leaders will claim it has been reclaimed for working people. This will condemn us to fighting the Tories under a leadership which, at the critical moment, will sabotage these struggles and who, even if they get back into government, will act in just the same way as Blair or Brown. Now is the time for the tens of thousands of militants to break from Labour and create the leadership we need in the battles ahead.

Brown sends teenage mums to reform homes

By Kam Kumar

Gordon Brown has unveiled new plans for single teenage mums. No longer are they entitled to council housing but instead will be sent away to live in supervised homes where they will be taught parenting and "responsibility". This draconian scheme is reminiscent of Victorian years where "immoral" women were forced to live in rehabilitation homes.

He also claimed that the vast majority of teenage pregnancies were unwanted and that teenage women simply should not get pregnant.

The fact that these supervised homes, known as "foyers", will be compulsory is the creepy element. Many of them are already up and running, housing an esti-

mated 8,000 teenagers. Brown has pledged £30 million to fund 500 new places over the next three years.

But aside from Brown's patronising attitude to single mums, who he thinks have to learn responsibility and parenting from the likes of him, these homes are less about helping young women and more about saving money and keeping young women "in their place".

The bosses have made scapegoats of single mums for "being a burden on the taxpayer". For those, who think single mums are a burden on society and only get pregnant so they can jump the housing queue, this new scheme will be music to their ears.

Under the new scheme, young mothers will be charged rent and pay bills as usual, but they will also sign a contract, by which they

must follow strict behavioural rules. If these are broken, they can be evicted and sent to even stricter homes. They are not allowed to decorate their rooms with posters and there are no communal areas in which to socialise.

The UK has a high rate of teenage pregnancy, the highest in Europe. This is down to many factors, including poor sex education, inaccessible contraception and family planning services, poverty and low self-esteem.

Young women need to be given decent employment opportunities and a chance to go to further and higher education, regardless of their backgrounds. This means the working class movement should fight for:

- A huge expansion of college places and abolition of fees; full grants for all

- A massive programme of state investment in useful jobs funded by seizing the profits of the banks and taxing the rich
 - Free fully funded 24-hour childcare provision so young mothers are not consigned to the home
- These are measures that would give teenage mothers a real chance of finding jobs and developing skills so they can make real choices about their lives. Brown's 19th century moralism will simply treat young working class mothers like criminals.

Ultimately, it is by delivering collective provision of childcare and all housework that young women will be freed from the dual burden of domestic labour and working for a living. That means a socialist planned economy – the only way for women to finally win real freedom.

FAR RIGHT

Smash the English Defence League!

By Mark Booth

The racist thugs from the English Defence League are marching again this month. With demonstrations planned for Manchester, Swansea, Newport, Leeds, Nottingham and Glasgow, the threat of these racist mobilisations is growing. Everyone should mobilise to stop the EDL and drive them off our streets.

The sort of action we need has been clearly shown in victories won by local youth and antifascists in previous weeks. In Birmingham the EDL were twice met with organised opposition from hundreds of working class youth. People from all races and backgrounds united to physically to drive them out.

Most recently in Harrow, where the EDL attempted to stage a demonstration against the building of a mosque, over a thousand youth from the surrounding area and across London turned out to

stop them in their tracks. The success of these actions so far shows the way to go forward.

The EDL may not have succeeded in mobilising in thousands so far, but they have received a lot of publicity. Due to the brave efforts of antifascists their increased profile is a negative one, and this will make it more difficult for them to bring a wider layer on the next marches they hold. But if they are not stopped in Leeds and Manchester, this could change.

Some parts of the antifascist movement have responded to the EDL's aggressive marching by calling on local police to ban demonstrations and have called for rallies or vigils rather than opposing the EDL on the streets. Where calls for police bans have been successful, police have generally banned the antifascists too – meaning mass local opposition to fascism cannot be shown. This is not an alternative to challenging them head on.



Anti-racist youth beat up EDL supporters at a recent demonstration

In the European elections this year the fascist British National Party got 9.8 per cent of the vote in Yorkshire and Humber and 8 per cent in the North West, electing MEPs in both areas. The EDL hopes it can bring out some of these voters onto its racist street marches. Antifascists need to turn out in force to make sure that this doesn't happen.

This is the strategy we need to win. The Nazi leader Adolf Hitler admitted in 1933: "One thing could have broken our movement – if our enemies had understood its princi-

ples and from the first day had smashed the nucleus of our movement with extreme brutality."

We should remember these words and rally the youth, the unions, black, Asian, lesbian and gay people to form our own Antifascist Defence League to crush the EDL.

Forthcoming EDL demonstrations include:

- 10 October: Manchester**
- 17 October: Swansea**
- 24 October: Newport**
- 31 October: Leeds**
- 7 November: Nottingham**
- 14 November: Glasgow**

Kick the BNP off Question Time!

Following the election of two British National Party MEPs at the Euro elections, the capitalist media has slowly been incorporating the BNP into mainstream political life. In the latest move, their leader Nick Griffin has been invited to appear on BBC Question Time.

Their London Assembly member, Richard Barnbrook, has been repeatedly interviewed by the BBC, and on 30 September the BBC's Newsbeat interviewed BNP youth leader Mark Collett, an open Nazi supporter who has stated publicly that he would rather live in 1930s Nazi Germany than present day Britain.

The media platform given to the BNP is a sign that the ruling class is subtly changing its approach towards the fascists under the impact of the economic crisis and growing workers' resistance. While not needing a fascist street fighting force right now, sections of the ruling class see the useful-

ness of promoting the BNP's divisive politics at a time when millions of workers are searching for answers to the economic crisis. The bosses see a diversion into the dead end of nationalism and racism as a useful response to rising working class resistance to job cuts.

The bosses would rather that working and middle class people, who are impoverished by the recession, direct their anger at migrants and asylum seekers than at the bankers and corporations, who caused the crisis. The inevitable by-product is always a series of violent attacks on black and Asian people by thugs incited by the BNP and the racist tabloids – but the bosses couldn't care less about that.

This is just one of the reasons socialists should campaign to get Nick Griffin kicked off Question Time and any other broadcast media they appear on. Workers should protest and take direct action outside the BBC television centre. *Join the protest outside Bush House, Ald-*

wych, London on 22 October!

BBC workers and their unions, NUJ and Bectu, should pull the plugs on the Nazi thugs. Let's follow the example set when Griffin was egged and flour bombed while trying to mount a victory rally for the press outside parliament after the Euro elections.

But socialists should not call for the state to ban Griffin and his thugs appearing in the media. Why? Because any such legislation would be extended to "all extremists" and would be used to ban the left, antiwar activists and the militant wing of the working class movement. As our resistance to the crisis mounts we need these rights.

Workers and trade unionists in the media should refuse to publish or broadcast live appearances by BNP representatives. TV and radio technicians should switch off their equipment, walk out and refuse to resume work until the fascists have left the building. Such action needs to be argued for and organised now.

Anti-fascists and the entire labour movement must give total support to all workers who undertake such actions and support any workers being victimised.

Of course, the bosses media will scream blue murder if workers infringe the millionaire press barons' "freedom of speech" in this way. We have to argue that we will tolerate no freedom to incite racist attacks or to build a mass force to attack the workers movement and the democratic rights we have won.

Mussolini's Italy in the 1920s, and Hitler and Franco's regimes in Germany and Spain, all show that, if fascist gangs are allowed to grow into a mass force and take power, they will destroy all the rights won by workers, trade unionists, black, Asian, gay, lesbian and disabled people. For this reason we must crush the fascists whilst they are still at an embryonic stage. Part of this task is to make sure that there is no platform in the media for fascism.

FIGHTBACK

Postal strike: the big guns begin to fire

The CWU ballot across Royal Mail closes this month. It is likely to signal a vote for a national strike. A *CWU rep* explains how they can win this dispute could change the political landscape

As we go to press, the national ballot for industrial action across Royal Mail is in its last week. Royal Mail managers are trying to influence the vote with laughable posters carrying the same tired old arguments: "This is just a London dispute", "The union is not negotiating". But it's not working.

The reality is that Royal Mail has imposed a pay freeze, despite record profits of a million pounds a day, threatened to close the pension scheme and embarked on a massive programme of job cuts, workload hikes and closures. The company started implementing these changes last April, office by office.

This is why some offices have already taken 13 days of strike action – before the national dispute has begun! In London there are already 10 million items of undelivered post lying around in warehouses. Managers from across Britain have descended on striking offices, desperate to deliver the priority mail. But in vain. Frustrated, these lackeys have turned increasingly to what they do best: provocation.

As a result, there have been unofficial wildcat walkouts in Stoke, Glasgow, Bristol and Kilburn, to name but a few. But in countless other offices, workers have clocked this as a ploy to pull apart the union. Darren from Mandela Way delivery office in London SE1 told Workers Power:

"Last week they came in and told us we were all to be moved from a four-day week to a five-day week (though with the same workload each day), messing up people's family arrangements and partner's jobs. Now they've got fifteen managers shadowing Taj, our rep, waiting for him to make a mistake. But he just soaks it up; we know they want us to walk out but we're disciplined."

Richard, a striking HGV network rep at the Yorkshire Distribution Centre, told a similar story:

"The business walked away from

negotiations, so we're in a situation where people who have been in the business for 30 years and never worked nights have been put on nights, and another driver who works weekends to look after his disabled wife has been put on weekday shifts. This new duty package imposed on us has also meant a massive hit to earnings potential, with some workers losing £5,000 to £6,000 a year."

Going national

This is the amazing backdrop to the national strike. Over 40,000 posties – a third of the workforce – are already engaged in weekly strikes.

The bitterness that usually sets in only after the first few weeks of a confrontation is already there. As Darren put it:

"I used to think that we should hold off till the national ballot, but not now. I've already lost £1,000; there's no way I'm going back to work off the backlog."

With no other way to deliver the mail and with some of the main arteries, like Glasgow, London and Bristol already clogged up, this is a strike that could be won very quickly if swift and decisive action is taken. But there are dangers ahead.

The greatest of these is the leadership's emphasis on negotiations

and delays to the strike so far, which could continue even after a yes vote. We need to demand: "No dropping the strike for talks!" And if Royal Mail gets a court injunction to delay or outlaw our strike, we should launch a national wildcat. Other sections, like the energy construction workers, have defied the anti-union laws this year and got away with it. We should be prepared to follow suit.

It is also becoming clear that Royal Mail has been preparing for our strike for some time now. Secret scab mail centres, like the one in Dartford, are already being used to stash excess mail and agency staff are being recruited and trained up. We need to check them out and be prepared to do whatever it takes to shut them down.

Another danger is the union's offer of a three-month strike ban in exchange for a freeze on "executive action", unilaterally imposed changes to working practices. However, this would just mean Royal Mail getting most of what it has already pushed through and does not even have as a condition the reinstatement of victimised reps.

As reps and activists, we must be ready to seize control of this strike, if Dave Ward and Billy Hayes have another wobble, like they did in 2007. By electing strike committees and fighting to establish these as the basis for rank and file control of the strike locally, regionally and nationally, we can begin to develop an alternative leadership, rooted in the membership and defending consistently the interests of postal workers.

By building solidarity committees, we can raise hardship funds, keep the public on our side and link up with other workers under attack. Local rallies, demonstrations and co-ordinated strike action can keep the momentum going forward and hasten our victory. The postal strike has the power to turn the tide and put the bosses everywhere on the run. Let's do it!

Tower Hamlets College: all-out strike wins results

By Jeremy Dewar

Lecturers marched back into Tower Hamlets College after four weeks on strike, proud and united in having won a significant victory. Their decisive action can now act as a shining example to other workers facing cuts and closure.

Threatened with 40 compulsory redundancies and closure of English as a Second or Other Language (Esol) courses in early summer, Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) and Unison stewards immediately met and decided to fight together. They secured a ballot for industrial action and activated it before the term's end, ready to launch an all-out indefinite strike from enrolment week onwards.

Mass pickets of up to 150 drew students and workers from other local unions into active support for the walkout. Strikers raised money by going directly to nearby workplaces, mosques and street markets. This community outreach both spread the news about the strike

and raised the funds necessary to ensure no one was starved back to work. Leaflets were produced in other languages – particularly useful since they were defending Esol courses.

Daily meetings and weekly assemblies ensured every striker had a say in how the strike was run. The UCU leadership also deserves credit for supporting the strike and providing strike pay.

Could more have been won? Possibly. In the end, posts were cut through voluntary redundancies and redeployment, and the college reserved the right to issue compulsory redundancies at a later date. Also only 300 out of 1,100 Esol student places were saved. But to win more, the strikers would have had to spread their dispute to other workers.

Nevertheless, they did win major concessions and the union is stronger and more united than before. When management returns to claw some of the gains back, as they surely will, they will find a more determined workforce waiting for them.

Leeds street cleaners' strike can rally other workers to fight

The all-out strike by 600 Leeds refuse and street cleansing workers has remained solid for over a month. Andy Yorke, who has been involved in solidarity work, says it is a key dispute

Leeds StreetScene workers are on indefinite strike against wage cuts of up to a third – £5,000 on average – reducing some to as little as £12,000 a year. The Lib Dem/Tory council is cynically implementing Single Status rulings, which were designed to bring women's pay up to the same level as men's, but are being used to level wages down. Cynical because many women workers are also facing wage cuts under Leeds council's proposals.

Regular mass picket lines of up to a hundred workers at the main depots and noisy rallies at council chambers have shown that workers from both unions, Unison and GMB, are united as one. As one striker said: "The council is brick-ing it. They thought we'd do a couple of days and start trickling back in. Instead more are joining the picket lines every day."

Only a trickle of scab lorries have left the main refuse sites throughout the strike.

Council leader Richard Brett (on "modest" expenses of £45,000 a year) took a strong stance at first, demanding workers end their strike and accusing pickets of threatening behaviour. He contracted four private companies and pledged fortnightly collections, then upped the ante by declaring the council would privatise refuse collection in 2011 – something the workers have always argued was his real aim.

But with the strike solid and rubbish piling up, Brett has been forced into a U-turn and has started official negotiations with the unions – after taking a holiday for "stress"! He has also publicly apologised that the shoestring scab service has so far failed to clear the bins.

Rank and file control

However, now union officials have gone into closed meetings with council officers, dropping the weekly mass meetings along with the joint stewards' strike committee. There is a danger of a deal leav-

ing out some sections or agreeing better pay in exchange "for a more flexible approach to work and more responsibilities for the staff". The GMB has also argued that the council could afford the deal by making other "efficiency savings", i.e. cuts elsewhere.

Workers and reps are adamant that they would reject a bad or divisive deal. As Gary, a StreetScene steward, put it: "Unless we all get something, we're not going back – there'll be a no vote. We'll keep out on strike till we get the goods."

One reason the workers have been so solid this far is due to the strike pay they receive, but union officials could pull the plug on this to help force through a "reasonable" deal. Stewards should demand they are included in the meetings so they can oversee negotiations, and that any deal is put to an immediate mass meeting, rather than a postal ballot where strikers vote in isolation and without open debate. There should be no suspension of the action to accommodate talks or a vote.

Solidarity

trade unionists, socialists and student activists have set up a solidarity committee with StreetScene workers to discuss how to win the strike swiftly and decisively, rather than accept a long drawn out battle that could hit morale or lead to a rotten deal.

One of the first issues we discussed was how to prevent scabbing and decided that picketing out Unite members, who still operate 11 public waste disposal sites, would be a good start. It is unclear whether this would contravene the anti-union laws, as StreetScene workers can be moved to these sites under their contracts. In any case, better to break the law than to allow the law to break the strike.

But the key targets are the depots and working lorries of the scab companies, which are daily doing strikers' work. Mass flying pickets to shut them down are essential.

Strikers and their supporters can appeal directly to these workers' class instincts – just like the miners did to great effect in the 1970s.

Spreading the action

Picketing out Unite workers and scabs could force the council to concede. But what if it doesn't? What else could the street cleansers do to ensure victory? Workers Power supporters have argued that they could – and must – spread the strike.

There are 2,500 workers in Leeds that have seen their pay fall through Single Status rulings. Cuts of 10-20 per cent over the next five years are also projected, while Leeds council already had plans to cut 650

jobs this year alone. Plus a major postal dispute is about to erupt on a national scale.

By addressing workplace meetings, starting with council employees and other workers in dispute, StreetScene strikers could offer a lead to coordinate action, putting maximum pressure on the council and the political establishment. A proposed joint demo led by StreetScene and Royal Mail strikers is a step in the right direction.

Leeds bin workers are striking a determined first blow against the public sector pay squeeze. It is a test case. All workers, young people and socialists need to strain every sinew to ensure they win.

Bosses feel the heat: FBU members protest in Yorkshire



Photo: Guy Smallman

South Yorkshire Fire Brigades Union (FBU) held a successful demonstration in Barnsley on 28 September. Up to 2,000 firefighters attended with delegations from around the country, including Essex and London, where they are taking action short of a strike.

The South Yorks FBU recently won an 83 per cent vote to strike against plans to sack 744 firefighters and force through new contracts requiring 12-hour day shifts from 1 January.

The FBU is holding a special meeting on 8 October that could pave the way for a national strike.

THEY GET BAILED OUT – WE GET SOLD OUT

The great cuts robbery

By Rachel Brooks & Mark Booth

“What should we cut?” This is now the big question on the lips of every newsreader on the television and radio. Interviews have been quizzing politicians at the party conferences on what they will cut first, and whether they are planning to cut enough. But in doing this the mainstream media has sidestepped the most important question for the future of our public services – do we need these cuts at all?

For the Tories and Labour, the answer to this has been a definite “yes”. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling predicted in April that the 2009-10 tax year could see a budget deficit of a dangerously high £176bn. But many economists now warn that even this enormous sum could be exceeded as rising unemployment sees a reduction in tax receipts and increased expenditure on unemployment benefits.

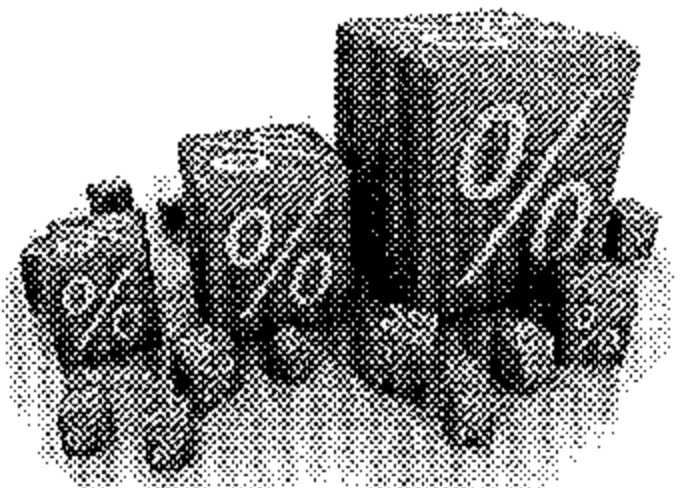
Both Labour and the Tories are now promising that to make up the expenditure gap, public sector cuts will be necessary, with Darling explaining at the Labour conference in Brighton that the major difference between the parties is that the Tories would “relish the chance to swing the axe at the services millions rely on”. The choice for voters at this general election seems grim. The alternative to a Tory public sector massacre looks to be a Labour government who will still “swing the axe” – just more reluctantly.

Why the deficit?

The current budget deficit was not a natural disaster caused by the “invisible hand of the market” but was a result of the policies of the Labour government over the last twelve years. The budget crisis has struck at every level. It has hit the finances of city, county and district councils. It has hit the budgets of local education and health authorities as well as the national treasury.

In Winter 2008 it was revealed that councils across the UK stood to lose £1bn as a result of placing council tax money in high-risk investments which were frozen or lost when unstable banking institutions collapsed, particularly in Iceland. But this was just the tip

Bank Bailout: £1.5 TRILLION



of the iceberg. Other money was lost as investment schemes received a battering from the collapse in the UK stock exchange. As a result of this, some councils have been extremely badly hit, such as Daventry where overall cuts of 15 per cent are being made and in Wyre Forest district council where £9mn in losses are to be put back to the next financial year, only delaying a funding crisis.

The story is a similar one in public sector budgets across the UK, where an obsession with the infallibility of the financial services industry, and management consultancy firms brought in to increase “efficiency” threw tax-payer’s money onto the bonfire. Now, many of the consultancy firms are the biggest advocates of swingeing cuts. Pricewaterhouse Coopers announced on 18 September that local authorities in Scotland would

NHS BUDGET: £100 BILLION

EDUCATION BUDGET: £60 BILLION

INTEREST ON DEBT TO FUND BAILOUT: £60 BILLION

need to cut costs by 25-35 per cent to meet their shortfalls.

In addition, the government’s inability to solve high unemployment rates, now at approximately 2.5 million means tax revenue has significantly decreased, by around 25 per cent. Expenditure as a result of increased unemployment has risen 11 per cent over a year.

But it is the enormous bailout of the banks that remains the most visible cause for the deficit. Costing an almost unimaginable £1.3 trillion, politicians from both parties plan to make our public services pay the price for the bankers’ greed, whilst they continue to take home bonuses every year that the rest of us would be unlikely to see after a lifetime of back-breaking work.

For a workers’ budget

The scale of the crisis in the treasury may seem huge, and it is. But

there’s still plenty of money around to increase public sector spending, to solve Britain’s unemployment problem and provide jobs for all, if only Labour were prepared to make the bosses and the bankers pay.

Billions of pounds every year is lost in tax avoidance with official estimates assuming this is around £25bn. However, in a meeting outside the Labour Party conference on 3 October, Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the PCS union, which organises Inland Revenue workers, estimates that £100bn is pocketed by the rich in tax avoidance every year. Either way, not a single nurse or teacher should lose their job whilst the rich hold on to these vast sums.

And the money that the super-rich do pay in tax is nowhere near enough. In 2006 British billionaires paid such a small amount of tax that it amounted to a rate of 0.1 per cent

on average.

Of course there are some cuts that should be made – in things used to harm rather than help working class people. For example, £4.6bn has been spent every year on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have left hundreds of thousands dead. Since the occupation of Afghanistan began, the wars have cost £14bn. We should fight to make sure there is no upgrading of weapons of mass annihilation like nuclear missiles and a ditching of the Trident nuclear weapons system which was due to cost £96bn overall.

We could renationalise, without compensation, the public buildings using private finance from companies that now rinse us for returns on the investments they made. We could cut back on the enormous six-figure salaries of public sector managers and top civil servants who gambled our public services on the stock market. These are just a few examples of how we can claim back some public money from the profiteers.

To do all this would just scratch the surface of the real wastage in our budget – the bosses, the bankers, the bureaucrats and their politicians. As the countdown to the general election begins, the real question facing public finances is not ‘what should be cut’ but ‘who should pay for the banks’ £1.5 trillion bailout – the workers or the bankers and the billionaires?’

Build the fightback

All across Britain workers are fighting back against cuts in jobs, cuts in pensions and cuts in services. We see successful strikes against redundancies like at Tower Hamlets college where an indefinite strike of four weeks saved 13 jobs. We see postal workers balloting for strike action over attacks on conditions and their pensions.

But the leaders of the biggest trade unions back labour – and they buy the lie that the bank bailouts were ‘unavoidable’, taking responsibility for the whole process of cuts.

We need to unite the fightback from below: building committees of action to link up the struggles (see back page). These committees could unify action, so we all stand together. By bringing together working class people from across local communities, they could start to draw up an inventory of the services working class people need, pointing towards an emergency plan to save jobs and rebuild communities – by taking the power and the wealth out of the hands of the rich.

What the capitalist parties want to cut

At the TUC conference Brown announced that in an attempt to save £500 million over the course of three years, he would cut the “early retirement” option for Whitehall workers. The rationale? “It’s a scheme that’s often as much as six times annual pay,” he said. “These high costs prevent us giving other people jobs and this is not the best way to spend public money.” PCS leader Mark Serwotka said the move was tantamount to “robbing his own workers” and that the staff worst hit would be the lowest paid. The move by Brown, far from reducing costs in order to employ more people, would make it much easier for civil service managers to make low-paid staff redundant, and throw them onto the dole queue.

Education

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls has promised £2bn in cut backs to the education budget. The proposal includes tighter control over school budgets, “tough” pay deals for teachers and even “federalising” schools in amalgamation schemes. These would result in larger institutions with more students, less teachers and less resources.

The government is also planning to speed up the city academies scheme by scrapping the £2 million up-front investment that businesses must normally pay to part-run academies. In state-run schools teachers and staff are subject to the National Pay Scale, but in the proposed academies they are not. With Local Authorities no longer responsible for paying teachers, the government can save millions by under-cutting, dividing and exploiting teachers working in different academies.

Universities are not safe from the cuts either. While departments are getting slashed left right and centre, funding for degrees which were previously free have slowly had fees introduced. PGCE’s, the training scheme for new teachers will now cost the same as a normal undergraduate degree, around £3,250.

Tory cuts even worse

The Tories are threatening a huge wave of £23 billion in cuts to make working class people pay the cost of £1.5 trillion bailout.

- Slashing incapacity benefit by 20 percent – taking money out of the hands of the sick and injured
- Lowering benefits for more than half a million people
- A complete freeze on public sector pay – in reality a pay cut for millions
- Raising the age for the state pension – work longer for less

...and no doubt there is worse – much worse – still to come.

NHS

With soaring public debt and a huge budget deficit the government is set to carry out fierce cuts on the NHS in the coming months and years. The Department of Health (DoH) commissioned a report from management consultancy firm McKinsey into how costs could be cut in the NHS.

The unpublished report which was leaked to the Health Service Journal claimed as much as £20 billion could be saved, much of this by axing 137,000 staff by 2014. The report lays out a range of “potential actions in the next six months” including:

- A recruitment freeze starting in the next two years;
- A reduction in medical school places starting in October,
- An early retirement programme “to be implemented in the next two years”.

The report even said that the cuts need to be felt as much amongst clinical staff as amongst administrators.

Plans to increase staffing levels and investment, like those in the national stroke strategy and the children’s service strategy, would be “reviewed”, i.e. cut or withdrawn. Acute providers with above average ratios of admin to clinical staff must cut their administrators down to nearer the average level. The average salary of these administrators: £20,000. So it will be clerks, receptionists and other support staff that are made redundant, whereas over-paid senior management will get off Scot-free. The number of admin staff whose jobs are at risk is 30,800. And for every eight

administrators, 10 nurses and 10 healthcare assistants must also go, and at least three doctors.

They claim £3 billion could be saved through increased staff productivity, making over-stretched staff work even harder. In doing this, the report estimates that 3,500 GPs and 1,600 district nurses are surplus to requirements. And this is in the face of a national shortage of midwives, health visitors, paramedics, radiographers and physiotherapists.

NHS estates were also targeted, claiming that £8.3 billion could be made if these were sold off and workspace area was reduced; admin staff would be forced to hot desk and more beds would be crammed into overcrowded and understaffed wards. The report also claimed that up to 40 per cent of patients could be seen as day cases, cutting back on the supervision before and after treatment that can be vital for spotting any complications.

The DOH was quick to publicly reject the report, yet it has already been circulated to senior health managers as early as March this year, two months before NHS Chief Executive David Nicholson announced the NHS would have to make “unprecedented savings” in his annual report.

Of course it would be madness for politicians to accept such a report in full so close to a general election, but clearly policy makers wish to use some of its suggestions to aid the cutbacks they have admitted they will initiate to close the budget deficit after the election has taken place.

SCOTLAND

Is Scottish independence back on the cards?

The SNP has tabled a bill for a referendum on Scottish independence. The three mainstream parties have all opposed it. Yet under pressure Gordon Brown has said a referendum is possible – after the next election. Should socialists back one? *Billy McKean* reports.

In September, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) announced an independence referendum bill as the centrepiece of its plans for the coming year, fulfilling a commitment made in the SNP's 2007 election manifesto. Historically, all three main parties, Labour, Conservative and Lib-Dems, have opposed any suggestion of a referendum. But recently, there has been speculation that some senior LibDem politicians are calling for a re-think. At the Labour Party conference in Brighton, Gordon Brown also gave ground, saying that a future Labour Government could "possibly" hold a referendum on Scotland's constitutional position but not in the short term.

The SNP has seized on Brown's comments as evidence of a "significant shift" in Labour policy, effectively endorsing the referendum, but it is no such promise. Brown is pandering to the nationalist fervour in a cynical gambit to gain back lost votes in Scotland. The rise of the SNP The SNP rode in to power in May 2007, becoming the largest party in the Scottish parliament by beating Labour by one seat.

A complicated ballot slip and apathy on the part of traditional Labour voters were widely blamed as the long-marginalised nationalists celebrated a largely unexpected victory. In the wake of the pro-independence Scottish Socialist Party's (SSP) demise and the consistent one-upmanship of the Scottish Greens, it was clear that the SNP's first term at the helm would not be geared towards any quick fixes on long term policy goals. This was to be a populist administration, making the most of what Billy Connolly ironically termed "the wee pretendy parliament" as a soapbox for a fledgling Scottish nationalism taking tentative steps towards authority. Renewed construction of social housing, after years of New Labour neoliberalism, served to shine a

more positive light on the party that many working class Scots have traditionally regarded as the 'Tartan Tories'.

Nuclear issue

Loud opposition to Blair's indulgent programme of Trident renewal seemed timely and, more importantly, sensible. Hilarity ensued when Alex Salmond's government publicly humiliated Westminster in October 2007 by writing to the heads of state of 189 countries signed up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to whip up support for Scotland to have observer status at their meetings. The newly incumbent Gordon Brown foamed at the mouth at the thought of Robert Mugabe and Mahmoud Ahmedinejad finding new 'anti-imperialist' allies in the belly of the beast. The least political of all Scottish voters thought it a great prank at the expense of a London government that likes to keep its nuclear explosives as far away from home as possible.

Further political capital came from victory in the July 2008 Glasgow East by-election when the SNP's John Mason beat the Labour candidate Margaret Curran in what had been a safe seat for Labour. But Salmond's long-peddled talk of North Sea oil and Edinburgh gold backfired when the British economy entered recession. The hard facts of declining oil field discoveries, combined with the British taxpayer's bailout of Scotland's two biggest banks, HBOS and the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), Salmond's former employer, killed the SNP's rhetoric about the '11th richest nation in the world'.

A humiliating defeat at the hands of Labour in the Glenrothes by-election last November suggested that Scotland had already lost patience with bridie-in-the-sky nationalism. The logic behind the SNP's £700,000 'National Conversation', the campaign to get people interested in independence, was always glaringly obvious, but why

have they decided to go for a referendum now, after a year of effectively picking up the pieces of a shattered national image? The simple answer lies, of course, in England. An impending Tory victory at the general election will do very little to harm the nationalist cause in a part of the UK where the Tories have long been all but wiped out.

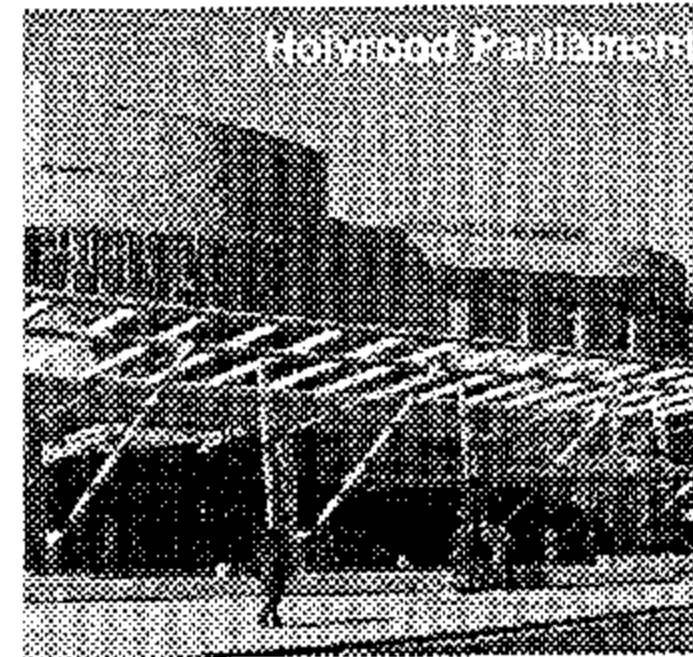
Labour's meltdown has not slowed and the Welfare Reform Bill has hit Labour heartlands in the West of Scotland extremely hard. Labour voters may not necessarily swing to the SNP, but in the absence of a bona fide workers' party they are more likely to vote with their feet, thus granting consistent nationalist voters more influence than their numbers warrant.

Communism not nationalism

Communists aim to build the maximum unity of the multinational working class and, as such, we are opposed to internecine squabbles. The Scottish working class has a proud tradition of solidarity with others irrespective of nationality. We see this tradition waning in proportion with the defeat, demoralisation and disorganisation of our class, and naturally make the connection between this decline and the relatively recent resurgence of Scottish nationalism.

However, we do not mourn the defeats of the past but look to a socialist future. As such we understand that socialism will be the fulfilment of the democratic, as well as the economic, demands of our class as a whole, and we do not adopt a sectarian attitude to the Scottish people and their democratic right to self-determination. Therefore we are resolutely in favour of a referendum on Scottish independence, because Scotland must have the right to separate from the United Kingdom if its people wish.

However, as active participants in that debate, in the referendum we would actively campaign for a no vote, arguing for unity of the



Scottish working class with its English and Welsh counterparts, against the machinations of the anti-working class SNP. This is why we raise the call for an anticapitalist workers' party based on local committees of action from one end of Britain to the other, so that class-conscious workers can have a unified revolutionary force to unite around, and defend and extend the legacy of past struggles with a programme for working class power. If a referendum bill passes through parliament, then the SNP will have everything to play for.

The prospect of massive Tory spending cuts and a moribund Labour opposition may cause sufficient desperation among voters from traditional Labour strongholds to believe the spurious arguments of the nationalists. Legislatively toothless as any Scottish 'yes' vote would be, a Westminster government would be likely to defy it - provoking a carnival of nationalist hysteria on both sides of the border. If despite the arguments of Scottish internationalists the majority of the Scottish people voted for independence, then the task of socialists in England and in Scotland would be to launch a mass struggle in defence of Scotland's right to separate.

The class struggle brings about an increased sense of working class unity, which is to be defended and extended in friendship with new migrant populations if we are ever to stand a realistic chance of achieving a co-operative commonwealth for all.

DEBATE

The British Left: will it unite in a new party?

General election approaching, Labour staring into the abyss – the time for a new working class party is now argues *John Bowman*. So what is the Left doing?

With the general election looming the left in Britain has as of yet failed to take steps towards a united anticapitalist alternative. Few predict anything but defeat and possibly annihilation for Labour, and most can see that a whole layer of workers could be won to an alternative. But why has the left so far failed to seize this opportunity with both hands?

There has been no lack of discussion around this issue – starting with the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) *Open Letter to the Left* which got activists all over the country discussing the possibilities. The letter was short on concrete proposals but it did put the debate into the open and call for "a conference of all those committed to presenting candidates representing working class interests at the next election".

Workers Power welcomed the call very soon after, arguing that such a conference could pull in many forces in struggle against Labour, including the existing socialist groups, trade unionists engaged in action against the government and the bosses, antiwar and antiracist activists, students and youth from all across the country. We said such a conference would be an opportunity to form a new party of the working class/

No2EU: a model to follow?

Part of the backdrop to the SWP's *Open Letter* was the No2EU campaign for the European elections. Initiated by RMT leader Bob Crow and supported by the Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Party, No2EU stood on a nationalist anti-EU platform, excluded organisations like the SWP and Workers Power who had opposed the 'British Jobs for British workers' strikes in January and February of this year. One of its candidates even put out a letter opposing the free movement of workers across Europe.

Though No2EU scored only 1

per cent in the elections, the Socialist Party made it clear in their reply to the SWP that it was the fulcrum through which they thought a new party could emerge saying "No2EU... should now be built on, with a new name, for the general election". In an unconstructive reply, they also downplayed the seriousness of the SWP's call for unity and raised a series of irrelevant past grievances. Above all they failed to accept the proposal for a conference, missing a chance to electrify the left with the potential for a new united challenge.

But allowing union leaders like Crow to offer workers a "take it or leave it" platform, which will likely contain much of the nationalist rhetoric of its No2EU, this coalition shows exactly how not to go about building a new party.

Unfortunately Glenn Kelly of the SP reported at a public meeting of the SP and RMT after the demonstration in Brighton against the Labour Party that the groups behind No2EU had been meeting on a fortnightly basis since the election.

A speaker from the RMT also announced that they would hold a conference on the 7 November to discuss what to do next. Fortunately they insisted it would be "open to all" – a step forward from No2EU. But it also needs to be actively built for to draw in large numbers of workers and youth and, unlike previous RMT conferences on political representation, participants should be free to take decisions on the future campaign.

Only in this way will we be able to ensure that the same reformist and nationalist politics are not imposed on any initiative. The fact No2EU had these politics is not an aberration but it reflects the Stalinist outlook of Bob Crow and the CPB. However, it seems that the CPB is itself now divided on the question of backing an RMT list at the election, with a party majority ruling it out.

By placing all their eggs in the bas-

ket of the CPB leaders and Crow, the Socialist Party are now at the mercy of what their hoped-for allies decide to do, when instead they should have a perspective of rallying broader forces from the strikes and struggles taking place around the country into local committees for the formation of a new anticapitalist party (like in France, see page 26).

SWP backs into a corner

The SWP also orientated their open letter towards the left wing trade union leaders like Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka in the PCS. They obviously hope they can be convinced to stand on a common slate with the SWP at the next election.

The danger is that having been given a cold shoulder by Bob Crow if not by Mark Serwotka, the SWP may now step backwards from campaigning for a left alternative and focus exclusively on the upturn in industrial struggle. At the Convention of the Left in Brighton at the end of last month, leading SWP members resigned themselves to calling for an electoral non-aggression pact – essentially a joint banner with Respect, the SP and the SWP itself could stand - which received a negative response from other organisations like Respect at the conference.

But there is another way. The New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France of over 10,000 members was set up, not primarily by an alliance between the left and trade union leaders with a programme written up behind closed doors, but by local committees of struggle in over 400 towns and cities across France. They developed a radical programme in an open conference of 600 delegates from these committees in February this year. In addition, the NPA, despite its faults, is a party of struggle that campaigns on the streets and the picket lines, not just outside the polling booths.

The SWP has been reluctant to appeal for such a party in Britain, with some members claiming that "Britain is not France", and

that there is little resonance among the working class for such a party here. Chris Harman, a leading member of the SWP, visited the summer camp of the NPA and returned enthusiastic about its prospects, and the way it was formed, but wrote, "I don't think we can translate it directly to Britain today. For the moment, we're still putting forward arguments in an atmosphere where people don't always have the confidence to fight."

Now or never

By backing off from calling for a new anticapitalist party in Britain, and by delaying the initiative for an open conference, the SWP have been caught up in a Catch-22.

Important sections of the working class, like the London posties who have suspended funding from Labour are moving into increasingly political struggles as the bosses move in to make them pay for the economic crisis.

In holding back from making the arguments for a new anticapitalist party, the SWP cannot possibly gauge the real level of support for it amongst the working class.

Members and supporters of Workers Power however, who are making the arguments, have found that the mood is there (see pages 12 and 13). Clearly thousands of people could be won if the SWP took up a similar initiative.

The SWP's indecisiveness is leaving the road open to the Socialist Party and its remaining No2EU partners to move forward with a left-reformist project in which all the decisions have been stitched up in advance.

Then the SWP will be without a serious political project come the election. The SWP leaders will have delivered yet another failed initiative to their members, who will have precious little to show for it. But if they could stop vacillating and take up the call for a new party clearly and decisively, there is a very good chance they could make it happen.

CALL FOR A NEW ANTICAPITALIST PARTY

Support grows for new

Workers all over the country are signing up to the Call for a New Anticapitalist Party.

Workers from Vestas in the Isle of Wight where wind turbine workers occupied their factory.

Striking postal workers in London at Nine Elms, Mandela Way, Kentish Town, Peckham and other offices.

Bin workers in Leeds on indefinite strike – people at the heart of the resistance – are adding their names to the Call.

Workers from Tower Hamlets College, who struck for four weeks and saved 13 jobs.

Hundreds of signatures have been collected, including members from across the trade unions, and reps from Unison, Unite, PCS, GMB, RMT and CWU.

Marchers in Liverpool, demanding action against job cuts from the TUC, signed up in their scores. Students at the recent Stop the War Conference added fresh support. Rapper MC Lowkey gave his voice to the Call.

Dozens more signed up at the demonstration outside the Labour Party conference in Brighton.

Activists from the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Workers Power, Socialist Resistance, the Alliance for Workers Liberty and

the youth group REVOLUTION have also signed up.

You can too.

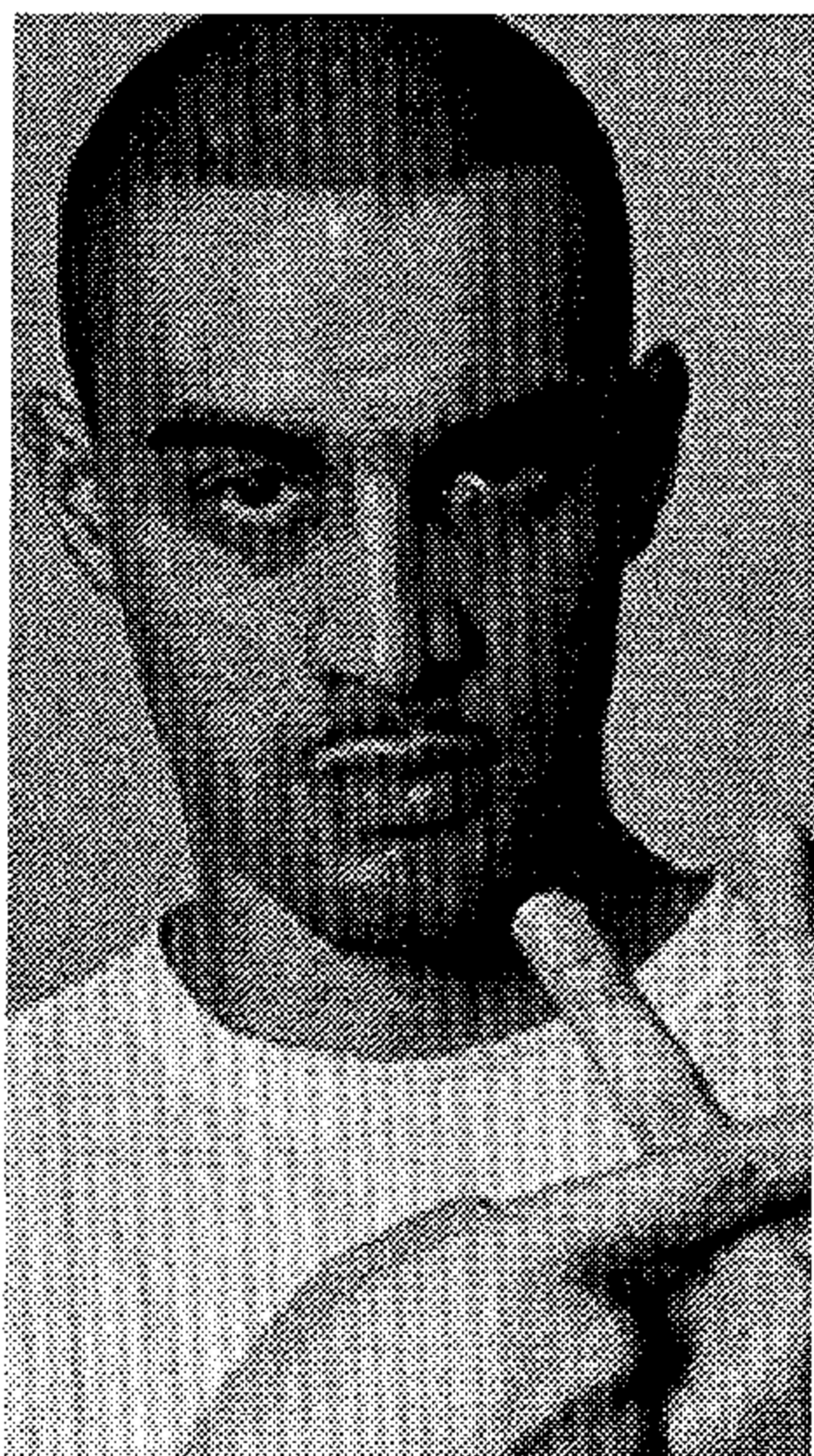
- If you think New Labour is for the bosses, not the workers
- If you think Labour's given £1.5 trillion to banks and is trying to make workers pay the price
- If you think our unions should stop paying millions to fund Brown's bosses' party
- If you think it's time for the socialist organisations and the fighting unions to unite in a new party

Then you should sign the Call for a New Anticapitalist Party today.



Workers at Tower Hamlets college have also signed the Call

MC LOWKEY – adds his name to the Call



The poet and revolutionary rapper Lowkey signed the Call for a New Anticapitalist Party at the Student Stop the War Conference in September.

Lowkey has built up huge following for his militant rap including Long Live Palestine, Tears to Laughter, Revolution and Bars for my Brother. He is particularly popular among young antiwar protesters who turned out in force to show solidarity with Gaza last winter.

He won last year's Big Chill Poetry Slam and also fronts supergroup Mongrel with members of Arctic Monkeys, Babyshambles and Reverend and the Makers.

Lowkey electrified the Conference with a speech attacking New Labour's bloody wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He made an impassioned appeal for solidarity with the Palestinians and for struggle against the warmongers, quoting the American abolitionist and former slave Frederic Douglass:

"Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want oceans without the awful roar of its many waters."

Leeds street cleaner, Gary Spink, explains why he signed

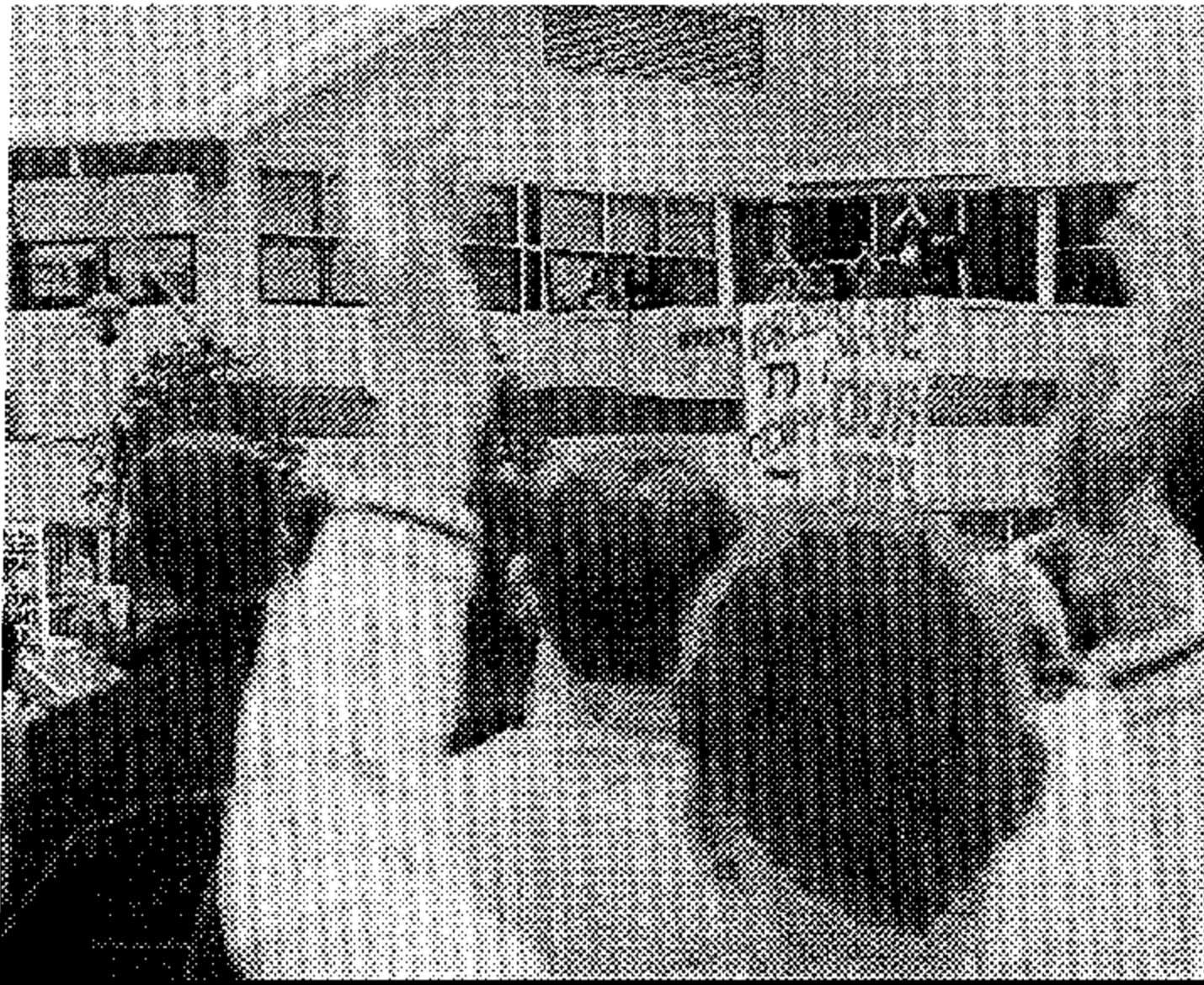
Leeds refuse workers on strike



"We all know that Labour will promise a lot but in the end they'll still do the same thing. I don't think they're deluding anyone"

"It's time for a change. We've been going along for a few years now with Labour, and a lot of people recognise that you need an alternative. It won't be easy to achieve, but many people realise that none of the main parties will do anything for you."

anticapitalist challenge



Vestas workers are furious with Labour and signed the call

ANTICAPITALISM AT THE GENERAL ELECTION



Jeremy Drinkall aims to stand in Vauxhall, South London.

Jeremy, 48, is a teaching assistant at Lilian Baylis Technology School and a workplace rep for Unison. He is editor of *Workers Power* magazine

Jeremy said: "There are many socialist, trade union and campaign-

ing groups in South London, particularly Vauxhall. I want to see them unite around a common challenge.

"I will be proposing a local meeting at which the movement can discuss common candidates and their programmes. I will be putting myself forward for selection as an anticapitalist candidate."

Jeremy is a well established activist and has spent many mornings showing support for striking posties near his workplace in Vauxhall.

He has also taken an active role in a support committee for the workers at the Vestas wind turbine factory, who occupied for jobs and the environment.

• **An anticapitalist candidate will also stand in Leeds Central**

Why pay for Labour?

The trade unions have handed £35 million to Labour since 1997. What did we get for it?

- The worst anti-union laws in Europe – not repealed
- Mass unemployment – jobs not protected
- Banking losses bailed out to tune of £1.5 trillion
- £2 billion to be cut from schools
- Billions spent on wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

No wonder postal workers, who are fighting this government over pensions, pay and conditions, are sick of propping up Labour. The London Division of the postal workers union CWU has voted by a huge majority – 98 per cent – to stop funding Brown and his party.

Tories

Labour are awful, but no-one should forget how bad the Tories are. Half of Tory MPs support tax breaks for the middle classes as a first step towards private health-care.

David Cameron wants to save £600 million by cutting benefits for half a million of the worst off people in the country. He wants to slice 20 per cent from Incapacity Benefit, and make unemployed people work for their dole: cheap labour for the bosses and starvation for people too sick to work.

Liberal Democrats

Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg says Britain needs "savage cuts" - he's the same as Brown and Cameron. In local councils all over Britain Lib Dems have carried out the same vicious cuts as the other parties.

Greens

The Greens try to make out they are for workers, but they're a middle class party that doesn't take a clear stand when workers are forced to take action. In the London Assembly earlier this year Tory mayor Boris Johnson put down a motion condemning tube workers for striking over pay and jobs – the Greens couldn't bring themselves to vote for the workers and against the Mayor.

The BNP

Don't believe a word of their lies – this is a Nazi party through and through. Some misguided people might be voting for them because of racism or because they seem to be standing up to the corrupt main parties. All the more reason to build a new party that can fight these Nazis head on. A new anticapitalist party would rally anger with the politicians in a positive direction, against the bankers and bosses, not against black people and foreigners, like the BNP wants.

Sign the call for a new party today

You can sign up by sending an email to anticapitalistparty@gmail.com

After more than 12 years in office, Labour has proved itself time and again to be a party that attacks workers' pay, conditions, jobs and rights. And now we face the worst capitalist economic crisis for decades, with a massacre of jobs sweeping the country.

The working class in Britain does not have a party of our own to organise and inspire resistance to the bosses' crisis on a daily basis – on the streets and in the workplaces as well as at election times.

Without a new working class party, there is a danger that the racists and fascists will take advantage of the anger and anxiety caused by the crisis and scapegoat migrant workers, asylum seekers, and Black and Asian people.

A new party would fight to force the rich capitalists to pay for the crisis of their system, not the workers.

We appeal to all the trade unions and socialist organisa-

tions, to all activists fighting for resistance from below, to anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigners confronting the BNP, to the trade union leaders and members: let's unite and build a new anticapitalist party.

Many activists and groups are now discussing left unity. Conferences in the autumn will discuss challenging Labour at the next election.

We want to see a new anticapitalist workers' party take up that challenge.

We call for:

- An open conference – bringing together unions, socialist organisations, workers, youth and left campaigners – to launch a new anticapitalist party
- Local committees for a new party: start building roots in communities
- For a slate of candidates in the general election

CHINA: 60 YEARS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

New weapons, new status – new bubble?

By Peter Main

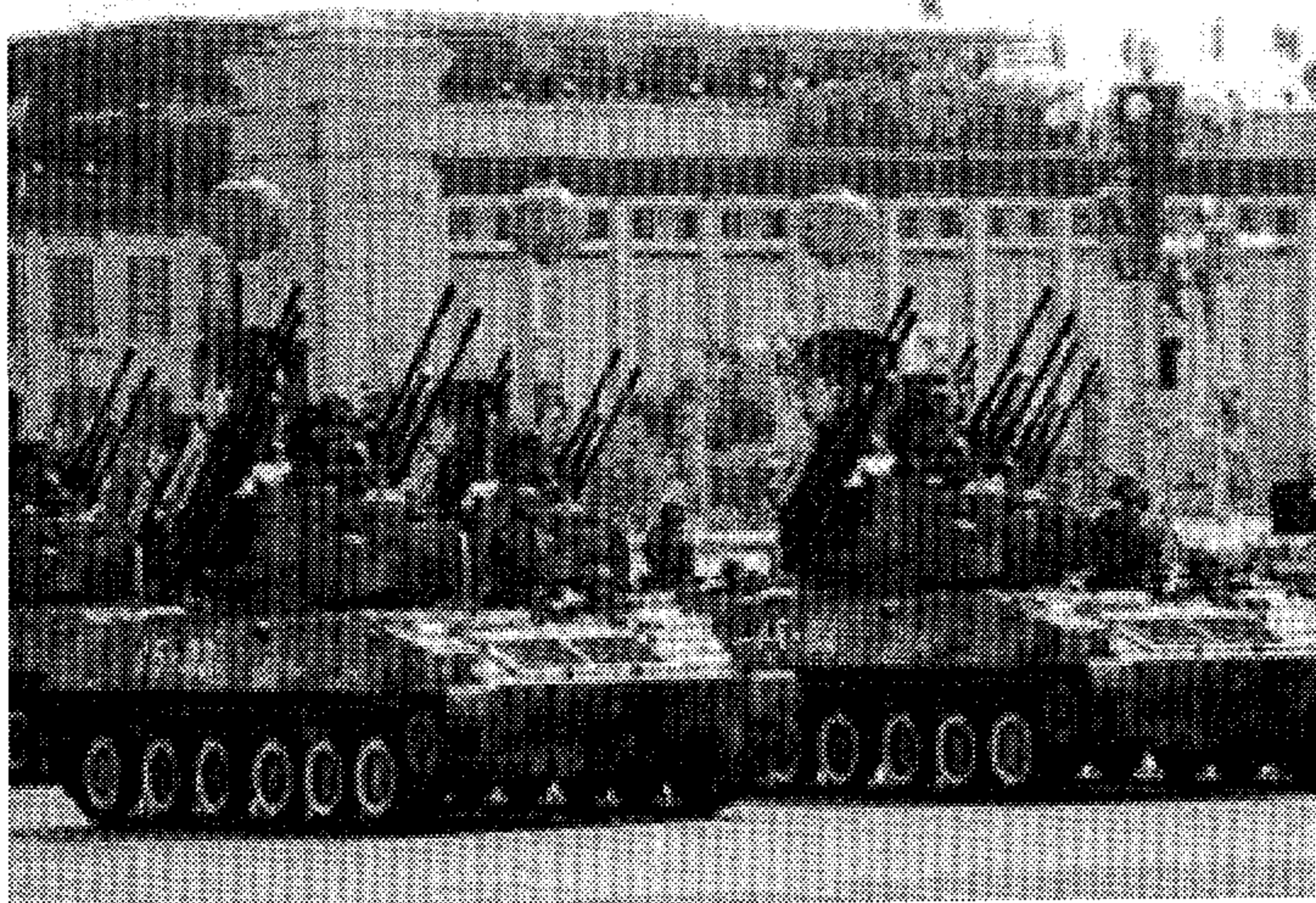
For the first time in many years, Beijing celebrated the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic with a military parade. President Hu Jintao watched from Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, as the latest weaponry passed him by. Unmanned drones, cruise missiles, nuclear-enabled missiles trundled past and, as official commentators emphasised, these were not only made in China but designed in China.

The message could hardly have been clearer. China, which earlier this year unveiled its first nuclear submarine, may still call itself a "developing country" but it is already a power to be reckoned with. And this is not just a question of military hardware, or software. Western recognition that the G20 has taken the place of the G7 as the principal global economic forum is, essentially, a recognition of China's newfound economic clout.

As if to confirm this, the IMF's latest six monthly outlook predicted a 9% GDP growth rate for China, in line with Beijing's own projections. In mid-September, the National Bureau of Statistics reported a 15.4% increase in retail sales in August and a 12.3% increase in factory output. Figures like these, which contrast very sharply with those for the major imperialist economies, the US, the EU and Japan, prompted George Soros to suggest that China could now become "one of the motors of the world economy".

In truth, China already is such a motor. But, whether it is a motor that can pull the rest of the world with it, is another question. For a start, many economists will be sceptical of China's statistics, which do not have a good track record. For example, last April's GDP figures showed a year on year increase of 7.3% yet, over that period, power generation declined by 3.5%, exports were down 22% and inward investment dropped by 21%.

Similarly, official figures showed that urban income rose by 11.2% in the first six months of the



China marches to mark 60 years of the People's Republic

year. This figure was so far distant from popular experience that the government's own newspaper, *Renmin Ribao*, (the People's Daily) questioned it. Such discrepancies have usually been taken to show that the ministries that compile statistics often massage them to maximise apparent activity in their own sectors.

There is little doubt that this happened in the past and may still happen now. However, while it might sometimes be politically useful to talk the economy up, the government itself, not to mention capitalist corporations, ultimately needs accurate figures on which to base its policies. In part, the problem stems from past accounting standards, inherited from the bureaucratically planned economy. Then, "urban income" was a measure of wages in (government-owned) industry, which accounted for virtually all employment. Used today, this figure excludes as much as 65% of the economy in GDP terms, which is now in private hands. By definition, therefore, the often pitiful wages

of migrant workers in sweatshops and on construction sites do not enter into the calculation. The salaries of managers and bureaucrats, however, are included.

Whatever their absolute accuracy, taken as a series, over time, the GDP figures do give us a clear indication of the relative performance of the economy. The most recent figures record the impact of the government's massive stimulus package, approximately the equivalent of £400 billion, which came into force last November. Spending on that scale inevitably has a significant positive impact on an index that tries to gauge total expenditure on goods and services. More informative than the annualised growth figure, however, is the breakdown of expenditure within the economy.

Beijing's declared aim was that the stimulus package should begin to rebalance the economy by increasing infrastructure development in the interior and boosting consumer spending to help offset a dramatic drop in exports. Latest figures certainly show a big increase

in "fixed asset investment", up 33% year on year. However, as premier Wen Jiabao made clear at the World Economic Forum earlier in September, "China's economic rebound is unstable, unbalanced and not yet consolidated". What exactly he meant was made clear by a Cabinet statement on the eve of Beijing's celebrations. Too much of the investment has gone into expanding productive capacity rather than the investment goods themselves. Such spending threatens to exacerbate the problems that contributed to the crisis in the first place.

The government has now put a complete ban on new aluminium smelters for three years and condemned "blind expansion" in the steel and cement industries. The *Financial Times* quotes the government statement, saying "some regions act illegally, give approval in violation of regulations or allow building before approval is granted." This confirms the prediction made in these pages in March: "What Beijing wants is not necessarily what Beijing gets. Although many of the biggest firms are sti

state-owned, they are no longer coordinated by any plan and many will pursue their own priorities.” (*Workers Power*, March 09) One result of this is serious overcapacity in various industrial sectors, which Beijing fears will lead to international tensions if Chinese producers dump their output on the world market.

The situation in the financial sector is equally problematic. The GDP figures reflect a massive increase in bank lending which was encouraged by Beijing to finance a substantial part of the stimulus package. However, easy credit has also fuelled speculative bubbles in the real estate market and the stock exchange. The Shanghai exchange has risen by 100% since its low point last year. In one week in July, half a million new accounts were opened, according to *Bloomberg*. The tripling of the price of shares in a toll-road operator, Sichuan Expressway, on its first day of trading in October, gives an idea of the increasingly frenetic atmosphere on the market.

That 15.4% figure for increased retail sales also bears closer examination. At first sight it would seem to confirm that Beijing has achieved its objective of increased consumer spending. However, in China, “retail sales” are not the same as “consumer sales”. These figures include government procurement and, therefore, also reflect the stimulus package. Figures from the consumer retail sector suggest a much lower growth rate, 5 or 6%.

How then should the economic statistics be understood? Certainly, economic activity has been revived to a significant degree and this ultimately reflects the fact that China is still a relatively young capitalist economy. Unlike the United States, which is burdened by over-accumulated capital and where huge government borrowing has basically been used to recapitalise the banks, it was always to be expected that after a couple of years of recession there would be a return to growth in China as the new economic cycle begins. Nonetheless, to the extent that state spending and easy credit obstruct or delay the destruction of obsolete capital they will act as a drag on recovery.

Politically, the developments that lie behind the figures show that, despite the dictatorial regime, the Communist Party is very far from being in complete control. The restoration of capitalism has inevitably created a new capitalist class, as well as inviting back the

Chinese capitalists of Taiwan and Hong Kong. This class is by no means a challenger to the regime, indeed it depends on it to maintain profits, but it clearly has its own interests and these do not always coincide with the Party’s.

The recent rapid development of speculative bubbles demonstrates this very clearly. It remains to be seen how the Party will react. If the speculators are allowed to continue, then, when the bubbles burst, as bubbles do, they could derail the whole economic strategy.

Another round of company bankruptcies, the re-imposition of another credit crunch when the recovery is still not self-sustaining, could certainly have an impact way beyond the ranks of the speculators in Shanghai and Shenzhen. However, Beijing may calculate that a quick lancing of the bubbles through, for example, tax changes, will not only protect the economy but also cut the insufficiently patriotic bourgeoisie down to size.

Ultimately even more importantly, rapid capitalist development over the last decade has also created a rapidly growing working-class and this too has begun to assert its own interests. A fascinating study of the workers’ movement in China, published by *China Labour Bulletin* earlier this year*, details not only the scale of working-class unrest, 127,467 “mass incidents” in 2008 alone, but also increased workplace-level organisation both within the official trade unions and separately.

Historically, the early stages of a new economic cycle have often encouraged workers to fight to retrieve what was lost in the recession. At the height of China’s boom in 2006, workers were able to force up wages in response to inflation and labour shortages, but for the last two years they have suffered a dramatic rise in unemployment and cuts in living standards.

Revolutionaries and working-class activists will now fight not only to make good those losses but to take forward the task of creating independent working-class organisations. Certainly these must include trade unions or, better still, industrial unions, but the highest priority must be the struggle to build an independent working-class party committed not only to defending workers’ interests within capitalism but overthrowing capitalism in China and internationally.

* *Going it Alone: The Workers’ Movement in China*, Published by *China Labour Bulletin*, Hong Kong

Guinean military massacres opposition

Soldiers belonging to the military rulers of Guinea have slaughtered scores of protesters in Guinea, West Africa. *Keith Sellick* reports

Fifty thousand demonstrators gathered in a sports stadium in Conakry, capital of Guinea, to hear opposition speeches in protest against Captain Dada Camara, who heads up the military junta, when soldiers burst in and started shooting randomly into the crowd. An estimated 150 people were killed.

The soldiers then went on a violent rampage, beating and shooting at protesters. They also captured women and raped them in the streets. Eye-witnesses say frenzied soldiers set upon the peaceful demonstrators.

“Protesters were caught in a trap. Soldiers fired at point-blank range. They raped women in front of everybody. They stabbed people with bayonets. They raped women with guns. This is a savagery that can’t be explained,” said Thierno Maadjou Sow of the Guinean Organisation for Human Rights.

Camara denied all responsibility and told Radio France Internationale: “I wasn’t myself in the stadium. They told me there was stampeding, and they told me also there were gunshots, and that some people stole weapons from a police station. So, in this human flood, there were gunshots.”

This is a callous response – an outright, bare-faced lie – from a man who leads murderers and rapists. He cynically went on to offer a government of national unity. Who would want to be in government with this man?

Decades of oppression

Guinea’s problems go back decades, as a succession of corrupt governments have ripped off the people and sold the country to the multinationals. In the past 10 years, prices have risen while wages have stagnated. But the workers and the youth have not taken this lying down; they have fought back time and again.

In 2004 there were riots over the price of rice in Conakry. In early 2005 teachers went on an all out

strike for a week. Later that year, in November, the unions organised a 48-hour general strike for better wages, including a minimum wage and decent pensions. There were two more general strikes in March and June of 2006. One day in June 2006 saw 11 students shot dead by riot police.

Workers organised further general strikes in 2007 that lasted for a total of 60 days. In this great revolt, 100 people were killed and 2,000 arrested.

All this occurred under President Lansana Conte, who, like his successor Camara, also ran a corrupt regime that violated people’s human rights and exploited workers and peasants. Through five years of mass mobilisation, the workers prevented Conte, however, from making moves to establishing a dictatorship.

But they were unable to oust him from power because the only political parties available to them were those of the bosses. And the bosses will always choose healthy profits under a corrupt regime than democracy brought to them by a militant mass movement.

The army chiefs, who were trained and emboldened in their murderous ways under Conte, realized the impotence of the bourgeois democrats. They stepped in when Conte finally died last December, and postponed elections for a year. Camara’s brutality is aimed at terrorising the people into submission for more military rules.

The workers and peasants of Guinea have fought and struck heroically over the past decade. The problem is the unions have failed to take the opportunity to form a party of the workers and poor peasants. But only the workers and the youth, armed with their own revolutionary party, one that links the fight against the dictatorship to the struggle against poverty and exploitation, can oust the military murderers, establish the rule of democracy and open up the road to socialism.

EUROPEAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

Germany: Social Democrats collapse and Left Party gains

Elections in Germany saw the Social Democrats hammered at the polls and an open party of the bosses. **Martin Suchanek**, editor, *Neue Internationale*, looks at the prospects for the working class

The new government of Germany will be made up of right-wing parties committed to attacking the working class on a scale that has not been seen since the early 1950s.

Despite losing votes in the election, Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats, Germany's main bosses' party, will form a coalition with the free-market Free Democratic Party. The Social Democratic Party (SPD), Germany's equivalent of the Labour Party and the historic party of the German working class, saw its vote plummet to a historic low – at just 23 percent its worst result since 1945.

Meanwhile the Left Party saw a sharp rise in its support, winning nearly 12 percent of the votes and 76 seats in the new federal parliament.

The SPD was being punished by its working class voters for its coalition with the right in the previous government, and for taking part in attacks on working class living standards.

The new coalition of capitalist parties has come to power at a time when Germany and the world are facing a severe recession. That the Christian Democrats and Liberals could once again win a majority in a period of historic crisis of capitalism appears to be a paradox. Shouldn't these parties that stand most clearly for a market economy (whether they call it "social" like the Christian Democrats or "pure" like the FDP) at least be "punished" as much as the SPD?

The truth is that elections are not a barometer of justice but of power relationships and the formation of classes and class alliances. The elections saw the ruling class use the crisis – and the collapse of support from workers for the SPD – to form a new block of right-wing parties that does not need the SPD in the long-term.

The two previous coalition governments were propped up by the



Lafontaine (right) with Gregor Gysi, leader of Left Party's MPs

left but prepared the way for the new right wing regime. The "Red-Green" coalition of the Social Democrats and the Greens before 2005, and the more recent "Grand Coalition" of the SPD and Christian Democrats, had right wing policies like the cuts packages of Agenda 2010, the anti-working class Hartz laws and the wars in

Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. Under both governments, the pro-SPD trade union leaders defended "their" government rather than the interests of workers. For years, but particularly during the recent recession, they made sure that the attacks on the working class went ahead but were softened with measures such as short-term working or

benefit payments. By refusing to fight the cuts outright, the trade union leaders allowed the ruling class to gain a new self-confidence and prepare for outright attacks on the workers.

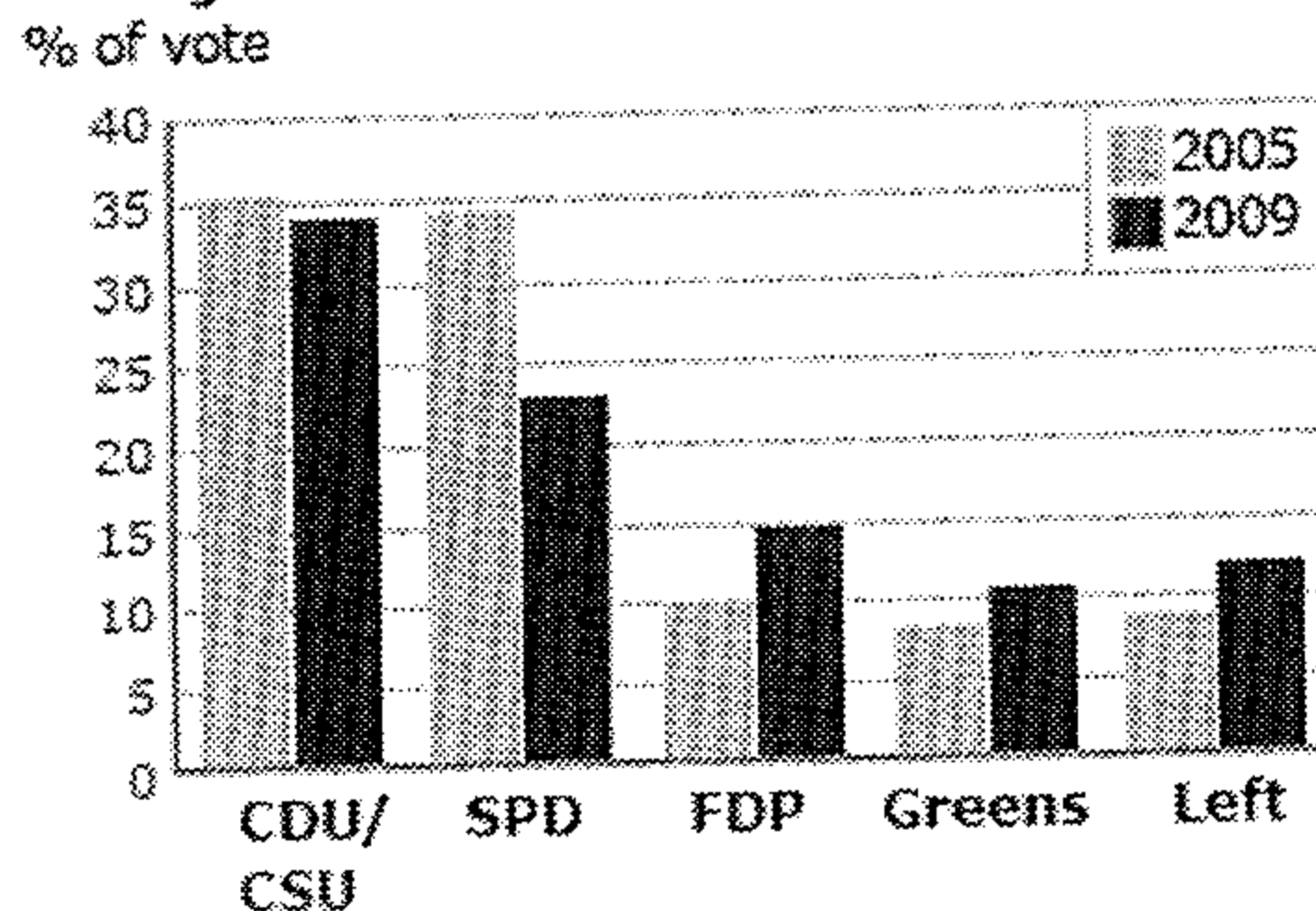
The increase in votes for the Liberals (14.6 per cent up and 93 seats up from previous 61 seats), the strengthening of the openly free market neo-liberal wing of the Christian Democrats during the election, and the clear preference of all the employers' organisations for the new coalition, means that the bosses want a government committed to a general offensive. And the Liberals, more any other party, stand for neo-liberalism and deregulation, the poverty of the billions and defending the wealth of the billionaires.

Although the Christian Democrats saw a 3 per cent decline in their vote (to 33.8 per cent), their leaders are celebrating the victory of the new coalition with the Liberals and an openly bosses' government. Alongside a programme for strengthening the monopolies and German imperialism (boosting the EU and its military plans, plus German participation in the occupation of Afghanistan) which will be implemented sharply but seamlessly, the new government will take up the slogan of "lower taxes". In the future, the whole government will use this rallying cry as a means of justifying a dramatic redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich.

The catastrophe of the SPD

It would be difficult to overestimate the scale of the SPD's disaster. Since 1998, the party has lost half of its electors: from about 20 million (40.9 per cent) down to 10 million (22.9 per cent). Only some 23 per cent of the unemployed and 18 per cent of the first-time voters voted SPD. Among workers and salaried staff, the figures were between 21 and 24 per cent. Only among pensioners was the SPD above average: and that was a miserable 29 per cent. The

Changes in vote since 2005



much lower turnout in comparison to 2005 was the result, above all, of SPD voters deserting their party but not transferring to other parties. Two million SPD voters stayed at home.

The origin of the crisis is not difficult to see: participation in government since 1998, from the "Red-Green" through to the "Grand Coalition", has weakened and undermined the base of the SPD in the working class and even in the trade unions.

The SPD had no answer to the crisis except to call for a "national effort" and a few more "regulations" on the financial markets. But, once it had put the banks back on their feet and, with help of the trade union leaders, made sure there was no militant response from the factories, the bosses no longer needed it. Its leaders could go to the opposition benches or onto the executive boards of various companies.

Through 10 years in government the SPD has governed itself to self-destruction. Now the party is facing ruin - and it fully deserves it! The time when the SPD had a monopoly over the organised working class is coming to an end. There are no grounds for expecting a rapid recovery. Instead there is likely to be a crisis in the SPD and in its relationship with the trade unions. This will become particularly clear if there is a full-scale attack on the organised working class in the coming months.

The success and strategy of the Left Party

The Left Party (Die Linke) gained 76 seats (up from 53 seats in 2005) and nearly 12 per cent of the vote. It beat the Greens into fifth place. For millions of workers, The Left offered a means to express their rejection of neoliberalism and, to some extent, of the existing system as a whole, and also their preparedness to fight. Within the working class, The Left has seriously challenged the monopoly of the SPD. Among the unemployed, The Left overtook the SPD to become the strongest party with about 26 per cent. At 18 per cent, their support among blue-collar workers was also above-average. They have also increased their share among trade union members.

Now, however, they have to be tested in practice in the struggle against the new government. It is not enough to talk about minimum wages, justice and safeguarding jobs; now we have to fight for them! It is not enough to cuddle up to the trade union leaders when all too often the same people are agreeing to "social plans" and redundancies in the factories. It is not enough to demand the right to take general strike action, now one has to fight for it by preparing and leading it.

In this respect, the statements by the leaders of The Left after the polls were

anything but positive. There was much talk of the need to "re-socialdemocratise" the SPD. In Brandenburg, the SPD was repeatedly called on to form a coalition with The Left.

Left party leader Oskar Lafontaine claims the SPD could have been spared their crisis had it followed his policy since 1998. This means that the leadership of the Left Party is preparing for an alliance for a "new politics" and the "re-social democratisation" of the SPD.

This is based on the idea that the SPD, if forced to the left, could become a partner for a "reform government" at the federal level. Evidence for this comes from the Saarland where a regional coalition government of the SPD, Left Party and Greens is a real possibility, depending on the decision of the Greens. In Thuringia and Brandenburg there could also soon be SPD-Left Party governments at provincial level. But even in "reform governments" at state level the SPD/Left has been attacking welfare and making cuts such as in Berlin.

How to build the resistance

While the Left Party increased its vote it failed to outline how the cuts can be fought in the streets, in the factories and in universities and schools. That, however, will be the decisive question in the coming months in the struggle against the threatened mass redundancies, social cuts and the billions to be cut from the budgets of local government. Against a general offensive, only a generalised political struggle can win!

We in Workers Power (Germany) called for a vote for The Left. But we also propose the following programme to fight the cuts:

- Against all sackings. For a 30 hour week with full pay and no redundancies. Share out the work under workers' control.
- For a sliding scale of wages and benefits against inflation.
- For a minimum wage of 11 per hour. Down with the Hartz laws and pensions at 67.
- Unemployment benefit and minimum wage for pensioners of 1600 per month, financed out of a progressive tax on wealth and capital
- No to the "rescue packages" and programmes for the capitalists. Open the books and accounts to workers' inspection.
- Expropriate the banks without compensation, fuse them into a single state bank under workers' control.
- Expropriate the corporations under workers' control, beginning with those firms that cut wages or post redundancies.
- Factory occupations, blockades and strikes up to a general strike.

PORTUGAL

Left Bloc advances

Portugal's elections in September saw the Socialist Party – their equivalent of the Labour Party – win despite a collapse in their vote. They lost half a million votes over 2005 (45 percent of the vote own to 36 percent). They are still the largest party in parliament with 96 MPs but are in a minority and will have to ally with other parties to form a majority government.

This is a result of the policies of the Socialist Party in bailing out the bankers rather than the people. The party has passed a law making it easier to sack people – in a country where 600,000 are already unemployed (nearly one in every 10 people). It has carried out privatisations and cuts.

The centre-right Social Democratic Party will have 78 seats and the right-wing People's Party will have 21 MPs.

The biggest winners were the Left Bloc. The Bloc had half a million votes (nearly 200,000 more than in 2005) and doubled its number of MPs to 16. It will sit with the Green/Communist Party coalition, and together they will have 31 MPs and 18% of the popular vote.

The reasons for its success are similar to the Left Party in Germany. The Socialists have carried out neo-liberal attacks and are losing votes. The Left Bloc are providing an alternative to the cuts. What is now needed is for the Left Bloc to begin to organise the resistance against cuts and job losses. Socialists should be calling on the Left Bloc to adopt a revolutionary programme linking the struggle to resist the cuts to a fight to overthrow the system.

NORWAY

Labour stays in power

The 'red-green' coalition government in Norway remains in power after the general election on 14 September. The coalition, which includes the Labour Party, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left, gained 2.7 million votes or 47.8 per cent of the total. It now has 86 MPs against 83 for the right.

One obvious reason for the victory was that Labour partly broke with the policy of the "third way", which in other European countries has seen Labour-type parties carry out neo-liberal (free market) attacks.

The party took a turn to the left at the last elections in 2005 and has carried reforms such as expanding childcare, raised benefits for the sick, stopped several privatisation projects and partly re-nationalised the water system. The red-green government even withdrew Norwegian troops from Iraq. While these reforms explain why the workers voted for the government, it has also handed billions to the banks, bailing out the profiteers' financial system to the tune of 350 billion kroner (close to 40.5 billion) in the form of bonds. The policy of the red-green government is to lessen the attacks on workers in the short term. The existence of the national oil fund (with a current value of approximately 285 billion), does give the Norwegian government more room for manoeuvre.

But the reforms will not last forever. The Norwegian bosses, and the international capitalists who lend the government money through bonds, will demand cuts and job losses. Also a worrying aspect of the elections was the growth of the right-wing racist Progress Party, which scored 22.9 per cent in its biggest election result ever.

Norwegian socialists must use the coming period to prepare the working class for the coming attacks and fight against racism.

• Full article at www.fifthinternational.org

HONDURAS

Crunch approaches in struggle against coup

By Keith Spencer

The conflict in Honduras is heading for a crunch point.

The daily mobilisations and conflict between supporters of ousted president Manuel Zelaya and the military coup makers have reached new levels of intensity.

Thousands of workers and poor people are marching, demonstrating and occupying buildings in support of Zelaya, who was deposed in June and is currently living in the Brazilian embassy in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa. The coup makers – backed by the oligarchy of capitalists and landowners, who have milked Honduras dry for decades – have unleashed soldiers and police, who have been beating and shooting hundreds and arresting thousands to prop up the regime.

On 2 and 3 October, the regime launched a new state of siege, cutting off all electricity and imposing a 48-hour curfew. One activist told an Australian newspaper: “Thousands of people heading to Tegucigalpa have been held around the city. The town is completely empty, ghostly. The curfew was extended to all day.”

In a chilling echo of the murderous Chilean coup of 1973, sports stadiums are being used to imprison people and the army is going into the hospitals, and taking people.

One eyewitness reported that 5,000 people gathered “to protect the President Manuel Zelaya. We were attacked at 5.45 am with guns and tear gas. They [the soldiers] killed an undetermined number of companeros [comrades].”

Zelaya's removal and return

President Zelaya was ousted on 28 June for promising a referendum on convening a constitutional assembly. The oligarchs that rule this deeply unequal society feared that an assembly would lead to radical reform as it has done in Venezuela and Bolivia. He was

arrested and put on a plane to Costa Rica. Since his removal there has been a wave of mobilisations against the regime, calling for his return and for an assembly.

On 15 September, the National Day of Honduras, thousands came out onto the street demanding Zelaya's return and an assembly. A week later, Zelaya came back to Honduras in a car boot and is now hiding out in the Brazilian embassy.

Immediately the embassy was surrounded by thousands of protesters welcoming him back into the country and calling for his return to the presidency. The next day 3,000 specially trained soldiers and paramilitary police attacked the demonstrators and fired at the embassy. Three protesters were killed with hundreds more arrested and wounded.

Then, on 25 September, the army attacked the Brazilian embassy with nausea and sickness inducing chemicals and threatened Brazil that they would storm it in 10 days. But the masses fought back. Resistance swept the country with daily actions. Resistance leaders have reported that between 15 and 20 *barrios* (poor neighbourhoods) in Tegucigalpa are in a state of insurrection.

Against the continuing resistance, head of the coup and chief usurper “President” Roberto Micheletti declared a state of siege on 28 September, on top of his already existing state of emergency and curfews. The measure suspended all citizen rights and constitutional guarantees, including the independence of the Brazilian embassy.

International pressure forced the regime to formally withdraw the state of siege but, on the ground, the military has increased its attacks. The two major, pro-Zelaya media stations Globo and Channel 36 have been closed down (Globo for the 10th time since the coup). The army has attempted to stop demonstrations in support of Zelaya outside the embassy, using live ammunition and tear gas. Police have carried out widespread



house searches arresting activists.

And on 2 October the regime cut off all electricity in the country for 48 hours and imposed a total curfew.

The resistance

The main resistance group is the National Resistance Front against the Coup (NRFC). Carlos Reyes, the leader of the beverage workers' union, who was hospitalised by police after leading a strike against the coup in July, describes it as including, “the three union federations... peasants', students', women's and indigenous peoples' organisations; churches and human rights groups”.

It is overwhelmingly made up of workers and peasants and the poor of the *barrios* and has correctly linked Zelaya's return to the presidency with the convening of a constituent assembly. Another NRFC leader, Gilberto Rios, said: “The constituent assembly is non-negotiable” because the whole purpose of the coup was to stop the vote taking place for an assembly.

Reyes argues that the landlords and multinationals want to defend the 1982 constitution, because it “allowed the large businessmen and the multinationals to monopolise all the power. It promoted ‘free trade’ and sweatshop pass-through industries, which have destroyed the national production of our

country and our jobs. They, the oligarchy, are the ones who have benefited from the 1982 constitution and who organised the 28 June coup to preserve their interests.” Under the constitution, for example, employers' organisations get to nominate the judges. The whole set-up privileges the power of big money.

Any move towards a constitutional assembly would destroy the 1982 constitution and weaken the oligarchy's rule.

Workers & peasants' power

The coup has unleashed a wave of opposition that has paralysed society, pushed back the oligarchs and has opened a revolutionary situation which could take society into a more radical direction. But the conflict has reached a breaking point. The regime has tried measure after measure to break the will of the oppositional movement. The latest is the 48-hour curfew and electricity shut down.

The state of siege launched on the 28 September is scheduled to last until the middle of November, which will prevent people from organising for the general elections of 28 November. The coup makers believe that if they can hold on till then, steal the elections, and stop the constitutional assembly, then they would have won and can return to their normal rule over

society.

That's why the state of siege must be smashed.

And it can be. The movement has now most probably reached as far as it can go with mobilisations, work stoppages and protests. There are now moves to close down the ports and transport routes with barricades and spread the confrontations to every town and city.

But the movement is at an *impasse*. It cannot stand still or it will suffer a defeat. People have been starved and terrorised by the military. They cannot keep mobilising without a push for power. What is now needed is:

- An indefinite general strike
- The formation of popular committees of workers' and peasants' delegates
- Setting up a popular militia
- An armed uprising to overthrow the coup makers, establish a workers and peasants' government based on popular committees, and convene the constituent assembly.

The resistance and the FNRG must organise the defence of demonstrations against military attack. Activists must go to rank and file soldiers or broadcast messages to them to break them from their officers. Most soldiers are poor as well and need to be convinced to support the movement. Once the army starts shaking, the unstable regime will fall.

There are already calls for the FNRG to launch a party. The mass mobilisations and courage of thousands of people daily to fight for the return of President Zelaya and a constituent assembly shows that support for such a party is there. A party of the workers and poor peasants would organise the masses and be the best weapon to fight for the assembly and address poverty and inequality in Honduras.

A working class party – independent of the church, business leaders and generals – would also guard against any concessions or betrayal by Zelaya himself. He is a landowner and businessman who became active in the Liberal Party in the 1970s and has held ministerial positions in previous governments. He became head of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise in

1987. He has already said he would return under the San Jose plan, which would see him as a figurehead president with a coalition of bosses as government.

If he returns to power, his base would not now be the Liberal Party (which, apart from a few radicals, has abandoned him) but the mass movement of the NFRG. This could well push him to the left just as Chavez was pushed to the left after the failed coup of 2001 – but there is no guarantee that he would break from the oligarchy.

The existence of a mass revolutionary socialist party can ensure that Honduran workers and peasants can destroy the oligarchs, use the constituent assembly as a weapon against the bosses' rule, and set out on the road to a workers and peasants' government: one that could settle accounts not only with the military coup-makers but with the capitalist system of poverty and exploitation itself.



Stop press!

Rumours are circulating that a "peaceful" deal might be reached between Zelaya and Micheletti to resolve the crisis. US congressional members have visited the county and the Organisation of American States has also intervened, with the agenda of preventing a more radical outcome from the Honduran masses.

All negotiations with the coup makers should be rejected. This regime is built on the blood of the people who fought back. Zelaya will be willing to make serious concessions to return to power or to be allowed to stand in the elections. The FNRG must maintain the call for a constituent assembly above all else. The working class forces can and must form a new party which is independent of Zelaya. The organs of resistance that have been formed in the fight back against the military can themselves form the basis of a workers and peasants government.

Timeline

- **27 January 2006:** Zelaya elected president of Honduras
- **24 March 2009:** Zelaya calls for a preliminary vote in June on whether to hold a referendum in November on National Constituent Assembly (NCA).
- **28 June 2009:** Supreme court, army and business leaders launch coup against President Zelaya and deport him to Costa Rica. Speaker of congress Robert Micheletti is sworn in as president
- **1 July:** Micheletti declares state of emergency, imposes curfew and enacts laws against demonstrations. Zelaya supporters arrested
- **4 July:** Organisation of American States suspends Honduras after coup regime refuses to reinstate Zelaya. The UN and US refuse to recognise coup.
- **30 July:** Zelaya comes to the Honduran border for three days where he is met by the military. Huge crowds greet him.
- **August:** The National Resistance Front against the Coup (FNRG) organises marches throughout Honduras.
- **11 August:** FNRG organises marches converging on capital Tegucigalpa. Demonstrators call for re-imposition of Zelaya as president and for a constituent assembly. Honduran people involved in widespread conflict with coup regime. Micheletti offers to step down for November elections but will not let Zelaya into country
- **21 September:** Zelaya secretly returns to Honduras and hides in Brazilian embassy. A wave of protests in his support engulfs the country.
- **28 September:** Micheletti declares another state of emergency to last until middle of November (i.e. two weeks before general election).

For more on Honduras go to www.fifthinternational.org/category/1/56/6

Obama cries crocodile tears

When President George W Bush was in power, the United States covertly backed coups against Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and tried to dismember Bolivia. By contrast Barack Obama's administration presents itself as opposing the Honduran coup and as supporting Manuel Zelaya's return. However, while Obama's government has withdrawn some financial support from the coup regime, it has not imposed full sanctions on it, which under US rules against military coups it should have done.

On 4 August, after a surge of support for Zelaya when he went to the Nicaraguan/Honduran border, the US State Department hypocritically condemned both sides: "We energetically condemn the actions of 28 June... We also recognise that President Zelaya's insistence on undertaking provocative actions contributed to the

polarisation of Honduran society and led to a confrontation that unleashed the events that led to his removal."

What provocative actions? Obama could only have meant calling for a constituent assembly to overthrow the discredited constitution put in place in 1982 with US support.

On 28 September the State Department issued another statement about the increased violence, blaming Zelaya: "The return was irresponsible... Zelaya and those who facilitated his return are responsible for the actions of their followers." Not a word about the state of siege imposed for 45 days or the routine arrests and killings.

The Obama government may oppose the coup but it fears the mass mobilisations of workers and peasants far more. It wants a negotiated settlement, in which Zelaya returns as a puppet president to placate his supporters,

while the real business of government – profits for US fruit, drinks and oil companies – continues. Any notion of radical reforms will be forgotten because the US fears another Venezuela or Bolivia.

Honduras has a special place in US foreign policy. It was once a *de facto* colony of the United States Fruit Company. Any attempt to reform society or limit the exploitation of agricultural workers was met by US invasion and the overthrow of governments. The US has invaded in 1903, 1907, 1911, 1912, 1919, 1924, and 1925. In the 1980s President Reagan backed death squads in Honduras and his representative was key to writing the undemocratic constitution of 1982.

The workers and peasants of Honduras must oppose any Organisation of American States, United Nations or US deal.

USA

'The Steel City was electric'

US revolutionaries report on the anti-G20 protests in Pittsburgh

By Workers Power (USA)

After six continuous days of demonstrations and actions directed against the Group of 20 (G20) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which culminated in a 10,000 strong march through the downtown area where the summit took place, world leaders, particularly to the chagrin of Barack Obama, witnessed first hand the willingness of thousands of Americans to protests against such "abstractions" as global capitalism. It was the largest demonstration the city of Pittsburgh has seen since the protests against the Vietnam War.

The Steel City was electric. From all directions people poured into the city as hundreds long-distance travelers flocked to one of the several tent cities erected in protest against the millions who lost their jobs and, thus, homes due to the crisis. The spirit of international working-class solidarity permeating the city was palpable; as tent city activists slept outside in the rain Thursday night and woke to a brisk, chilly morning, they did so to show their solidarity with all those suffering the effects of the recession across the planet.

Residents were ebullient, to say the least, when they found out why we were in Pittsburgh. Several members of Workers Power (USA) spoke with local residents for hours about police brutality, the differences between how officials in Pittsburgh portray the city in the media and how it is in reality, and the historical civil rights battles that engulfed the city during the 1960s.

Around noon on Friday, demonstrators met at Freedom Corner where passionate speeches condemning unemployment, the reduction of state and federal funds towards sustaining and developing education programs, and the utterly deplorable conditions currently prevailing in the health care system, reverberated throughout the surrounding area, ricocheting from one skyscraper to the next.

From there, the two primary mobilizations slicing through Pittsburgh were to converge and combine their forces before storming the downtown portion of the



Protestors at the G20, Pittsburgh

city. When they did, it was a remarkable sight. We could literally feel our collective strength growing as more and more people from all corners of the city funneled into the march. Protestors chanted, "power to the people, not the G20," and "this is what democracy / a police-state looks like." And what a police-state it was! Local police, National Guardsmen, even out-of-town volunteer police flocked to Pittsburgh to get their chance to fire tear gas, club demonstrators and students, aim piercingly painful sound-truck horns at defenseless bystanders, and even pull unsuspecting protestors into unmarked military-police units without any explanation of what they were being "detained" for. It bore deeply in the minds of all in attendance the striking similarities between the conduct of the American police and other "security forces" at the G20 protests and the actions of despotic governments and their own repressive apparatuses around the world whom the leaders of the "free world" criticize and levy sanctions and boycotts against while championing the "liberties" of their own so-called "enclaves" of freedom, justice, and reason.

Vociferous speeches came from a multitude of organizations against the crimes caused by capitalism the world over. From local residents, to representatives from Students for a Democratic Society, to the International Socialist Organization [ISO], all agreed that capitalism was the prime culprit fueling the destruction of the environment, the

loss of jobs and of homes, the failure to provide health care treatment for all those who need it, the waging of imperialist wars of plunder in Central Asia and the Middle East, and the malicious campaign to deny workers the right to form their own or join already existing unions.

The march came to a stop outside the main business district where the afternoon ended with a rendition of The Internationale. What an invigorating sight to witness such a mixed group stand as one and sing the anthem of international socialism!

The main catchphrase of the day, "build a movement to rid the world of capitalism," was not, however, without ambiguous coloring. What did the speakers mean exactly by "movement?" Naturally, every group had a different explanation. Some argued in favor of the tactic of providing admonition to Barack Obama and other Democrats in the false hope that they would see reason, and heed their call for peace, justice, and international cooperation between nations and peoples. In other words, these organizations sought to prostrate the movement before those individuals who actively and knowingly promote the interests of capitalist multi-nationals and financial institutions, begging them to stop doing what they do best – exploiting in the interests of profit accumulation.

Surely, the only socialist organization allotted a slot to speak – the ISO – would offer a substantially less naïve proposal for action and

offer up a concrete program? Yet despite the passionately delivered rhetoric lambasting capitalism and the economic havoc, destitution, and war it creates, there was no definitive answer from the ISO either. The speaker from the ISO berated capitalism, but there was no mention of the need to break the mass of the working class and youth away from the Democratic Party, not to mention the trade union bureaucrats and their "friends of labor", who block the formation of an independent working class party that could fight to consign capitalism to the dustbin of history. Yes, socialists need to be fighting for is strike action against job losses and industry closures. But what was lacking was the call for a new workers' party armed with a program for socialist revolution. Without such a party the working class will not be able to take lasting steps forward.

The consequent failure to argue for such proposals and demands is the reason why anarchists take such prominence at summit sieges. Unquestionably, the black bloc "stole the show." They made all the headlines Friday morning after a non-sanctioned, "illegal" protest Thursday afternoon resulted in some of the most violent clashes between State forces and demonstrators. Even though the tactics and strategies used by the Black Bloc are ill conceived and incapable of building a mass working class resistance, their eagerness and energy to fight back against the capitalists, if it proves nothing else, shows that young people currently stand at the forefront of the resistance and can be won to revolutionary struggle.

Although the G-20 protests in Pittsburgh did not actually shut down the summit itself, it did herald great potential opportunities for future work amongst anti-capitalists forces desiring to build a new world, a world free of capitalist exploitation and oppression worldwide. Between now and the time of the convening of the next United States Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan in the coming year, we must ask ourselves what we want most of all and what we are prepared to do to obtain it.

• More US news at
<http://workerspower.net/>

IRAN

US war threats and sanctions won't free the Iranian people

By Marcus Halaby

United States President Barack Obama's decision to abandon a controversial missile defence system, intended to be based in Poland and the Czech Republic, appears to have succeeded in persuading Russia to drop its opposition to sanctions on Iran.

The anti-missile shield, ostensibly to defend against the as yet non-existent nuclear threat of intercontinental ballistic missiles from Iran or North Korea, had been denounced by the Russians as being directed instead at their own nuclear arsenal. Its shelving, ostensibly in order to concentrate on the threat from Iran's short- and medium-range missiles, was a clear signal to Russia that the new US administration would not stand in Russia's way in its "sphere of influence" if Russia allowed the US to continue its aggression against Iran, with Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev declaring that there were cases where sanctions were "inevitable" after talks with President Obama on 24 September.

This has happened as Iran has conducted new missile tests, alarming the US with its apparent (if still theoretical) capacity to "hit Israel", and as Iran has been forced to admit to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it had concealed the still-uncompleted construction of a uranium enrichment plant near the holy city of Qom. Bending to pressure over this revelation, Iran announced in the course of talks in Geneva, with the US, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, that it would allow inspections of its Qom facility, as well as of an already acknowledged facility at Natanz. However, it has argued that it is not obliged to do this until 180 days before any nuclear material has been placed there, and has not yet set a date for inspections of the Qom facility.

The revelations have supposedly caused alarm in the US because the new enrichment facilities could enable Iran to expand its nuclear programme to develop weapons-grade uranium and plutonium, although Iran insists that its programme is for energy production and for peaceful purposes only. Un-



Iranian opposition supporters demonstrating outside UN building

named US officials have said that if Iran has not taken steps to reassure the world of its "peaceful intentions" by the end of the year, then the threat that Iran might be attacked will increase – a clear reference that Israel will be given a US "green light" to attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

US Hypocrisy

A much more openly expressed threat has been to impose sanctions – through the United Nations (UN) or unilaterally – on petrol imports. Iran, despite its huge oil industry, has little oil refining capacity, making it dependent on foreign sources for petrol, most recently from Venezuela.

The hypocrisy of the US's sabre-rattling should be clear to all. Israel, the US's main ally in the region, has never officially acknowledged its arsenal of nuclear weapons, has never allowed any inspection of its nuclear facilities, and is allowed to conduct its aggression against neighbouring countries – and against the occupied Palestinian people – with impunity. But when nations like Iran, justifiably alarmed at the threat of invasion or attack, and with an eye to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, even start to develop the ability to acquire a nuclear deterrent, they become the subject of sanctions, military threats, diplomatic isolation and media vilification.

Every socialist should oppose the drive to war and sanctions on Iran in the West, and support Iran's right to

defend itself if attacked. We should do this despite the anti-democratic and reactionary character of the Islamic Republic regime, which represses socialists, working-class activists, women, national minorities and gays and lesbians within its own borders. Anyone who imagines that an imperialist attack on Iran will aid the struggles for democracy, secularism and women's rights in Iran need only look at the "achievements" of the US-led occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the fig-leaf of democracy is a fiction, where sectarian and reactionary-Islamist forces have been strengthened by foreign invasion, and where these forces have been as likely to be on the side of the occupiers (and benefiting from their assistance in repressing resistance) as to be resisting them.

Moreover, the Iranian masses remember all too well the experience of the 1950s, when a CIA- and MI5-backed coup overthrew the elected prime minister Mossadeq (who tried to nationalise foreign oil interests), and imposed the absolute rule of the Shah for a period of three decades.

Reactionary regime

None of this should allow us for a moment, however, to drop our opposition to the regime or our solidarity with its victims. Nor should it allow us to view the regime as an even potentially consistent anti-imperialist force, as many on the left have done, dazzled by the Islamic regime's successful open defiance of the West,

the left-populist character of its ally, Venezuela's leader Hugo Chavez, and by the undoubted popularity of its Lebanese client, the Shi'a resistance movement Hezbollah.

The demagogic anti-Americanism of the clerical regime masks a deep hostility to modernity, the working class and women's rights, and allows it to silence all criticism as the product of mythical "imperialist plots". Moreover, as a regime defending capitalist private property, the source of the domination of the so-called "developing countries" by the rich "first world" states, its opposition to imperialism can only ever be episodic and inconsistent.

It is not accidental that of the hundreds arrested by the regime since the crushing of the mass protests against the rigging of the recent presidential elections (many of them tortured and held in isolation), those brought to public trial in recent weeks have been coerced into "confessing" that their protests were orchestrated from the British and US embassies. If the prospect of imperialist war and sanctions weakens the struggle for democracy in Iran, then equally, the continuation in power of an anti-democratic regime, that has already counterposed itself to the people on the streets, weakens the ability of the Iranian people to defend their country from US aggression.

This contradiction can be resolved only when the Iranian working class, through its own organs of struggle, brings itself to the head of the democratic struggle in Iran, opposing both the clerical regime and imperialist domination of the region, and displaying its solidarity with the regions oppressed peoples. In particular, we should note that the protests over the rigged election achieved such potency – and posed such a threat to the regime's future existence – only because they brought large sections of workers into the movement. Our task, therefore, should be to support this embryonic movement, encouraging it in its steps forward to a confrontation with the regime – while opposing any attempt by the US to impose its own version of "regime change" – one based on dictatorship and the theft of the country's natural resources.

Forward to a workers' Iran!

1989 – 2009: 20 YEARS SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF STALINISM

What the fall of the Berlin Wall meant for socialism

This is an edited transcript of a speech by *Richard Brenner* at the Workers Power Summer School in July 2007.

The fall of the eastern European Stalinist regimes, like a pack of cards in 1989-90 and culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991, was a deeply traumatic experience for many communists around the world. Despite the fact that icons of Joseph Stalin had been removed in 1956, Stalinism retained the idea that the Kremlin was the infallible leadership of the international working class.

The world's bourgeoisie immediately declared that Communism was dead – but that was to be expected. However, within the left there were those that argued that although socialism isn't dead, this proves that nothing can be learned from the Russian Revolution, that it was an entirely negative experience. Or as the United Secretariat of the Fourth International put it "the epoch of October is over", which they said in the mid-1990s when reviewing the experience of the Russian revolution.

It is important to review the entire experience of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the historical circumstances that gave rise to its degeneration, examining the contradictions, specifically the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary developments which culminated in the collapse of the USSR and the following destruction of whole swathes of the economy, as occurred during the re-introduction of the robber capitalism in Russia today.

The leaders of the Russian Revolution were 100 per cent aware at the time of the revolution and thereafter that it was entirely possible that the Soviet Union could be defeated, that soviet power in Russia could be crushed, and that the world's first working class revolution and working class state could go down to defeat – and they knew exactly what it was that might culminate in that defeat.

Vladimir Lenin, speaking to the Moscow Soviet in April 1918, barely six months after the seizure of soviet power, said: "We are a revolutionary working class contingent that

has advanced to the forefront, not because we are better than other workers, not because the Russian proletariat is superior to the working class of other countries, but solely because we were one of the most backward countries of the world, which will have a final victory when we succeed at last in smashing international imperialism. But we will achieve victory only together with the workers of other countries, of the whole world. Our backwardness has put us in the forefront and we will perish unless we are capable of holding out until we receive powerful support from workers who have risen in revolt in other countries. Our tasks consist of continually advancing our tactics of proletarian struggle."

Hence for Lenin, Leon Trotsky, the revolutionary Bolsheviks, and the early Communist International, the fate of the Russian Revolution and the USSR was integrally bound up with the fact that workers in other countries were engaged in struggles against imperialism. They realised that they had only opened a process of revolution – that the social revolution will begin in one country and will unfold on the international stage – it will be completed on the world stage, as Trotsky put it.

In discussing the degeneration of the Russian revolution, it is important to understand that the system that emerged in the USSR had none of the characteristics of socialism except the existence of a planned economy in place of the market, effectively a state monopoly of foreign trade rather than allowing the world market simply to dominate in the USSR, and the absence of large-scale private ownership of the means of production.

The key elements required for the transition to socialism, including workers' control of industry and a democratic centralist party, in which mistakes could be corrected and debates could be had, and a systematic move to reduce privilege across society, were thrown in reverse under Stalin. Workers' control was part of the Bolsheviks' programme, which they started to introduce, but which

Stalinism extirpated – in no Stalinist state was there any semblance of working class control over production. Collectivisation, where it was carried out, was carried out in a compulsory and brutal way, which could not but make the peasants feel that they were alien from the entire process of collective agriculture.

Party democracy did not exist – not only was there no right to factions, but there was no right to voice dissent. Anyone how did was forced to join the long queues of people marching to the concentration camps of Vorkuta, or would disappear in the night. Or you will be hunted down around the world like Trotsky and assassinated.

As for privilege and inequality, the Stalinists built special shops with access to luxury goods; had dachas, or big villas, in the countryside; were driven around in limousines. The Stalinist bureaucracy was a parasitic caste. Abandoning the Bolsheviks' original idea that no one was to earn more than four times anybody else, which itself was only for when the Bolsheviks needed specialists in the crisis situation in the aftermath of the civil war – here was systematic inequality.

Furthermore, whereas Lenin said all nations should have the right to self-determination and that the Tsar's prison house of nations should be broken up in so far that any nation that wanted to separate from it should be entitled to do so, Stalin in contrast converted the USSR into a prison house of nations and engaged in systematic national oppression. The Tatars in Crimea were forcibly deported and moved to another part of the USSR altogether. Anti-Semitism, that most vicious reactionary ideology, which had been used by the Tsar, the fascists and Nazis, re-emerged in the Soviet Union in the campaigns against the opposition and the intelligentsia.

In Stalinism, all the reactionary vapours of bourgeois ideology were concentrated together and poured back into the working class state. The working class state ceases to be in transition to socialism and is, in fact,

a state that is blocked in its transition to socialism. Women's rights, such as the right to abortion, were removed. The woman's place was in the home. Of course women workers still had to work, but the whole idea of a revolutionary transformation through the socialising of domestic labour was completely removed from Stalinist ideology. Homosexuality was outlawed again.

The planned economy, one of the greatest gains of the Russian Revolution, was nevertheless completely divorced from any democratic planning. Without market indicators, which tell capitalists what people need, the only way a planned economy can create a balanced society, which sees expansion and meets the consumption needs of the masses, is if it knows what people want and need. Without the market signals, which give you a sense of those needs but through a distorting mirror under capitalism, a planned economy needs to ask the people directly.

People must be allowed to speak in relation to the plan and its priorities. But if the Stalinist bureaucracy determines all the planning priorities, then there is no sense of what is really needed in society. Then production plans are based on aggregate growth, on weight or amount of output, but with no idea of whether it is any good. Ultimately, there also develops economic stagnation in all departments except those that serve the bureaucracy.

Of course, luxury goods were imported from abroad for the bureaucracy, so they didn't have to worry about that. But the guns, the pig iron, the airplanes, uniforms for the army, bullets, munitions, steel, coal, all of these things can be built up in vast quantities but created in great disproportions. If a worker is told that they have to produce 100 tonnes of steel goods forks or knives or whatever, and they are too afraid to argue, then they will make the same number of goods, but just make them heavier. Anyone who visited Soviet Russia or eastern Europe can testify as to how heavy all the manufactured goods were – I almost broke my fin-

gers in 1989 typing a leaflet on an east German typewriter.

What was the class character of this state? Trotsky said that it was a degenerated workers state, not capitalist but nor was it led by a new class because classes have a social purpose. A class plays a necessary role in a given social system. But the Stalinist bureaucracy was illegitimate and socially useless within the Soviet system. They didn't own the Russian state – they stole from the state. The system didn't entitle them to their privileges and special shops; they kept them secret from the masses. All of these things indicate that the bureaucratic leadership of the Soviet Union was a caste rather than a class, and we can see in the collapse of the Soviet Union how true Trotsky's prognosis really was.

The USSR was a working class state in the process of bureaucratic degeneration. A caste of middle men, similar to the trade union leaders in Britain, but with guns and tanks and mediating between the workers state and imperialism, accrued privileges for themselves and blocked the road to socialism in the process. And Trotsky's conclusion was as dynamic as it was clear with regard to the tasks of the working class in a degenerated workers state. He said: "Either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers state, will overthrow the new forms of property and throw the country back into capitalism, or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the road to socialism."

Now the situation that unfolded didn't play out the way Trotsky anticipated when he wrote those words in 1938. In the aftermath of the Second World War and in circumstances of the destruction of the Nazis' armies and destruction of German imperialism, the Red Army expanded across eastern Europe and governments that supported the Soviet Union, which were basically dominated by Communist parties loyal to the Kremlin, were installed in each of these states. This meant that Trotsky's perspective of a revolutionary crisis, which would either end in the victory of the working class or in the restoration of capitalism, was postponed for decades.

In understanding the real world, Marxism has to understand contradictions. These governments, with the help of the Red Army, actually overthrew capitalism in each eastern European country and did it in such a way that the working class itself never had an opportunity to exercise any control over the process to raise its level of organisation and consciousness, to exert its control over the planned economy, or to feel that this event was its revolution. In fact, in state after state, the independent working class movement was atomised or forcibly unified with the Stalinist parties. Trade unions were shackled to the state and the opposition terrorised. Only then were the capitalists booted out and an economy created which was not rational and democratic under working class control but mod-

elled on the bureaucratic plan of the USSR.

In the aftermath of the collectivisation and industrialisation of the USSR in the 1930s, there was significant economic growth. Partly because there was a big job to be done, partly because the workers were encouraged and enthused by the revolution, and partly because centralised planning has some real benefits even when it is completely warped by bureaucratisation. Certain eastern European countries also saw elements of this in the aftermath of the war, but steadily the plan starts to stagnate – lower and lower economic growth and poorer and poorer quality of products. The plan was blind to what was happening in society and had no connection to the real needs and organisation of the masses. These were workers' states that were degenerate from birth.

Other workers states emerged in countries where the Soviet Union didn't have an armed presence – such as in Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Cuba – but these followed the same model where the party takes control and organises a bureaucratic plan, always with the working class being kept out of power and workers' organisations being broken up.

Many people said that this shows Stalinism is not as bad as Trotsky thought because these countries are overthrowing capitalism and this is something that needs to be supported. True, the Trotskyists did not shed a tear for any one of the capitalists dispossessed by the Stalinists in the course of these revolutions, but Trotskyists aren't just against the capitalists, we are also for the working class.

Trotsky said: "The primary political criteria for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or other area, however important that these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organisation of the world proletariat – the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one and only deciding standpoint, the politics of Moscow as a whole completely retains its reactionary character and remains the chief obstacle on the road to world revolution." The Spanish workers in the 1930s found out how Stalinism was an obstacle to world revolution, just as the Indonesian workers found out in the 1960s, the workers of Latin America found out in the 1970s, and the workers of Iran found out in 1979.

Inside the workers' states, the class struggle did not stop either because the working class cannot be excluded from control over its own labour process without the bureaucratic states encountering class struggle. From the 1950s right up to the collapse of Stalinism, the history of these degenerated workers' states was punctuated by sudden explosive moments of working class rebellion.

When Polish workers went into struggle in Gdansk in 1980, it was so illegal that they had to come out in large numbers and stand firm. They instructed their leaders

that they had to negotiate with the Stalinist leaders in public, because they didn't want their leaders to capitulate and grass them up – they didn't want to be left to be mopped up by the secret police in the aftermath of their struggle.

In 1953 in East Berlin, a rebellion began with the building workers and quickly spread to other sectors of the working class. The working class leaders actually said the strikers were not against socialism, they weren't striking for the capitalists, but were against the privileges of the bureaucracy in this new people's democratic republic, as the Stalinists called it.

In Hungary 1956 saw an explosive struggle of the working class in which workers' councils were built and debates took place around what the programme for the future of Hungary should be if the workers were able to influence the government, or change or overthrow the government. Some said they wanted a more market-based system, but many others said that they wanted to retain what was gained under the workers' state but wanted to get rid of the complete absence of democracy, the secret police and get rid of the bureaucrats.

This struggle was crushed by Soviet tanks, which caused enormous ructions in the Communist parties in Western Europe, including many of the members of the Communist Party in Britain going over in large numbers to what passed for Trotskyism in Britain at that time. This was very important – a whole number of cadres joined the Trotskyists.

In 1968, when there was a general strike in France and students all over the world were radicalised by opposition to the Vietnam War, the Czech Communist leader decided to introduce slightly more democracy and look for market reforms. The masses saw this chink of light in the bureaucracy's armour and rushed to maximise their democratic control. Debates and democratic discussions began about what sort of society could exist, and then the USSR sent in the tanks again and crushed the protests.

This same year students and workers all over the world were being mobilised in struggle. No wonder there was a new left – no wonder that revolutionary and other organisations were propelled to discuss the ideas of Trotsky or Mao or anything rather than Brezhnev in the Kremlin, who sends the tanks into Czechoslovakia at a time when these rebellions are going on all over the world.

Retuning to Poland in the early 1980s, the revolutionary situation began during the strikes in Gdansk shipyards, led by a man called Lech Walesa, but he didn't have total control over the movement. Due to the stagnation of the Stalinist plan, a number of the east European states had started to borrow money from Western imperialist banks, which then put the screws on and started austerity programmes: cuts in services and provisions, as well as making people work harder for less money. Therefore

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Polish workers began to take strike action and fight back in large numbers and soon a strike movement developed. The Polish United Workers Party, which was the ruling Communist Party in Poland, was shaken up by the potential of a mass workers' movement. A real working class movement from below began to develop across Poland; hundreds of thousands of workers started to join it and formed the independent trade union Solidarnosc (Solidarity).

There were many different trends in the trade union – Walesa himself, while trying to balance between different factions of the movement, later emerged as the leader of Solidarnosc, the Catholic pro-capitalist political party that evolved out of the trade union. It is important not to mistake a situation's outcome for every aspect of the process. In the early 1980s when Solidarnosc was still legal and before the crushing of the workers' movement, there were factory committees and self-management initiatives. There were also many political organisations, such as a restorationist pro-capitalist grouping called the KPN and a grouping of social democrats that wanted some democracy, a softening of the plan and maybe a little bit of the market; there were many people that wanted workers' self-management, by which they understood workers democracy in the workplace but maybe not a central plan; and then there were the people who said that an integrated plan of production was needed which will bring the movement into a head-on confrontation with the state.

On the 14/15 April 1981 representatives of 17 key factories met on the initiative of Varsky and Gdansk shipyards to establish a network and discuss the issue of self-management. By August 1981, over 3000 plants were organising the struggle for self-management. They challenged the right of the bureaucracy to prepare a list of names and appoint all the factory managers, all yes-men to the Stalinist leadership. This was a real challenge to Stalinist control over production – a point of departure for working class militants wanting to create a political revolutionary situation.

However, in the end the Polish bureaucracy sent in the tanks and destroyed the working class movement. Some of the left cheered when this happened – Arthur Scargill did as well as Spartacists. Why?

For many people, terrified by the weakness of Stalinism and terrified that this would result in the restoration of capitalism, the emergence of a working class movement that hated bureaucracy and privilege but didn't yet know what alternative it wanted was enough of a threat for them to oppose it themselves.

These people didn't have enough faith in the working class that they could build a political revolutionary socialist alternative to Stalinism – they wanted the workers to be crushed until they had decided

that they had to seize power to preserve the planned economy.

Of course there is always the risk of a social counter-revolution, where the workers might bring back capitalism by voting for a capitalist party, but if they make that decision it is because the revolutionary working class party hasn't been built. And if revolutionaries say that they won't participate or fight for the leadership of the independent workers movements against Stalinism, then the outcome of the struggle is determined in advance. Leninist-Trotskyists would fight to come to the head of the struggle by advancing the programme for a revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy, for the destruction of the secret police, for workers councils everywhere and for the revolutionary democratic organisation of the plan of production.

If that had happened in Poland in 1980/1, in Hungary in 1956, then what a model for the period at the end of the 1980s – 1989-91, the period we described as the general crisis of Stalinism – the period of the proletarian political revolution. Which can end in one of two ways – as Trotsky predicted, either the working class will overthrow the bureaucracy or the bureaucracy (or bourgeoisie) will plunge the USSR back into capitalism.

Restoration of Capitalism

In the 1980s, leader of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev, who realised that the writing was on the wall for bureaucratic command planning, started to introduce two aligned policies which he thought might be able to encourage production and growth rates and re-establish the authority of the Kremlin bureaucracy in the USSR. These policies were glasnost, which means openness, and perestroika, which means modernisation or re-structuring. However, Gorbachev didn't want the USSR to go capitalist because he knew that would mean they would get rid of him as well because he was leader of the Communist Party.

Nevertheless he did want to get the economy going and looked to the market, not the workers, to do it. However, as the crisis deepened in the USSR, the working class and other social forces, such as the intelligentsia, took advantage of the relatively open situation in order to press forward their claims. National rebellions started to erupt – in Kazakhstan, the Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Baltic states. There was rising discontent because these countries were nationally oppressed by the Great Russian chauvinist bureaucracy.

In May 1989 the world watched the massacre in Tiananmen Square – students demanding more democratic rights were supported by the workers' movement until the bureaucracy brought in the People's Army to crush the movement. This event had an enormous impact on Eastern Europe, which was already tottering.

The Stalinist regime in Hungary, hugely indebted to the west, decided to try and appease imperialism, with the approval of Gorbachev, by relaxing their border controls with Austria. As expected, many people left for Austria; but what they didn't expect was that a lot of people left East Germany to go to Hungary to then get to Austria. However, a lot of other people decided to stay in East Germany but demand basic things: freedom of speech, the right to move, the right to go on holiday to West Germany and see family there. Other anti-bureaucratic demands began to be raised and on vast demonstrations in Leipzig, Berlin and Dresden, people started to take up the simple slogan "We are the people".

This was a very powerful slogan because the Stalinists didn't call the eastern European states 'workers states', they called them 'people's democracies'. So the demonstrators were saying "we" are the people, which had an enormous effect and eventually reached the stage where Eric Honecker, the leader of the East German Stalinists, got the police ready to gun the workers down. Gorbachev came to East Germany and made it clear that if Honecker suppressed the movement, he would have no support from the Red Army or the USSR. Honecker resigned and Egon Krenz took power in the face of a complete crisis with the masses on the streets demanding evermore radical changes in society, an end to privileges and the bureaucracy, and an end to party rule.

On 9 November 1989, Krenz made the announcement that the Wall was now open – this went out on the radio and people couldn't believe it – the Berlin Wall is down. So they went and crossed over – there was a celebration like never before. The bourgeoisie use the image of the Wall being torn down as an image of the triumph of capitalism. But it is important to remember that the mass movement in East Germany had not decided to go over to capitalism but the fall of the Wall opened up a process of political revolutionary crisis.

Suddenly a huge number of organisations appeared: Die Nelken, New Forum, United Left. All of these organisations suddenly popped up and were demanding all sorts of things: some were demanding an end to bureaucracy; some wanted to maintain the GDR but wanted it to be more democratic; some wanted a more ecological system, some of them were stuck up intellectuals who didn't like the working class and wanted to replace the bureaucracy with their own group of artists or writers; and some were socialists.

Romania was a different situation. The Stalinist regime in Romania was the maddest Stalinist regime in the world. Ceausescu built what was effectively a vast temple to himself. The masses were starving. He had a programme of uprooting,

without consultation, entire villages. An explosive situation developed in the mining town of Timisoara where a local dissident protestant priest was arrested, a demonstration for his release was suppressed and the miners came out on strike. As they rushed the soldiers up to the area, all the workers from the surrounding area came out on strike, there was a pitched battle with the police – and the police went over to the workers.

The movement started spreading to the capital Bucharest – pretty much open civil war was now raging in different sections of the regime, some of them thinking about getting rid of Ceausescu. His horrible Securitate secret police, who had a network of underground tunnels that they could move around Bucharest to spy on the people, break up meetings, and find and kill people, were scuttling around underground completely loyal to Ceausescu.

On Christmas Day in 1989, Ceausescu calls a rally in his support and a big crowd gathers – he comes out onto his balcony and delivers the usual pompous Stalinist speech and suddenly – unheard of – people start booing. As the people start booing, the police move in and people start resisting the police to stop them coming through. Ceausescu looks like he can't believe it; he then looks over his shoulder and the next minute he's off in a helicopter. It is now open civil war in Bucharest and parts of the regime decide to finish Ceausescu off. A previously unheard-of National Salvation Front shows up on TV with footage of Ceausescu and his wife being bundled against a wall and shot through the head. The BBC news then interviews one of the demonstrators who said that this was the best Christmas present the Romanian workers have ever had.

Revolutionary Programme

The fact of the matter is that during these days a power struggle was going on in all of these countries. Workers Power's programme was clear: we needed a political revolution of the working class to seize control of society, break up the secret police, drive the Stalinists from office, suppress the bureaucratic counter-revolution so the capitalists can't get back, and to maintain the planned economy. Only the political revolution of the workers could stop the social counter-revolution.

The 1990 elections in East Germany saw the new prime minister, Lothar de Maizière, stand on his new version of the old Stalinist party. He put together a roundtable to dis-

cuss consensual politics for the new GDR with representatives of the New Forum, United Left and all the other organisations, which fundamentally want to keep the GDR and the state apparatus. They didn't know what else they wanted – but the West German bourgeoisie did know and they came in with some very clear slogans:

“Equal pay for equal work”, promising to pay the East Germans workers the same wage as in the West.

“One for one”, paying one Deutschemark for each East German mark.

“We are one people”, co-opting the slogan “We are the people”.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) proposed the revolutionary destruction of what was and what the workers hated, but in fact what they delivered was the counter-revolution.

The idea that the national question, the reunification of Germany, was somehow not going to be popular with the masses was ridiculous. The revolutionary reunification had to be posed because the only way a proletarian political revolution in Germany would happen was if the German workers in the east knew that part of that revolutionary project was to unite the country.

The reunification of Germany happened on a capitalist basis – Workers Power saw that now the crisis of Stalinism was an unstoppable process and predicted in 1990 that there was going to be a revolutionary crisis in the USSR, which would end in one of two ways. We also said that the bureaucracy in the USSR would fragment, with a part wanting to go back to Stalinism, no democracy and smash everything including the working class; on the other side, there would be part of the bureaucracy knowing that they would fair well under capitalism.

This is exactly what happened in August 1991 when the Gorbachev regime tottered and a coup was led by a section of the Stalinist bureaucracy who wanted to eliminate all rights. Remember that the workers in the USSR are now starting their own organisations, such as a movement called Sotzprof, an independent working class trade union, not a reactionary organisation, with a lot of influence from various different new socialistic currents within it. This was an organisation that was fighting against the effects of the market reforms which were impoverishing workers across the Soviet Union.

Boris Pugo and Gennady Yanayev, whose idea was back to Stalin, wanted to clamp down hard and abolish

all democratic rights, even the minor ones, that Gorbachev allowed and stop people organising. They planned a coup. Yet they were possibly the most incompetent and cowardly coup plotters in history.

Boris Yeltsin, one of the leaders of the Communist Party, was even more pro-market than Gorbachev, and wanted to restore capitalism in the USSR. During the coup attempt, Yeltsin comes forward when Gorbachev is paralysed – Pugo and Yanayev actually held him under dacha-arrest in the Crimea. When Pugo and Yanayev started to send tanks towards Moscow, Yeltsin put out a call for a general strike to stop the coup. Huge crowds gathered in Moscow to defend the parliament, to defend democratic rights, and workers around the country begin to down tools. Pugo and Yanayev's coup attempt completely collapsed, but Gorbachev was now politically dead because he didn't do anything to stop this coup. As Yeltsin did take action, so he took the power – two days later he went to the Supreme Soviet in Moscow and announced that they were forming the government now that the coup had been completely destroyed.

He took the microphone and said “We will now move to lighter business – the dissolution of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union”, which then took place. The dissolution of the party meant a situation where a new form of government could be established that would set about systematically re-introducing capitalism in Russia through shock therapy, which led to massive closures, unbelievable destruction in the collective farming sector, huge job losses and workers not getting paid, and the re-establishment of a capitalist class based on just plundering the planned economy, based on former secret policemen and factory managers suddenly finding that they owned the entire oil industry. People that buy up football clubs and fly around in private jets today – robber barons.

What do we make of the overall process? It certainly does not invalidate a single word of what Trotsky had to say about the matter. It shows that there were ample opportunities time and again throughout the life of Stalinism for the working class to have been rallied to a political alternative which didn't involve the restoration of capitalism.

It proves that the fundamental idea on which Trotsky founded the Fourth International in 1938, which was that Stalinism was counter-revolution-

ary and would bury the workers states but it could be overthrown by the workers, was absolutely true. The real problem was that the Fourth International had not established itself as a revolutionary force in these countries.

Nor could it. By 1951 it had already decided that because Stalinism had expanded into Eastern Europe, it could no longer be regarded as a completely counter-revolutionary force, therefore it didn't need to be overthrown but reformed. With that policy, they abandoned the fight to build a revolutionary movement. The failure of the political revolutionary movement in the Stalinist states is integrally linked to the political failure of the Fourth International to maintain its revolutionary stance against Stalinism and to maintain a systematically revolutionary approach.

Finally does this all mean, as the bourgeoisie and the Fourth International say, that the epoch of October is over? First, let's take stock of what happened in the 20th Century. Marxism was verified by a massive revolution in one country which, in a perverted and degenerated way, did spread to other countries. The bureaucratic social revolutions in Eastern Europe, China, Southeast Asia and Cuba represent, in an upside-down way, the enormous social impact of a workers' revolution in one country.

It changed a whole century and the system is still the same system that gave rise to the Russian revolution. We have programmatic proof in history that what Marx said about the organisation of the working class and the revolution, what Lenin said about the organisation of the party and the international, what Trotsky said about the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism and the need of the self-organisation of the masses, have all been verified. And another thing that has been verified as well: we still see revolutions and revolutionary movements today. We see a revolutionary process in Venezuela, we have a system that cannot keep itself indefinitely out of crisis, and we have a working class stronger more international, more interconnected, than ever before.

So for those that say the epoch of October is over, I say that we are still in the imperialist epoch of wars and revolutions, and we are going to prove them wrong not just in theory, we are going to prove them in practice by writing new Octobers on the page of 21st Century history.

FRANCE

New Anticapitalist Party: strengths and weaknesses

By Dave Stockton

The New Anticapitalist Party in France has been the focus of attention for many on the left across Europe. It has major strengths compared with the timid and reformist “united lefts” and left parties that have arisen in Britain and Europe over the past ten years.

Workers Power believes that the opening up of a process of unity in action and programmatic debate at a local and national level, with the clear goal of creating a working class party that is anticapitalist, would be an enormous step forward in Britain as it has been in France. But in the end whether it can fulfil its potential depends on what sort of programme it finally adopts and how it puts it into practice. The weakness and ambiguity of the NPA's strategy for power – and its opportunist approach to elections – will need to be overcome.

In France the New Anticapitalist Party (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste NPA) has drawn together over 10,000 militants. In this Winter and Spring's upsurge of struggles – several days of mass strike action called by the unions, the NPA was in the forefront of the demonstrations, on the picket lines, and in the factory, school and university occupations.

Their presence was so great that one of the more right wing union leaders, François Chérèque, of the CFDT, angrily complained of their activity on the picket lines and at the occupied factories. To this the NPA's most well known leader, Olivier Besancenot, a 35 years old postal worker, replied pugnaciously; “you had better get used to it – you're going to see a lot more of us”.

The NPA was founded last February after a year long process of debate and discussion at a local as well as a national level. The background to the party's formation was clearly waves of resistance to the right wing government attacks. These include the banlieues uprising of youth largely from the families of immigrants

in November 2005. They were fighting back against police racism, mass unemployment and social exclusion.

Then came the school and university occupations in February-March 2006 against the CPE (a cheap expendable work contract for youth). Earlier this year another mighty wave of struggles erupted. On 29 January, 2.5 million, and on March 19, over 3 million workers struck.

At a number of workplaces faced with closures, workers occupied them sometimes kidnapping their bosses.

The French “overseas department” of Guadeloupe was paralysed by a general strike for 40 days. Olivier Besancenot went to Guadeloupe to express the NPA's solidarity and led a demonstration in support of the strike in France. The NPA's leaflet carried the headline “Guadeloupe shows the way forward”. Besancenot spelled out what that meant:

“24 hour strikes and demonstrations will not be enough to make the government and the bosses give in. To stop the sackings, raise wages and lower prices, only an all out general strike will enable us to achieve our objectives.” He also called for “a new May '68”.

Strengths

The NPA's founding congress adopted a document – Founding Principles of the New Anticapitalist Party which is not as yet a complete programme but points in that direction. This contains a large number of bold anticapitalist measures and demands that open the road to a transition to socialism and contrast sharply other left unity projects across Europe, specifically Die Linke (The Left) in Germany which sticks firmly to a reformist programme- i.e., solely demands which are realisable under capitalism.

It counterposes to capitalist “nationalisation” the expropriation of all the dominant sectors of the capitalist class:

“This programme insists on the social appropriation of the produce



of labour by the expropriation without compensation of the major capitalist groups beginning with those of CAC 40 and essential sectors and services under the control of the wage earners and the population.”

The “CAC 40” are the top 40 companies on the French stock exchange: Alstom, Alcatel, BNP Paribas, Carrefour, Michelin, GDF-Suez, Peugeot-Citroen, Renault, Vivendi, etc.

When it comes to the demands of the programme the NPA it rejects the idea of their limitation to those “possible” within capitalism.

“We fight for an emergency programme responding to immediate needs, which challenges capitalist ownership of the means of production, attacks capital and profits, increases wages, pensions, minimum incomes and meet the needs of the population.”

This emergency programme, in fact, contains a considerable number of transitional demands, that is, ones which challenge the rights of capitalist property, establish workers' control over production and point to the need for a general takeover of the capitalist economy and the replacement of its state with one based on organs of workers' struggle.

It unequivocally sides with countries or national independence movements that are resisting French imperialism:

“The anticapitalists of an imperialist country must before everything struggle against their national capitalists, their own imperialist state and their army. (...) And wherever the French army (or that of other imperialist countries) is present, we support the popular resistance and the military defeat of the imperialist armies.”

No electoral road

Moreover it explicitly rejects the idea of an electoral road to socialism and reformism:

“It is not possible to put the state and existing institutions at the service of political and social transformation. These agencies, totally dedicated to defending the interests of the bourgeoisie, must be overthrown in order to establish new institutions at the service and under the control of workers and the population.”

Instead it insists that:

“Class domination cannot be eliminated along the road of reforms ... It will require a social revolution to destroy capitalism, (it) will require a formidable popular mobilisation of the people that can create new forms of power that will give an anticapitalist government the means to carry out its policy.”

On the question of the trade unions, the Fundamental Principles argues that the NPA fights for: “A trade unionism whose dual purpose is the defence of immediate and everyday demands but also the struggle for a transformation of society as a whole independently of parties and the State”

It goes on to advocate:

“Democracy in trade unions and in the struggles, self-organisation. We champion sovereign general assemblies, the creation of strike committees, coordinations for the democratic representation of workers in struggle with elected revocable representatives.”

Weaknesses

However the NPA's Principles as they approach the question of government – of power – becomes more and more evasive. They talk about “shifting the balance of forces” in favour of the workers. As we have seen Olivier Besancenot has repeatedly called for an all out general strike. But in the revolutionary situation, which would be created by a general strike, no lasting equilibrium can be expected.

The continuing ambiguity of the NPA is revealed even more in the fact that when it came to the

Continued on next page...

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European elections it stood on a programme which was devoid of the transitional demands embodied in the Principles. Indeed its programme was not so different to that of its reformist rivals the Parti de Gauche and the Communist Party (PCF). The temptation – which the French and indeed the international left always yield to when it comes to election manifestos – is to offer only a programme of reforms. For the NPA this did not lead to any major breakthrough.

In fact in the June elections to the European Parliament, the NPA with 4.9 per cent was outdistanced by the PdG-PCF bloc which scored 6.3 per cent, giving them five seats to the NPA's nil. In fact the NPA should clarify that it sees elections as opportunities to present its programme, its overall strategy to the working class and to raise the key slogans for the struggles of workers, youth, the unemployed and the immigrant communities.

Already it is embroiled in negotiations for an electoral agreement with the PCF and the PDG, though

to the indignation of the these parties, and of the right wing within the NPA itself, on 29 September the party's executive insisted that any such block be based on anticapitalist measures and rejection of governing coalitions with the Socialist Party. In fact it is impossible that thorough reformists like these parties will adopt measure that really challenge capitalism, just as it is impossible that they should renounce entering regional administrations if they are given the opportunity. The NPA should stand on its own programme – a completed anticapitalist programme of transitional demands.

This should pose the workers taking power as the necessary climax of a strategy starting from the present defensive struggle – “we will not pay for their crisis” – from the demonstrations against mass unemployment the NPA is supporting this autumn. The aim must be to create in these battles mass democratic councils of action (coordinations) to unite every front of the struggle. With such bodies there

can indeed be a general strike which the union leaders will not be able to sabotage: a general strike which initiates a real struggle for power.

The NPA must declare openly and in advance that its goal is to erect on the ruins of bosses state – through the smashing of the present government and its police and armed forces – a workers' government based on the workers' democratic organisations of struggle. This is what the NPA's programme of action needs to say.

Of course, many interruptions and halts are possible along this road, given the conservative leadership of the unions and the size of the reformist parties, but a party which describes itself as revolutionary and anticapitalist of itself, as the NPA does, needs to be unambiguous on its total strategy. The NPA must clarify this position in the months ahead. The left wing forces within the NPA who support this consistently revolutionary strategy need to unite and fight in the party for such a development.

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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Committees of action

By Joy Macready

As Labour and the Tories compete over who will deliver the most savage cuts, and the bosses and bankers demand the working class pay for their financial crisis, we need to think strategically about how we can organise the fightback.

The mainstream parties' assessment of the extent of the public sector cutbacks needed – an estimated 10-20% cuts in the health sector, £2bn cuts in education, 10 per cent savings across government departments – is staggering. Their representatives and their loyal friends in the media, however, never mention that it is caused by the gaping hole left in the public purse from the £1.3 trillion bailout of the banks.

Meanwhile, private sector bosses are using the recession to relocate production, sack workers, cut their wages and steal from their pensions. Share prices and profit margins may be recovering, but this is not enough for the greedy capitalists; they want to inflict further damage on working class families and communities.

Solidarity

But already we see the signs of a militant fightback. Occupations are leading the way: Visteon, Two Sisters, Prisme, Waterford, and Vestas, to name a few. Parents and teachers in Glasgow and Lewisham occupied their schools to prevent closure. Postal workers are balloting for a national strike against redundancies and reductions in hours and wages. Tower Hamlets College lecturers took all-out indefinite action for four weeks, while Leeds bin workers are still all out.

The list of struggles shows that it is not just the public sector that is under attack, but also the private sector; it is not just workers fighting back against service cuts, but the users of worsening services. Although the public sector is in the direct firing line of the government, all workers will be affected by cuts in housing, healthcare or education.

As Marxists, we do not just live in the realm of ideas and theory, but we put our theory into practice. The challenge is to find a way to link these struggles together, overcoming the division between public and private, between providers and users, and between the various unions. Those struggles listed above are inspiring but all are isolated to a degree.

Within the different struggles, Workers Power has argued for local committees of action to unite activists at a community level. The Vestas solidarity committees, which attracted workers from many different unions, community and green activists, and

socialist organisations, were an encouraging step in this direction. But we need a more permanent form of organisation that goes beyond the limited scope of one struggle, one strike or one issue – committees of action that can be mobilised to fight on a number of fronts at the same time.

Such committees can react quickly to events, overcome divisions between workers in different unions, and also bring into struggle the unemployed who have been thrown out of work. They should also include users of public services; as the government and bosses try to lay the blame for deteriorating services at the feet of public sector workers, public opinion must be won to the struggle of these workers for quality services.

Unity from below

Britain has developed organs of class struggle like this in the past. During the 1926 General Strike, councils of action were built by the trades councils in each town and city – all working class political, industrial, co-operative and unemployed organisations were represented, and, importantly, women were also heavily involved. They counteracted the “poisonous and pernicious propaganda” of the government and the employers’ organisations and even took control of food

By building committees of action in every town and city, more workers will feel able to take militant action and the level of the class struggle will rise

supplies, organised defence corps against scabs and the police and army, and directly controlled the strike locally.

In 1984, during the Great Miners’ Strike, a network of Miners’ Support Committees criss-crossed the country, providing vital solidarity like food supplies, Christmas presents for the miners’ children, speakers to factories to explain why the miners’ needed support, campaigning against police harassment of strikers and mobilising support for the picket lines.

But, say the sceptics, Britain today is not at that level of class struggle – the working class does not have the “confidence” or the fighting spirit to create committees of action. This is a self-defeating argument. In every area where there is struggle, strikers can put out the call for committees

of action and rally support from others. The committees will in turn help to boost confidence and raise fighting spirit.

Take the Vestas struggle, for example, where workers occupied a plant that made blades for wind power when bosses announced its closure. It was the solidarity movement – the climate camp and Campaign Against Climate Change – that encouraged the workers to occupy the plant. If solidarity committees could be built for Vestas, then why not for other struggles? By building committees of action in every town and city, more workers will feel able to take militant action and the general level of the class struggle will rise. But to do this, they must do more than simply raise donations, hold meetings and stand on picket lines, crucial though these acts are. They can start to become an alternative centre of power in society.

Alternative power

What do we mean by “an alternative centre of power”? Three things.

First, we know from bitter experience that the trade union leaders often sabotage our struggles, selling them short, calling off action, disuniting strikes. Committees of action can help thwart such treachery by building unity from below.

Second, committees of action can also lay the basis for a political alternative to Labour – a basis from which to build a new anti-capitalist party in Britain, one that will fight for the interests of the working class.

Committing to a new party is not a precondition to joining the local committees of action – many workers who still look to Labour or who are against all parties can be rallied to them. But, because these will be engaged in the local struggles, because they will be coming up against the government’s cuts and attacks, many will begin to realise that only a working class political party can secure general, society-wide victories for our class through fighting for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the formation of a workers’ government.

Finally, a government of the workers would be based not on an unelected civil service bureaucracy, unelected generals, unelected millionaires in the boardrooms, and 600-odd MPs who are elected every five years but are free to break their promises itself. It could be based on democratic organisations of working class delegates from below, workers’ councils with all delegates recallable by the workers who voted for them. The formation of committees for action is a step in that direction – a step towards an alternative centre of power for the whole of society.