

REVOLUTION

ISSUE 61

socialist youth movement
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FOR FREE EDUCATION



STOP
FEES
NOW



TAX THE CORPORATIONS

Letter from Mario in Bratislava prison

Dear comrades,

Hi. Yesterday I received your letter and also a letter from Gemma. Thank you very much. Several days ago I got a letter from comrade Rebecca and picture postcard from comrade Max. All helps to keep me going in this time. The ESF in Paris was certainly a big event. I heard about it on the radio.

Dear comrades: thank you for all that you do for my family and myself. I appreciate it very much. Comrades, do not worry that I have been sentenced to such a high punishment. I did anticipate it. Our hearts don't drop. NO! We must stand strong. I have been thinking about the whole case at least a thousand times - and I still believe that I did the right thing. I did defend my only brother. I feel proud of my brother and all you dear comrades. Fascist bastards must be destroyed!

Last week I got newspapers from prison fellowship international in which was an article about Rubric's 'What is your passion?' Interesting question, don't you think? In this article the author wrote about his religious beliefs. In these days I am thinking 'what is my passion?' At first my desire was to meet with my family and comrades. Yes this is important, but the situation demands more. Our proverb says: "In every thing

there is something good." My imprisonment has taught me allegiance to the ideas of the working class and responsibility to our international, the 5th International.

I mustn't cry - I'm in prison, what will I do? I must think about what I can do for my comrades. In this course, prison is a very good 'school of life.' Such conditions forge steel.

So what is my passion now? The idea that comrades support me. This strengthens me. It will be nine years until I see freedom. I must last the time. I must use all my humble powers to struggle for a classless society.

Dear comrades: you are 100% true when you say the anti-capitalist movement is moving forward. I believe in the revolution. Yes it is still a long way away, but I hope for success. I admire you and your comrades for your revolutionary work. Very good!

You can send me only letters because newspapers and magazines are banned from being sent into the prison. If you want to send me some magazines, you must send them to my brother and he will send it to me in a parcel. I can only receive one parcel every three months.

I appreciate your willingness to help me. You are brave comrades! I shake



your hands. Stand strong. Victory belongs to us. Long live the Fifth International; long live a classless society. Mucha suerte, compañeros. Venceremos.

With revolutionary greetings,
Mário

Write to Mario
Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982
Ústav na vy'kon väzby
priečinok 1077
Chorvatská 5
812 29 Bratislava
Slovensko/Slovakia

Cardiff Social Forum

Written by Natalie in Cardiff

The Stop The War movement brought millions of people onto the streets. Many were young and many were first-time activists.

In Cardiff a number of people wanted to go further. They were aware that the war in Iraq was about many things: imperialism, privatisation, racism and environmental degradation. So the local Stop the War campaign gave birth to an anti-globalisation movement: the Cardiff Social Forum.

Social forums began in Italy and have spread all over Europe. They are a place for activists to discuss, debate and network. But they are also a place to plan action. In its short life (founded May 2003), Cardiff Social Forum has held anti-G8

events, mobilised for the European Social Forum, organised against a local arms fair and sent activists from Cardiff to the DSEi London arms fair.

On Feb 1 the forum is holding a major event - the Cardiff Alternative Assembly - drawing together a whole range of campaigns, trades unionists and political groups for a day of workshops, skills-sharing, entertainment and discussion of the anti-globalisation movement.

Two speakers from Revo will be leading off a session on racism and asylum, including an update on the Mario Bango campaign. This event will also plan mobilisations and protests leading up to the 2004 European Social Forum, due to take place (probably) in London.

There is no one blueprint for a

social forum, and there has been much debate in meetings and on CSF's website as to how CSF should work. Some think it should remain simply a place for networking, while others (including Revo supporters) argue that it should also act as a united front, taking basic positions on issues such as workers rights, just as Stop The War took basic positions on war, Palestine and racism.

Whatever its future, there is no doubt that the forum has been a success. Unlike anti-globalisation campaigns such as the SWP's Globalise Resistance, it is not simply a party front. But nor is it anti-party, like some social forums, because it realises the role political parties play in the movement.

It is a home for all anti-

globalisation activists in Cardiff, and its popularity has shown that similar forums can be built in every city in the UK.

That is something we desperately need in the build-up to the ESF. To make it a success and to build the movement local STW groups across the country should play a major role in initiating Social Forums.

The Alternative Assembly
Sunday 1 February,
11am-5pm
East Moors Community Centre
Carlisle Street,
Splott, Cardiff
For more details, write to:
cardiffsocialforum@yahoo.co.uk
Check the website at
www.cardiffsocialforum.org.uk

WANKER OF THE MONTH

Written by Fran in Peckham

'We are told that the Arabs loathe us. Really? For liberating the Iraqis? For subsidising the lifestyles of people in Egypt and Jordan, to name but two, for giving them vast amounts of aid? For providing them with science, medicine, technology and all the other benefits of the West? They should go down on their knees and thank God for the munificence of the United States'.

By the way, the Arabs taught the Europeans maths, chemistry, medicine and other technologies way back in the middle ages. But racist pigs who've never read a history book in their lives wouldn't know that.

The minute Robert Kilroy-Silk's secretary hit the fatal keystroke that sent the infamous 'We owe the Arabs nothing' article to the Daily Express, Mr Talkshow automatically earned himself the coveted title of 'Wanker of the Month'.

Let's just allow words to speak for themselves. The rant continues: 'The people who claim we are loathsome are currently threatening our civilian populations with chemical and biological weapons. They are trying to terrorise us, disrupt our lives'.

Right. Mr Wanker of the month is trying to say here that all Arabs should bow to the United State's magnificence, stop threatening us with albeit non-existing weapons and stop disrupting our lives.

Shock and awe style attacks are, for Mr Talkshow, just like a display of fireworks; they don't actually disrupt anybody's life. Yes, why not? It's all free entertainment courtesy of the ever-generous 'Coalition of the Willing'. I bet Syria can't wait for the show to go their way!

The unrepenting bastard then goes on a massive generalisation spree, calling 200million ordinary Arabs around the world 'suicide bombers, limb amputators and women oppressors'.

However, as he later declared, he is not a racist (seems to me there is a missing 'but' at the end of that sentence). Of course he's not a racist, his infamous probably-out-of-a-job secretary can vouch for him: 'The Muslim Council is just stirring up trouble. Robert is very fair-minded; and on his show he just lets everybody have their say. He is not a racist at all - he employs a black driver'.

Oh my! We should all be utterly ashamed of ourselves for having attacked such a fair person. He employs a black driver, how on earth can he be a racist! I bet some of his best friends are Black too!

Kilroy defended himself by reminding us of all the good he does for society and the Daily Express backed him up by declaring the BBC is 'utterly out of touch with public opinion and what a shabby way of treating a popular hero'.

Let's hear it from the 'popular hero' of



the empty headed then: 'Whatever else I am, I am not a racist. I have done more for race relations than the Commission for Racial Equality, empowering black people and presenting them in a positive light. I have gone out of my way to do that, sometimes I might have gone too far'. Like, for example, empowering a black man to wear a uniform and drive you around. Weird, the secretary didn't mention anything about other black employees in Kilroy's production company, possibly because they are not worthy of empowerment in professional capacities. Manual work should be fine for now, dear.

And just check out the title of the article 'the secretary' should have sent instead: John Reid, the NHS and why should foreigners get free treatment?

Yep, not a racist.

Dear Revo,

Civil servants will strike on 29 and 30 Jan after voting for strike action. Low pay offers have driven them to this measure as it has local government and other public sector workers before them. In many departments the pay offers were below the rate of inflation (the rate by which prices of goods go up). So your salary will buy you less than it did last year, making the offer a pay cut in fact.

The stereotypical image of civil servants is white middle-aged men in grey suit and bowler hats. However the truth is that this dispute affects mostly low paid workers, often women and ethnic minorities. One in four civil service workers earn less than £13,750 a year. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administers benefits to the public. 20,000 of its own workers

claim those same benefits because their pay is so low! In the DWP, the starting salary is £10,300. Their pay offer was 2.6 percent. For the lowest paid this would have meant a rise of less than £1 a day, after tax and NI.

This is an important issue because it goes beyond the civil service. It's about poverty pay. Blair can spend billions of pounds invading and occupying Iraq and the Chief Exec of Abbey National can earn £1.7 million in the same year that his company made a £1 billion loss! But ordinary workers are condemned to slave away for barely enough to live on. A victory for the civil service workers will give confidence to others to stand up and fight for fairer wages and restore the confidence that was lost when the firefighters were beaten.

Yours in struggle
Yuen (PCS member)

bombay boy

at the World Social Forum

DAY 1 : The fourth World Social Forum opened in Mumbai, India with more than 100,000 delegates from around the globe gathering to participate in over 300 seminars, workshops, conferences and discussions each day.

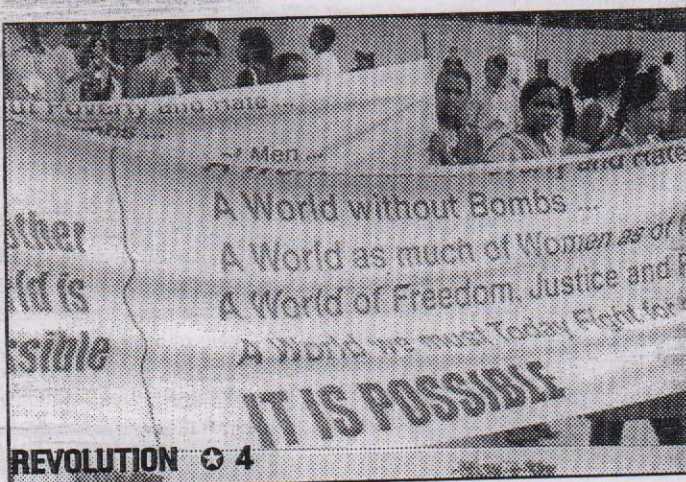
The opening speeches were delivered on Friday evening just as the sun began to set on the huge outdoor stage in front of tens of thousands who had gathered earlier to be entertained by musicians and performers from around India and Pakistan.

Many of the speeches had an air of predictability, with speakers actively avoiding definitive calls for action, preferring to wallow in wishy washy rhetoric, such as that of Nobel Peace prize winner, Shiri Abadi from Iran who called for the reform of the WTO and UN, believing this to be the key to reducing global poverty. Her message to the WSF was that we must work for the "Democratisation of Globalisation."

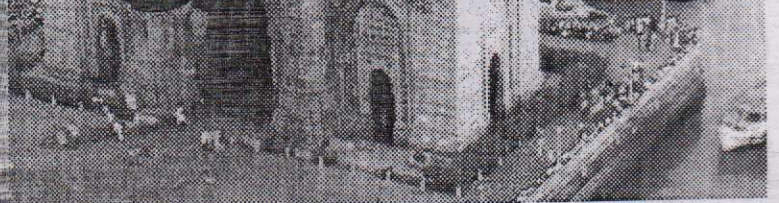
Arundhati Roy was the only one to call for action, pleading for people to not "...just support the resistance, be part of the resistance," and calling for the closing plenary to commit the WSF to initiating a campaign targeting two prominent US companies which benefit from the occupation of Iraq, with the aim of shutting them down. This was subsequently rejected.

The call itself falls woefully short of what is required to end the occupation of Iraq. The WSF - which boasts the support of trade union federations around the world - could issue the call for a global general strike just as on 15 February last year when 20 million poured onto the streets to protest against the imminent invasion of Iraq after a call by the Assembly of the Social Movements at the 2002 European Social Forum in Florence. A call at this Assembly could transform the political landscape.

DAY 2 : Things are going well. I have spoken to both Mark Thomas and Jeremy Corbyn and have got verbal agreements from both to support our Free Mario campaign. Thomas may use Mario's case for a future article in New Statesman and I have contact details to follow that up.



REVOLUTION 4



DAY 3 : I spoke twice on Palestine today. Firstly about Revo/ISM and then regarding the one debate over whether Palestinians and Israelis should fight for one shared, socialist state - or two separate states. I also attended a meeting on Democratising WSF, which dealt with anything but that.

Met up with Meistra, our Indonesian comrade today too. Great to see that he has photos of a Revo group of six on actions in Jakarta. The International Youth Camp (IYC) has no printed programme which makes it a bit difficult but I've met loads of different people and went to an IYC meeting where I spoke about the need for a Youth International and youth space at the next ESF.

DAY 4: Met two exciting contacts today. Two guys from Bombay, and we talked for ages about Revo. They are now talking of organising Bombay Revo! I gave them all our literature, got their details, and I'll maintain contact this week.

Got back to IYC and rounded up a group to come to the bar with me. I dragged about 10 people out after midnight only to find bar had closed, (typical me). We will have to do some more research on this.



DAY 5 : Went to a couple of Assemblies today. As ever they were long on words and short on action. However amidst the verbosity they did at least manage to endorse International Women's Day (8th March) as a day of action, and that the 20th March should be a global day of action against the war. When the discussion turned to the WTO meeting in Hong Kong some called for the movement to abandon the tactic of trying to prevent the negotiations taking place and instead approaching them with a more conciliatory air. Fortunately this worrying trend was soundly quashed.

DAY 6: The final rally must have had about 100,000 people at it. We had a noisy Revo contingent that went down very well. We sold all our Revo's and people were keen to talk to us and work together. Anyway it's all over for another year and I come away with positive thoughts and contacts, but I am somewhat cautious. What is missing is not the means but the political will. The WSF has achieved much in uniting and spreading the global movement against capitalism but many of the delegates have been sponsored to attend by NGO money, some of which, in turn, is raised from government grants from the very regimes the movement seeks to challenge. This movement feels very different from the anti-capitalist movement that grabbed the headlines in violent confrontations with the state on the streets of Seattle in 1999. Yet, walking around the campsites and talking to the rank and file activists you get the impression that - if the battle for leadership can be won - we can build a truly global, revolutionary International.

by kuldip - just back from Mumbai



REVOLUTION
socialist youth movement

fight back against fees

By Tom in Liverpool

Average graduate debt stands at something like £17,000. Now the government wants to double this, by increasing tuition fees with "top-up fees" of up to £3,000 a year for some courses. This is being portrayed as a socialist policy of robbing the rich to give to the poor, but this is a fallacy, because in reality its robbing young people of their right to a free education.

Working class people fought for university education to be free in the last century, but in the present day the government prefers to spend £1 billion on the imperialist invasion of Iraq than to spend it on filling the hole in universities' budgets. They lied in 2001, their manifesto pledging "we will not introduce top-up fees", and they are continuing to lie to us now, saying that if taxation funded universities fully, then it would be the dustman subsidising the doctor. This is stupid. Not only do doctors pay more in tax anyway, but corporation tax has been cut by 23% and the top rate of

income tax has been slashed by 43% since 1979. This means that the rich pay barely any more tax than workers, and if they're rich enough to employ accountants they often avoid tax altogether.

Proponents of top-up fees in the liberal press claim that its right to make students pay vast sums of money for their education, because graduates all get well-paid jobs that will put paid to their debt swiftly and easily.

Try telling that to any teacher or nurse, or the thousands of graduates working in call centres because there are no other jobs available.

We also have the highest graduate unemployment ever seen, showing that there is no guarantee of a job at the end of our degrees, leaving us with a mountain of debt to climb before we can even begin to plan for a life, house and family.

Variable top-up fees are yet another way of oppressing working class people too. As the government tries to get 50% of young people into university it is simultaneously trying to keep the working class down by charging variable fees, forcing the poor to go to universities that charge lower fees and take courses that cost less.

Continued on next page...

Continued on from page 5...

So to describe the policy of top-up fees, as socialist is not just wrong, it's offensive.

Members of the current government who went to university, all did at a time when there were no tuition fees, and they got given a grant to help with their living costs. That they are now implementing policies the complete opposite of this is a disgrace, as is the stream of careerist Labour students who run the NUS and pay lip-service to the needs of students before falling into line, capitulating and failing students at every opportunity.

Education is a right not a privilege and should be free for all, funded by taxing the rich and the corporations that benefit from a highly educated work force.

Even if the government manages to get its legislation to introduce fees through parliament, the fight is just beginning.

We need to build a mass campaign which aims to shut down and occupy every university.

We can build on the support we already have on campuses. We need to draw in secondary school students into the campaign because they are the ones who will have to pay the fees. They should be involved in every occupation. They've already shown around the war that they are willing and able to take direct action.

We also have to link up with every trade union involved in the university sector. Workers in the universities are fighting on a number of fronts against the government and the vice-chancellors who want to introduce the fees. Link the fight-back.

But we should not stop with the workers on the campuses. All over the public sector workers are fighting back against Blair's attempts at privatisation. Students should go to the meetings of trade unionists and explain why fees are all part of Blair's plans to privatise education. Explain why the struggle against fees is the same struggle as the fight against foundation hospitals or the fight against low pay in the public sector. We should propose a joint campaign against privatisation in every sector and link all the struggles together into one big fightback against Blair's band of privatisers.

Lobbies of parliament and pleading with Blair and the vice-chancellors will get us nowhere.

Occupy the universities, link the issues and build a joint fight back against privatisation with the unions. That's the only way we can win.



For free education

By Luke in Riegate

According to the government, top up fees - the latest attack on students - are justified because graduates are proven to earn more over their lifetime. Apart from the fact that this is not true (statistics show that in the age of globalisation and increasing liberalisation of the labour market, a university degree does not guarantee a well paid job), education should not be about straightjacketing people into this or that job but about learning about the world around us. We have a right to this knowledge. That's why education must not be a privilege for the rich alone and should of course be expanded. But as it is expanded we must demand that it is free.

Completely free university education, with a living grant, is a right that our great grandparents' generation fought for and won in the 1940s. It is the corporations that benefit from a skilled and well trained workforce and they are the ones that must be made to pay. We

need to raise the call for a punitive increase in corporate tax to finance an efficient public higher education system. As students we demand the right to a living grant as part of a massive injection of money into our education system. It is our right!

A Globalised offensive

It's not just British students that are having their rights attacked. In Germany students have been battling against the introduction of fees, cuts in funding to the universities and attempts to force in corporate sponsorship of education - sounds familiar? French students are fighting attempts to "decentralise" control and funding of schools; these are forms of creeping privatisation. Spanish students are also struggling against Aznar's attacks on their education.

This is part and parcel of a co-ordinated neo liberal offensive across Europe. The social

WALK FOR FREE EDUCATION

Natalie from Cambridge University has hit the streets to protest against the introduction of top-up fees. A group of them are walking from Cambridge to London arriving in time for the vote in parliament on Tuesday 27th Jan. We caught up with her on the road...

13.30 Saturday 24th Jan

Where are you now? Just south of Cambridge. We are approaching Trumpington.

How long have you been on the road? Half an hour. We are a bit late starting because there was a rally to send us off. We were interviewed by the Telegraph, Times and the Associated Press.

When do you expect to get to London? We should get to Middlesex Uni on Monday evening. We will stay the night there - they have arranged a party for us - and then a group of us will do the last leg to Parliament in time for the demonstration at 12 noon.

How many people are with you? There are about 15 - 20 people now but only 8 will go the whole way. People will join up with us for part of the walk as well.

Why are you doing this? We thought this was a good way to prove our point as students and working people against top up fees. We know that top up fees will create a

two tier system within higher education, like they have in the States. This is a giant step towards opening up education to the market - commodification of our education. I think it's important that Cambridge students are taking a stand because Cambridge is known as an elitist institution - so it sends a very strong message when we are demonstrating against the fees. We want everyone to have the chance we had: a chance in the future.

Do you think the bill will go through? I think there's a good chance it won't. Last night we had a meeting with the local MP who was trying to defend the government's plans. But not one person in the room supported her; as our representative she should vote against top up fees.

Action needed: The most important thing now is to put enough pressure on Tony Blair and Labour so that the bill doesn't go through, because this will be just the beginning and every year we will see a creeping increase. We need to take action to pressure the government to find other ways to fund education. But ultimately we must take direct control over our education. The Labour government makes decisions based on the rule of profit, not of need - they are a capitalist government. We need to overthrow the capitalist system so that the socialist principle of free education for all, throughout their lifetime, can be guaranteed for generations to come.

make the corporations pay!

gains of workers over the past 50 years are up against the capitalists' drive for profits. In Germany, another "Socialist", after Tony Blair's own heart, Gerhard Schröder, is pushing through his Agenda 2010: a comprehensive programme that is seeking to do precisely what Thatcher did in the 80s - privatise everything in sight and break up the Trade Union movement.

Globalise the fightback!

In the face of a co-ordinated offensive we need a co-ordinated and militant fightback. We should follow in the footsteps of the students across Germany, France and Spain who reacted to cuts to their education system by occupying the universities and shutting down the campuses. In Berlin, thousands of striking students used discarded Christmas trees to build barricades around the parliament building!

The more militant we are the less Blair - and

all the MPs who will be voting for Top Up Fees on Tuesday 27th January - will be able to ignore us. A wave of campus occupations here in the UK can also restart a non-payment campaign. Let's hit the greedy bastards where it hurts.

No trust in parliament... No trust in the Labour left... Take action!

160 Labour MPs have signed a motion against top up fees two months ago. But as each day passes before the crucial vote, more Labour MPs are falling behind "their leader", scared of the repercussions on their careers that voting against the government will bring. Many are saying that they have won the concessions that they wanted. We ask, where are these mighty great concessions? They don't exist.

We need to show these cowards that there is mass opposition amongst students to the fees.

And that we are willing to take direct action to stop this government. We need to take to the streets and besiege Parliament on the day of the vote. Get involved with the action at your uni! And let's not stop at fighting top up fees: we need to fight for a free education with a living grant! After all, it's our world and it's our future - let's take it back!

REVOLUTION FIGHTS FOR:

NO FEES!

NO GRADUATE TAX!

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FOR FREE EDUCATION

A LIVING GRANT FOR ALL

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Privatising our schools

By Frank in Hammersmith

Three or four weeks ago, our Sixth Form was told to attend a photo-shoot for our new "connexions" cards, a new system of registers, connected to a system of rewards for attendance and punctuality. They asked us a number of questions, name, address, and essentially tried to ascertain a number of personal details, before falling on the key question, "Would you mind if we sent you details on upcoming promotions etc." I was sickened. The company which had apparently been hired by the whole of the Borough of Hounslow's schools was trying to use their knowledge of one of the most vulnerable sections of the community, in order to target them for marketing campaigns.

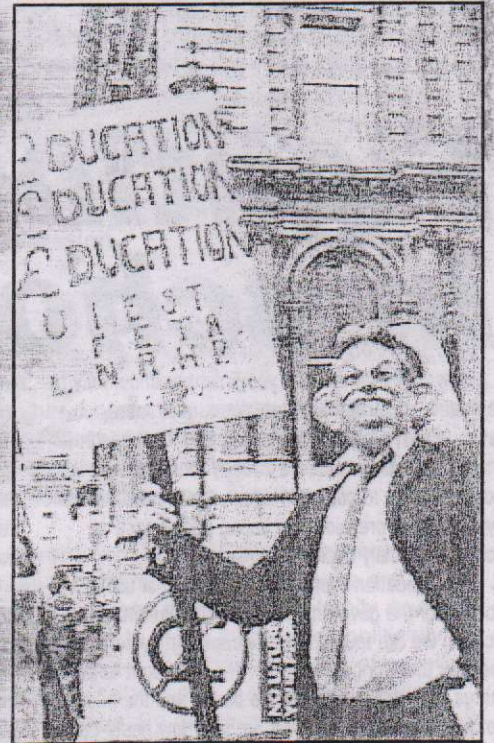
A correspondence to the good people at Connexions informed that the company would only pass on our details to those organisations whom they genuinely believed would be of interest to the students... all for a tidy profit.

This was just one of the recent events which have led up to the increasing corporate control of our school. For the duration of my time in this school (6 yrs approximately), we have seen our cafeteria prices rise dramatically above inflation, prices more than doubling in some instances over these six years of amazingly low interest. The food standard has been consistently poor, the quality of the food often being reflected in the presence of ice crystals or insects in certain instances. Indeed, as soon as people enter the Sixth Form and cease to be forced to use the cafeteria, they no longer use it. I for one haven't used it for the duration of the past half term (the first of the academic year), and I know of no individual who does. Again, the same company has been offered contracts throughout Hounslow.

Sometime a couple of years ago, the school

announced it would be applying for "Science School" status. Around half of all schools in the Borough of Hounslow are now adopting "Specialist" school status such as this. In order to apply for "Science School" status, our school must raise £50,000 in private sponsorship. Our sponsorship has come from the kind people at GlaxoSmithKline. Again, this investment has been carried out across the borough of Hounslow. This can not but help raise the inevitable questions as to what GSK intend to gain from this investment (approximately £50 per student). Perhaps our school genuinely believes, as Capita does, that GSK products are indeed superior to those of its rivals. Perhaps it feels that GSK does indeed offer pupils the opportunity they deserve regarding employment. Perhaps indeed our headship does genuinely feel that GSK can set a clear moral code of conduct for the borough's children. After all "The Specialist Schools Trust offers a range of possibilities for individuals, corporations and foundations to play important roles in support of key Government educational initiatives." GlaxoSmithKline has clearly been chosen as an embodiment of what society wants from its younger generation.

GSK, unfortunately is slightly lacking in what might be considered good qualities which we'd expect from students. Actively preventing the production to anti-retroviral drugs in Africa. Omitting to the British patent office that the research, testing and development of its AIDS drugs were not only funded, but fully carried out by NHS scientists. Morality is essentially summed up by the greed expressed by the directorship as they demanded bonuses as the company profits plummeted. The perfect model for the nation's children: Bullying, lying, and open corruption. The appearance of



advertising and posters bearing the GSK logo have already begun to sum up this moral code. Until we can make this clear to society, however, GSK will remain the good people who provided our school with £50,000.

So, there we are: the cafeteria, the science department, even our registers are now run by private companies, offering low quality service at ludicrous prices. My school has sold its soul to Corporations and me and my peers will now pay the price.

Student Unionisation

by James in Baidon

Over the last year it has been clear for the whole country to see that as the youth, we are not the apathetic, unmotivated drones the media and the government like to portray us as. A combination of proposed university tuition fees, and the war in Iraq has, on numerous occasions, bought countless numbers of students from schools, colleges and universities on to the streets in protest against the government.

In the case of school walkouts over the war, many students suffered a stinging backlash to their actions, with pupils being heavily punished, and even being suspended in some cases. This was particularly the case during Bush's visit to London last November, when the Secondary Heads Association backed Charles Clarke on his suggestion that any pupils taking action over Bush's visit should be dealt with severely by their schools.

University students have suffered similarly disgraceful treatment at the hands of the state. With the continued determination of the Blair government to charge top up fees and the threat that, if these fees are not charged, we will see the closure of many universities taking place.

These two situations reflect the continued oppression of youth but at the same time present its solution: unionisation. As it stands now, the only form of union support available



to students is the NUS, which is only open to students studying further or higher education, neglecting many in schools and sixth form colleges where unionisation is perhaps all the more necessary to combat the increasing oppression by management. Despite running a skeleton campaign against top-up fees, and providing some information on organising unions within colleges or universities, the main attraction for most students are the discounts that are available on the NUS card. This is not to say that discounts are the only reason students join the NUS, but that it is pretty much the sum of total support offered by the union in most places of education.

The next logical step from this groundswell of student political activity, is the rank and file organisation of students in schools, colleges and universities across the country and

the renunciation of NUS bureaucracy and its token support. Within many schools and colleges, systems of councils and forums for tackling internal issues already exist (and are for the most part minimal gestures and completely useless). In places where systems like this exist, the infrastructure of meetings must be taken over and run by the students for their own means. Within schools this could mean for example anti-bullying campaigns being taken into the hands of students, rather than being left in the grasps of teachers, who can often unwittingly compound such problems.

In the case of more student strikes taking place it would mean that there would be an independent student body in school to defend any pupil being singled out for punish as a result of their actions. On a wider level, the unionisation of students would ensure that decisive, collective action could be taken against anti-youth policies across the country when required. For example in the case of top up fees, rather than just the university students being out on the streets, students of all ages could be out protesting together.

The state has tried to divide the youth, building barriers between those in different levels of education. Breaking those barriers to fight together as a student movement is a key point in the struggle to end the oppression and degradation of the youth.

Fighting oppression in school

by Josh in Halifax

How many times have you finished school only to feel really miserable? Undervalued, mistreated, isolated, bored? Chances are quite often. The reason for this isn't because you're a stropky teenager with nothing better to complain about, it's because of the systematic oppression that young people face at school on a daily basis.

The education system is one big tool of social control for the government. Under the national curriculum we are taught that the capitalist system is the way that things should be. We are taught to see things from the position of the banks and the bosses, not from the of workers. We are told how nasty Lenin and those evil Bolsheviks were in history (for overthrowing capitalism), and how we shouldn't mention homosexuality, not take drugs and be good citizens in PSE.

The planting of these ideas in young people's minds serves the agenda of the capitalist class.

What we are taught is only part of the problem in school. The education system also plays a big part, not only in repressing views that young people have, but in oppressing youth themselves.

For instance, in exams strict time limits, and a strict marking criteria, means that anything that is written in an exam has to be

very restricted and is often just a regurgitation of what is written in our text books.

Going through this process year in, year out is deliberate. It teaches us that in order to succeed you have to repeat what we have been taught with little regard for criticism or our own interpretation on what we've learnt.

For another example, look at the structure of lessons. The role of the student is simply to note down what they are told to. No time for debate. No time for criticism. No time for exploration. Just note it down and pay attention. This clearly promotes unthinking obedience and the only conclusions that we are allowed to draw are those drawn for us. This is not an exercise in education. It is just repeating those ideas and concepts the government has decided we need to now to be useful for capitalism.

A lot of what we learn is also sexist, racist, and homophobic. Ideas that are common in society. The absence of the process of questioning these accepted ideas in schools often results in these accepted ideas being enforced by pupils themselves through bullying.

Bullying exposes the role that schools have as a social tool. Through bullying the reactionary ideas in society that divide us - sexism, racism and homo-

phobia - are reinforced. Being different or looking at the world differently singles you out for victimisation.

Anti-bullying programmes in schools are usually half hearted and never address the causes of bullying itself. The only way this can be done is by attacking reactionary views in society as a whole.

The way to combat youth oppression in schools is not through some vague anti authoritarian attack on teachers as being oppressive. They are oppressed as workers and share common interests with students in terms of combating issues which are bad for pupils and teachers alike. We need to look at the real cause of the oppression. We can fight it by setting up strong student unions, democratic and effective student councils (if needs be separate from the meaningless official school councils) and use them to campaign around the issues that affect us in school. We must campaign alongside teachers against government imposed bureaucratic measures, against privatisation of our schools and we must fight against reactionary ideas which fellow students hold. Only by students and teachers standing together on issue which affect us both, can we hope to successfully fight the problems we face in schools.

MYTHS VS REALITY

THE TRUTH ABOUT ASYLUM SEEKERS

Myth No. 1: "...a tide of humanity that sees Britain as the land of milk and honey." If Britain is the land of milk and honey for asylum seekers then how come asylum seekers are not allowed to claim state benefits in Britain? Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and their only option is the National Asylum Support Service which gives a single adult £37.77 a week, 30% below the poverty line. Hardly enough to buy milk or honey.

Myth No. 2: "...illegal asylum seekers." There is actually no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker in the UK because the UK signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees. This states that, by law, anyone has the right to claim asylum in the UK.

Also there is often a distinction made between asylum seekers who are escaping torture and persecution and economic migrants who are escaping poverty and starvation. Most immigrants are part of the working class and are simply seeking work to escape from the grinding poverty that imperialism imposes on most of the world. Wasn't it the Tories who told us to "get on yer bike" to find work? It seems ok for the ruling classes to take their businesses from country to country, but the workers should go where they're told.

Myth No. 3: "losing the war on asylum crime." This was one of many headlines implying that asylum seekers are criminals. In fact a report published by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) recently confirmed that there is no evidence for a higher rate of criminality among refugees and asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are much more likely to be the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators of it.

Myth No. 4: "bogus asylum seekers are draining millions from the NHS and the tax payer's purse." Asylum seekers are entitled to the NHS as much as any other resident or visitor in the UK. Also 40% of NHS staff were actually born outside of the UK and the same goes for workers in many public sector jobs.

Immigration is a scapegoat for the government. In 1998 the EU average spent on health was 8.9% of GDP (a nation's wealth). Britain was spending 5.7%, a shortfall of £9.9 billion. Today nothing has changed. The picture is the same across our public services (Britain ranks 9th out of 15 EU countries when it comes to spending on education). This is a result of the Tory and Labour government slashing tax rates for the rich over the last two decades.

In fact, the most notorious instance of "burdening the taxpayer" remains that of Rupert Murdoch. Reporters worked out that if NewsCorp Investments paid corporation tax at the current rate of 30 per cent - the lowest ever, by the way - it would have given the Inland Revenue £350m over 11 years, enough to build seven new hospitals, 50 secondary schools or 300 primary schools. As it was, it paid virtually nothing.

Murdoch's tax dodging is legal. So, as he revels in his hoarded millions courtesy of the tax payer, he uses his racist, gutter press tabloids to denounce 'benefit/asylum scroungers.'

The same goes across the board (rooms?) for the rich and ruling classes who use tax loopholes and low government tax rates to hoard their wealth.

Myth No. 5: "Britain the No. 1 refugee magnet." A laughable claim! Within the EU Britain ranked 10th in terms of asylum seeker applications in relation to the overall population and globally Britain ranked 32nd! If you look at it in terms of percentages, Britain only takes 2% of the world's asylum seekers. The biggest burden falls on poorer countries such as Iran, Burundi and Guinea because these are the countries closest to those from where most asylum seekers come: Iraq, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Somalia.

By Jane in Leeds and Dan in Lewisham

BANNING THE HEADSCARF: secularism or racism?



Over ten thousand people were on the streets in Paris on January 17th to protest against President Jacques Chirac's attempt to ban Islamic headscarves in schools. His plan involves legislating the removal of all 'ostentatious' symbols and overt displays of worship from all

state schools. Chirac asserts this law seeks to remain in keeping with 'French ideals of secularism' as demonstrated by the omission of questions of race, ethnicity and religion in the national census. The current draft of the proposal states that any 'signs or dress that ostensibly show the religious affiliation of students' be prohibited, which includes large Catholic crosses, Jewish yarmulke, and Muslim hijab. Students who refuse will face expulsion.

Chirac has painted the ban as a necessary response to growing Muslim extremism and a defence of 'France's values.' He said that France "would lose its soul" if it allowed religious communities to dissuade it from imposing this ban. In response to the protests against the ban, the next week the Education Minister has said that beards and bandanas may also be included under the ban. "If a beard is transformed into a religious sign, it will fall under the law," he said. So would female students wearing bandanas as a substitute for Muslim headscarves.

This is an insidious attack on personal freedom and religious expression.

"If we can't remove the source, let's remove the signs" is what Chirac is really saying. Secularism is an excuse to justify purging a society of the feared Other by removing what is visible, and then maybe, just maybe, we can get rid of it altogether. The very mandate of this law is characterised by conformity and submission to a pre-established white, patriarchal 'norm' that is threatened by these 'ostentatious' expressions of difference.

The French government ban will disproportionately affect youth. As the ultimate catch-22, youths are being forced to choose between their faith and family, and getting enough education to make themselves politically and economically viable. The consequences of expelling Muslim students for adhering to their religious beliefs extend beyond schools. By denying education, the French government is denying them any future of participating as equals in society. Forcing young Muslim women out of school will isolate them even more by forcing them into faith schools. The direct result of this is the effective removal of ethnic diversity in the workplace. It is a downward spiral: educational denial, economic oppression, and political repression.

This is not a question of religion, of whether or not it's right to give your faith to a god. Rather this is a question of choice and how that fundamental right is being exploited by a racist government.

by emma in finsbury park

9 ★ REVOLUTION

Israeli Teenage REFUSENIK

At the beginning of January Haggai Matar, a young Israeli man, was sentenced to a year imprisonment in the military detention centre in Haifa. His crime? Refusing to serve because he objects to the occupation. Haggai is part of an Israeli growing movement called Refusenik. So far, five other young men have been given one year sentences for publicly denouncing Israel's brutal war in Palestine and for refusing to take part in it.

'Sometimes people react badly to what I say. They say that we're destroying the country, we're anti-democratic, we're the worst criminals', Haggai said during an interview. This might be true of the Israeli ruling class, but the huge support Haggai and his schoolmates received showed that there are a lot of young Israelis ready to join them.

Since the Refuseniks decided to go public with their protest, more than 1,000 school leavers and reservists have signed petitions, sent refusal letters and started a real movement. The young Refusenik's rebellion is spreading in schools around the country, where students have taken up the struggle and are determined to show

their solidarity with Palestinians by preferring to go to prison rather than being instruments of Israel's dirty war.

Solidarity between the Israeli working class and students and the Palestinian working class and students is the thing that US imperialism and the Israeli ruling class fear most of all. And it can be a real possibility.

Many Revo members have visited Palestine through the International Solidarity Movement and all of them have come back and said that many of the Palestinian youth they met were keen to make links with Israelis who were in solidarity with their situation.

Recently there have been strikes across Israel as the ruling classes attack their own working class to pay for the apartheid system. If this wave of militancy can link up with the struggle for Palestinian liberation a real force for change can be forged. Students and young workers in Israel and Palestine could act as a vanguard in enabling this to happen.

The Sharon government and the Palestinian ruling class say that the way forward is the "peace" process and a state for Palestine. But a two state solution has always been totally utopian. The Israeli ruling



class and their puppet masters of US imperialism will never allow two equal states of Israel and Palestine, and the ever expanding settlers just reinforce this.

The Refuseniks and youth of Israel, combined with the struggle of young people on the streets of Palestine could form the embryo of a new revolutionary movement. That's why the judge commented that their actions threaten its very existence. Because the fight for a socialist state that combines both Israelis and Palestinians in a class struggle is the only way that the barbarity of Israeli apartheid will be overthrown for good.

by Dan in Lewisham

AFGHANISTAN AND THE BLOOD

It's official! The all American Shrub and his 'War on Terror' is making the world a safer place! The 'Axis of Evil' is being suffocated by pink love hearts and those 'bad guys' are realising they can't mess with the good old US of A! Wherever he goes he improves people's lives, uprooting evil dictatorships and sprinkling democracy to war torn rogue States. That brutal, nasty dictator Saddam was found in a hole! Now you can rest assured that he will never strike us down with those dreaded (made in the USA) WMD's! And then there's Afghanistan! The training base for the deadly and all feared Al-Qaeda. You can bet your bottom dollar OBL won't be returning to a cave in those rocky mountains any time soon. A new constitution has been drafted after 25 years of tyranny and lawlessness. Afghanistan, formally the recruitment ground for the CIA of Al Qaeda militants in the fight against the Soviet Union, finally has a constitution! Not only that but full blown elections in June!

In reality Afghanistan couldn't be further away from establishing a true democracy. The UN has pulled its international officials out of the region, as have most foreign aid agencies, because of murders and

abductions. Voter registration for the presidential elections has ground to a halt in Kandahar after the mullahs of two mosques were threatened. The world food programme is supplying less than half its promised amount of grain to the needy because lorry drivers and others fear for their lives. The UN refugee agency has stopped helping Afghan's return from Pakistan.

Democracy is an alien concept in Afghanistan, mostly thanks to the US who have turned their back on it in the past and helped the Taliban gain power. At the moment, violence and the threat of violence pervades at every level: from women at home who are repressed and often not allowed to vote by their fathers or husbands, to a national level where inter-ethnic tensions could spill over into civil war.

As NATO tries to extend its 'peacekeeping' mission beyond Kabul, where lawlessness has been reinforced by a resurgence of attacks by the regrouping Taliban, grave doubts are cast over the prospect of free elections. It is little wonder that the president, Hamid Karzai, is known, disparagingly, as the mayor of Kabul. His influence does not extend beyond the capital

USA: Caught in an Iraq mire

Early December of 2003 saw the capture of the Middle Eastern man, the embodiment of evil we have been taught to hate; indeed, the cause of all Middle Eastern problems: the reason we sent troops into Iraq in the first place.

With his capture, it might have seemed almost unnecessary to continue the war. After all, his political structure was of a Stalinesque, feudal nature, held together by fear and mistrust. Could we have finally achieved what we have spent so much in money and lives to on: The end of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, an end to torture, oppression and corruption? With Saddam, his sons, and his chief followers either dead or captured, surely the age of fear and violence in Iraq was over. The attacks would stop, and we could all go home.

Apparently so! Since Saddam's capture, attacks on American forces are down 22%, troops are 22% safer, and we're 22% closer to democracy in Iraq. However, it is now clear that 78% of Iraqi attacks were carried out independently of Saddam. The vast majority of the so-called "insurgents" were in fact fighting for Iraq, not Saddam. These people oppose the British-Polish-Australian-Spanish-American and now Japanese occupation, but to assume that your enemy's enemy is your friend is misleading and moreover dangerous.



USA troops get their welcome in Iraq

In Vietnam, the opposition came not from genuine communists (the vast majority never having heard of Marx) but from a sincere wish to be free from occupation: first the Chinese, then the French and finally the Americans. Ho Chi Minh became to the Vietnamese not a symbol of working class struggle or even equality, he became a symbol of the struggle against the American occupation. Most neither cared about nor supported his personal ideology, but were prepared to fight with him.

In turn, in Iraq, we have seen not the open support for Saddam Hussein from insurgents calling for a return to tyranny, to torture and to murder, but a group of nationalists who up till now have been prepared to accept Saddam's as the face of nationalist struggle against the American invasion.

With his demise, the struggle has and will carry on: two American soldiers are but the latest of a list of casualties sure to grow longer. Saddam is gone, but he was just a symbol of nationalism, who was once a tyrant. Now, he is neither. He will be tried and speedily executed and will become

much like a passing leaflet or advertising campaign. The struggle against American imperialism will inevitably continue with perhaps a new face, or indeed now as a faceless organisation, like the IRA or MI6. It will only be a matter of time before more Iraqis, bombed out of house and home will join the nationalist course. It is imperative that troops leave to allow the Iraqis to determine their future before more people die. **By FRANK in Hammersmith**

SPLATTERED ROAD TO ELECTIONS

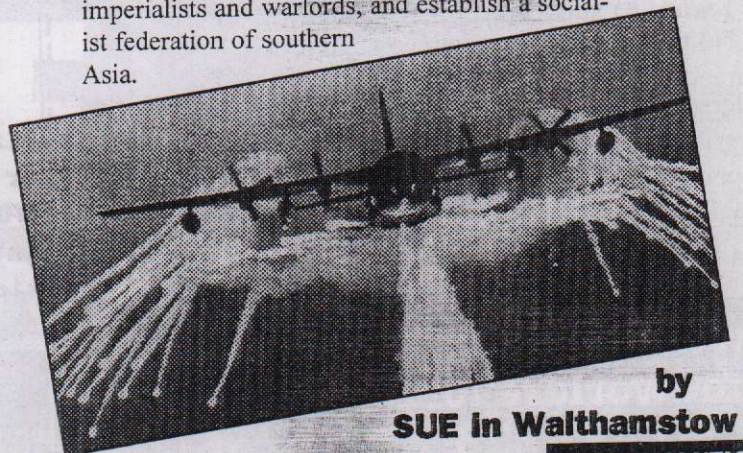
This week, 503 Afghan delegates from all over the country met in the city and approved a new constitution. According to unconfirmed reports, some delegates received death threats from members of the Taliban.

Jobs, services, education and reconstruction are the only things that can bring stability to this impoverished land. Yet foreign governments are less inclined to spend cash rebuilding Afghanistan while insecurity remains. The Afghanistan reconstruction project has made it onto the drawing board. It is a \$160 million project to build schools, hospitals and communications facilities in a country with not a single fixed line telephone. "Up to now Britain has promised to provide \$42 million and the US has promised to donate \$25 million. We hope that... we will be able to raise the amount of money we need for this project," says the Afghan interior minister Ali Jalali.

Gwynne Dyer from the Jordan Times has a different view; "Three predictions. There will be no internationally recognised free elections in Afghanistan in 2004 (though some sort of charade may be arranged). US forces will pull out within three

years. The Taliban will be back in power within five".

We can add a less cynical fourth prediction. When the huge working classes of neighbouring Pakistan and Iran overthrow their Islamist, capitalist dictatorships - one of their first tasks will be aiding the poor peasants of Afghanistan to push out the imperialists and warlords, and establish a socialist federation of southern Asia.



by
SUE in Walthamstow



for a youth space at the next European Social Forum

REVOLUTION has been involved in the organisation of the past two European Social Forums - Florence and Paris. This year the ESF will be held in Britain, probably London. We are trying to find creative ways to increase the amount and level of youth participation in the Social Forums. We have argued for this at the European Assembly 13/14 Dec. If you agree, add your signature...

Young people around the world have been central to creating and building the anti-capitalist movement, contradicting the idea put forward by the media that we are becoming more and more politically apathetic and individualistic.

The European Social Forum is an unprecedented opportunity for different groups and individuals within the movement to meet, exchange ideas and plan action - but how easy is it for the younger generation of activists to have a decisive say in shaping the forum? Look around you at ESF planning meetings; think back to the speakers on the top tables in 2002 and 2003...where are the youth?

This proposal outlines an idea for creating a physical space and a space on the ESF timetable so that young people can meet, see the work and ideas of other groups and individuals, discuss shared actions and campaigns (and different theoretical approaches) and eventually feed back their ideas to the Assembly of the Social Movements so that their participation affects the whole forum.

We are proposing:

- ⊛ A physical space within the forum buildings (not far from the other venues as this will ghettoise the debates and events that take place) where there can be stalls, rooms for youth related or organised seminars/workshops, and cultural events. This way we can all see who else is there, what they do, and what they have to say about it... Also, a space where meetings can be organised spontaneously, to follow up ideas that come out of the other workshops, or to work on proposals for joint action.
- ⊛ A "theme" within the timetable - highlighted by colour coding or reprinted as a separate list within the programme - showing the times and locations of youth related or organised seminars/workshops and cultural events.
- ⊛ A youth assembly at the end of the ESF, to bring together the themes of the meetings and to prepare to report back to the Assembly of the Social Movements.

At present the organisation of the ESF can seem impossibly complex and discouraging to anyone who is new to it, and young people have not played a major role in shaping and planning the forum. This proposal gives us a way to bring youth groups and individuals to the heart of the forum and to encourage their participation in every aspect of it in the future.

For more info on these ideas or to make suggestions, etc, contact info@worldrevolution.org.uk

We are calling on all youth organisations and individuals to support this call for a self-organised youth space within the framework of the ESF. We call on you to argue and build for it within your networks, local social forums and ESF mobilising committees. So far we have gained support from the Scottish youth (SSP), Basque youth (SEGJ), many participants at the Paris ESF, and the UK programme working group.

Revolution sees this as a first step in developing an anti-capitalist youth international - to break down the barriers they use to divide us and unite in struggle across borders and nations. Through our democracy and organisation we can show that there is an alternative to the chaos and anarchy of the capitalist system. Young people lead the movement in action and they should have the opportunity to lead it politically too.

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