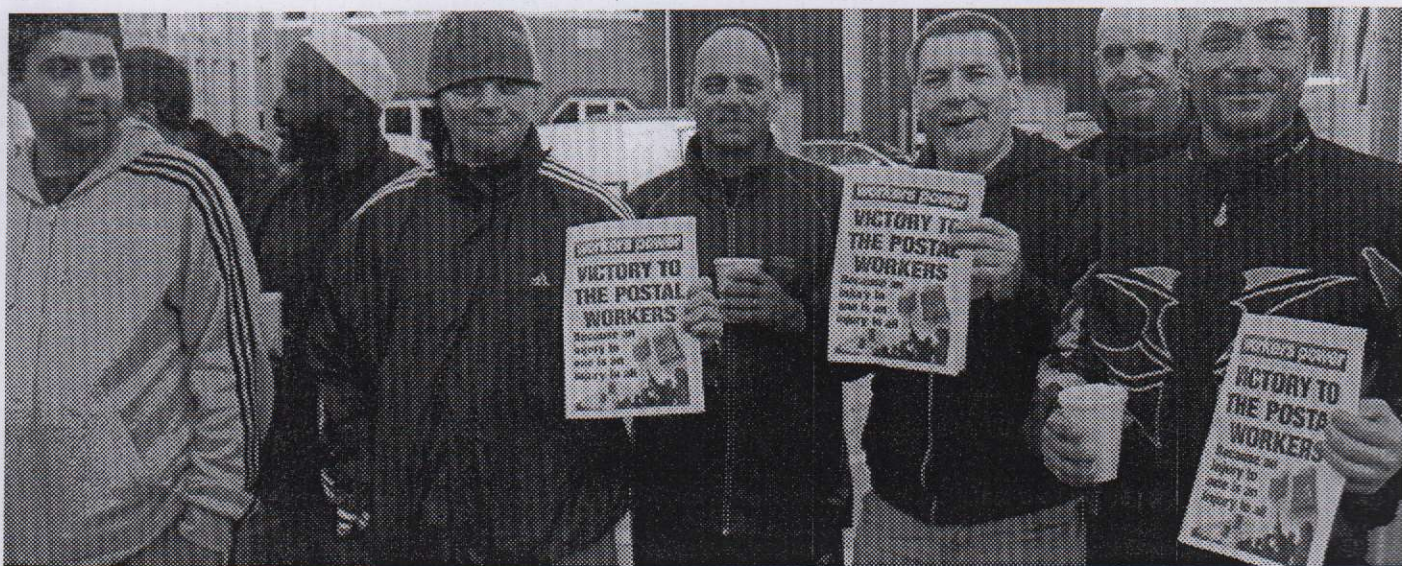


workers power

November 2009 ★ Price £1 / €1.50 Issue 440

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

POST, BINS, BUSES, COLLEGES



LINK UP THE STRIKES!

Inside:

- For an Antifascist Defence League!
- Victory to the postal strike!
- Pakistan moves into war crisis
- Special report: What is fascism?



League for the
Fifth International

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tories' plan to smash unions

The Conservative Party has outlined their intention to finish where Thatcher left off by smashing the CWU in the ongoing postal strike.

Backing the wholesale privatisation of Royal Mail, the Tories say that it would be easier to sell the company off if huge cuts are forced through, and the workforce de-unionised.

One of their proposals is to toughen Britain's anti-union laws by demanding a minimum turnout threshold for strike ballots, making the strictest anti-union laws in Europe even worse. The proposal would mean that even with a majority of ballots in favour of industrial action, strike action by unions could be made illegal if too few members send back their ballot papers.

The bolstering of the anti-union laws was originally proposed by London mayor Boris Johnson to stop strikes on the tube, but now other Tories are convinced that they could use such a law against other unions too.

David Cameron wants to make sure that workers don't get in the way of the enormous public sector cuts the Tories plan to make if they are elected into government in June. Unions need to respond with a clear message that they would react with a general strike if any such legislation were brought in by either Labour or the Tories.

Drugs adviser: sacked for truth

The sacking of Professor Nutt, the leader of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) by Alan Johnson has exposed the truth about government drugs policy - that it is based on ideological dogma rather than scientific fact.

Nutt was sacked after advising ministers that alcohol and tobacco could be more dangerous than ecstasy and cannabis. After receiving a letter from the Home Office informing him of his dismissal, Nutt told the BBC that it was the job of scientists to look at evidence and report findings - not to hunt for evidence to back up existing policies made in Whitehall.

The ACMD was originally set up in 1971 to ensure that drugs policy was "evidence based". However, scientists on the advisory council have had advice on drugs ignored repeatedly after being told by ministers that their advice "sent the wrong message".

The advisory council now looks set to rebel over Prof Nutt's dismissal, with two scientists already having resigned, and *The Times* suggesting that a meeting of the council could even lead to the all the others doing the same.

It's time drugs policy was based upon fact, and to start, we need an end to the criminality of users of ecstasy and cannabis.

More jobs to go in Birmingham

The UK's biggest local authority, Birmingham City Council, faces a £2.2 billion black hole in its finances. The council's Chief Executive, Stephen Hughes, used the occasion of a TV interview to announce that 800 jobs will have to go. He said "in the main those will be managed by natural wastage and redeployment of one form or another but there is a potential need to make some redundancies."

Tory Council leader Mike Whitby had previously made an announcement of 800 job losses but had not consulted staff. The cuts will be on top of 3,500 jobs to be axed over the next decade as part of the council's Business Transformation Programme. It also comes amid a pay and grading review in which many council workers are appealing against the loss of thousands of pounds in wages.

Unions predicted the job cuts in May. UNISON official Roger McKenzie questioned the claim that the cuts could be achieved through non-replacement rather than redundancies, describing this as 'a big worry for workers.'

Unions need to say in the recession's worst hit city - "No cuts or job losses!" They should call mass meetings of workers and organise strike action to defeat the plans right away.

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EDITORIAL

• Link up the strikes

• We need a new party!

Britain is still in recession – it's official. Gross Domestic Product fell by 0.4 per cent in the July-September quarter, making the contraction of the economy 5.5 per cent over the past 12 months. These figures make it the longest recession since quarterly figures began in 1955. The talk about "green shoots" of recovery proved to be little more than a confidence trick.

There are now nearly two and a half million unemployed, over 900,000 of them young people (16-24 yr olds) and a similar number of them women. The working class are paying the costs of the crisis whilst the big bankers are still awarding themselves gigantic bonuses.

Ordinary people are still angry at the injustice of it all. Many are fighting back in a wave of strikes and protests. Others, in a dangerous development, are looking for scapegoats: migrant workers and Muslims.

First let's look at the signs of hope. The RMT, the transport union, is threatening action on London Underground; First Group bus drivers are resisting a pay freeze and in Leeds bin workers Leeds bin workers have been on all out strike for eight-weeks.

British Airways staff are fighting planned cuts in cabin crews. Unite is balloting its 13,000 BA members for strike action and most importantly 121,000 postal workers are engaged in a bitter battle with Royal Mail management.

In towns and cities across the country support groups for the post workers are being set up. They have a vital job to do. If the CWU are isolated and defeated then it will be a massive setback for the entire union movement. For this reason we should invite into these groups all other sections involved in struggles. In this way we can really begin to link up the struggles.

People are angry and worried about their jobs. But it is not just the trade unions and socialists who are responding to this. The BNP is growing and through their related organisation the English

call for a new
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Defence League are tapping into the world of white youth. They are moving on from elections to the stage of taking to the streets.

The bitter truth is that the far right is ahead of the game when compared to the socialists in one crucial respect – they are building a party that is widely recognised and can use elections to intervene in parts of the country where unemployment, bad using and neglect by the Labour government and Labour councils makes many workers feel abandoned. In contrast the left has made a mess of building various electoral blocs or alliances, most notably the failed Respect – the Unity Coalition, and has no recognised, unified political party that can attract to it thousands of people sick of Labour and direct their anger in a positive direction, against the system of the big capitalists, not against foreigners and minorities.

A new working class party could quickly rally huge support from among workers fighting back. It could initiate a nationwide network of support groups for workers in struggle, fight for a workers' united front to smash the BNP and offer the goal of an alternative socialist society, bringing hope to those in confusion and despair because of Labour's betrayals and the horrific prospect of a return of the Tories.

Bob Crow of the RMT transport union and the Socialist Workers Party are planning conferences to discuss electoral alliances of the left in the coming election. But both claim that it is impossible to build a party before the general election. Naturally leftwing Labour MP John McDonnell and his Labour Representation Committee agree since they are putting all their hopes on reclaiming Labour after Brown's

defeat.

These are counsels of despair. The basis exists right now to create a new anticapitalist party many times larger than the BNP and with deep roots in the most militant sections of the working class. If this was not so then after twelve years of a Labour government that has cut, privatised, got us into two bloody wars of occupation, you might conclude that the working class will never learn.

But in fact there is no reason to draw such a conclusion. On the contrary with two unions (RMT and FBU) expelled or disaffiliated from Labour, and with London postal workers voting by more than 90 per cent to stop funding Labour, what is lacking is not the potential mass support and membership such a party but a left that has the vision and the courage to pose this task and take practical steps to make it happen.

What are these steps?

- Call a conference open to all representatives of working class organisations, both trade union and political, to antiracist and antifascist campaigners, and draw up a programme of action to make the capitalists pay for the crisis, including the key practical steps now to win the battles of today
- Carry this action programme into the battles against the bosses and the government - like the postal strike and others that will erupt in the months ahead
- Stand Anticapitalist Party candidates in the general election, selecting working class militants, drawn democratically from the different participating organisations, using this not just to win votes but to find thousands of new members and fighters
- Open a democratic and constructive debate on what should be the full programme of the party including the burning question of how to end capitalism – and in this debate Workers Power supporters will argue that we need to link the struggles of today to a fight for working class power and the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

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POST DISPUTE

Strike remains solid

The post strike is the most important dispute for many years but can the workers win? A **CWU rep** believes so – if they are ready to stay out until total victory

We're in a life-or-death battle to save the postal service. Many of us have already lost £1,000 or more in the strike and every postie has had to make sacrifices. But we know that, if we lose, our jobs won't be worth having, the service will rapidly go downhill and we will be privatised.

The real reason we are being picked on is so that the government hopes to come back and pick off more public services, attack other groups of workers, all in order to get back the money it gave to the banks. That's why every worker and union should support our strikes, come on our picket lines and, where possible, strike alongside us!



We are striking against so-called "modernisation" – cuts that impose unsafe workloads and threaten tens of thousands of jobs. Royal Mail bosses hope to smash the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) and open the road to privatisation, all with the support of the Labour government and its business minister Peter Mandelson (see box below).

We have risen to challenge this threat with a solid 76 per cent vote for action, and followed through

with solid strikes, mounting lively picket lines and piling up an impressive backlog of up to 70 million items, after the first two rounds.

Now we're ready for two more strikes – on Friday 6 and Monday 9 November – only this time, all out together, doubling the effectiveness. We are in a strong position and can win if we continue to step up the strikes, threatening all-out action if Royal Mail doesn't concede.

Royal Mail torpedo talks

Despite the CWU leaders offering to "compromise" and pressing for ACAS mediation, Royal Mail bosses have refused to budge and recruited thousands of scabs to do our work. This is why we are forced to escalate the strike – preferably make it indefinite, since this would overwhelm and defeat the strike breaking operation.

In a recent interview its Chief Executive Adam Crozier told the union to "shut up" and get back

Why we are on strike

The failure to shift Royal Mail and the fact that the talks are kept secret from the workers, raise the question: what are the goals of the strike?

The CWU leadership is promising to guarantee a three-month strike ban in exchange for national talks over modernisation, accepting that there will be job losses, and local negotiations over cuts to jobs and working conditions imposed since the spring.

Those CWU members and reps, who have been victimised for taking an active role in the strike, would remain outside the door.

In their rush to appear "reasonable", our leaders keep forgetting the CWU's policy, too. Our conference has an alternative to job

"London will not go back till we have a deal we're happy with"

losses from walk sorting machinery and other changes to delivery practices: share out the work with no loss of pay, reducing the working week of 35 hours. But this has been dropped in the endless secret talks since September.

The strike should also deal with

the £10 billion pension deficit. The government created this "black hole" by not paying in its contributions for 13 years, milking the company dry. Yet Labour says it will not underwrite the pension unless it can sell off part of the company!

Peter Mandelson and Gordon Brown have shown that they are only willing to nationalise the losses if they can privatise the profits that will then flow (£321 million last year).

We should aim to crush both threats in this strike by demanding the government pays back all the money it stole from our pension fund – which it can do if it has the guts to tax the big corporations and the super-rich – and abandons its privatisation proposals.

Solidarity Committees

Solidarity committees have sprung up around the country in support of the postal workers.

For meetings look at redpostie.com. If yours is not listed, please phone or e-mail the details to us. Here are two key ones in London

- NSSS meeting to coordinate action across London, 7pm Weds 11 November, Exmouth Arms, 1 Starcross St, London, NW1 2HR
- London CWU and London RMT call meeting open to all union reps and delegates 7pm Monday 16 November Indian YMCA

time to up the fight

to work, stating, "There can be no half-way-house on modernisation." Managing Director Mark Higson torpedoed a week of talks in mid-October saying, "There is no going back on change," refusing to discuss this year's cuts.

Meanwhile a leaked Royal Mail document declared the company's intention to impose the cuts "with or without the union". The document stated that the company had secured "shareholder support for implementation of change without agreement", confirming that the Labour government stands fully behind the company's plans to smash the union.

This has been underlined by the company setting up a mass scabbing operation, hiring 30,000 agency workers and organising them in secret mail centres that bypass the normal network – blatantly breaking the law against agency staff being used to undermine strikes.

As a result of this stonewalling and under pressure from its members, the CWU has been forced to escalate the struggle and declare two days of strikes with all 121,000 postal workers out together, rather than the usual rolling strikes where different sections come out on different days.

Stopping the scabs at Dartford

Unison activist Mark Booth went to talk to and leaflet agency staff

I went to the Dartford scab mail centre in Kent with the Right to Work campaign to try and convince agency workers not to scab on the post strike. About 20 of us arrived at 5:20am and began leafletting. We explained we were there in solidarity with postal workers.

We tried to talk to everyone; around just under half took a leaflet. Some scabs were hostile. Many were desperate for work. One told an ITV reporter that he had a wife and kid to feed and needed to work. When confronted with the argument that was what postal workers would say, he said he didn't care, he had to look after his family.

Several listened to the arguments,

"Finally, finally, we're all out together!"

Rep from Leeds sums up the national strike

At the same time, CWU leaders Billy Hayes and Dave Ward have called for emergency negotiations, saying, "We're not going to let this drag on over Christmas. The next 48 hours are crucial." So what are the next steps for the strike?

It is right to step up our action and all come out together; it is the only way to avoid sorting the backlog and undermining our own sacrifices. But this needs to be speeded up, up to an all-out strike as quickly as possible to flood the system with backlogged mail and bring Royal Mail bosses to their knees.

Rank and file control

But Billy Hayes and his leadership team are clearly unwilling to take these steps. The Guardian claims that last month's secret negotiations only produced a document "full of vague promises of further talks and reviews but few specifics". Only the intervention of the postal executive prevented the strikes

being called off by insisting the agreement cover "pensions; Royal Mail regulation; a ban on more temporary staff being taken on by the company; and a demand that striking workers would be allowed to claim overtime to help clear the backlog of letters" (The Guardian).

Even worse, Royal Mail has now called on the CWU to change its rules so that area and workplace reps are not to have to be elected every year. Why? Because it makes them too responsive to their members' needs!

What better argument could there be for strike committees, made up of elected and recallable delegates, to run the strike and staff the talks at every level? Only rank and file control can ensure that Hayes and his deputy Dave Ward are not pressured into calling off strikes or accepting deals that fail to deal fully with our concerns.

Any compromise at this stage would simply allow Royal Mail to clear the backlog and get over the Christmas rush, before coming back for us again – just like they did after the 2007 strike. There is no need for such panic. If we stick to our guns, we can blow Crozier and Mandelson away – and make the Tories think twice before trying to take us on again.

Break with Labour

The pension crisis and the leaked document that shows government pulling Royal Mail's strings in this dispute, make a mockery of £7 million donated to Labour by the CWU since 2001. It is time Labour-loyal CWU leaders, like Billy Hayes, put their union card firmly before their Labour membership card.

When asked in a ballot what they thought about handing over money to the party that is attacking them, 98 per cent of London postal work-

"The CWU leaders tell us too stay in Labour because we have an ear in there, well it must be deaf".

ers voted to disaffiliate from Labour. Martin Walsh, London CWU divisional rep, recently told a solidarity meeting that the next step is to roll out the ballot nationally.

Good. Ditch Labour. But workers need a political party of their own to make the bosses pay for their crisis. That's why the CWU should also put its weight behind the call for a new anticapitalist party.

The RMT's conference on working class political representation on 7 November at the Camden Centre in Bidborough St, London WC1 provides a timely opportunity to discuss this further.

Read Red Postie blog

Read redpostie.com for the latest news and views of the strike. This is a blog that is 100 per cent on postal workers side

redpostie.com

We also found loads of tags showing where the mail was diverted from: London, Belfast, Edinburgh... and international mail from Australia, Poland, Hong Kong. I grabbed some tags to show postal workers on picket lines and at solidarity meetings.

The workforce was very mixed: with a minority of migrants; lots of young white men and women, a few who looked like students.

As more and more scabs are recruited, this kind of solidarity work must be stepped up. It can boost strikers' morale and damage Royal Mail's scab operation.

• See back page on dealing with scab workers

"I have to feed my wife and children"

Scab worker

"So do striking postal workers"

Posties on strike

and one discussed possible action, which is a great development if we can follow through on it.

We found a letter in one of the rubbish bags that had obviously been binned because it had no post-code, showing casualised labour means slipshod work.

WORKPLACE

Bin strike now in hard third month

Leeds refuse and street clean workers have been on indefinite strike for eight weeks and are showing no sign of going back to work until they have won. Leeds City Council has now offered them two deals that favour some workers but not others. Both have been rejected by a huge majority of the strikers.

The latest offer was said by the council to be their "final and best" but it included pay cuts of up to £994 and a more than 15 per cent hike in workload for bin workers, which the scab bin crews have proved is impossible by failing to achieve the current productivity rate of the crews.

The workers look unlikely to accept a divide-rule-deal and the strength of feeling amongst the pickets and their union representatives suggests that Unison and GMB would risk a lot by recommending such a deal to them. The most immediate danger to the strike is, instead, the scab operation, which the council is now looking to intensify.

Fifteen of the striker's jobs have now been advertised by the council, on top of the hundreds of scab workers already employed on temporary contracts to "clear the backlog" of unemptied bins. There's still

a lot of rubbish piling up over the city leading to health warnings but most households in the city have had their bins emptied and the city centre has been regularly cleaned by the scabs.

This undermining of the strike will certainly lengthen the dispute and has the potential to defeat the workers. The more that temp workers are brought in the more proficient they will become rendering the strike ineffective. It's this threat that makes the scab labour one of the most pressing issues and one that must be tackled head on.

Union leaders have consistently downplayed the scab operation believing they will never become as efficient as the permanent workforce. It's not just short-sightedness that's given rise to this idea but the unions' fear of they would have to do to defend their strike.

Some of the temp workers were employed by the council before the strike began and have continued with their jobs, crossing the picket lines and undermining their colleagues. However, Unison and GMB made no attempt to win these workers to taking action alongside the permanent workers – which could have been achieved by adding the demand for permanent contacts for the temps to the reasons

for the strike. This demand could still be raised by the unions and would make a massive difference to the strike.

Stop the scabs

In a situation where unemployment has risen to almost 2.5 million, there will always be people willing to cross picket lines and screw over other workers to make a living. The only way to deal with these people is to physically prevent them from undermining the strike.

There are mass pickets in Leeds, like in Crossgates, where over 100 workers regularly congregate. With these numbers it would be possible to stop scabs entering the depots and also stop trucks from leaving. The union has enough resources to organise flying pickets where other sites are being used

as part of the scab operation.

Such action breaks the anti-union laws which the trade union leaders are loath to do, even if it's the only way to win a strike. Many workers have broken the anti-union laws recently, most famously the unofficial walkouts at the Lindsey Oil Refinery, and faced no legal repercussions but these laws are maintained by the Labour government and union leaders don't want to take action that would damage their relationship with Brown and Co.

The only way to strike effectively is to defend our democratically organised action by stopping the scabs. If that means breaking these laws then so be it. If enough of us do it then it'll be made clear to Labour that these laws aren't worth the paper they're written on.



Labour prepares to axe civil servants

By Rebecca, PCS rep

The Labour government is determined to shred the civil service before it has to call a general election. It believes government workers are a safe and easy target, as Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling look for cuts to pay for the £1.3 trillion they gave to the banks.

Despite the media misrepresenting them as faceless bureaucrats, it is underpaid, largely women workers, not highly paid mandarins, who stand to lose their livelihoods. Their jobs are not unnecessary, but to provide valuable public services: why else would they be employed in the first place?

The most dramatic cuts so far announced are in the Land Reg-

istry, where 1,400 jobs – a quarter of the total – are threatened with the chop or privatisation. At least five offices are set to close. And management claim this is just phase one of the restructuring!

At the passport service, 44 jobs will go if 10 interview offices are shut, while 5,000 works and pensions staff will be transferred to "contact centres", glorified call centres. Border Agency officers have voted by 97 per cent to strike against a £500 a month cut in their overnight allowances.

The best chance civil servants have of halting these and many other attacks is to strike together. And they have a chance to do this. The government has ominously given notice that it wants to tear up the compensation scheme for

workers who lose their jobs. A civil servant with 25 years experience would, under the new proposals, lose over £50,000 on being made compulsorily redundant.

Not only is this a direct rip-off, it would encourage departments to cut even more jobs, as well as making parts of the service more attractive to privatisers, who could slash jobs on the cheap.

As the consultation period for this change draws to a close, PCS activists, branches and groups should flood the union's headquarters with demands for a strike ballot to defend their conditions.

Unfortunately, it is rumoured that some on the NEC would settle for a deal that closed the scheme for new staff, while existing work-

ers continued to enjoy better conditions – much like they did three years ago with the pension scheme. As Rebecca Allen, a PCS rep, told Workers Power:

"PCS should demand that redundancy pay remains the same for all staff and take strike action if the government ignores us. If we sell out new staff then are they really going to want to join the union? The whole idea goes against everything that trade unions should stand for."

Exactly. And instead of stringing out the dispute with one-day strikes months apart, this time the union could call strikes that create a backlog, like in the post, and step them up to an all-out stoppage if the government refuses to budge.

Bus workers on strike at First

By Bernie McAdam

Bus drivers at First, Britain's biggest bus operator, have been on strike in Bolton, Bury, Wigan and Essex against a pay freeze the company has imposed for this year. London is the next area to be balloted for action.

First are offering 3 per cent at some depots for next year but are using the recession as an excuse for no rise this year. Steve Linger, Unite regional organiser in Essex, said: "First Group made millions of pounds in profit this year despite the recession, yet are refusing to play fair by the very employees who help deliver these profits." Indeed First made record profits of £134 million!

Bus drivers in the North West have struck every Monday since early September and Essex drivers



Bus drivers in Bolton are on strike

have been out for two days. South Yorkshire strikes were suspended and workers voted to accept the 3 per cent offer.

Pickets have been in action and successfully thwarted a scab bus in Bolton. There is a need now to co-ordinate and spread the action across the country, in particular to London, to prevent more individual areas like South Yorkshire deciding alone to accept a deal.

In another dispute with First, Sheffield bus drivers have been on strike for four days against management bullying. Unite have also announced a further three days of action in November. Martin Mayer, Unite branch secretary, said: "Too many drivers have been disciplined unnecessarily with final warnings and dismissals being a far too common occurrence."

Tube workers unite to reject pay cut

Thousands of workers on the London Underground are balloting for strike action in their campaign to reverse a two year real pay cut. Unite and Rail Maritime and Transport union members are incensed that they have been offered just 1.5 per cent this year and the RPI rate of interest plus 0.5 per cent next year, while a tube boss has awarded himself a £100,000 bonus. Drivers' union Aslef has also rejected the deal.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said, "We are looking for a pay offer that matches up to deals elsewhere in our industry and which reflects the real costs of living and working in an expensive city like London." Exactly. The pay offer is in fact a pay cut.

Tube Lines – the private consortium that runs half the underground infrastructure – certainly understands the need to reward some of its staff. The company chief executive Terry Morgan is to get a £100,000 bonus, taking his annual salary to over half a million – despite failing to reach 27 of its 39 performance targets. The company made £41.6 million profit from the £360 million it receives from the taxpayer for operating the lines.

Not only do these figures demol-

ish the lie that Labour's Public Private Partnership scheme to privatise the tube would deliver value for money, but also that the bosses do not have the cash to cough up.

Likewise, London Mayor Boris Johnson has recently announced

"All public sector workers are under attack – tube, post, you name it. The time has come to support each other in our actions"

Andy Littlechild, RMT tube rep

increases of 4 per cent on tube fares and 12.7 per cent on the buses – itself a scandalous attack on the capital's workers – but wants to spend none of this on maintaining transport workers' incomes.

Strike now

Activists in Unite and RMT should campaign together for a massive

"Yes" vote and a programme of sharply escalating strike action. By forming cross-union strike committees and running a joint campaign, it will be harder for management to divide the workforce, for example, by offering some grades more money.

It will also help force Aslef's hands; the drivers' leaders actually encouraged their members to cross RMT picket lines during the last tube strike in June, publicly denouncing their strike. Now that Aslef members have rejected the deal, they must demand their union goes straight to a ballot and agrees to honour RMT and Unite picket lines.

The worst thing would be for

these two unions to hang back until Aslef is on board. Johnson is a union-buster. He wants the Tories to pass new legislation, in which unions would have to win an absolute majority of workers for strike action, meaning all those that did not or could not vote would be assumed to be against the action.

Aslef drivers ran trains on at least one line during the last strike. This time, RMT and Unite activists should step up the pressure to bring Aslef members out, against their rotten leaders if need be.

Only the bosses win when the union leaders divide our forces: time for all workers to strike together.



33% of young women experience bullying in the workplace

By Rachel Brooks

One in three young women experience bullying in the workplace, according to research by public sector union Unison. The survey found that workplace bullying was mostly determined by age, then gender, which means women under the age of 26 are more likely to face harassment in the workplace. Disturbingly, the majority of young women have been bullied by an older female in a position of seniority.

The most common bullying behaviours include: excessive work monitoring and criticism, isolation/exclusion, intimidation, unrealistic targets, public humiliation and insulting jokes, malicious rumours and withholding information to get the job done. Bullying can also be physical abuse. One 26-year old woman reported being hit with a ruler if she made a mistake: "A senior colleague would hit me with a ruler when I made

mistakes in my work. I did the same job as her, but was paid half as much, and put up with abuse on a daily basis."

A majority (73 per cent) believed that bullying was fuelled by increased work pressures during the recession and 40 per cent felt that bullies were tolerated in the environment created by the credit crunch. In a climate of job instability, it is easier for workplace bullies to get away with their actions as young women feel powerless to challenge their superiors since they could well face the dole queue.

And young women are not getting support from management to stop bullying. Almost 60% say they know the bully has bullied before; of those who knew the bully had done it before, 68% believe management knew about this previous situation. Ninety per cent believe that bullies can get away with it.

Many women are afraid of taking action because they think that the



situation could get worse or that they could be labelled a troublemaker, so they try to look for another job or suffer in silence. Of those harassed, 37% believed they had to accept bullying as part of the job.

The results of the survey are disturbing but not shocking. In a work

culture where we are already alienated, overworked, underpaid, stressed and exhausted and not to mention the climate of fear surrounding job security, it is not surprising that young women are victims of bullying at work.

But it is unacceptable - bullied women suffer from anger, mental stress, depression, lowered confidence and insomnia. It must be stopped and can be through collective action. If you feel bullied at work:

- Join a union.
- Raise the issue at a workplace union meeting or at the branch level.
- Even if the union is not recognised in your workplace, it can give you legal advice and support, as well as provide leaflets, feature articles and posters.
- Make contact with other workers who may also be bullied and encourage them to join the union to increase your collective strength.

Two million children robbed of civil rights in fingerprinting scandal

By John Bowman

School students are being pressured into handing over their fingerprints to register for class, borrow library books or even obtain school meals in thousands of schools across the UK. The children's biometric data is being collected without them or their parents being given adequate explanation of how it is stored and used. This data collection has been ongoing for several years and has over 5,000 schools participating, covering two million school students.

Although paying for lunch with a fingerprint might sound like something out of a sci-fi film, these dystopian visions of the future are increasingly becoming a reality in Big Brother Britain as new technology is used to take our civil liberties away.

One of the fingerprint identification companies, Vericool, offers "cashless catering" services, which

use the students' biometric data to link to a meal account topped up online by parents. The Vericool website says: "At the point of payment the student places their finger on the fingertip scanner and, once successfully verified by the Catering Point of Sale Operator, their account is debited... cashless catering is a clear winner for both the student and the school."

Vericool also offer a number of anti-truancy and registration systems using the same biometric technology for primary school age up to sixth-form students. But while these £20,000 systems might be a "clear winner" for shareholders, they are a clear loser for civil liberties, data protection and human rights.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and schools, as well as the companies delivering the systems, claim that they enhance efficiency and speed of registration, canteen queuing,

library administration and, in the case of school meals, reduce bullying of those entitled to free meals and lunch money theft.

But campaigners, such as LeaveThemKidsAlone.com, say that there is little or no evidence of this. Instead, biometric systems in schools hold highly sensitive data without good reason. Against claims that the fingerprint "templates" (digital numbers) collected by the systems prevent actual fingerprints from being reconstructed, campaigners point out that this unfairly exempts the collection of fingerprint data from being categorised as "sensitive" under the Data Protection Act.

In fact the police collect the same "templates" along with ink fingerprints on criminal databases. Often stored on teachers' laptops and Local Education Authorities' computer systems, as well as the biometric firms systems themselves,

information security is an issue, putting identity theft on the agenda early in life.

More worryingly still, the rapidly expanding biometric market is now big business and with some appallingly reactionary usages. Vericool is owned by Anteon, the US company which trained interrogators in torture methods used at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons. Many parents would be outraged to discover that school funding is being spent with companies guilty of torture.

After continued exposure of serious data loss from Inland Revenue and Natwest in 2008, and with the police collecting ever more data on protesters and political activists, biometric systems should be kicked out of schools by students, staff, unions and parents. We need to build a fighting movement to claw back our liberties and challenge the state that targets them.

Who's watching the police?

By Joy Macready

The fact that the police collect personal details and photographs of thousands of activists who attend political meetings and protests comes as no surprise to those of us who have watched the police ramp up their surveillance equipment over the past decade and been subject to the Forward Intelligence Teams' (FIT) intruding cameras on demonstrations.

What is shocking is the covert apparatus constructed to monitor people that have committed no crime, as well as the illegal storage and usage of this data.

Anyone who feels strongly about climate change or the war in Afghanistan is now liable to be labelled a "domestic extremist" and entered on the database. This term has no legal basis. It was coined by police targeting animal rights groups in the early part of this decade but is now used to justify the scrutiny of any dissenting individual or group.

Three units given the task of monitoring political activists are run by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The triumvirate includes the National



Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU), which operates a giant database of political activists. NPOIU works in tandem with two other little-known ACPO branches: the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (NETCU), which advises thousands of companies on how to manage political campaigns; and the National Domestic Extremism Team, which pools intelligence gathered by investigations into protesters across the country. These units lack any statutory basis or accountability.

NETCU helps police forces, companies, universities and other bodies that are on the receiving end of protest campaigns. The unit passes information to thousands of companies in aviation, energy, research, farming and retail and its head, Superintendent Steve Pearl, has testified for a number of firms which have obtained injunctions against protesters.

There also is evidence that police forces supplying the data are not holding the information lawfully. In May, the Court of Appeal found

against the Metropolitan Police in a landmark ruling over the retention of photographs on a database run by its public order unit, CO11.

Protesting is not illegal – yet

The fact that this database exists and the personal details of activists are being shared with big business to further their corporate agenda is a direct threat to our civil liberties.

A spokesman for ACPO said people on the database "should not be worried", adding that "protesting is not a criminal offence but there is occasionally a line that is crossed when people commit offences."

So according to ACPO, every protestor is a potential criminal – or domestic extremist – and therefore everyone becomes a legitimate target for police surveillance. The remit becomes infinite, assisted by advances in technology.

The right of free protest in the UK now hangs in the balance – as the very expression of opinion and attendance at meetings is enough for an individual to be categorised as an extremist enemy of society. The police evidently know heavy surveillance will intimidate and deter some people from protesting.

So is this democracy – or a police state?

Armed police - off our streets

By Joy Macready

Plans to allow officers from the Met's Specialist Firearm Command CO19 to patrol estates and streets with semi-automatic weapons were met with a huge outcry from local communities. The Met commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson was forced onto the defensive, saying that the decision had been a "misjudgment" made without his knowledge. His deputy Tim Godwin, Mayor Boris Johnson, and the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) also denied any knowledge of the pilots.

This announcement followed eight pilot operations conducting "pro-active" sweeps of housing estates in five London boroughs, including Tottenham, Brixton and Haringey, which turned up three firearms. Pilots have been taking

place since June because of rising gun crime. While national crime figures recorded a 5 per cent drop in firearms offences, and gun crime is down by as much as 27 per cent on Merseyside, London has experienced a 17 per cent rise of offences in the 12 months to September.

On average, armed officers undertake about 40 operations every week, although these are carried out in reaction to an immediate threat. Guns are only carried routinely on patrols at perceived terrorist targets such as Heathrow.

For many working class, poor and ethnic minority communities, armed police patrolling the neighbourhood is a source of fear and repression, not security. It was CO19 members that shot dead Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube station after mistaking him for a sui-

cide bomber in 2005.

Other "mistaken" shootings by police include Harry Stanley, a Scottish painter and decorator, who was fatally shot by police for carrying a table leg in a plastic bag. In 2001, Derek Bennett, a psychiatric patient, was shot dead by a police marksman in Brixton for brandishing an imitation gun cigarette lighter and in 2006, Abdul Kahar was shot in the shoulder by police raiding his home in East London, but was later released without charge. No officer has been prosecuted in connection with these shootings.

Additionally, many Black and Asian youth have been on the receiving end of police racism, including stop and search and harassment. Ministry of Justice figures show that stop and searches under the controversial section 44 of the counter-terror legislation

soared from 37,197 in 2006-07 to 117,278 in 2007-08. Even the official statistics confirm that black and Asian people were disproportionately targeted. The number of black people stopped under these powers rose by 322%, compared with an increase of 277% for Asian and 185% for white people.

Putting armed police in our communities is a sure way to foster an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. To really tackle crime, we need self-defence bodies formed from within working class communities; but more importantly we need to address the underlying factors like poverty and alienation that drive some people to crime. There is desperate need for a massive programme of public investment in new housing and infrastructure that is developed with the active involvement of local communities.

How can the BNP and EDL be defeated?

The rise of the BNP and the mobilisations of the English Defence League has put anti-fascism to the fore of working class politics. Here **John Bowman** reports on the failures of the UAF in Leeds and Manchester, while **Simon Hardy** looks at the debate over the BNP appearing on *Question Time*. We also outline the strategy we need to confront and defeat the fascist threat

UAF AND LEEDS ANTI-EDL RALLY

On Saturday 31 October the fascist English Defence League held another racist rally against Muslims and later hundreds of EDL supporters attacking people in the gay district of Leeds. They did so despite more than 1,000 anti-fascists holding a rally nearby – most of whom wanted to march against the EDL and stop their rally. So, what went wrong?

Community leaders discouraged youth from joining the anti-fascist demonstration. A facebook group was set up called “DO NOT GO TO THE EDL DEMO TOMORROW – nothing but blood will be shed!” Some Asian youth on the demonstration told Workers Power that the mosques had organised a trip to Alton Towers theme park to keep young people away. “Our community is under attack and our leaders are telling us not to defend ourselves,” one young protester said. Initially, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) lobbied for the police to ban the Leeds EDL march. In the past, the police have used bans against the fascists to stop antiracist marches. The call sparked debates in the local anti-fascist movement. Many comrades, including SWP members, correctly identified the problems with the tactic, because it fosters illusions in the idea the state can stop the rise of the fascist menace.

Any illusion in the “anti-fascist” role of the police should have been quickly dispelled on the demonstration.

Police used force to prevent two large feeder marches reaching the EDL and pushed them into a pen where a Unite Against Fascism rally was occurring. The police crushed several antifascists in the process and confiscated flags and placards. They were clearly going to defend the EDL march and rally at all costs.

Bin strike foe on platform

Principally to blame for failing to confront the EDL were the UAF stewards and in particular SWP member and leading UAF organiser, Weyman Bennett.

Instead of confronting the EDL or trying to break through police lines, demonstrators were subjected to a series of speakers. The worst was when a Liberal Democrat councillor was invited to speak. The Liberals are running the city council with the Tories and both parties are united in trying to smash the bin workers who have been on strike for two months.

REVOLUTION and Workers Power members shouted, “support striking workers!” with many others joining in. Incredibly, SWP member and UAF steward Hanif Leylabi retorted angrily, “You don’t have to

be in favour of strikes to be against fascism!”

In one line Leylabi had summed up the bankruptcy of the UAF strategy. Any refuse worker who attended the rally would have been rightly angry that this councillor was speaking – and most probably become disillusioned with anti-fascism and the left.

Instead of developing a militant, class struggle movement that can link the fight against the far right to the battles to defeat attacks on the working class, UAF and Leylabi ally with the very politicians attacking our jobs, pay and conditions; creating the conditions for why fascism grows.

Militant challenge

Younger SWP members were becoming openly more ashamed and

embarrassed of the UAF leadership as the day went on. Soon afterwards of “We want to march” and another by Bennett other stewards. Bennett was broken and several thousand protesters, including many SWP and REVOLUTION members, stepped towards the EDL rally.

Police formed lines and laid charges against the break-out. When numbers weren’t sufficient to clear the police, the break-out showed there was a will to challenge the EDL.

As protesters went back to the pen, Bennett was heckled when he welcomed them back. The marcher shouted at him: “Where were you?”

There was more frustration as speeches continued. There were more chants to march on the EDL and heckles of rally organisers’ failure to lead action. This eventually led Bennett to ask for a show of hands on who wanted to demonstrate. The overwhelming majority did and formed at the edge of the pen. But police refused protesters’ exit.

Then, UAF stewards worked with the police to push them back. Some Asian youth wearing yellow UAF jackets threw them off in disgust when they saw this take place.

UAF organisers planned to march later on with police permission, presumably after the EDL had left the city. But it was clear to most people that an opportunity to confront the EDL had been missed. News came later that groups of EDL thugs had broken off from their rally and were threatening Halloween partygoers in the Leeds gay district.

After the rally, many activists agreed that the Leeds EDL demonstration showed decisively that we must form an Antifascist Defence League that is capable of taking on and defeating the EDL menace. But to do that we must abandon the bankrupt UAF strategy.

LESSONS OF MANCHESTER EDL PROTEST

The EDL held a rally in central Manchester on 10 October. The mistakes made there should have provided lessons for Leeds.

Before the march, the Manchester Unite Against Fascism group called for the police to ban the demonstration.

The Muslim community leaders set out to demobilise Asian youth, with chain text and email messages warning young Muslims to stay away from the city centre.

Haleema, a school student who attended the demonstration, told Workers Power “The police even spoke to the imams and were allowed to hold slide

shows at the Mosques.

On the day, The UAF held a rally with speakers.

About 60 EDL hooligans spilled out of the nearby Weatherspoons pub, jeering and holding up nationalist banners. As they started to march, many people rushed over to confront the EDL

Rather than provide leadership, UAF continued the rally to move attention away from the hundreds of activists, now bolstered by a few local Asian youth trying to get past police towards the EDL.

Again the UAF failed to provide leadership to the militant anti-fascists. Another missed opportunity.

THE BBC AND LIBERAL ANTI-FASCISM

The British National Party is a virulently racist party, with connections to fascist movements across the world. It has a hardened core of Nazis in its leadership, and a record of violence against Black and Asian people.

So the BBC's decision to invite the BNP leader, Nick Griffin, onto its flagship political programme *Question Time* was extremely controversial.

The BBC argued that it was in the public interest to allow Griffin to speak because the party had won two seats in the Euro elections and their politics had to be open to scrutiny.

Eight million people tuned into the BBC to watch this fascist argue with panellists Labour's justice secretary Jack Straw, liberal democrat Chris Huhne, Conservative Baroness Sayeeda Warsi and playwright Bonnie Greer.

At the end of the debate on *Question Time*, Jack Straw said that it was a "huge defeat" for the BNP. The BBC maintained that this was multicultural liberalism in action and that the BNP was shown to be a fringe party with crazy racist ideas.

But the truth be told, *Question Time* was a success for the fascists.

The Daily Telegraph commissioned a poll after the BNP's appearance asking people if they would consider voting for them: 22 per

cent said they would "seriously consider" voting for them. The BNP claimed that the night of the programme had seen the most people asking to join in their history.

So, *Question Time* ended up promoting Griffin rather than exposing him. Why?

The three mainstream parties argued among themselves over "who was to blame" for immigration and who would do the most to keep migrants out. When Griffin called Islam a "wicked vicious faith", none of the politicians could mount a serious reply.

Remember, it was Jack Straw who said that he felt "uncomfortable" when a Muslim woman in a niqab came into his constituency office?

Liberalism or Marxism?

Liberals hold that there are certain universal rights that are inalienable to everyone, for instance freedom of speech. This includes expressing opinions that are upsetting or nauseous to others, such as Holocaust denial or racism. Instead, they argue, ideas must be argued against and exposed for their irrationality.

Marxists reject this. Not because we are against freedom of speech, in fact Marxists have been some of the most vocal proponents throughout modern history, but because for us freedoms are not abstract and universal but are linked to the needs



Up to a 1,000 people demonstrated at the BBC main centre in London against Griffin being on *Question Time*.

of the class struggle. We fight for the unemployed to have the right to work, but this doesn't mean we defend scabs' right to work for scabs crossing picket lines.

The BNP is a fascist party. Fascism is not just a nasty racism, or a particularly shocking set of ideas. It is a violent political ideology committed to mobilising a mass force against its opponents – migrants, Black people, Asians, as well as the working class movement – and ultimately to destroy democracy once

in power.

Socialists therefore do not support their right to freedom of speech, since it gives them the freedom to organise for the imposition of their political programme: the suppression of the left, banning of workers' organisations and violent racism.

This is why Marxists oppose the liberal strategy and counterpose a militant working class fight against fascism based on a "no platform" policy, i.e. driving the fascists off the street by force.

HOW TO DEFEAT THE BNP AND EDL

The BNP and EDL are growing because of the economic crisis. The recession is throwing people out of work and into desperate situations. The political centre ground – the Liberals, Tories and Labour – all agree that there must be massive cuts in public services and years of austerity for the mass of workers. They are all moving to the right on these social issues, while also talking "tough" on issues like law and order and immigration.

The BNP and EDL meanwhile are appealing to people to join them by attacking migrants and "standing up for Britain" – with the mainstream parties also giving a nod and a wink to this right wing demagoguery and populism. The BNP present themselves as the only "consistently" anti-immigration

party, as they want to halt it completely.

At the same time, they sometimes use "left" sounding arguments – on *Question Time*, for example, Griffin slammed Straw and the Labour government for kowtowing to the big banks.

But no matter what the BNP say, they are not an anticapitalist party – they are wedded to British capitalism and defending profits, no matter what lies they might try and spread about being for "white working people".

These arguments do allow them to pose as anti-establishment radicals, but they are a reactionary party of class war.

We need to defend the working class movement and ethnic minorities from this growing fascist threat. Wherever the BNP and EDL

organise they should be denied a platform. This involves demonstrations, protests and workers taking action to prevent the fascists having a voice in the media, such as pulling the plug on TV and radio programmes or refusing to print stories that allow the fascists to spread their ideas. We also need to physically confront them where necessary. That is why we need an Anti-Fascist Defence League.

But we can't be seen to be defending the existing political order from the BNP – we must have a positive programme for radical change. Otherwise we end up like the UAF in Leeds, giving a platform to a councillor who is attacking the refuse workers in the city. We know there is a capitalist crisis, and that society polarises between left and

right in these conditions, but if there is no party of the left then we will be defenceless in the face of the rising fascist threat.

We must take steps towards a political alternative: an anticapitalist party, which can answer the lies of the BNP and EDL and put forward socialist solutions. Rather than target migrants, we will blame the banks, multinational and capitalists.

We will point out that the lack of housing is caused by refusing to tax the rich; that the bosses want to cut our health and welfare services and we need to fight back.

Such a party will be rooted in the trade unions and working class communities, fighting for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism rather than the BNP or EDL's fascist dream.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Copenhagen: no roadmap to a low-carbon destination

By Joy Macready

Next month's United Nations climate talks in Copenhagen – or COP15 – were supposed to be the 'great leap forward' for taking action on climate change. When talks broke down in Bali two years ago, with the US backing away from any binding emission reduction targets, the Copenhagen summit was hailed as the place where a deal would be done to replace the Kyoto Protocols, which expire in 2012.

Yet the UN has spent these past few weeks scaling back its expectations of reaching an agreement on a new treaty to slow global warming. Even UN climate convention executive secretary, Yvo de Boer, admits that it is now "unrealistic" to expect a treaty to be negotiated and agreed by the end of the year. This looks particularly likely after the recent talks in Bangkok, where disagreement over the new treaty's legally-binding aspects looks likely to derail any deal. Many developing nations have long accused western countries of wanting to make targets more flexible, which they justifiably fear will only allow these nationals extra "wriggle room" to dodge emission cuts.

Eyes on the big polluters

In June, the G8 and a number of large developing countries agreed that the average temperature rise since pre-industrial times should be limited to 2°C, but they still have no concrete roadmap as to how to make that happen. While, even if this is achieved, many scientists have pointed out the effects of even a 1 or 0.5-1°C rise could be devastating.

The biggest polluters China and the US, which each account for about 20 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas pollution from coal, natural gas and oil, have been making the right noises in the past few months, but without any real figures or plans to back up their rhetoric. China's president Hu Jintao said that it would curb its carbon emissions by a "notable mar-

COP15 Climate Summit

COP15, sponsored by such big industry names as IBM, DHL, Honda, Mercedes-Benz, Scandinavian Airlines, and Volvo, will attract 15,000 officials from 192 countries, including some heads of state. They intend to discuss:

- a treaty to follow the Kyoto protocol which expires in 2012;
- targets for industrialised nations to reduce carbon emissions;
- targets for poorer nations to limit greenhouse gases; and
- funding for developing countries to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effect.

gin" by 2020 from the 2005 level.

US president Barack Obama, on the other hand, is putting his weight behind the Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act (Boxer-Kerry bill), which passed through the House of Representatives in June by a tiny margin of 219-212. The bill was to enter the Senate in July but is facing heavy opposition by the oil industry, led by the American Petroleum Institute, whose intent is to bury the bill.

The EU, which is responsible for 14 per cent of the world's emissions, thinks the answer lies not in pushing harder for member states to reach their reduction targets, but in throwing money at the problem. The EU summit has agreed to pay 7 billion euro a year for three years to developing nations as part of a global climate deal – but the contributions are voluntary, meaning that they may not be made at all.

Gordon Brown, trying to paint himself as a climate champion, said

Europe is leading the way in "making these bold proposals". But, as many nations devastated by natural disasters discovered, aid pledges are one thing, actually getting the money is quite another matter. And during an economic downturn, where will the money come from?

Brown's government had the opportunity to show its commitment to shifting to a renewable energy source when the owners of the Vestas factory, the only one in the UK producing wind turbine blades, threatened to shut it down. The 600 workers facing redundancy led a militant fightback, occupying the factory not just for their jobs but for the environment. When faced with the workers' demand for nationalisation, Energy and Climate Secretary Ed Miliband just said "no".

The need for a plan

Needless to say, the 7 billion euro promised to combat climate change is a paltry sum compared to the £1.3

trillion that Brown threw down the black hole of the bank bailouts. But throwing money at the problem isn't going to work. What is needed is conscious restructuring – a planned shift away from carbon-intensive production and transport to a low-carbon society. This has to be done on an international scale with a level of political commitment that is completely lacking today.

Even the Committee on Climate Change, led by Lord Adair Turner, who is also chair of the Financial Services Authority, agrees this will not happen without a major change in policies – "which must entail a switch away from reliance on market forces to encourage investment in low-carbon technology".

There are organisations that argue that the global recession provides an opportunity to curb climate change and build a low-carbon future. The International Energy Agency (IEA) calculates that global greenhouse gas emissions will fall by 3 per cent this year – an increase on previous estimates.

During a recession, production levels – and therefore emissions – drop as factories shut down, trade drops and shipping decreases. But the recession also has a massive impact on the quality of people's lives as they are thrown on the dole and forced into poverty.

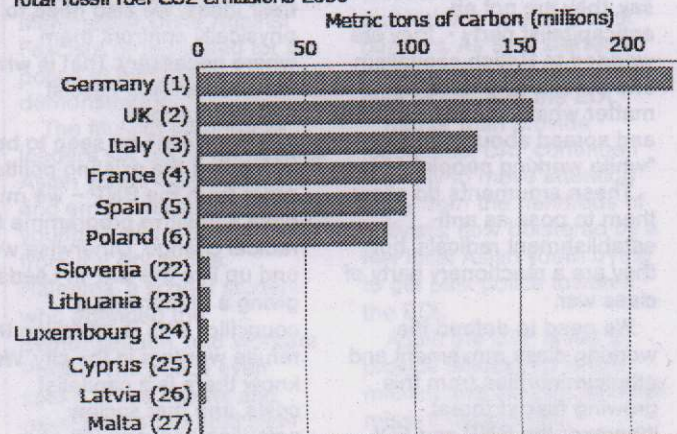
That's what so crucial about the socialist answer. There is after all a simple reason for two decades of climate talk failure: the near-universal refusal of world governments to do anything that might undermine the profits and vested interests of big capital.

And that's why socialists want to take profit out of the equation by fighting for the nationalisation of these corporate giants under workers control and taxing the rich to fund a massive expansion in renewable energy. But until we've got rid of the profit system once and for all, we will never be realise sustainable and equitable development – we need socialist, democratic planning to guarantee the lives of future generations.

• **DEMONSTRATION 5 DECEMBER**
Rally 12 noon at Speakers Corner, Hyde Park. March leaves Grosvenor Square at 1.00

European rankings

Total fossil fuel CO2 emissions 2006



Source: Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis

LIBERATION

Deadly homophobic violence on the rise

Recent months have seen an increase in the number of homophobic attacks across the country. *Alex Kelby* and *Jim Parker* argue for a militant campaign of resistance

Over the summer, a number of gay men were attacked coming out of London bars. In one incident, a 21-year old was left paralysed after being repeatedly stabbed outside a bar in Hackney. Then Ian Baynham, 62-year old civil servant, died as a result of a brutal attack in Trafalgar Square, central London.

Homophobic attacks in London have risen by 20 per cent according to the police, but lesbian and gay rights' group Stonewall says that most crimes are never reported. A Stonewall study last year found that one in five lesbians and gay men had experienced a homophobic hate incident in the previous three years. It also found, three-quarters of those attacked did not report the attack to the police. In fact, 70 per cent didn't tell anyone. Stonewall explained: "Respondents in our research didn't report incidents to the police because they didn't believe the police could or would do anything about them. So the number of people experiencing homophobic crime could well be far higher than crime figures show."

At the vigil held in memory of Ian Baynham, organiser Mark Healy said: "We need to unite against all forms of hate crime, stand together and say out loud that this is no longer acceptable."

And everyone nods yet the attacks continue. On 25 October, 22-year old James Parkes was attacked by a group of up to 20 people outside a gay bar in Stanley Street, Liverpool city centre, leaving him with multiple skull fractures and fractures to his eye socket and cheek bone.

Homophobia and the capitalist media

Homophobic violence is but an extreme expression of an ideology that is both widespread and constantly promoted in capitalist society. Many people may not have paid attention when BNP leader Nick Griffin said that he finds gays kissing "creepy" on *Question Time*, but far more are influenced by a mainstream publication of the capitalist media, such as the *Daily Mail*.

When Boyzone singer Stephen Gately died, *Daily Mail* journalist Jan Moir jumped on the chance to whip up homophobia. Gately's death, she said was "strange, lonely and troubling. Whatever the cause of death, it is not by any yardstick, a natural one."

In case we didn't get the point, she goes on to claim the "ooze" of a "dangerous lifestyle has seeped out for all to see", striking a blow to



Ian Baynham was murdered in Trafalgar Square by a gang of homophobic youths

the "happy-ever-after myth of civil partnerships".

The article provoked outrage with more than 25,000 people complaining to media watchdog, the Press Complaints Commission.

It is clear from all of this gay bashing, be it verbal or physical, that despite the legal reforms of the past decade, including an equality act outlawing discrimination on grounds of sexuality, homophobia is alive and thriving in some places.

Lesbian and gay resistance

Lesbian and gay people have fought back against attacks showing that it is possible to win victories through militant struggle. The Stonewall riots of June 1969 broke out after a police raid on a gay bar in New York. The police were carrying out one of their usual raids, but this time they met with resistance. Seven plain clothes detectives and one uniformed cop entered the bar and attempted to remove people from the bar and arrest them. A crowd of 2,000 gathered outside the bar, fed up with routine police raids they started to fight back. Despite police reinforcements, the riots continued into the next night.

Stonewall was a turning point in the gay rights movement. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people across the US began to organise. New publications were launched and groups created determined to show they'd had enough of being marginalised and oppressed.

LGBT people are still struggling for acceptance and equality today. However, it won't be won through parliamentary reform. Indeed, LGBT oppression isn't accidental, it is endemic to capitalist society.

Capitalism uses the family as a social unit for the reproduction and socialisation of labour power. Capitalism has developed "moral codes" to reinforce the family as an institution, providing the justification for the oppression of LGBT people. In this sense, although there are non-working class LGBT people, the struggle for LGBT liberation is a class question.

Socialists, of course, defend everyone against homophobia. This includes countering it when it is in the media or wider society and having joint defence committees between LGBT and workers to defend themselves against physical assault.

But working class LGBT people do not have the same material interests as those of the middle or upper class, who can find themselves a comfortable niche within capitalist society.

Working class LGBT people have a material interest in fighting to overthrow the capitalist system that underpins their oppression. This is why we oppose the call for "an autonomous" or cross-class movement, arguing instead for a working class LGBT liberation movement, a part of our overall struggle against oppression and exploitation.

• **Forward to socialism and LGBT liberation!**

THE LEFT DEBATES ITS FUTURE

Why you should back a new anticapitalist party

1 Millions of people can see Labour doesn't represent them

2 Without a left alternative the fascist BNP will grow into a strong force

3 A crisis of capitalism needs an anticapitalist solution

4 We need a fighting party, building resistance from below

Let's go for it!

“ Standing on an antiprivatisation platform in a recent council by-election I received nearly 9 per cent of the vote in a rock-solid Tory ward - more than either the Lib Dems or Greens who were forced into 4th and 5th place. In the wake of banking scandals, the haemorrhage of jobs, attacks on posties and relentless privatisations, such as our local Tyne and Wear Metro Rail System, anticapitalism has entered the mainstream. An anticapitalist party that would bring the socialist tendencies under the same umbrella as the defiant unions and community struggles? Lets go for it! ”

**PETER BURNETT, ANTI-PRIVATISATION CANDIDATE
TYNE AND WEAR**

Labour came to power in 1997 promising that “things can only get better”. But in power they have continued the same policies of Thatcher and the Tories. Now they threaten an avalanche of cuts in education and healthcare to pay for their £1.5 trillion bail out of the rich bankers. Some people have argued that we need to keep supporting Labour as a “lesser evil” to the Tories. But all the three main parties share exactly the same policies. Even the Liberal Democrats, who have on occasion posed to the left of Labour, have called for “savage cuts”. If we are going to defeat these attacks, we need a party of our own

At the European elections the fascist British National Party (BNP) won nearly a million votes. They are feeding off the despair with Labour that millions of people feel. The housing crisis, mass unemployment and grinding poverty all help create conditions where the BNP can grow. Instead of blaming the capitalist system for these terrible conditions, they blame asylum seekers, Muslims, Black and Asian people and offer only the despair of racism and fascism. Unfortunately, as people look away from the main parties, some might see the BNP as a radical alternative. The sad fact is that the far right have had a united

party for a decade. We urgently need to make sure that the BNP is not allowed to present itself as the lone anti-establishment voice.

The capitalist system is in the midst of the biggest crisis in at least half a century. From the bank bail outs, through to the city academies programme in education and the moves to privatise the postal service, the Labour government shows that it will do everything to protect capitalism at the expense of working people. We need to do the opposite. Standing squarely with the working class means we have to be against the capitalist system that exploits us. Anticapitalism must be cornerstone of our left alternative.

Across the globe the capitalists are attempting to make working people pay for their crisis. But thousands of workers are standing up to fight - from bin workers to postal workers, lecturers and students - all saying “We won't pay for their crisis”. One question repeatedly comes up on the picket lines and mass meetings of every one of these struggles - there is no political party that stands up for those fighting back. A new workers' party could support these movements and give them a lead, not just elections, but at work and on the streets.

More voices back Call

- Lyndon Holmes, Unison rep
- Duncan Chapel, Socialist Resistance/Respect
- Steve Baker, Unison rep
- Ed Maltby, Alliance for Workers' Liberty
- Steve Terrington, GMB branch secretary
- Steve Heyward, Youth Fight for Jobs
- Juan Piedra, UCL cleaner
- Matt Hale, Socialist Workers Party
- Sinead Rylance, Communist Students
- Jesse Oldershaw, Socialist Workers Party

Where now for the left? The debate continues

The debate on the future of the left in Britain is entering a crucial phase. On 7 November the RMT union will hold a conference to discuss the question of political representation. Time is really of the essence - we need a clear and bold call for a united, anticapitalist challenge at the 2010 elections.

But, unfortunately, as with previous similar RMT-initiated conferences on political representation, they are unlikely to take resolutions so that it will be difficult to make any concrete decisions.

At the conference supporters of a new anticapitalist party will be putting forward the call, which has three key proposals: for local committees for a new party, for a slate of anticapitalist candidates and an open conference to launch the campaign.

It is imperative that we don't wait for the trade union leaders before



With a debate in the CWU over funding Labour, the call for a new anticapitalist party is very popular among striking postal workers

we decide to act - we need to bring them under maximum pressure to launch a challenge to Labour but shouldn't see their inaction as an excuse not to take the initiative ourselves.

A clear and decisive call by the

socialist organisations for a new anticapitalist can rally thousands of workers in struggle in a common political campaign. Just think how popular this idea - a new party of the working class - could be in the general election campaign.

Sign call for a new anticapitalist party

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 advan-

tage 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 organisations, 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.

Sign the call at anticapitalistparty.org.uk

WHERE THEY STAND

Socialist Worker

In favour of a united left electoral challenge to Labour at the 2010 general election. Proposed at the Convention of the Left that different socialist organisations stand their own candidates under a common banner. For example, "Left Unity - SWP". Are opposed to the call for a new anticapitalist party because they believe it is "too soon", as the class struggle is not yet at a high enough level to win support for it. The party is thought to be divided between those more attracted to the Left Party in Germany - an "old" Labour-type social democratic party - and those that favour the more radical class struggle approach of the New Anticapitalist Party in France as a model for us here.

Socialist Party

Participated in the No2EU election campaign launched by Bob Crow and the RMT union for the European elections. The alliance brought together the sections of the left that had strongly supported the first Lindsey construction walkouts despite the slogan 'British jobs, for British workers' being a prominent feature of these. The SP defended their participation in No2EU, despite its semi-nationalistic politics and opposition to the free movement of labour in the European Union, on the grounds that it was a step towards a new workers' party. They are pushing for Bob Crow and the RMT to announce a "workers' list" of candidates for the 2010 election, possibly with the support of the PCS and the prison officers union, the POA.

Workers Power

Launched the call for a new anticapitalist party and have collected several hundred signatures from the labour movement in support of it. Wants to see a slate of anticapitalist candidates challenge Labour at the elections. Argues the left should use the elections as a platform to rally mass support for a new anticapitalist party founded on revolutionary socialist politics.

PAKISTAN

Offensive against Taliban pushes Pakistan even closer to civil war

The Pakistani military offensive targeting Taliban forces has seen widespread death and destruction, reports *Simon Hardy*, and threatens to tear the country apart on behalf of the US

Many of the world's most powerful armies have been waging the "war on terror" for eight years. Today they are no closer to winning than they were after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Despite Washington's administration change, the message is clear - the US will stop at nothing to exterminate anyone it considers Taliban or Al-Qaeda.

Previously, people talked about the Afghan war, but now there is a new phrase used by US generals and politicians - "Af-pak". Today, the war in Afghanistan is intricately bound up with Pakistan. Pakistan has moved from being auxiliary supporters of the US war effort straight to the front line.

There is also a history of cultural and ethnic tensions between the provinces of Pakistan and the Islamabad and Punjabi dominated centre. The Pakistani military invasion of South Waziristan is just the latest in a long series of campaigns being waged to try and pacify regions in rebellion against the central government: first the North West Frontier Province, then Baluchistan, and now South Waziristan. The government is using the war on terror to settle old scores with different tribes, many who share linguistic and cultural ties to eastern Afghanistan.

Hilary Clinton's recent visit to Pakistan coincided with the South Waziristan offensive. The day that she arrived, a massive bomb exploded in a marketplace in Peshawar, killing 100 people, a reminder from the terrorists that their tentacles reach deep across the country. Clinton was there to reassure President Asif Ali Zardari that the US has Pakistan's best intentions at heart, while also applying the necessary pressure to get more results.

Pakistan first

The new Kerry-Luger bill has caused some serious tensions between the US and Pakistan. The bill (part sponsored by Democrat John Kerry) promises \$7 billion for Pakistan over the next five years but the conditions attached have caused outrage among politicians in Islamabad, claiming that it undermines Pakistani sovereignty.

To get the money, the government is required to up the ante against proscribed terrorist organisations, like Lashkar-e-Taiba, taking more measures against their operations and members.

The ideological drive behind the bill is the principle of "Pakistan first". The logic goes like this: first we deal with the Pakistani militants; then we can win the war in Afghanistan.



To Pakistanis, it is obvious that the US could not beat its chosen enemy in the war across the border, so now it is arming its regional ally into opening up a second front for them. If the US military cannot win in the White Mountains and the plains of Helmand, then how can the Pakistani military hope to do so in South Waziristan?

Since mid-October, 28,000 Pakistani military personnel, supported by fighter bombers, artillery and all kinds of armour, have continued an offensive in South Waziristan. It is clear from reports that the fighting, town by town and village to village, has resulted in widespread devastation and destruction.

Kotkai, home to one of the Taliban leaders, was almost destroyed after intense fighting. Al Jazeera TV showed footage of desperate survivors, picking through the rubble of their homes. The United Nations says that over 150,000 refugees have now fled the region in the wake of the offensive.

And the role of the US military in all of this? "We've put military assistance to Pakistan on a wartime footing," said Lt. Col. Mark Wright, as the fighting got under way. That war footing is what is angering so many Pakistanis.

Predator drones

During her visit, Clinton attended several public meetings with students and women, as well as TV debates. At one of these, a woman enquired about the use of unpiloted US Predator drones, which assassinated high-level Taliban leaders, as well as slaughter innocent people at weddings and other non-terrorist activities.

The woman described these drones as carrying out "executions without trial", effectively assassinating terrorist suspects. Much of the reconnaissance, which comes from informants run by CIA networks, is inaccurate, sometimes coloured by personal animosity. Clinton, of course, refused to discuss the drones, or the CIA, or the tactics of the US military and espionage network with its claws deep in Pakistan.

Sana Bucha of Geo TV said: "Your war not our war. You had one 9/11. We are having daily 9/11s in Pakistan."

And the daily 9/11s will keep on happening. The people of Kotkai have learned that the hard way. The problem facing the US and Pakistani governments is that the border region with Afghanistan is fairly porous with many tribes and villagers of different ethnic groups and languages living there, most of them peasants and farmers living off the land.

Many of them support the armed militias because they see them as defending their land from invaders, defending their farms and culture from outsiders. Some are committed Islamists, but many are not. However, if the Islamists are the ones fighting and dying to liberate their land from the military, then they support them.

This war will not end well for Zardari or US President Barack Obama, who has repeatedly referred to Afghanistan and Pakistan as the "good war". In the same way that the US was forced out to start carpet bombing Laos when it was losing the Vietnam war, this recent push in Afghanistan is not a sign of strength, but one of desperation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Devolution of policing: no solution to a sectarian state

As devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly threatens to become a reality, *Darren Cogavin* looks at the real face of policing in Britain's oldest colony

For the past two decades, most of John Brady's life was spent in prison as a result of his involvement in republican activity. Following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), Brady joined many other veteran republicans in denouncing Sinn Féin's de facto surrender to the British state. The deep demoralisation of former volunteers opposed to the GFA has been compounded by a systematic campaign of harassment, persecution and victimisation by security forces in the North.

Brady was on weekend release from Maghaberry Prison, where he had been incarcerated for the past six years although convicted of nothing, when he was again arrested by the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) following a domestic dispute. He was discovered dead in his cell less than 24 hours later. The PSNI claimed he took his own life even though his solicitor had informed his family that he would be released shortly - within an hour of the solicitor's phone call, Brady was dead.

Brady's tragic death once more shines a spotlight on the colonial and nefarious nature of policing in the North. Since Sinn Féin appointed representatives to the crown constabulary's Policing Board in 2007, republicans have pointed to the increased instances of harassment by the PSNI. Stop and search powers are routinely used to intimidate the spouses and children of republicans. Republican opponents of the GFA continue to experience arbitrary arrest and detention without trial. These tactics, redolent of the hated Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), are clearly designed to instil fear and paranoia within nationalist communities.

Sectarian police force

The façade of cross-community policing - masking British repression and injustice - came tumbling down last July. When nationalist residents from Ardoyne organised a peaceful protest against the Orange Order bulldozing down the community in a nakedly sectarian and triumphalist fashion, the PSNI responded by corraling protestors in the face of 300 drunken loyalists singing sectarian party songs. When Ardoyne youth organised and resisted the heavy-handed tactics of the PSNI, they were attacked with baton charges, water cannon and plastic bullets. It's little wonder then that graffiti appeared declaring "PSNI - 17% Catholic. 100% Unionist".

The policing debate continues to reveal profound divisions within the republican movement. On the one hand there is Sinn Féin, seduced by the power, status and individual gain awarded to them by British imperialism in



Republicans honour John Brady

return for their shameful acceptance of the unionist veto, repressive police structures and neoliberal exploitation. Their slavish implementation of cutbacks and divergence from left republican rhetoric has disillusioned many of their supporters, North and South, and a number of councillors have already resigned.

On the other hand there is the nationalist working class, condemned to deepening social and economic injustice. In marginalised areas like Ardoyne, the community refuses to support the police. Instead these areas are self-policed by groups like Concerned Families against Drugs (CFAD), who perform a dual role confronting local drug pushers and highlighting the lack of jobs, youth facilities and treatment services in the area. Groups on the republican fringe - like the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), 32 County Sovereign Movement (32CSM) and others - have modest support here.

A sectarian state

The imperialist partition of Ireland into two separate entities inflamed sectarianism, maintaining the division between the Catholic and Protestant working class and making it easier to push forward the continued exploitation of all workers. The sectarian nature of the Orange statelet is underlined by a shocking statistic - some 60 per cent of applicants for social housing in Northern Ireland are Catholic and 40 per cent Protestant, yet 60 per cent of allocations go to Protestants. Some 90 per cent of social housing estates in the North are segregated, where a large number of "peace lines" (high walls and barbed wire) continue to separate workers on both sides of the divide.

The right-wing austerity measures of Sinn

Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) are designed to placate foreign investors and impose the burden of the economic crisis on the working class. A leaked memo from Sammy Wilson, the DUP's Finance Minister, revealed that £200 million will be slashed from current expenditure, as well as another £172 million to be cut from capital expenditure, including schools and hospitals.

A recent update of the 'Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland' report in September also highlighted the tangible increase in social inequality since the global recession began. It revealed that there has been a steep rise in house repossession over the last two years while the proportion of working-age adults not in paid work has risen to 34 per cent. On top of this, 52,600 (12 per cent) of children in the North are living in conditions described as "absolute poverty".

Devolution of policing

Ten years since the GFA and Sinn Féin is still waiting for the transfer of policing powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Its DUP partners have stalled and prevaricated at every turn. In so doing they have extracted up to £1 billion from the British government to increase compensation for ex-RUC hearing losses, retention of weapons for ex-RUC and army personnel, retaining the RUC reserve with its overwhelming Protestant composition, removing restrictions on Orange parades, etc. Gerry Adams only complained about one of these - the abolition of the Parades Commission!

Sinn Féin hails every concession to Unionism as a victory. Every concession is made in the belief that the greater good is to preserve the power-sharing government. Sinn Féin is trapped into accepting the Unionist veto on any change to the sectarian and privileged nature of the Orange state.

The devolution of policing is not making the police force - or the state - more democratic. Workers must look to their own strength to police their communities. We already have the tradition of the Citizen's Defence Committees in Belfast and Derry of the 1970's and of course James Connolly's Irish Citizens' Army, which developed to defend workers' picket lines.

This is necessary, not only against sectarian attacks from Orange bigots, but against PSNI incursions too. It needs to be a mass force, drawing in and training the youth, guarding and aiding the growth of a mass movement for equal rights, immediate social and economic demands, such as jobs and decent housing for all, and crucially for a united workers republic of Ireland.

TWENTY YEARS ON

November 1989: when

It is 20 years since the fall of the Berlin wall and the capitalist media is crowing. They say these great events were nothing more than a movement to bring down communism and bring back capitalism. Here, *Peter Main* shows how the struggle against the Stalinist dictatorship in East Germany in fact began as a struggle against bureaucratic controls and for working class freedoms – but the crisis of working class leadership meant that the Left handed the initiative to the right wing.

It was the visibly weakening power of the Soviet Union that prompted political crises across Eastern Europe in 1989. Attempts by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to revitalise Soviet society by a policy of “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (reconstruction) encouraged dissidents and political activists to be more open in their criticism of dictatorial regimes.

At the same time, approval of the brutal massacre of the Democracy Movement in Beijing by Eric Honecker, the East German leader, made clear how high the political stakes were.

As calls for reform became louder in the GDR, both Honecker and the West German leader, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, immediately recognised the importance of the national question. The previous year, Hungary had opened its border to Austria for its own citizens. Now, hundreds of East German “tourists” tried to reach the West through Hungary. Kohl not only supported their demands but emphasised that they were all entitled to full citizenship in the Federal Republic, and also to Social Security funds. Honecker countered that those who wished to leave the country were “social parasites and misfits”. It was this which led the growing protest movement to deny any suggestion of disloyalty to the GDR with the slogan “we’re staying here!”

September

The first overt call for democratic reforms was published on Monday, 4 September as the “Appeal for a United Left of the GDR”. This explicitly rejected the idea that democratic reform meant the restoration of capitalism or the dismantling of the state but, equally clearly, restricted itself to reforms within the existing state. The platform said “the bureaucracy has brought the economy to a dead-end, post-capitalist property relations have to be maintained, only Democratic Socialism based on the rule of workers’ councils can realise the potential of the planned economy”.

Also on 4 September, a prayer meeting in Leipzig turned into a demonstration demanding freedom of movement and democratic elections. The local police did not disperse the demonstrators whose numbers quickly grew to several hundred. As news of this spread, the call for “Monday Demos” was taken up in towns and

The GDR and the national question

It is difficult for some people today to remember that only 20 years ago Germany was still divided into two halves. The division into the Federal Republic in the West and the Democratic Republic in the East was the result of the Soviet occupation of the eastern part of Germany after the Second World War. In 1949, the “East German” Stalinist dictatorship expropriated what remained of private capital, laying the basis for centralised planning and founded the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on the model of Stalin’s USSR. This created what Trotsky called a degenerated workers’ state, one based on the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a planned economy, but without working class control over the government and the plan. Although the destruction of capitalism was carried through bureaucratically rather than as the conscious act of the working class, it was now necessary for workers to oppose any restoration of capitalism and defend this state against any attack on it by the western imperialist powers. At the same time it was necessary to fight for a political revolution to

smash the Stalinist dictatorship over the workers and replace it with a workers’ democracy.

The reunification of Germany continued to be a principled democratic demand, and meant the creation of workers’ councils and a revolutionary movement on both sides of the border. In the West it was still necessary to take the main levers of the economy out of the hands of the capitalists, whereas in the East the revolution had to focus on seizing control of the planned economy and breaking Stalinist police rule. This however was never the programme of the majority of the German left. Even in the West, the radical left continued to be heavily influenced by Stalinism and saw any opposition to the East German government and Stalinist regime as automatically pro-capitalist. At the same time, the capitalist Federal Republic claimed to be the legitimate government of the whole of Germany so that, for many, the very idea of reunification could only mean the absorption of the East into the West.

cities across the country.

On 9 September, a number of well-known dissidents associated with the peace movement published “Initiative 89”, this proposed the formation of a national political organisation called “New Forum” committed to democratic reform and “reshaping” society. When members of New Forum applied to register it with the authorities on September 19, this was rejected on the grounds that they were “anti-state” and “disloyal to the people”. This accusation was immediately rebutted by demonstrators across the country who raised banners saying “We ARE the people!”

October

Despite official condemnation, political dissent grew. On the first weekend in October, the United Left held their first national conference in Berlin. Two days later, Mikhail Gorbachev, who

many saw as a champion of democratisation, arrived in Berlin for the official celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR. He used his visit to make it clear that there would be no Soviet intervention to maintain the status quo as there had been in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The visible dismay of Honecker and his cronies was matched only by the jubilation of the crowds. That evening, the first mass protest demonstrations took place in Berlin itself. The crowds on the streets sensed a change in the tide of events; the political revolutionary crisis was reaching its peak. With the threat of Soviet intervention lifted, the issue became whether the regime would turn its own guns on the people. On the following Monday, 9 October, all eyes turned to Leipzig. Would there be another demo? Would it be bigger or smaller? Above all, would the security forces open fire?

the Berlin Wall fell

In the event, although preparations were made to prevent the demonstration, local commanders allowed it to go ahead and it was bigger than ever with thousands thronging the central square. This was the bursting of the dam. From then on, there was a *de facto* right to demonstrate, to organise and to hold meetings. Within days, Eric Honecker had resigned as party leader and been replaced by Egon Krenz. In a vain attempt to curry support, he criticised the former leadership and revealed something of its opulent lifestyle.

November

On 7 November, the Cabinet, led by the Prime Minister Willi Stoph, formally resigned. Official demoralisation was made worse by the revelation that over 60% of the membership of the SED had resigned. When the Central Committee met on November 9, it recognised that concessions had to be made and agreed that "in future" GDR citizens would be allowed to travel to the West. When the official spokesman announced this, it was taken to mean that travel restrictions were lifted immediately and it was this that led to the famous "Fall of the Wall" as thousands of East Berliners surged to the crossing points and the border guards, now without any effective chain of command, raised the barriers.

The flood of people into West Berlin was heightened by Chancellor Kohl's offer of 100 Deutschmarks as a "greetings gift" to all GDR citizens. The combined effect was not only to reinforce the image of West Germany as a "land of plenty" but to undermine even further the legitimacy of the East German regime. Recognising this, the Central Committee of the SED made Hans Modrow the new Prime Minister and gave him the task of forming a coalition government.

Particularly in the South, newly formed political organisations such as Democratic Awakening and Democracy Now were openly calling for the dismantling of the regime, the permanent opening of the border, political pluralism and free elections. Such demands inevitably posed the question of the continued existence of the GDR itself and, from then on, the "national question" was increasingly the defining issue in the politics of the GDR.

However, for the great majority of the Left, unification could never be anything except a reactionary project. By contrast, at the United Left's working conference on 25 November Workers Power's German sister organisation proposed a programme that linked the struggle for workers' control in the factories and the formation of a workers' militia to the overthrow of the existing DDR state machine, and also recognised that, "it is almost inconceivable that the continued political crisis in the GDR will not see the emergence of unification as a possible

solution to economic weakness and instability. Therefore, the demand for the revolutionary reunification of Germany is not a subordinate or merely tactical one but rather a central component of the programme. And it concluded with a call for, 'Workers' councils and workers' militia throughout Germany and the convocation of a congress of workers' councils as the organ of state power of the German Workers' Republic! For the revolutionary reunification of Germany!'

Although this programme formed the basis for building a section of our international tendency in the GDR, the rest of the GDR Left totally rejected any demand for national unity, and this ensured that the right wing was unchallenged as the force championing this crucial demand of the people.

December

In early December, to try to restore some popular support, Modrow summoned the leaders of the main opposition groupings, including the previously banned New Forum that now had 200,000 members, to a Round Table meeting. This adopted his proposal for parliamentary elections on May 6 but also affirmed its loyalty to the GDR. It is a measure of how far politics had already changed that this led to a split in New Forum between its founders and leaders and a rank and file that now called for reunification with the West. On the demonstrations the slogan was now 'We are all ONE people!'

Two events now polarised opinion even further. Helmut Kohl spoke at an election rally in Dresden, promoting an electoral block, the Alliance for Germany, dominated by his own Christian Democrat party. He made it absolutely clear that its strategic aim was reunification, and that this did not mean any kind of parity of status but simply the absorption of East Germany into the existing Federal Republic. This not only invigorated the right wing of the protest movement by giving it a clear goal and the open backing of the Bonn government but also galvanised the left.

1990

On January 3, ostensibly in response to the desecration of Soviet war memorials by neo-Nazis, the government called a demonstration of the left, effectively in defence of the GDR. Modrow's aim was to tie all opponents of capitalist restoration to the maintenance of his own regime. In this, he appeared to be unexpectedly successful. Some 200,000 turned out in the freezing cold and made clear that the pro-Western Alliance was not the only mass force. The size of this demonstration appeared to stabilise the political scene.

However, Modrow misread the situation. Feeling more secure himself, he proposed the formation of a new security force to replace the

hated secret police, the Stasi. This proposal electrified society; spontaneously, mass demonstrations took place all over the country. Above all, in Berlin, the masses stormed the Stasi HQ. The polarisation was now complete; a much-reduced left called for "order", which meant defence of the regime and even, perhaps, of the Stasi. Meanwhile, the right wing, with its equation of reunification with the restoration of capitalism, assumed leadership of the masses on the streets.

The whole situation was now transformed. In effect, the political crisis had been resolved and the right wing was in the ascendant. Modrow now proposed a "Government of National Responsibility", to include both left and right, and brought forward elections to March 18. Electoral campaigning now took the place of demonstrations; Kohl promised 1:1 exchange of Deutschmarks for Ostmarks and economic union within three months, the governing party, now renamed Party of Democratic Socialism, proposed market reforms to revive the economy within the GDR.

In the election, the Alliance for Germany, dominated by the Christian Democrats, gained the most seats rather than an overall majority but was able to form a coalition with the Social Democrats with the CDU leader, Lothar de Maiziere, as premier. Both wings of this government were committed to the restoration of capitalism and reunification with the West and its establishment marked the end of the GDR as a degenerate workers' state.

Within weeks, on 18 May, Parliament adopted the State Treaty which provided for the abolition of planning, the removal of all controls on capital movement, the introduction of the Deutschmark as the only currency, the imposition of West German labour law and the primacy of the West German Finance Ministry with effect from 2 July, 1990. After that, it was, quite literally, only a matter of formality to complete the dismantling of the GDR and the integration of its territory and people into the Federal Republic on 9 November 1990.

Today, commentators often note the extraordinary speed with which the GDR collapsed and conclude that this proves that reunification on Kohl's terms was always inevitable. It would be more accurate to say that the failure of the left to fight for a revolutionary reunification, linking the call to a struggle to overthrow both the bureaucratic regime in the East and the capitalists in the West, was the final legacy of German Stalinism. What began as a working class movement for political revolution in the GDR, ended as a social counter-revolution and the restoration of capitalism. In this as in all other class battles, the crisis of working class leadership was the key.

HONDURAS

The deal is a sham

The fight to transform Honduras must continue without Zelaya, writes *Keith Spencer*

“Whether Mel [Zelaya] is reinstated or not, we are going on with our demand for a Constitutional Assembly.” was the recent call by the Honduran Beverage Workers Union, part of the opposition to the coup against President Zelaya in June.

A nine-point deal has now been struck between the elected President of Honduras, Manuel (Mel) Zelaya and the men who overthrew him in a military coup on 28 June. In it Zelaya is supposed to return as President for the last three months of his term. An interim “government of national reconciliation” will be formed and then elections held on 29 November for both President and Congress. The masses, who supported Zelaya against the coup for four months because they wanted a Constitutional Assembly will be robbed of a vote on this question.

This plan represents a cruel betrayal of the four months of heroic opposition to the coup. During them security forces detained nearly 10,000 people; police and soldiers clubbed protesters and gang-raped women and death squads murdered 14 leaders of the resistance.

This rotten deal is the work of US President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, along with Organization of American States (OAS). With Zelaya's return, the US, EU and OAS can now back the elections and get back to business as usual with the landed, business and military elite. The international peace brokers are hoping that the threat over the election is enough to push the coup-supporters into accepting Zelaya's return. But an adviser to the current President Micheletti, Marcia Facusse de Villeda, told Bloomberg News: “Zelaya won't be restored...just by signing this agreement we already have the recognition of the international community for the elections.”

The pro-coup parties will also dominate the “government of national reconciliation”, so there will no more reforms for the workers and poor – the agreement accepts in law the national budget and spending plans of the



Zelaya: His return to office is a betrayal of his supporters

coup government. Finally, under the agreement Zelaya explicitly renounces calling a Constitutional Assembly – the key reason he was ousted in the first place and the main reason the mass resistance supported him.

The state of emergency will not be lifted till two weeks before the elections so they will occur in climate of fear and intimidation. Furthermore under the reactionary constitution, the army controls the ballot boxes in the election! The oligarchs will get what they want: a return to their two-party rule and the crushing of any reform movement.

The National Resistance Front Against the Coup (FNRR) which has co-ordinated the struggle is a popular front of workers, peasants, priests, middle classes and the section of the Liberal Party that supports Zelaya. This reliance on the Zelaya and his faction of the Liberal Party is its fatal weakness – after all Micheletti comes from the other faction of the party. So too was assumption that Zelaya – a Liberal turned populist in office – could simply imitate Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. Chavez strong position was a result of the failed military coup and mass mobilisation that broke the power of the old elite over the armed forces. Without the masses actually defeating the coup,

Zelaya – even if he wished it – would always have been unable to remove the obstacles to any serious progressive reforms opposed by the army and the state machine. For this a revolutionary mobilisation of the masses was necessary, including the winning over of the rank and file of the army. Instead the mass movement was derailed for a month while Zelaya and his supporters were negotiating with the coup-makers.

Now the FNRR has issued a statement welcoming the deal.

“We celebrate the upcoming restoration of President Manuel Zelaya Rosales as a popular victory over the narrow interests of the coup oligarchy. This victory has been obtained through four months of struggle and sacrifice by the people who, in spite of the savage repression unleashed by the repressive forces of the state in the hands of the dominant class, have been able to resist and grow in their levels of consciousness and organisation and turn themselves into an irrepressible social force.” It claims the agreement represents “the explicit acceptance that in Honduras there was a coup d'etat that should be dismantled ... to guarantee a democratic framework in which the people can exercise their right to transform society”

This is a delusion at best, a deception at worst.

The election process is likely to prove a farce – it is run by the army under the Honduran constitution – the “worst in the world” according to Costa Rican president Oscar Arias. The agreement re-emphasised this as well. So the masses will vote under the guns and batons of the police and the army. The agreement also outlaws any demonstrations or protests during the election period or against the results – so ensuring that there will be no popular revolt if the result is fixed.

Carlos Reyes, a key figure in the FNRR and leader of the Beverage Workers' Union, is standing for president as an independent candidate. His union has been central to the opposition. It has demonstrated, led strikes and issued statements calling for a constitutional assembly and the arrest of the coup-makers. It is not clear as we go to press what attitude Reyes has taken to the final deal though previous statement would suggest he is opposed to all the concessions it contains.

If he now unequivocally denounces it and calls for the continuation of the fight against the illegitimate regime and whatever reactionary president that is elected in November, if he continues the fight for a Constituent Assembly, then his candidacy could be a clarion call for the struggle to go on, despite Zelaya's betrayal. In this case revolutionaries should certainly critically support him. Another giant step would be if Reyes and his union breaks with Zelaya and the Liberals compromisers within the FNRR and goes on to form a workers' political party.

Such a party must be independent of the bosses, of all agencies of US imperialism, the NGOs and the church. It must develop into a mass, revolutionary party rooted in the trade unions, peasant organisations and colonias (the shanty towns around the cities). It should continue the fight for not only for a revolutionary Constituent Assembly but for a socialist revolution that can smash the power of the Honduran oligarchs.

• For more on the crisis in Honduras go to <http://www.5thinternational.org/category/527/>

FRANCE

Relaunching the resistance

The French media is full of the country's economic recovery yet 252,000 have been added to dole queues since January alone. *Jo Cassidy* – a member of New Anticapitalist Party reports.

The French government is hell-bent on making the workers pay the full costs of the crisis. As in other countries this means an attack on the public sector to offset the cost of the handouts to the banks and private industry, which increased the budget deficit – by 140 billion this year alone. So the government of Nicolas Sarkozy aims to axe 13,000 posts in education, to make big cuts in the health service, and by privatising of the post and breaking up of the state railway company SNCF in preparation for sell-offs.

In stark contrast is Sarkozy's generosity to the bosses, abolishing the wealth tax, introducing a tax shield for the super rich and imposing a ceiling on business taxes.

This autumn however a series of mobilisations has shown that the French working class and youth are determined to resist these attacks.

When the universities came back, general meetings of students, hundreds strong, took place to plan action. These assemblées générales were the bodies which coordinated the strikes and occupations earlier in the year

Students across France have struck and taken to the streets in opposition to plans to bring metal detectors, bag searches and police into colleges, proposed by government minister Xavier Darcos.

In the factories too the recent struggle at Freescale shows workers are ready to defend their jobs. The Freescale factory in Toulouse (formerly Motorola) employs 1,700 workers but in spring this year the management announced it would be closed by the end of 2011 and production moved elsewhere. After this announcement cutbacks began with management slashing hours and planning 170 job cuts, despite having been given handouts of 20 million euros of public money over the last 10 years.

This triggered a six week strike and a ten-day occupation of the factory. Police were brought in to help scabs enter the factory. However despite of this courageous struggle the strike was suspended on 9 October; yet the strike committee



Workers from the Freescale factory in Toulouse on the march

remains in place and there is the promise of more action in the future.

Struggles like these will continue to erupt over the coming weeks and months. We have to make sure they do not remain isolated. It is vital that every closure is met with a strike and an occupation. In every city, we should be forming committees to support and coordinate these struggles.

In short we need to re-launch the mass movement around the slogan "We will not pay for their crisis!" which reached a peak in spring of this year a movement. We must demand a series of measures and emergency plans against social cuts and mass unemployment.

The problem we face is one of leadership. At the end of the spring the union leaders, having played their usual trick of calling widely separated days of action, eventually exhausted workers' hopes of winning in the short term. The New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) founded this year has correctly condemned this strategy and called for an all out, indefinite strike to smash Sarkozy's offensive and the bosses' jobs massacre.

Yet in this year's European elections, the NPA advanced a reformist platform. Today too elections are

beckoning – next year's regionals – and the NPA is holding discussions with the left reformists of the Communist Party (PCF) and the Left Party (PdG) for some sort of common programme. This could only be a programme these dyed in the wool reformists could accept and would be a real sell-out. Rank and file NPA members must demand that the programme for the regionals be decided by a conference of the NPA.

The programme the NPA should be concentrating on would be a programme of action for a new mass wave of resistance, culminating in a general strike.

Certainly the NPA must demand that the union leaders organise huge, united demonstrations, which can be the fulcrum for launching an all out strike and wave of factory occupations. But when the bureaucrats once more try to sabotage the movement – as they will – we must do all in our power to organise these days of action ourselves, at rank and file level,

To this end we must advance an emergency programme of simple and necessary demands whose application can be imposed by workers in struggle.

- There must be strikes and occupations of all factories faced with closure. Oppose every sacking.
- Nationalise all the banks and enterprises that declare lay-offs, without compensation and under workers' control.
- An immediate increase in wages of 300 for all. Increase the minimum wage to 1,500 after deductions!
- Abandon all plans for privatisation of the public services, starting with the Post.
- No loss of jobs in the National Education system. Stop the creeping privatisation of the Universities. Scrap the school 'reforms'.
- An emergency plan must be drawn up by the workers from below to build public housing, schools and hospitals.
- Requisition all empty homes for the homeless.
- For a massive increase in taxes for the large firms and the private fortunes of the rich
- Force an end to insecurity and low pay in employment. Transform all short-term contracts into regular fully paid and permanent employment.
- Residence and citizenship papers for our immigrant brothers and sisters. Repeal all racist laws. Open the borders!

A general strike, a mass wave of workplace, university and school occupations can halt the attacks but as long as Sarkozy remains in power, whenever we demobilise he will return to the attack. Nor would a Socialist Party government be any better. On the crest of a wave of mass revolutionary struggle we need to bring to power a workers' government that can carry out an emergency programme, an anticapitalist government that is based on the coordinations of the workers and youth.

That is what the New Anticapitalist Party needs to be fighting for in the year ahead: above all in the workplace, schools and colleges, in the streets and at the regional elections next year. Workers will only take the NPA seriously if it stands for something radically different from the more moderate leftwing parties: an uncompromising anticapitalist platform, a call to action.

AUSTRIA

Vienna University occupied

On 22 October the great hall of Vienna University – the Audi Max – was spontaneously occupied during a 2000-strong student demonstration. Since there have been occupations in colleges in Vienna, Graz, Klagenfurt and Innsbruck. A mass demo took place on 28 October with 30,000 students demonstrating in Vienna. Messages of support have been coming from all over the world and in Santa Cruz students briefly occupied their university in solidarity.

Here we publish an interview with **Roman Birke**, a Viennese student activist and a member of the League for the Socialist Revolution.

What is the mood like inside?

It wasn't long before we realised the students' total determination to occupy for as long as necessary in order to win. The mood here is to do whatever it takes. But we are prepared. We are now occupying the gym to provide us with more sleeping space and showers. The level of support has been incredible. We are overwhelmed with messages of solidarity.

What caused the occupation?

Already by 21 October the Academy of Fine Arts was occupied. The aim of the protest is to stop the planned conversion of the course and study structure to the Bologna model being pushed by the European Union – part of its marketisation drive in education. As a reaction to the occupation of the academy a spontaneous demonstration developed the next day, and took place in the inner courtyard of the Vienna University. There and then the students decided to occupy the 'Audi Max'.

The origins of the protests are many faceted: fundamental mismanagement of the education system, massive social selection discriminating against working class students, and attacks by the government like the reintroduction of tuition fees.

What are the students' demands?

The demands focus above all on education policy: for the indebtedness of the universities to end, for a struggle for free access to higher education, to the question of democratising the universities. One weakness of the demands so far is that they don't connect enough to the broad-



2000 strong plenary meetings are the highest decision making body in the occupation

er political and economic crisis that is gripping Austria. For example, on the mass demonstration people took up the call "Money for Education, not for Banks and Bosses", but this never made it into the official list of demands.

In the final analysis it all hinges on the question of what side the students take in the main struggle between the capitalists and the workers. There have been expressions of solidarity from workers – for example nursery workers, printers, metalworkers and individual trade unionists – which have been positively received. But so far the students have been somewhat unwilling to go to the workers and to see their struggle as a common one.

But the decision of the Plenum on Tuesday [27 October] to deliver the students' demands to the finance minister and the prime minister and to ask them to respond has put the whole programme of the government at the heart of the debate.

How are the protests organised?

The spontaneity of the protests is leading to a fundamental discussion about the structure the movement needs to take. At the beginning libertarian tendencies dominated, who were above all against taking decisions by voting, but lately the vast majority of the movement have begun to understand that decisions need to be taken so that the occupation can continue and not become

paralysed.

Recently regular full plenary meetings have become the highest decision making body of the movement. After the earlier chaos a system has been set up by which discussions are conducted, contributions made, and votes held. Participation in the plenaries grew as a result with something like 2000 students often there – filling the Audi Max.

The meetings themselves are really lively with loads of contributions to the debates. Until now there has been no real legitimately established leadership, even though despite that unofficial structures have been established. An election to a new strike committee would be a real step forwards.

The official students union has nevertheless been able to make a first attempt to take control of the movement. Politically they have tried to restrict the protest and to tie it into negotiations – organisationally they are trying to get a foothold in the movement by providing infrastructure like printed materials and so on.

How can the struggle win?

The strike needs to be broadened to an all out strike as the first and most important step. Only in this way will we be able to bring the university to a standstill and in this way take students out of the stressful everyday life of the university and develop a broad participation in the political discussions and actions of the movement.

We made an important decision recently, that we address our demands not just to the Education Ministry but against the Finance Minister too. We have been chanting 'Money for education – not banks!' on the demonstrations, making the link between the economic crisis and how we are being made to pay the price. In attacking decisions of the finance minister I hope we can broaden the protest out to government policy as a whole and show that the capitalist system is to blame.

Equally important, we need to broaden it out to other layers of society, above all to the workers. The situation is good for doing that: nursery workers and printers are right now in struggle for higher pay, the metal workers have just broken off their talks over their collective agreement with their bosses. And there we have a real chance.

Because if the protest can go in that direction and get that broad, it will pose a problem for the whole economy and of the government – then not only will it be easier to win our demands, but the movement can take on another dimension and begin to raise the issue of an alternative society.

The League for the Socialist Revolution and the youth group REVOLUTION stands for broadening and organising the movement. All Out Strike – Strike Committee – Solidarity.

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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Make cheques or postal orders out to 'Workers Power' and send to
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FIGHTING FUND



Our own fundraising has slowed this month due to our attention turning towards the postal strike, where we have raised over £130 for their strike fund through badge sales and donations. We are also actively involved in solidarity committees that are springing up across the country to draw together trade unionists and community activists.

HELP US RAISE OUR FLAG HIGHER!

Our campaigning work continues. We are fighting for the formation of a new anticapitalist party, which has been gaining support among striking postal workers, anti-war campaigners, and youth who are

beating back the racist EDL in Manchester and Leeds. In the coming months we be intervening in the British class struggle, as well as preparing for the Istanbul European Social Forum 2010 and intervening in the New Anticapitalist Party in France. Our comrades in the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka are building solidarity with Tamils still being held in internment camps. Through the Jhangara Joint Health Workers Union, the comrades are trying to get medical aid into the camps.

Workers Power would like to thank EW from Cheshire and TH from London who made donations of £20 when taking out paper and journal subscriptions.

PLEASE SEND US A DONATION

If you want to help – then please send cheques and postal orders to Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX. You can also donate online at workerspower.com and fifthinternational.org

OCTOBER WEB HITS SOAR

Workers Power is attracting a lot of attention as we report on the EDL protests in Manchester and Leeds and anti-BNP protests at the BBC. Web visitors have been checking out our Call for a New Anticapitalist Party, our analysis of the postal strike, not to mention great international coverage on countries like Honduras. Our websites are attracting an increasing number of new people – as last month's results show:

WorkersPower.com

- Web hits up 53 per cent to 7,901
 - 71 per cent were new visitors
- ### FifthInternational.org
- Web hits up 20 per cent to 6,458
 - 63 per cent new visitors.

WorldRevolution.org.uk

- Web hits up 17 per cent to 1,718
- 76 per cent new visitors.

Stop the strikebreakers

By Jeremy Dewar

In the wave of strikes that is sweeping Britain, bosses are using strikebreakers to weaken workers' action. Royal Mail is recruiting 30,000 strikebreakers to clear the backlog of mail caused by the Communications Workers Union (CWU) dispute.

In the current strikes at the First Bus company, bosses have brought in managers from around the country to drive buses, even though they do not know the routes they are supposed to be driving. And in the Leeds bin workers' eight-week strike – which is still going strong – council bosses have contracted strikers' work out to private companies and sent waste to other sites for processing.

The working class movement has a long and justified hatred of strikebreakers – or scabs as they are rightly called. Scabs are often desperate for work to feed their families, but they gain directly at the expense of other workers. Worst of all, they undermine collective action by workers – making it harder not only for strikers to win struggles for their own jobs, pay and conditions, but harder for all workers to unite and stand up to the bosses.

Today's strikes are taking place against a backdrop of high and rising unemployment, creating a huge pool of desperate people that the bosses can try to mobilise as strikebreakers. Bosses know very well that when more workers are chasing fewer jobs they can more easily dictate wages and conditions to the workers. Many workers have experienced this, when managers say, "If you don't like it, there's millions on the dole who will take your job tomorrow."

During a strike, bosses try to bring in scab labour to minimise a strike's effect. Bosses will often try to use migrant workers to scab because they will often be desperate and willing to work for very low wages.

So how should workers respond? The first thing to remember is that the strikebreakers are not necessarily conscious enemies of the strikers; they might not have thought about the issues and they will almost always be driven simply by need to find work, any work. So the starting point is to address them directly, explain what is at stake, and appeal to them to show solidarity with other workers and refuse to break the strike.

How to handle scabs

Socialists who recently leafleted strikebreakers at the Dartford mail centre were told by one agency worker: "I have a wife and kid to feed. I need the work." He was told in no uncertain terms: "So do the postal workers, who are on strike to defend their jobs and

conditions. You are weakening their fight."

Karl Marx was involved in organising against scab labour on behalf of the First International. In May 1866, he directly appealed to Germans who were being recruited to break a Edinburgh strike. He pointed out other German workers in Britain (of which there were many) would suffer and that the newly-imported workers would soon sink to the level of pariahs. He also appealed to the Germans' class interests: "Furthermore, it is a point of honour with the German workers to prove to other countries that they, like their brothers in France, Belgium and Switzerland, know how to defend the common interests of their class."

Whenever trade unionists today write leaflets in Polish, Italian or Portuguese to persuade migrant workers to join the

A worker, who has enjoyed the union's backing for years and had the chance to take part in democratic debates leading up to the strike and to vote in a ballot, has no moral right whatsoever to ignore the union's decision once a strike is called

union and the strike, offering to defend their rights, too, they are following this great tradition. Like Marx, we should write leaflets addressed to strikebreakers not only in English but in Polish, Italian, Portuguese, Yoruba or whatever it takes to get the arguments across. The aim should be to persuade the strikebreakers to refuse to scab, to join the union and the strike, and to offer to fight for their right to work in unionised jobs.

Unfortunately, strikebreaking is not confined to non-unionised, casual or imported labour, where the agency or casual staff are ignorant of the issues. Sometimes members cross their own union's picket lines, or members of other unions scab during strikes.

Fight betrayal

In these instances, we should apply maximum moral pressure. A worker, who has enjoyed the union's backing for years and had the chance to take part in democratic debates leading up to the strike and to vote in a ballot, has no moral right whatsoever to ignore the union's decision once a strike is called.

Here, strikers and their supporters should argue with them, tell their friends and family about their betrayal and cut them off socially – "send them to Coventry", as the old expression goes.

Of course the bosses and the press create a hullabaloo when scabs are treated this way – but we must always point out the context of the sacrifices being made by the strikers to defend their jobs and conditions, and the callous way the scabs break the solidarity of the workers. Many postal workers, for example, have already lost over £1,000 and are rightly angered by scabs being offered bonuses or overtime to clear the backlog. For miners in the Great Strike of 1984-85, their whole communities were being destroyed – no wonder they took it on themselves to discourage scabbing in the strongest possible terms.

Communists argue that workers who scab on a strike should be expelled from the union.

Confrontation

Finally, this means physically prevent scabs from entering the workplace or doing the strikers' jobs. Last month, First Bus drivers in Bolton did exactly this, forming a line across the road to successfully block the exit of a bus driven by an inspector.

However, once strikers take up this task, they will soon find which side the law is on, as the police can often try to break up the picket, even trying to arrest and charge strikers in the process. This is done, without any sense of irony, in the name of defending the scabs' "right to work". Of course, the strikers' right to a job, a living wage or decent conditions gets no police protection.

As Marx said, "Between equal rights, force decides." In Bolton no-one was arrested, let alone charged, because the police and management were wary of the strikers' unity. The stronger we are, the more carefully the bosses and cops have to think before trying it on. All the more reason to create picket defence squads, organised from the ranks of the strikers and accountable to them, to protect union actions from police repression.

Ultimately strikes have to be pursued ruthlessly, and that means treating scabbing harshly. If we can learn to act in this way, we are doing more than just strengthening our strikes. As Frederick Engels wrote in 1844: "It is in truth no trifle for a working man, who knows want from experience, to face it with his wife and children, to endure hunger and wretchedness for months together, and to stand firm and unshaken through it all... people who endure so much to bend one single bourgeois will be able to break the power of the whole bourgeoisie."