

workers POWER

**VIVA
ZAPATA!**
Mexican
march for
justice
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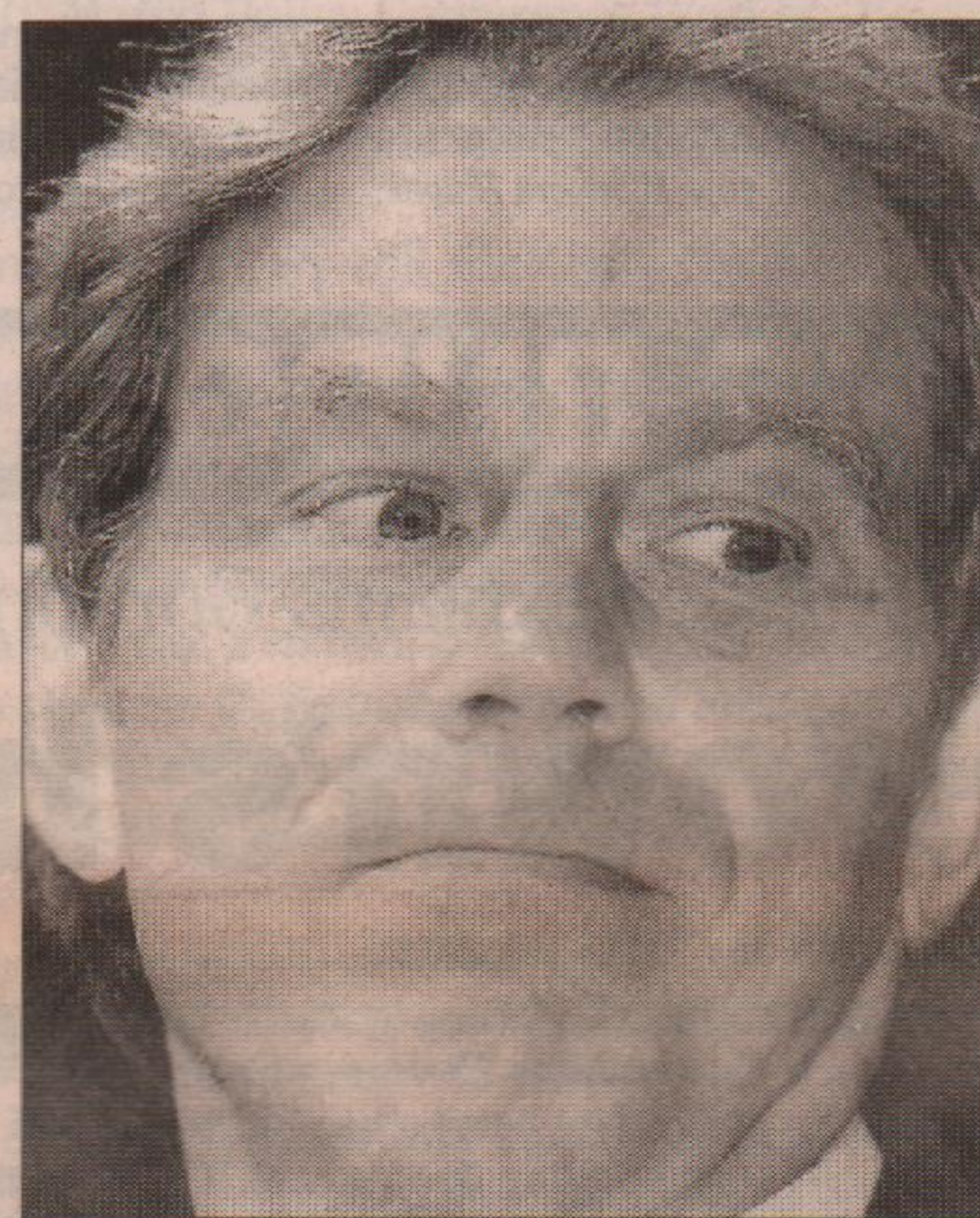
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Empty, corrupt and capitalist



**"The Millennium Dome will write the
first page of the Labour manifesto"**
Tony Blair, 1998



**Dome is a
monument to
Labour's broken
promises**
Socialists launch
election challenge
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The socialist alternative

WORKING CLASS people who are sick of Tory Blair now have an alternative choice at the upcoming election. The Socialist Alliance and Scottish Socialist Party will together be fighting more than 150 seats.

The Socialist Alliance launched its election bid on 1 March, with former Coventry MP Dave Nellist hosting a press conference for several national newspapers, including *The Guardian*.

A year ago they would have ignored us, but after a successful campaign in the London assembly elections last May and a series of good by-election results, the press accepts that the Socialist Alliance is a credible challenge and will win disillusioned Labour voters to its ranks in the months ahead.

That is why *Guardian* political columnist Polly Toynbee poured scorn on the Socialist Alliance. She called us "the dotty left...a coalition of dreamers" and so on.

But she gave the game away when she wrote that a "majority of Labour members may secretly yearn for Socialist Alliance policies".

She's right. Across Britain, in election organising meetings, on stalls in local shopping centres, and in union branches – the SA's message is getting a great response.

Thousands of working class people have simply had enough. They've had enough of

- A government stuffed with millionaires and their sycophantic hangers-on.
- Chaos on the privatised railways.
- Failure to deliver real improvements in the NHS, council services and education – except for improvements to the balance sheets of the private contractors who are taking over

public services.

- The growing gap between rich and poor under New Labour – and the terrible hopelessness that Labour is bringing to run-down towns and cities by criminalising a whole generation of youth, while slashing local services.
- The spread of racism and bigotry, fuelled by Jack Straw's vindictive campaign against asylum seekers.
- The bombing of Iraq, combined with Britain's refusal to end the arms trade to dictators and murderers across the globe.

'Speaking up for the millions not the millionaires'

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE candidates at the next election will be the very people who have fought against New Labour's cuts, closures and privatisations.

John Mulrenan is standing against Harriet Harman in Camberwell and Peckham. As assistant secretary of Southwark Unison he led a campaign against the Labour's council selling off of the borough's education services to a building firm. He told *Workers Power*:

"I want to be part of a movement that offers a genuine alternative to the British people, and that's what the Socialist Alliance will do."

Theresa Bennett, a long-standing anti-racist campaigner, is challenging Kate Hoey in London's Vauxhall constituency. "We are standing to speak up for the millions not the millionaires," she told the Alliance launch meeting.

And while Blair is rushing to offer compensation to the rich farmers and

agribusinesses whose ruthless drive for profits has done so much damage to the countryside and the environment, John Lister, standing in Oxford East made a telling point: "What the Socialist Alliance is trying to point out are that the class divide between rich and poor in the cities applies with even more force in the countryside. What we want is a programme that doesn't just address the fox hunting predilections of the rural rich but which gets

to grips with the issues that poor people face in the countryside – low wages, bad transport, poor services, education and health."

The Socialist Alliance, like the Alliance's whole election campaign, is not just about getting votes and promoting star politicians. It is all about translating the real feelings of betrayal at New Labour, felt by tens of thousands of working class people, into an active, fighting campaign for socialism.

The campaign is under way. Workers Power calls on all our readers to get involved. Join your local Socialist Alliance. Help us raise £100,000 to fight the election and vote Socialist Alliance come the election.

■ To join write to Socialist Alliance, PO Box 121, Coventry CV1 5DA, Phone 020 7536 9696.

Send donations to above address and make cheques/POs payable to Socialist Alliance

THE BUDGET

Colin Lloyd explains Gordon Brown's budget dilemma and asks what would a socialist Chancellor do?

Brown's budget for the bosses...

GORDON BROWN has a budgeting headache: he has too much money. After 25 years of both Labour and Tory politicians being obsessed with cutting public spending, the government has ended the financial year with £18 billion in the bank. That is despite using up the windfall from mobile phone licences to pay off debt, and despite some public spending increases in the last budget.

The capitalists want tax cuts – but before the budget they called for Brown to avoid a pre-election giveaway, a move echoed by the IMF.

They say that if Brown were to spend the money he has in the bank, it would lead to "boom and bust".

The government netted £22 billion from the privatisation of the radio spectrum to the mobile phone companies. He poured it straight down the drain of debt repayment in order to avoid having to spend it to meet working class needs.

But budget surpluses are still way ahead of predictions. One reason is economic growth. More

THE MEANEST GOVERNMENT IN EUROPE?

THE BRITISH government spends around 36 per cent of the nation's annual income (GDP), a substantially lower share than in most European countries. Across the European Union, employers pay an average National Insurance rate of 28 per cent, more than double the UK figure.

Corporation tax – on the profits of business – brings in just £34 billion a year. From industrial and commercial

company profits of £120 billion in 1999 the capitalists gained £35 billion worth of "exemptions" and a further £8 billion of tax relief. If businesses were simply charged at the same (low) rate as rich individuals – 40 per cent – then the corporation tax on all businesses would rise to £66 billion overnight. In fact, during Thatcher's first five years corporation tax stood at 52 per cent.

important, though, is central government's reluctance to spend the money allocated in previous budgets. Like a person who's been starving, the public sector can't digest a full meal at once.

A third reason for the high surplus is the regressive nature of taxes on working people. High duties on alcohol, tobacco and fuel, plus 17.5 per cent

VAT on the vital necessities of life – all this is coining it in for the Treasury while massively boosting the cost of living.

Under present economic policy the fear of "boom and bust" is justified. But this is only because Brown refuses to make any serious attempt to control the workings of the capitalist market.

The economists say more public spending would boost inflation, prompting the Bank of England to raise interest rates – something the Bank can do without reference to the Treasury because Gordon Brown privatised it in 1997. That in turn would boost the value of the pound, hitting UK jobs.

A socialist government would start by nationalising the Bank of England and taking all the levers of economic policy back under public control.

How would it cope with the resultant threat of inflation? By imposing price controls both in shops and at the factory gate and by boosting economic growth to levels that could absorb the inflationary pressures.

At the same time, it would transfer large chunks of the economy out of the remit of the market forces that threaten boom and bust – renationalising the major utilities and transport companies. Under working class control, the prices of essential goods and services like power, water, rail and bus fares could be slashed.

...and our budget for the workers

IN DRAWING up the budget Gordon Brown is assisted by professional economists who all share one basic premise: the decisions must be made in the interest of the capitalist class. The decisions are also made in secret.

A socialist budget would start from the interests of the workers and would be open to public debate before it was announced. There would be democratic working class forums in every borough to discuss the best way to spend the new money raised by our tax changes.

A socialist budget would not just alter the proportions of tax and spending – it would change the whole structure of taxation and use spending to meet the needs of working people.

Spending

If we look at today's public spending bill of around £370 billion, near-

ly one third is spent on pensions and benefits, while another third goes on the NHS and education. Housing and the environment, "law and order", industry and employment, transport and defence each get less than 10 per cent of the total. Debt interest repayments total £28 billion a year.

- The NHS could be given a 25 per cent increase overnight, just by spending the full £18 billion surplus on better healthcare.
- Education could get a 25 per cent increase if only half of the money raised from mobile phone auctions were allocated to schools and universities.
- Meanwhile, another £23 billion could be released by abolishing defence spending. A socialist government would abolish the armed forces and institute a workers' militia.

But today's £370 billion spending bill would have to grow much more

than 25 per cent to really meet the needs of working people. A workers' government would launch a programme of public infrastructure investment – with public transport, housing and urban renewal at the top of the list.

Tax the rich

If we look at taxation there is ample scope for the changes a workers' government would demand. Some £96 billion is raised annually in income tax – £34 billion of it from people who earn more than £50k a year and the rest from the working class.

But the main scope for increasing the tax burden on the ruling class, and reducing it on the rest, lies outside of income tax. National insurance is collected from both workers and employers.

Lifting the NI cap on well-paid peo-

ple would raise £5 billion extra. And if the employer rate were raised to 28 per cent straight into meeting our demand for a living pension and a living income for those on the dole.

Labour has refused to use tax to redistribute society's wealth. It uses tax concessions for the poor to replace universal benefits. The top rate of income tax remains at 40 per cent, while New Labour has actually cut the levy on corporations to the lowest level of any major industrialised country.

For the full alternative budget of the Socialist Alliance go to:

www.socialistalliance.net

A SOCIALIST BUDGET: THE HIGHLIGHTS

- Immediate release of the £18 billion surplus for a massive programme of public investment in education, health, transport infrastructure and housing. All state benefits raised to the level of the European decency threshold: £7 an hour or £280 a week.
- Boost economic growth, relying on price controls and nationalisation of key utilities, transport and telecoms companies to combat inflation.
- Boost public spending by at least 25 per cent – £100 billion a year extra – raised by increased taxes on the rich and on the large corporations and finance houses.
- Scrap VAT, tax the oil producers heavily, while reducing excise duties on petrol for consumers and small business.

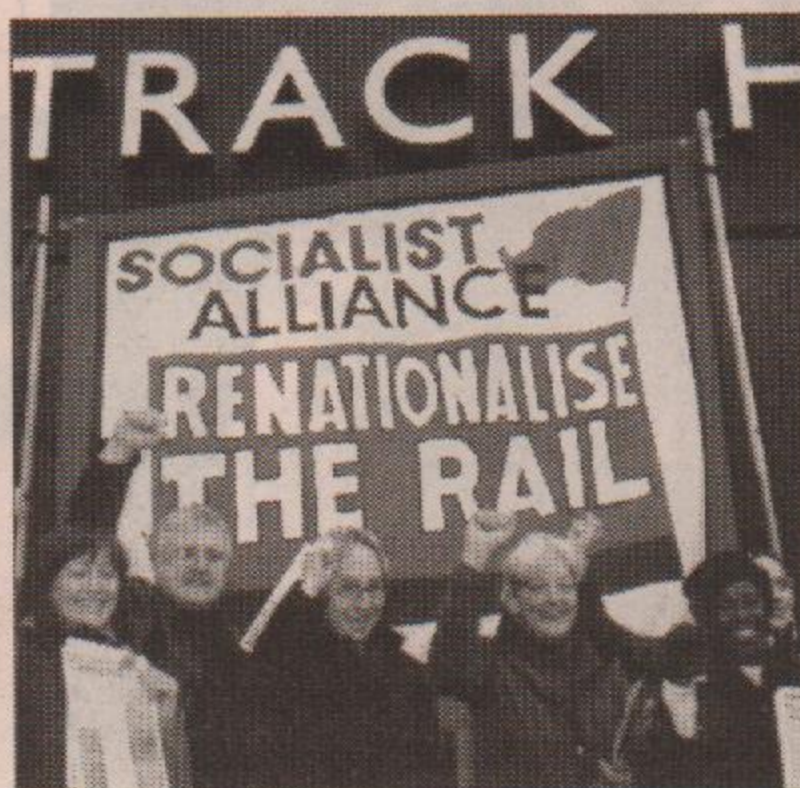
to New Labour

Renationalise the railways

GREG TUCKER, a railway worker and national secretary of the train crews section of the RMT union, told *Workers Power* that two key priorities for the Socialist Alliance will be renationalising the railways and stopping Labour from privatising London Underground.

That stance is getting good support from members of the RMT, a Labour affiliated union. Tucker said: "We had a meeting of 120 train crew delegates. There wasn't one person in the room prepared to support Labour and there were ringing endorsements from people there from different areas for the Socialist Alliance."

Building support for the Socialist Alliance in the unions will be crucial in the months ahead. The Socialist Alliance will be organising fringe meetings at union conferences and is willing to speak to trade union branches and workplace meetings. Contact the address above or phone us on 020 7793 1468.



In the shadow of the Dome

WORKERS POWER supporter Kirstie Paton is set to stand as Socialist Alliance candidate for Greenwich & Woolwich in south-east London.

Kirstie will be challenging the Labour's housing minister Nick Raynsford. Kirstie, who works as a teacher in a local secondary school, says education will be a key issue in the election:

"Education, education, education? I remember Blair saying that, and it is one of the reasons so many teachers voted Labour last time round. But look at what we got - privatisation, privatisation, privatisation - plus cuts and closures thrown in for good measure. I'm sick of it, and so are thousands of others. That's why I'm standing as a Socialist Alliance

candidate."

"The Dome was a £1 billion disaster... the best solution would be to knock it down and build thousands of affordable homes on the site - together with a much needed local hospital."

Kirstie is determined to fight a revolutionary socialist campaign, drawing in local trade unionists and appealing to activists in the anti-capitalist movement to get involved in the fight for a left alternative to Blair. If elected, she will work only for the average wage of a skilled worker, and donate the rest of her MP's salary to the workers' movement.

And she wants to hear from local people - about their problems and issues.

Contact Kirstie on: 07989 344569 and kirstiepaton@hotmail.com
■ The great Millennium Dome disaster - Kirstie Paton's new column starts on page 10.

Socialist Alliance needs your money!

We are not backed by millionaires or multinationals so please send donations to Socialist Alliance, PO Box 121, Coventry CV1 5DA and make cheques/POs payable to Socialist Alliance

FARMING CRISIS

Foot and mouth disease: the market is to blame

"LIKE SCENES from the apocalypse" said the BBC reporter. He spoke as an image of a JCB scooping up farmyard carcasses appeared on the screen. Photographs of blazing pyres dominated the front pages of national newspapers.

Such pictures will linger in the mind's eye long after the 2001 "epidemic" of foot and mouth disease (FMD) has come to an end. But what lies behind this widespread outbreak of FMD that has wrought such havoc to the sporting calendar, sparked panic buying in supermarkets and led to the imposition of draconian travel restrictions across rural Britain?

The simple, accurate answer is the quest for profit in an increasingly global marketplace. Market pressures dictate that farms concentrate ever larger numbers of livestock, often in squalid conditions, and transport them ever greater distances to sale and slaughter. This explains why the geographical spread of the disease is much wider now than at the time of the 1967 epidemic and why it looks set to affect both Ireland and continental Europe.

The Northumberland farm believed to be the source of the outbreak was filthy, yet the inspection teams sent to visit it five times in six months never shut the farm down. Despite the widespread fear about food safety in the wake of e-coli and salmonella outbreaks, and, above all, the BSE crisis, the regulation of farm hygiene remains hopelessly inadequate.

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE FACTFILE:

- The first outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Britain occurred in the 1830s. The most serious epidemic was in 1967-8.
- FMD cannot be transmitted to humans. The majority of animals infected with the virus would recover in less than a month. In general, it is fatal only among very young, old or otherwise diseased livestock.
- FMD leads to animals losing weight, milk productivity and therefore value.
- Mass slaughter became the preferred method of dealing with FMD in response to pressure from rich cattle farmers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- In the 1967-8 outbreak 400,000 animals were slaughtered.
- The British authorities have consistently rejected the development of FMD vaccination programmes. Some countries refuse to buy meat or dairy products from vaccinated herds.

The infected livestock were rapidly transported around the country by dealers looking to make the highest profit. The trail of contagion spread from the North East to the South East of England and the Cheale Meats abattoir in Essex - one of the comparative handful of slaughterhouses that has come to dominate the industry in the wake of BSE.

The culprits who benefit from the current system of poorly regulated, complex chains of food processing and distribution include the big supermarket chains. In Britain these outfits command bigger market shares and higher profit margins than elsewhere in Europe or the US. The "big five" monopolies (Tesco, Sainsbury's,

Asda, Safeway and Somerfield) chalk up 80 per cent of UK grocery sales. Tony Blair may make the occasional noise about the role of the supermarkets in the FMD crisis, but will not lift a finger against them. He even has one of their bosses, Lord Sainsbury, in his government.

Ultimately, ensuring food safety and effectively controlling the likes of FMD will mean challenging the giant capitalist retailers' control over the marketplace. In its place, we need a planned system of agricultural production and distribution that can make the best use of the agricultural science and technology developed under capitalism while minimising the environmental damage.

workers POWER

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A new party

The biggest socialist election challenge for 50 years is under way. Across Britain activists are coming together in vibrant local Socialist Alliances to challenge Labour at the polls.

Two political issues dominate the meetings: party and programme. It's clear that most of the independent activists expect the formation of a united left party after the election.

Their main concern is not so much the party's programme, but its structure. At the head of the Alliance are two big left organisations with a track record of bureaucracy - the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party (formerly Militant). That fact leads many individual members - including some who have left or been expelled from these groups - to want the most decentralised party possible.

On programme, the first major debate takes place this month. At the 10 March Policy Conference *Workers Power* will put forward amendments that would make the current draft programme into a coherent revolutionary action plan for the election.

Whether or not we win, we will stick with the Alliance. We will criticise its programme where it is inadequate, but will unite with trade union and community activists in their fight for a left alternative to Tory Blair.

But a loose network and a programme of radical reforms are not enough to form an effective socialist challenge.

We need a party - not a network - so that the programme can be made to stick; so that councillors and MPs can be held to account; so that the united caucuses of SA members in the unions can sort out the militant wheat from the careerist chaff.

If we want a "direct action" party, we need to realise that direct action only works when workers' democracy goes hand in hand with working class self-discipline.

A party that can lead the working class - not just applaud from the sidelines - has to be based on the principle: maximum freedom of debate, maximum unity in action.

To go from today's struggles to the overthrow of capitalism we need more than just a good set of electoral policies. We need a way of linking all of today's struggles with the struggle for working class power.

Socialism will not come through parliament - even one stuffed full of socialist MPs. The working class has to break up the capitalist state: the army, the police, the unelected judges, the Monarchy and so on.

In their place we need a new kind of government - one based on delegate workers' councils drawn from workplaces and estates, and defended by an armed and accountable workers' defence organisation.

We need a revolutionary workers' party.

Some in the SA want to rebuild "old Labour"; others want a more radical socialist party that stops short of revolution. Most of the left groups are happy to go along with this as a "stage" because their leaders think workers can't cope with full-blown Marxism all at once.

We think they're wrong. But actions speak louder than words. We want to show the thousands of activists in the SAs that open revolutionary politics and a democratic but centralised party are no obstacles to rebuilding mass support for socialism.

If we have to do this as a revolutionary minority in a broader party, so be it. The only condition is that we get the democratic right to fight for our policies, and that the Alliance continues to attract significant working class forces.

We want to turn the election into a referendum on the profit system. We want to draw in the thousands of anti-capitalist youth activists to our movement - half-baked reformism won't do that.

Most of all we want to make sure that the SA uses leaflets, posters and broadcasts in this election to take revolutionary socialism to millions of workers - not a rehash of old Labour reformism. If you agree, join us.

Tell us what you think: paper@workerspower.com



Zapatistas march for dignity

Tens of thousands of Mexicans, backed by supporters from across the world, have been flocking to the Zapatistas' March for Indigenous Dignity, which is set to arrive in Mexico City on 14 March.

The march set off from the EZLN's base in the rebel province of Chiapas on 24 February.

Though the Mexican government has given official "protection", the march has met with serious opposition from reactionary local governors and rightists as it gets closer to the capital.

Brutal police and paramilitary violence flared when the EZLN Caravan passed through Cancun and merged with mass protests against the World Economic Forum being held to plan

austerity measures against the Mexican people.

Led by the enigmatic Subcomandante Marcos - the guerilla fighter, poet and radical democrat who has inspired new forms of protest worldwide - the Caravan is aiming to win support for demands on the government, which the EZLN says are preconditions for peace talks. These include a new law enshrining rights for indigenous Indian peoples and the release of EZLN prisoners.

When the march reached Ixmiquilpan, Zapatista leader Marcos delivered an extraordinary improvised speech to the thousands in torrential rain:

"For them democracy has to do with a calendar. On such an hour, on such a day, an election.

We are all citizens, and we can all have opinions, but the rest of the time our word doesn't count for anything. The rest of the time a group of professional politicians makes decisions for us, without asking us if we're in agreement, without taking into account whether it can do us damage or be to our benefit.

"There's another difference between their liberty and ours. For them, liberty is the liberty to buy or sell.

"For us, the ones who have it hard, what can we buy or sell? The only thing we can sell is our blood, our hands - and even so, we have to sell them very cheaply. That's not the liberty we want."

■ For a daily update on the Caravan go to the website: www.narconews.com

Protests spoil WTO's Cancun party

On 27 February 27, nearly 500 activists took the anti-capitalist protest movement to the doorstep of the World Economic Forum in Cancun, in the Mexican State of Quintana Roo.

The demonstrators were attacked by paramilitary police armed with tear gas, truncheons and shields. As a result, 45 people were arrested and several injured - two of them seriously.

The attack took place outside a hotel where Mexico's president, Vicente Fox, was meeting with bosses and top bankers.

A statement protesting against the police action from the Mexican Trot-

skyst group the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo-Contracorriente Unificada (LTS-CC) said: "These events show that the Fox government, in spite of its promises to deliver peace and democracy - which some left intellectuals echoed - is continuing with the policies of the PAN-PRI-PRD regime.

"There is no doubt that the government will continue its anti-working class and anti-popular measures.

"The government talks about peace in Chiapas, but the militarisation of the region continues, driving millions of indigenous people and peasants into misery. The government talks about democracy but sends the police to

repress the anti-capitalist demonstrators and expels student activists.

"The LTS-CC calls for the formation of a broad committee against the repression in Cancun and throughout Mexico carried out by the Fox government.

"We believe that an important demand is the release of all political prisoners in the country, and we make an appeal to trade unions, and to social, popular and human rights organisations to join this campaign."

■ Send messages of solidarity to: ltsmex@prodigy.net.mx

■ Send messages condemning the repression direct to the Fox himself: presidencia@gob.mx

From t to the

People's Global Action - an alliance founded in the jungles of Chiapas that helped stop Seattle and put mass protest on the agenda - meets in Milan this month. **Jeremy Dewar** asks: where did it come from - where is it going?

THE ZAPATISTA rebellion of 1994 was different. They renounced the traditional goals of seizing state power, of negotiating independence for the Chiapas, of entering a coalition government.

Instead, they used the internet imaginatively and called on all people in revolt against neo-liberalism to see in the Chiapas rebellion their own fight against oppression and exploitation.

Rather than uniting around a common programme for a co-ordinated onslaught against the powers that be, the Zapatistas urged people to struggle in solidarity with one another - separately and locally.

Instead of seeing themselves as the head of a new movement of resistance, they see themselves as a "mirror" in

which others could see their own potential. As subcomandante Marcos, the most quoted of the Zapatistas, said:

"We are you. Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10pm, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains."

This celebration of the diversity of struggle chimed so perfectly with workers, peasants and students around the world who were coming up against the monoculture of globalisation.

You can't beat

The PGA's manifesto (available at www.agp.org) is a useful summary of the political, economic and social effects of globalisation.

Its weaknesses lie in two major prejudices and in its conclusion.

First the prejudices. The PGA manifesto consistently underestimates the role of the nation-state - and at its core its machinery of oppression and mass destruction - in defending the property, wealth and privileges of the ruling class.

While correctly noting the tendency for capital to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state through its regional and global institutions and the transnational corporations, it forgets that when push comes to shove capitalism calls on the state forces to smash resistance in its path. It will clobber demonstrators, lock them up and eventually use its armies to murder whoever stands in its way.

Also, in order to conceal its dictatorship and because it is forced to from below, capital is obliged to grant certain democratic rights. The battle to defend and extend these rights - for elections, for the limitation of the powers of the police and the courts, for the right to birth control, etc. - can stop capital achieving its aims in the short term and lay the basis for a broader and more confident struggle for its final defeat in the medium and longer term.

Related to this lack of understanding of the state and democratic reforms is the second prejudice: the idea that

everywhere and in all circumstances, local is good, centralisation is bad.

This is dogmatic and wrong. Capitalism creates destruction and misery on a mass scale, whether this be through the laws of the market, which only satisfies "effective need" leaving billions to rot on less than a dollar a day, through "natural" disasters like the floods in Mozambique proliferated by the erosion of the soil and the ozone layer, through the spreading of diseases which should and can be stopped, or through war and trade sanctions. In short, we will inherit an earth in dire need for the immediate alleviation of suffering.

We will need to take control of the centralised means of production, centralise them even further through the destruction of harmful competing private capitals and put them to use eliminating poverty, hunger, disease.

Yes, we want to put an end to the artificial need to centralise all production to the harmful detriment of diverse cultures and the environment. But to ignore the need for centralisation in any field of human activity is wrong. Even after the initial work of undoing capitalism's wrecking of the planet and its people, we will want to collaborate on a world scale in areas as diverse as medicine, philosophy and the natural sciences.

The conclusion to the draft manifesto is, however, its weakest link. The resilience and creativity of the numerous strands of resistance to the WTO and free trade capitalism are praised. The

The jungle streets

In August 1994 the Zapatistas called a convention in the Lacandon jungle. Radical activists from around the world came to meet the post-modern guerillas.

The most important of the networks or movements that were inspired by their experience in Lacandon is People's Global Action (PGA).

In February 1998, three months before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meets in Genoa, Italy, activists from all over the world met in the same city. Representatives from diverse campaigns, organisations and movements met for three days. They included Ya Basta! - the Italian social centres movement; Reclaim the Streets from London; the Sem Terra movement of landless peasants in Brazil, the 750,000-strong Bangladeshi Garment Workers Union and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. In all more than 300 delegates from 71 countries were present, with the majority coming from the semi-colonial Third World.

They set rolling the movement that was to burst into the headlines at Seattle in 1999 - and which the world's capitalist rulers have targeted as enemy numero uno.

They co-ordinated a Global Street Party to co-incide with the meeting of the WTO on 16 May 1998. Parties took

place on all five continents. This event tapped into popular discontent with the austerity programmes, the privatisation and the monoculture of the multinational corporations and the governments that stood behind them.

But more than this, it was an action. Direct action, confrontational though non-violent, was to be the hallmark of this new movement.

Secondly, the delegates agreed to form a new alliance: the Peoples' Global Action against "Free" Trade and the World Trade Organisation (PGA). In classic Zapatista style, the PGA declared that it was not an organisation and that it had no members. Based on principles of decentralisation and autonomy the PGA prefers to call itself "an instrument of co-ordination and mutual support":

"The PGA does not have and will not have a juridical personality. It will not be legalised or registered in any country. No organisation or person represents the PGA, nor does the PGA represent any organisation or person." (Organisational Principles of the PGA)

Finally, the PGA discussed a draft manifesto - see article below. Since May 1998 the PGA has been centrally, though not exclusively, behind some of the most significant anti-capitalist actions. Its preferred method of co-ordinated struggle has been the various Global Days of Action (GDAs).

On 18 June 1999 (J18) it organised a number of actions, most famously London's Stop the City demonstration and street party, against the Group of 8 summit in Koln, Germany.

Even more impressively in the eyes of the world - and benefitting from the collaboration with rank and file trade unionists on the day - the PGA was involved in co-ordinating the blockade which prevented the WTO from completing its business in Seattle.

The European components of the PGA met in Prague in September last year where they were the inspiration behind the "Pink-and-Silver" march which actually broke through the police lines and momentarily entered the Culture Centre where the IMF and World Bank were meeting.

But there have been problems. The PGA, on its own admission, has lost contact with some of the organisations that supported its founding. It has also reported by means of its convenors that the GDAs have only a limited ability to involve and progress peoples and struggles in the southern hemisphere.

It is even unclear whether its second conference, scheduled to take place in Bangalore, India in April 1999, even took place. Certainly, it appears to have been less productive and the manifesto remaindered from Genoa in 1998 has not been developed.

the state by stealth

need to respect, support and even co-ordinate between these strands is clearly stated. But no particular forms of struggle are preferred.

Most importantly, there is no mention of the need to smash the state, expropriate the means of production and establish the rule of workers' and peasants' councils protected by democratic defence guards - all this is missing.

As the Zapatistas' own struggle has shown, unless rebellion spreads and breaks out of its isolation, repression

over time will sap its energy, divide its ranks and ultimately defeat it. Only revolution can keep the forward momentum going and deny our oppressors the time and space to regroup and attack.

A manifesto has to clearly state its aims and its major methods of achieving them. Each partial struggle should not only ask for solidarity but push towards a revolutionary challenge to the whole global profit system.

To achieve this we need a new, revolutionary international party. It has

to be democratic in its internal debates, weighted to include and promote fighters from the oppressed semi-colonial countries and united around a programme.

That is what the League for a Revolutionary Communist International fights for. We urge everybody involved in developing the PGA to discuss with us at the Milan conference about how to take this project forward.

■ **What do you think? Email: contact@destroyimf.org**

On the other hand, the SWP fills Globalise Resistance meetings with speakers from the soft, liberal wing of the movement: Jubilee 2000 and Green Party. Meanwhile, they have carved out anarchists or revolutionary socialists. Having given the liberals a platform, the SWP then refuses to criticise them.

Workers Power and Revolution are trying to work within both Monopoly May Day and GR. In both we call for maximum unity in action and the fullest democratic debate.

We need to turn the activist movement to the working class and the workers' movement towards anti-capitalist action. This can't be done if the two parts of the equation carry on ignoring each other.

The main problem with the May Day Collective lies in confusing principles with tactics. The collective agreed - with a large minority in opposition - to include in their

ENDING THE DIVISIONS

call for action on May Day, a statement that the upcoming election was pointless because "whoever you vote for the government always wins".

This statement is an obstacle to the participation of NGOs, socialists and trade unions.

Why stop people getting involved in common action? Why not open up a debate?

Since Prague, the anti-capitalist movement in Britain has become divided.

The May Day Collective contains anarchists, environmentalists and direct actionists. Globalise Resistance, launched by the Socialist Workers Party, contains NGO-based liberals and reformists, trade unionists and socialists.

The libertarians believe that the SWP are piggy-backing on the anti-capitalist movement only seeking to recruit to their party. Socialist groups complain that the anarchists are hell-bent on confrontations with the police, limiting the growth of the movement.

Both contain a kernel of truth but miss the main point.

NO SWEAT!

Unions join fight to end sweatshops

NO SWEAT - the campaign against sweatshops - is getting right up the noses of the UK's clothing retailers. In fact we're getting right into their shop windows, writes *Andy Yorke*.

Last month anti-sweatshop protesters hit Gap and Baby Gap at the swanky Canary Wharf shopping mall in East London.

Some of the protestors slipped into the shop windows and posed as living mannequins, advertising Gap contracts instead of their clothes: "I will sleep locked up in the factory", "I promise I will not fall in love", "I will not have a baby".

These placards were all examples of the conditions that Gap workers in Saipan are forced to accept.

The action drew massive support, especially from the staff emerging from a hard day's low-paid work in the yuppie shops and restaurants nearby.

Actions outside of Niketown in London have been followed by a wave of protests against Gap around the country. Now the National Union of Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades (KFAT) has come on board in support of the campaign. It will speak alongside an activist from the American sweatshop movement and No Sweat activists at NUS conference in late March.

Workers Power, the socialist youth organisation Revolution, and Workers Liberty have merged their campaigns to form a single focus of action.

We aim to link up directly with workers in the third world sweatshops and make our organisations as global as the corporations that we have to fight

■ **For more info email: revouk@hotmail.com**

■ **Visit the anticapitalist website: www.destroyimf.org**
 ■ **Or check out the brand new interactive website from No Sweat (see below)**

How to get active

In the first week of March Gap stores across the country will be besieged by protestors. A Gap store opening in Sheffield will be met by local campaigners planning to rain on its PR parade with a large reception of their own. On March 8, to mark International Womens Day, No Sweat protestors in Cardiff will hold a Clothesline Conga from Nike to Gap.

In London on the same day the plan is for a picket at the flagship Gap store in Britain, called by anti-capitalist group Globalise Resistance, to be finished off by a No Sweat Tour of Shame going past the Disney Store, Marks and Spencers, to Niketown, with a samba band in tow. If you can't make it to these locations, organise your own Gap protest.

For details of the actions and how to get involved, contact No Sweat
 ■ **020 7793 1468**
 ■ **NoSweatUK@hotmail.com**

New web site launched...

No Sweat UK has launched its own website. The website is open to everyone who wants to be involved.

Local organisations can put materials up themselves and the site is designed to allow maximum discussion and debate.

This will allow the new movement to get a sense of its spread and strength - and to debate out its strategy and goals in an open democratic manner.

Check it out at: www.nosweat.org.uk

Nike on the run!

This is what sweatshop labour means: "Some workers are as young as 15 years old. You have no energy after work. In the small towns some get home at 8.30 pm and have to wake up at 3 am or 4 am. There are many single women at the factory."

"Sometimes I have to borrow or steal from the store to make ends meet. If you stay home because you are sick, they take away two days of wages. A worker has to literally be dying in the factory to be allowed to leave."

These are the words of a striker at the Kukdong factory in Mexico, which supplies Nike.

Workers there organised a union against low wages, lack of maternity pay and a host of other abuses. Management tried to sack the union organisers and the workers went out on a wildcat strike and occupied the factory.

In January and February this year No Sweat collected money for the workers, released press releases, petitioned thousands of people at schools, universities and on the street outside sports stores and Niketown.

A worker writes in a letter how the international campaign helped the workers get this far:

"I am a worker at Kukdong and am glad for what up to now we have accomplished thanks to international support. Something without which they would have hit us harder or killed us when the granaderos...came to get us."

Nike slam-dunked

A report published last month confirmed that Nike's Indonesian factories are rife with verbal, physical and sexual harassment.

Workers are coerced to work overtime to meet quotas, and not allowed to see a nurse. As a result two workers have died on the shopfloor from lack of medical attention.

The unions there say the workers will need a 75 per cent pay rise just to meet basic living needs, while Nike sells the shoes at 250 times what it cost (including labour) to make them!

Nike says it will address the issues, but is quietly shifting its production out to China from Indonesia because the workers have successfully unionised and Nike thinks their wages are too high already. Independent unions are illegal in China - just what Nike wants.

Close the GAP!

■ **Picket the GAP store on London's Oxford Street to celebrate International Womens Day**
1pm - 7pm, Thursday 8 March
276 Oxford Street
 ■ **www.gn.apc.org/globaliseresistance**

Political crisis

On 1 March Ukraine's police smashed up a camp protesting against the growing despotism of the regime. But this will not end the political crisis for the right-wing government of Leonid Kuchma. **Konstantin Rosdolsky** of the Ukrainian socialist group Workers Power-Young Revolutionaries (RV-MRM) surveys the battle lines in the crisis

PRESIDENT LEONID Kuchma's regime has entered into a deep social and political crisis. Kuchma has alienated not only masses of the Ukrainian people - even some of the big businessmen, who run the country and some of his allies in the west want him out of office.

For most workers and farmers life consists of grinding poverty. They scrape by on low and often unpaid wages. The health and education services are collapsing. Even the urban middle class, who were promised so much by Kuchma, find themselves fighting for survival.

The protest movement was triggered by the murder of opposition journalist Georgy Gongadze. His body was discovered in December and tapes were uncovered which show that Kuchma was involved in plans for the murder.

But the regime's crisis goes deeper than the scandal surrounding Gongadze. The Ukraine Without Kuchma movement that has taken to the streets in the past few weeks is a response to the impact of capitalist restoration, which has been underway in Ukraine since 1991 (see box, right).

Added to workers' anger at the current economic crisis, many capitalists also see the Kuchma regime as an embarrassing obstacle to improving economic and political ties with the West.

There is a growing division inside the new ruling class. Ten years ago the first elements of the new capitalist class emerged simply as robber barons, stealing and looting the economy inherited from the decomposing degenerated workers' state.

At a later stage a differentiation took place between those capitalists who were

able to make the transition from theft to profitable investment and those who could not. However, these divisions are overlaid in Ukraine by regional and ethnic divisions and by the country's geo-strategic position.

Before 1991, in the old USSR, the Russians were the ruling state and the Ukrainians an oppressed nation. This changed with the achievement of independence: the Russian population within Ukraine became more and more oppressed. Moreover, the most highly industrialised parts of the country are situated in the Russian-populated east (Donetz region, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkov, Odessa, Crimea and so on.) It is no surprise that most of the big businessmen who supported Kuchma in the last elections came from the east.

While sections of the new bourgeoisie are looking to western imperialism, they face enormous problems. The European Union, the US government and the IMF are demanding more and more concessions from Ukraine to open up the economy to western multinationals.

As a consequence, the country remains enormously dependent on Russia - a country that is itself well on the way towards capitalist restoration and that wants to be an imperialist power in its own right.

This is particularly evident in the energy sector where Ukraine owes Russia billions of dollars. In part payment of these debts, Kuchma has agreed to give Russian monopolies a huge share in the privatisation of Ukrainian enterprises.

In foreign policy the Kuchma regime has initiated a re-orientation towards Russia. Until autumn 2000 it followed a strictly pro-western policy. Then Kuchma replaced the US-friendly for-



KUCHMA BRINGS ECONOMIC DISASTER

Capitalist restoration involves what Marx called the "primitive accumulation" of capital, albeit in a form which he could not envisage: the destruction of the Stalinist economy.

It involves the wholesale destruction and looting of the state-owned means of production, and the enslaving and exploiting the working class as wage labourers once again.

While the economy is growing for the first time since 1990, unemployment has exploded. From an official rate of 2.4 per cent in 1997 it has risen to 8 per cent in 2000 and is expected to grow even more rapidly this year. Behind the figures, the reality is much worse.

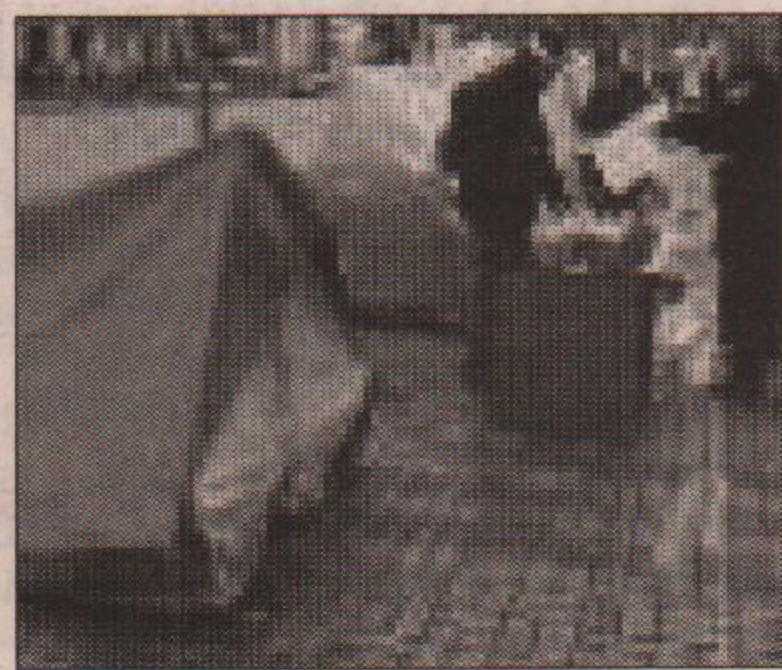
In the countryside more and more land is being turned over to huge agri-business estates. Like the rest of the economy, agriculture suffers from terrible under-investment.

So the former collective farm peasants are suffering badly. All this adds up to economic depression and social impoverishment - on a worse scale than the Western countries faced in the 1930s.

Who is behind the tent camp?



Former prime minister Tymoshenko (left), supporter of the tent camp; and police break-up camp



THE "UKRAINE without Kuchma" movement, which recently renamed itself "National Salvation Forum" is a coalition of reformists, conservatives and the far-right. It includes the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) - a bourgeois workers party in the process of transformation into a party of bosses; the "Motherland" party of the sacked and arrested former prime minister Tymoshenko; bourgeois conservatives (like Rukh); and right wing parties, including the extreme right-wing UNA-UNSO party.

While fascist forces like the Social National Party of Ukraine are not formal members of the alliance they played a significant role in the tent

camp at Independence Square in central Kiev. So the reactionary forces within the opposition predominated at this protest, though there was weaker working class involvement.

The demonstrations were relatively small, with 5,000-10,000 participants in Kiev. Most of them were students, professionals and better paid workers. But they enjoyed the broad passive support of the working class in Kiev. Recently some sections of the workers movement joined the protests.

Why are the demonstrations relatively small? Partly because they are dominated by open bourgeois forces who don't want to mobilise the workers. Partly because many workers, facing a daily fight for survival, are

demoralised and passive. Partly because the workers don't trust the bourgeois opposition.

Nevertheless, the protest movement represents an important opportunity that the working class can and must utilise for its own goals.

Workers Power/Young Revolutionary Marxists Ukraine denounced the state's attack on the tent camp as an attack on democratic rights. We called for all those arrested - activists, opposition politicians - to be released.

It is urgent now for the workers' movement to organise self-defence squads and arm themselves as best they can - not only against the state security forces but also the far right and fascist forces.

The workers' must resolve

The current situation in Ukraine presents enormous opportunities for the working class - but enormous dangers too. The ruling class is divided and weak. The workers, peasants and even middle class people hate the regime.

But if the workers' movement does not take control of this situation, it can go from ripe to rotten. It could result in a severe defeat for the working class and the triumph of counter-revolutionary forces.

The task of the hour is to build a mass workers' movement that can play an independent role in the crisis. RV-MRM calls on the youth movement PM, the KPU, VCR, PSUP and all other progressive forces to build a united front now.

It is urgently necessary to bring out workers, peasants, working class youth and students onto the street. Symbolic demonstrations and tent camps are not enough. To challenge the Kuchma regime seriously, the workers' movement must organise mass demonstrations and strikes culminating in an all-out, indefinite general strike!

Should the workers' movement join the bourgeois careerists of the National Salvation Forum (NSF)? No. The workers should organise themselves independently. That is why we call for the creation of mass action councils in all towns and villages.



We must call for an independent investigation of the Gongadze (above) murder

RV-MRM calls for an independent investigation of the Gongadze murder by a commission of representatives of the workers' movement.

The workers' movement must not sit with folded arms during the present events. While they should not join the NSF they should intervene at their demonstrations and try to kick out the fascist forces. The task is to win over the democratic student forces on these demonstrations and win them to an alliance with the workers movement.

But this must not lead to an alliance with the right-wing forces.

The protest movement is united by the call for Kuchma to resign. Naturally, we support this. More than this we reject the institution of the presidency

rocks Ukraine

eight minister with a more Russian-friendly one and improved the political and economic relations with Russia. Added to that, Kuchma and Russia's president Putin signed military agreements earlier this year.

All this has rung alarm bells for western governments and led to a tacit support for Ukraine's pro-western prime minister Yushchenko.

The political re-orientation of the regime towards Russia has infuriated the Ukrainian national chauvinist far right.

When Kuchma had a pro-western orientation he promoted Ukrainian nationalism. This also included financial support for right-wing and fascist forces. But with the turn towards Russia, important sections of Ukraine nationalism and fascism have deserted their former financier and joined the opposition.

So while in 1999 the ruling class was united around Kuchma and pro-western imperialism, the turn to Moscow has led to a serious power struggle: ranged against Kuchma now are the pro-western bourgeoisie, the far-right nationalists and fascists, and many of the capitalists who have lost out in the recent economic crisis. The more profitable capitalists have less to fear from an integration to the imperialist world market.

So the present crisis combines a split inside the ruling class, growing disillusion by the middle class and a mass hatred of the regime, albeit largely passive or fragmented until now, among workers and peasants.

When the political crisis erupted last December after the discovery of Gongadze's body

and the audiotape scandal, it was both a mass democratic protest and a power struggle inside the ruling class.

The Ukraine Without Kuchma movement certainly represented the democratic outrage of many people against the cynical textile director turned dictator. But it also contained a pro-western opposition, determined to bring prime minister Yushchenko to power and reverse the orientation to Russia.

The crisis deepened massively in mid-February. Kuchma not only sacked but also arrested the former deputy prime minister Tymoshenko. At the same time he issued a common appeal – with prime minister Yushchenko and parliament chairman Plyushch – that sharply condemned the right-wing National Salvation Forum.

The appeal warned against “professional revolutionaries” and “extremist forces” that represent a “real threat to the national security of the state”. The statement was nothing less than the threat of a state of emergency: a “constitutional” coup d'état. A group of masked security officers posing as anarchists attacked the opposition tent camp. Then, on 1 March, police waded in to break up the tent camp. These were the first steps of Kuchma's crackdown.

The regime is fighting for its survival and is prepared to mobilise all its forces against the threat.

The arrest of a former prime minister reflects the degree of its desperation. On the other hand the movement on the street is radicalising too with left-wing forces forming a bloc against Kuchma and the far right (see right)

Faced with the choice of Kuchma or the workers, it is no surprise that, in the hour of a “extremist threat” Yushchenko turned to Kuchma.

movement the crisis!

altogether because it is an inherently dictatorial, bonapartist instrument for the ruling class.

However as we are clearly approaching a deep crisis of the regime the question arises: Who should govern the Ukraine. Kuchma? No! Yushchenko? No! Moroz? No! The workers and peasants - organised in action councils in every town and village across Ukraine - should take the power, the privileges and the plunder from the oligarchs and the bureaucrats.

What we need is a workers and peasants government - based on and answerable to action councils and to a mass workers' and peasants' militia. Such a government should immediately set about solving the economic crisis by taking the means of production into social ownership under workers' management and democratically agreeing and implementing an emergency plan.

Workers and peasants of Ukraine! Your enemy is weaker than you think. The bourgeois opposition is split and confused. You have the chance to stop the terrible decline of the country. But you will succeed in this only if you do not place a single ounce of trust in the bourgeois and reformist politicians. Instead organise yourself now. Go onto the streets in your tens and hundreds of thousands.

Activists of the protest movement!

At the moment you are a small vanguard and you bear an enormous responsibility for the future of the country. The task of the hour is to kick out the fascists from your ranks to break the grip of the likes of Moroz and Tymoshenko over the protests.

The workers' movement must become the central force in the struggle against Kuchma. For these burning tasks a strong revolutionary organisation must be built one which has a clear understanding of the present situation and is armed with a Marxist programme, based on the historic lessons of the world workers' movement of the past 150 years.

Building such an organisation now is the decisive task of the day.

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

- Down with Kuchma - the murderer of Gongadze!
- Don't trust Moroz and Tymoshenko!
- The workers' movement and the left must mobilise - NOW!
- For mass demonstrations and strikes up to a general strike!
- Build action committees in every town and village!
- Kick out the fascists!
- For a workers' and small farmers' government!
- Join RV-MRM and its comrades around the world in the LRCI!

Shameful role of Stalinist party

DECADES OF Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship and the reformist policy of the Communist Party of the Ukraine (KPU) since 1991 have left the working masses confused and disorientated. This is the key to an understanding as to why the new ruling class' has been able to drive through a social counterrevolution without significant resistance over the last 10 years.

On the occasions when the working class did fight back - like the miners' strikes in the Donetsk or Luhanska regions, or the popular revolt in Dnipropetrovsk last year - the reformists did their best to demobilise them.

The role of the reformist opposition - particularly of the KPU - is truly shameful. Instead of intervening in this political crisis and building an independent working class pole it has remained largely passive. To be more precise, its policy is marked by zigzags. The party leadership has pursued a generally abstentionist policy. True, it tried once to join the demonstration, appealing to the right-wing nationalists to collaborate (“for

the sake of the motherland!”). True, individual members have participated from the beginning. But in parliament it refused to vote for the sacking of the notorious General Prosecutor who is Kuchma's puppet and declared the incriminating audiotapes to be fake.

The KPU leadership says it can't support the protest movement because it does not want to bring the neoliberal Yushchenko to power. The real reason is that the KPU is quietly pleased with Kuchma's pro-Russian orientation and even has hopes for a future role in a coalition government. Last but not least the KPU leadership is fearful of mobilising its membership and supporters against the bourgeois forces with whom it hopes to form a coalition government in the future.

The left wing inside the KPU around the All-Ukrainian Worker Union (VCR) and some PSUP forces recently joined the protests. They marched together with the revolutionary Marxists of RV-MRM and other left wingers - and naturally clashed with the fascist and semi-fascist forces.

For a united front to bring down Kuchma

Statement of “For a Ukraine without bourgeoisie and fascists!” - a left bloc formed last month

Ukraine is being sold to liquidate debts. Among the buyers are the “Great Western Neighbours”, the transoceanic “Strategic Partners”, and “compassionate” Europeans. All of them are capitalist colonisers of Ukraine, indifferent to the fate of the working people. The lackeys of the local colonial administration represent their interests in the tender of sale of the homeland. It's entirely clear that the President wants to carry out his gendarme responsibilities on his own, ‘according to understandings’ without the observation of any rules.

In its turn the bourgeois opposition declares its aspiration to defend bourgeois rights and freedoms, but its general democratic demands hide the bluntly anti-worker essence of the pro-Western, pro-IMF politics of the Yushchenko government. They are openly striving to transform their campaign to the movement for “Ukraine without Kuchma and Communists”. When necessary, neither faction of the bourgeoisie is shy about the use of brute force. In the February events both sides (of the bourgeois forces) used neo-fascist militants against the attempts of worker-activists to give the movement ‘Ukraine without Kuchma’ an anti-bourgeois content.

The bankrupt authorities used Bandera bandits from the Trident (the Ukrainian nationalists' symbol); the bourgeois opposition used Nazis from the “Ukrainian National Self Defense Forces” (UNO-UNCA).

In this complex situation, the only alternative to the coming reaction may be the formation of a unified workers' front of all actual left forces under the slogan ‘For Ukraine without Bourgeoisie and Fascists’, on the following principles:

- No support for any fraction of the bourgeoisie! Determined separation from all of them!
- Condemnation of the acts of neo-fascist terror against worker- and left-activists; ban Nazi parties and organizations.
- Resistance to attempts to establish an open bourgeois dictatorship in Ukraine, defense of freedom of speech and other democratic rights and freedoms.
- The demand for the early dismissal of government, parliament and the president.
- Abolition of the office of the president.
- Liberation of Ukraine from the IMF, oligarchs, bourgeoisie and their lackeys, and from betrayers of the working people.

We appeal to all political parties and organizations, who defend the interests of the working class, to establish a joint committee of the unified workers' front, in order to develop a program of coordinated actions for the nearest future.

We are certain that with coordinated actions of parties, youth organizations, groups and activists, we will be able to open the eyes of the people of Ukraine on the witches' Sabbath of the bourgeoisie, and that the time has come for the combined forces of the working people to do away with the dictatorship of capital.

Signed

- Progressive Youth - a youth union with 8-10,000 members. Komsomol, RV-MRM and Ukraine CWI group have representatives in the All-Ukraine leadership
- All-Ukrainian Worker Union (VCR) - a trade union grouping which at the same time constitutes a left wing inside the KPU and has deputies in parliament.
- Komsomol - the youth organisation of the KPU, the Communist Party, which is the largest party in the country
- Union of Marxists
- Workers Struggle (affiliated to the CWI)
- Young Revolutionary Marxists (affiliated to the IBT)
- Ukraine Trotskyist Opposition (affiliated to the ITO)
- Revolutionary Workers Organisation (affiliated to the LRP/COFI) Ukrainian Workers Committee (affiliated to the International Workers Committee)
- A group affiliated to the De Leonists
- Workers Power - Young Revolutionary Marxists (RV-MRM, sympathising section of the LRCI)

Does the left understand the anti-globalisation movement?

In the January issue of *Workers Power*, we published a series of articles which looked at aspects of the fight against globalisation. Here **Steve** of Haringey Solidarity Group bashes back at our article – he says the unstructured forms of organisation used by groups like Reclaim the Streets are the key to success. Below, **Kate Foster** replies for *Workers Power*.

Dear Workers Power

Your four page feature on the anti-capitalist movement (WP250, January 2001) was interesting if flawed. Obviously Jeremy Dewar is better informed than many on the Left about the anti-capitalist movement. Also, it is difficult to make generalisations about such a diverse movement without running the risk of leaving out part of the picture.

So in the spirit of genuine criticism I would say that his article was a marked improvement on some of the caricatures in the Left press. In an era when the far Left seems obsessed with the electoral fortunes of tiny parties such as the London Socialist Alliance you were right to point out the importance of direct action in the anti-capitalist movement and the influence of anarchism that has brought this about.

Still, because of your perspective you cannot avoid having a dig. So the statement that the movement is "action-oriented, scoffing at resolution mongering" leads on to "in short the movement at this stage was petit-bourgeois in character and shot through with utopian schemas". No evidence is given for this leap of argument and one can't help thinking that when you haven't got an argument you resort to abuse.

Yet contrary to the above you say later in the article that the Liverpool dockers' militancy and direct action "fitted with the radical outlook of many of the activists within the militant environmentalist movement". A strange way for petit-bourgeois utopians to react!

Again, you say "through collaboration the dockers forced RTS to look to the working class and labour movement, and global capitalism" (my emphasis). But there was no forcing to be done – rather a co-operation based on mutual interests and mutual respect and an enormous learning curve on both sides. As you admit the Far Left played little part in these massive steps forward for the anti-capitalist movement.

Your analysis of the ideological props behind RTS, whilst plausible, seems to leave out traditional anarchist and anar-

cho-sindicalist views, which are probably more influential than Hakim Bey. However, the truth is that the success of the movement has been precisely because of the libertarian forms of organisation that it has used.

I was present on J18 and took part in the Revolution action outside BP headquarters. Most of the people present apart from 'Revolution' had just come from our picket of the Reed Employment agency. I don't know if this is the collaboration with RTS that you are claiming. Your comrade who fought back against the police in full view of various cameras would be well advised next time to mask up. Nevertheless the libertarian-organised Legal Defence & Monitoring Group gave him and everyone else arrested unconditional

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
Is the left chronically addicted to bureaucracy? Are the anarchists doomed to sandal wearing irrelevance? What really happened with the Samba Band? Send us your news, views and eyewitness accounts by email to: paper@workerspower.com or write to: Workers Power, BCM Box7750, London WC1N 3XX

support. Whilst the old 'fluffy' versus 'spiky' debate still lingers on, it seems weird to see this transformed into "Panic elements versus Black Block" in your article. Having spoken to members of the Samba Band they do not recognise your account of their actions at Prague. More importantly, where do you stand on the question of violence? Personally I large-

ly agree with the sentiments of the leaflet "Some thoughts on violence on demos" which took a militant yet pragmatic stance. Most of the Left get into a debate about who threw the first brick in the class war, which seems fairly futile.

Strange also to see your defence of the SWP and their blatant band-waggoning of the anti-capitalist movement after J18. Obviously, to you, anarchists spreading propaganda against authoritarian socialist is "spreading half truths and lies". We are surprised when we get even half truths from the Far Left.

The SWP's idea, as usual, is join the movement in order to recruit to their own brand of social-democracy. It is interesting who they have chosen to associate themselves with; Jubilee 2000, a coalition of charities, clergy, pacifists and the like; and the ubiquitous George Monbiot, another parasite on the movement, who wrote a long article attacking RTS in the Guardian after Mayday. With friends like these...

As for the cock-up on Mayday – let's face it if one flower bed had been trampled the right wing press would have been up in arms. A tiny activist group can't always pull off an action in the face of police surveillance and harassment.

In "Reflections on Mayday" you will find various views of what went wrong. I don't believe that Parliament Square was the destination intended by the organisers, but only they know that. Probably more important was the two-day conference that discussed many aspects of libertarian socialist and anarchist politics, which had a range of speakers from around the world, and which had thousands attending. This peaceful conference of course got zero coverage in the bourgeois press.

You unfavourably contrast the British

anti-capitalist movement with that in the USA. But in fact the British movement is more orientated towards the working class and is more working class in composition. The fact that middle class students are important in the US movement shows in the reactionary role they played in running the press centre in Prague – where various statements were issued condemning violence on the part of the protesters.

The last section of the article sets up a few Aunt Sallies, such as "the idea of an enlightened elite who have reached a state of being through their lifestyle away from consumerism". The only people I know who believe in an enlightened elite are the Far Left vanguardists like yourselves.

You say "the anti-capitalist movement is deeply hostile to the trade unions which anarchists view as a bosses tool to trick and tie the working class to capitalism" which you say "explains their general rejection of a serious orientation towards the workers' movement. By a slight of hand the trade unions become the workers' movement. Actually anarchists have been instrumental in promoting direct action and independent organisation of workers against collaborationist trade unions. An example was our work locally around the support group for the JJ Fast Food workers strike in 1995/6. (see the pamphlet *Up Against the Odds*).

The slogan "turning the anti-capitalists to the workers and the workers to anti-capitalism" may have a ring to it but poses a false duality. The anti-capitalist movement is a movement of workers, amongst others, particularly those workers who have broken most radically with reformism. Anarchists have shown spectacular success with small numbers in showing an alternative to class collaboration.

Steve, Haringey Solidarity Group (in a personal capacity)

All the documents mentioned in this letter can be obtained from Haringey Solidarity Group, PO Box 2474, London N8



Prague demonstrators – prepared to defend themselves

We reply: From riot to revolution

Leaps in our argument? Or are you jumping to conclusions? Just because two sentences come together doesn't mean that you should read them separately to the rest of the article, writes **Kate Foster**

The article Steve mentions is one of the few serious attempts to chart the development of the anti-capitalist movement and explain its material roots.

In the section Steve refers to we were trying to sum up the movement prior to the end of the Tory government and the dockers' strike in 1996-7. We describe the movement at this stage as environmentalist, localist and lifestyle. And if you believe that five people in Leicester refusing wearing leather shoes are going to bring about the downfall of global agri-business we would argue you were "shot through with utopian schemas" too.

The experience of collaborating with the dockers inspired those involved in RTS, led to the growth of RTS and led, alongside Seattle later on, to the anti-globalisation movement having more of an orientation towards workers' struggles. Steve himself refers to the steep learning curve.

You criticise us for pointing out the role of a self-appointed enlightened elite and then give a fine example of just what we mean. We stand by our criticism of the Mayday debacle. And the fact that, as your letter states, the organisers are the only ones who know what went wrong is an example of just how unaccountable and undemo-

cratic these people are.

On violence, you have a point. The article could have been clearer on where we stand.

We are not pacifists. Workers Power has a long record of giving unconditional support to those who are prepared to fight back against capitalism and imperialism, in revolutions or in national struggles, such as Ireland. And whilst we don't glamorise violence, we do recognise that organised self defence of demos and picket lines is legitimate.

Yes, many workers are involved in the anti-capitalist movement – but the key task is to turn the anticapital-

ist activists out towards the organised workers' movement, transforming the unions – and organisations like the Socialist Alliance – away from passivity and electoralism, towards direct action.

Anarchism, "libertarianism" and self-appointed leaders can take the movement from protest to revolt, but never from riot to revolution.

Read the original article on our website: www.workerspower.com For more on the anti-capitalist movement visit: www.destroy-imf.org

Jackboot Straw gets tough

Crime is a major issue for working class communities. But Labour's 10-point crimebusting plan is not the answer. New Labour is determined to criminalise deprived communities – and, writes *Alison Hudson*, its conservative-style solutions just won't work

THE PRISON population has risen by 6,000 since Labour came to power. And they want more. Labour's new 10 year crime plan calls for another 2,660 prison places. They promise 9,000 more bobbies on the beat, backed up by police-accredited private security guards, bouncers and park attendants.

But prisons aren't the answer. Prisons are brutal and violent – witness the recent scandals over Wormwood Scrubs, Brixton and Stoke Heath young offenders' institution.

To survive in prison young people have to become brutal and violent too.

Last month the Chief Inspector of Prisons stated that 20,000 current inmates should not be inside. That includes women, boys, elderly people, mentally ill people and petty offenders. The Director General of the Prison Service Martin Narey, has threatened to resign over the high levels of beatings, gangsterism, suicide and murder in Britain's jails.

While young offenders institutions are decried as "hellholes" by the government's chief inspector, the Labour crime plan calls for tougher sentencing for persistent offenders – whom the government admits are mostly under 21. "It's time to make

the sentence fit the offender rather than the offence" said Home Secretary Jack Straw.

Fitting the punishment to the offender rather than the offence is a sinister development that has been denounced as a serious attack on civil liberties.

Prolific offenders will face increasingly severe punishment, so it is possible that someone could get a more severe sentence for serial shoplifting than for a first time rape.

Labour has already attacked the jury trial system by proposing to get rid of juries for dealing with minor offences. They now want juries to be

told of the defendant's previous record. That is a clear attack on the principle "innocent until proved guilty". The capitalist justice is already stacked against defendants who are poor or black. Labour's new rules are just another brick in the wall.

Labour will jail more young working class men. Jails are factories that turn young men and women into seasoned criminals. Jails only reduce crime if you are prepared to treat bigger and bigger numbers as lifetime criminals, trapping them in a cycle of bail, jail, tagging, probation, unemployment, social exclusion and the almost inevitable next offence.

Cool Britannia: a crook's paradise?

England has one of the worst crime records in the industrialised world, second behind Australia and worse than the US, according to a survey produced by the Dutch government last month.

We have an annual rate of 58 crimes per 100 inhabitants. While crime rates are generally falling around the world, in England and Wales crime levels are still higher than they were at the end of the 1980s.

We are also a country with an addiction to prison as a solution. Fifty per cent of those questioned here thought someone convicted of stealing a TV for the second time should be sent to prison for two years. In France only 12 per cent thought they should be jailed at all.

But it is not the same across Britain. Scotland ranks as a medium crime rate country with 43 offences per 100 inhabitants, and Northern Ireland has the second lowest crime rate of the countries surveyed with 24 offences per 100.

It is England that is home of the UK's crime problem. While the general rate of crime in Britain seems to be edging down violent crime and street robberies are going up. New Labour's plan doesn't refer to crimes such as tax evasion, or corporate fraud.

It is crimes against the capitalists that the system punishes most severely – see the vindictive 21 month jail sentences handed out to those convicted for the anti-capitalist protest in the City on J18 1999.

Is Labour really 'tough on the causes of crime'?

LET'S BE clear – poverty causes crime. Most crime that matters to working class victims is anti-social crime: violence, street robbery, domestic burglary and sex crime.

As for the "crimes" of benefit fraud, non-payment of rent, TV licence dodging or buying knock-off goods at a street market – most working class people see these as minimal problems compared to the unprosecuted crimes committed by big business.

A big percentage of anti-social crimes are perpetrated by alienated young people, people brutalised by years in prison and people on the rack of unemployment.

The problem is not just material poverty – although that is a major factor – but generations of poor education, unemployment and brutalisation.

Socialists reject Labour's attitude to this layer of working people, which labels

them an "underclass" and writes them off as the "undeserving poor".

Decent education, housing, jobs and working-class friendly social services would go a long way to defusing the atmosphere of violence and despair that exists on some run down estates.

Another part of the solution is tackling youth oppression (see below). And even more important is restoring the pride and solidarity that flourished in working class communities before Thatcher smashed the unions and unleashed grinding unemployment.

Labour can't provide these social solutions to crime because it won't tax the rich and won't spend to alleviate poverty. But it will spend millions on a police crackdown.

Jack Straw has decided to abolish community service orders for 80,000 "persistent offenders". Straw described

the target for the coming crackdown: "Half are under 21. Nearly two thirds are hard drug users. More than a third were in care as children. Half have no qualifications at all. And three quarters have no work and little or no legal income."

So despite recognising the social causes of crime, Labour have no other solution but longer prison sentences.

Even Lord Woolf, Britain's most senior judge, cannot follow Straw's logic. He says: "A short custodial sentence is a very poor alternative to a sentence to be served in the community. It is far more expensive. It will do nothing to tackle the offender's behavioural problems".

Prisons are schools for crime. The younger a person is when they are first locked up the more likely they are to reoffend. Prisons are overcrowded: there is hardly any training or education on offer. And with over 60 per cent of prisoners found to be using heroin on admission drug treatment facilities are woefully inadequate.

Labour's crime policies, while pandering to tabloid hysteria about drug crazed jobs do nothing to really address the causes of crime. In fact, they will almost certainly make things worse.

The war on drugs is a war on youth

Labour's stance on drug laws flies in the face of all the advice – from drug unit workers, health professionals and even the police.

The Police Foundation national commission on drugs report has been largely rejected by the government because it calls for:

- The reclassification of cannabis (class B to C), ecstasy and LSD (class A to B).
- Making possession of cannabis a non-imprisonable offence.
- Not classing as supply having enough drugs for a small group of friends.
- Reducing sentences for offences involving class A drugs.
- More community and less custodial sentences.
- No prison sentences for cultivat-

ing small number of cannabis plants.

These reforms are minor and yet Labour could not countenance them – proof if any were needed of their absolute refusal to deal with the causes of crime.

Instead, Tony Blair rattled out rhetoric about hard drugs. He is way out of line with most people: only hardened *Daily Mail* bigots really believe "zero tolerance" on drugs will work.

The socialist position – to legalise drugs under a state monopoly, decoupling the world of addiction and misuse from the world of gangs, prostitution and violence – is gaining support.

Once again New Labour flies in the face of what working people want in order to mollify the far right.

It's a class thing...

Today our city centres and housing estates are bristling with CCTV cameras. Security guards patrol shopping precincts and even posh estates. New cars have near theft-proof immobilisers, while the homes of the rich have reassuring modern burglar alarms.

What does all this technology have in common? It's only available to the bosses and the better off. If you drive an old car it's more likely to be nicked. If you live in a hi-rise council block, you're more likely to be broken into or robbed.

And if you live in a high crime area, it's harder and more expensive to get insurance.

CCTV will not stop you being robbed – but it will ensure the police keep working class youngsters under a heavy handed surveillance.

The capitalist "solutions" to crime always work for the middle class – they are rarely available to people on low incomes.

What's the solution?

What is the alternative to the 'hang 'em and flog 'em, throw away the key' approach to crime?

Legalising drugs would be one of the first acts of a socialist government – we would put the supply of safe recreational drugs under a state monopoly, accompanied by a vigorous health education campaign among users.

But the real solutions to high crime don't lie in the police and justice systems, or even in the probation and community work arena.

They lie in providing decent living standards for all and reviving solidarity and self-organisation within hard pressed communities.

At ground level we would set up community defence organisations. The police are racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-working class agents of the state. Ultimately they cannot be reformed or made accountable – although these are sometimes useful short term demands. Long-term they must be disarmed and disbanded.

Democratic, accountable defence organisations, made up of representatives of all groups in the community, and with union involvement, would be able to crack down on anti-social crime. This worker's justice would not be vigilantism, but democratically controlled action to create safe communities for all.

A workers' government would release as many prisoners as possible – rapists, murderers and the leaders of organised crime would be the exception. We would make intensive rehabilitation available to them.

As long as class society exists we'll need prisons – but under socialism they would be the last resort. A socialist society would see every prisoner as a failure of the system, not a social outcast beyond redemption. The vast majority of petty crime would disappear as we progressively eradicate poverty, alienation and social oppression.

Give young people a future

Young people are denied control over their own lives by capitalism. They are herded into low-pay job schemes like the New Deal. Their access to further and higher education declines in direct proportion to the income of their families. Many thousands endure violence and abuse in their family homes. If in local authority care they

are again often victims of abuse.

Youth homelessness is a massive problem – there is little or no decent quality affordable housing available to young people who wish to live independently. Leisure facilities are often expensive or non-existent. Given the poverty, hopelessness and loss of purpose youth have to endure it is

not surprising that some get drawn into a world of street gangs and hard drugs.

A workers' government would tackle the social injustices suffered by under-18s: it would provide a living minimum wage and benefits, cheap social housing, free further and higher education with full grants, good quality free leisure facilities.



Kirstie Paton

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Kirstie Paton, the Socialist Alliance candidate for Greenwich & Woolwich, kicks off her new monthly column for Workers Power with a complaint about south London's biggest waste of space – and the Dome.

TONY BLAIR once said the Millennium Dome would write the first line of the next Labour manifesto. You can bet he's changed his mind on that, but it would be about right: like the Dome, New Labour is full of empty promises, tainted with corruption and run by big business.

The Dome was a flop because people don't like having corporate propaganda shoved down their throats at the best of times – let alone having to pay for it. It cost £1 billion to stage this rubbishy advert for Britain's multinationals – now it's costing taxpayers £600,000 a month just to keep it standing.

Labour has put off a decision on the Dome's future until after the election, but capitalist contenders to take it over are clamouring for this prime real estate.

There are two basic proposals being considered: keep it as an entertainment venue with yuppie flats on the side, or just build yuppie flats. Both schemes would require a massive amount of government subsidy.

For most Londoners it's obvious what should be done: build thousands of affordable homes.

We've got the most hi-tech stretch of railway line in Britain and at present it goes nowhere! Many people in London's poorest boroughs live miles from the nearest tube or rail link.

And the South East has a skills shortage because tens of thousands of working people are priced out of the property market.

In Greenwich 48% of people live in council housing. Greenwich Council says it needs £200m to bring these homes to a reasonable standard – and by 2011 we will need an extra 11,000 homes.

We could also do with a new hospital in the area: last month saw the closure of Greenwich's local accident and emergency unit.

But who will pay for it all? The government says local councils should privatise their housing stock to pay for adequate renovation and maintenance.

Council house building has virtually stopped. And on their own the private housing charities could never mount a viable bid for the land the Dome stands on.

We say the government should foot the bill – raising taxes on the big corporations and finance companies who rake in billions per year, just across the river in the City.

The land the Dome stands on remains too contaminated for house building – so there would be money needed for proper decontamination once this blot finally disappears from the landscape.

The old Legacy bid for the Dome promised a hi-tech business park – but behind the headlines the real objective was to build yuppie houses on the riverfront. Many of the other bids being put to English Partnerships will be variations on this theme.

But we need affordable homes for Londoners now. What's stopping Labour doing all this? It won't tax the rich and it won't do anything to upset its friends in the property and construction industries who see the Dome site as a get-rich quick opportunity.

IN ELECTIONS you're meant to be polite about your opponents. But it's impossible to say anything pleasant about Nick Raynsford – the sitting Greenwich & Woolwich MP.

He's Labour's minister for planning and housing – but his real title should be "minister for the construction companies".

In George Monbiot's new book, *Captive State: the corporate takeover of Britain*, Raynsford receives nearly a whole chapter to himself.

He has been an even bigger friend to the construction giants than his Tory predecessor, John Gummer.

In 1997 Raynsford outlined how he saw his new job. He said openly that he was committed to "unblocking the Private Finance Initiative". The PFI was designed to make sure that taxpayers underwrite the profits of companies like Kvaerner and Tarmac for 25 years. Raynsford has not had much time to look after local constituents' interests – since he has been busy travelling the globe to help UK construction firms win fat foreign contracts.

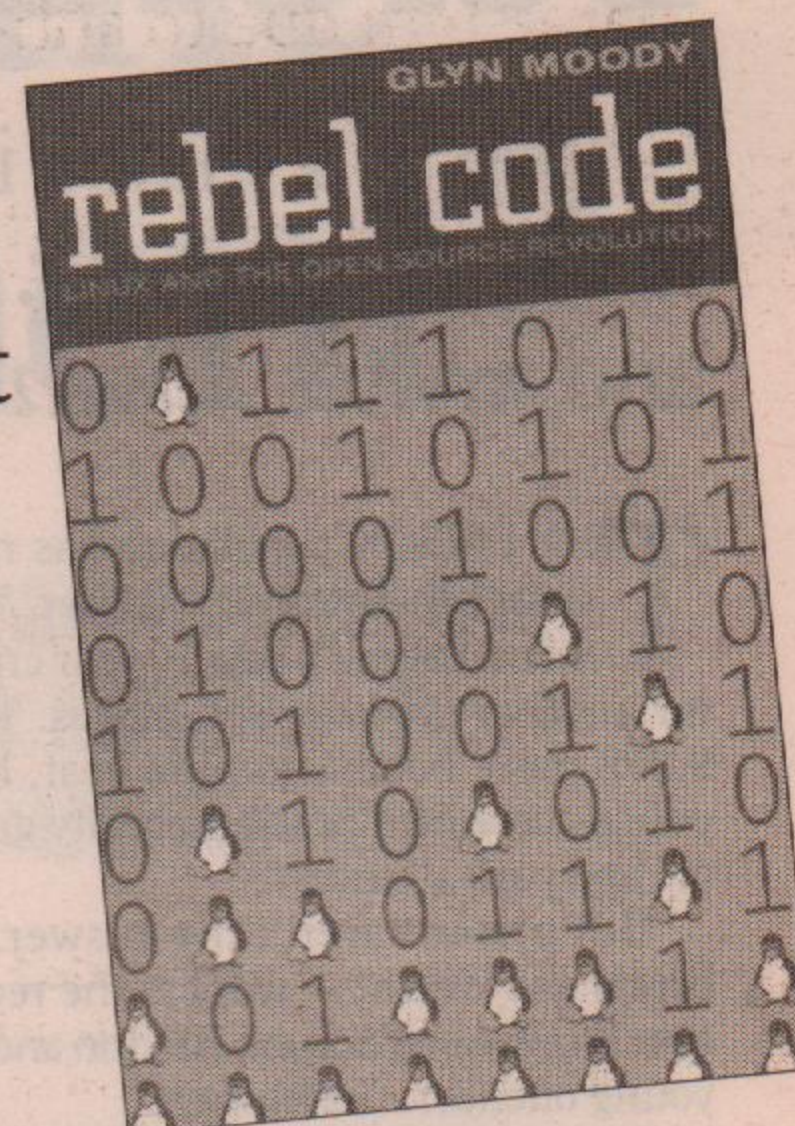
His travel itinerary included a visit to Turkey, with the ostensible purpose of seeing how Britain might help a country ravaged by a devastating earthquake. In reality, the Raynsford trip was little more than a promotional exercise for Balfour Beatty, one of the multinational construction firms involved in the Ilisu Dam project. This dam threatens to displace 25,000 Kurdish villagers from the homes and has been condemned both by human rights and environmental campaigners.

I am looking forward to confronting the honourable member for Kvaerner and Balfour Beatty about his record as a peerless promoter of the construction bosses: they run an industry with the worst health and safety record in Britain and many of them are vicious opponents of trade union rights and environmental regulation.

Kirstiepaton@hotmail.com

Software geeks in guerrilla war with IT giants

Colin Lloyd reviews *Rebel Code*, a book about Linux and the free software movement



Rebel Code: Linux and the Open Source Revolution

By Glyn Moody,
The Penguin Press
2001, £12.99

What has the anti-capitalist website Indymedia got in common with the French government? The answer is they both use Linux, the free computer software system that, according to its supporters, is the route to liberating IT from the domination of multinationals like Microsoft, Siemens and Compaq.

Glyn Moody's new book *Rebel Code* outlines the origins, not just of Linux but of the movement to develop free software, collaboratively over the Internet, that adherents call "open source".

The key ideas of the open source movement challenge much of what's wrong with capitalism. They say:

■ Computer software should not be "owned" by big multinationals, which stifle innovation and cream superprofits from computer users

■ Humanity innovates better when it works in open collaboration, not, as with privatised science and technology, in small competing teams.

Modern computing is dominated by four or five mega-corporations. By owning the rights to software and computer hardware designs they can corner the market for technologies other businesses and governments need. They generate profit not just from exploiting their own workers but from their ability to dictate and dominate other capitalists.

Key to their power is their ownership and control of hardware patents and "source code" of computer programmes. Computer programmers are not even allowed to look "under the bonnet" at the workings of software like Microsoft Windows, let alone make changes or cheap copies of it. If they wanted a free alternative to the software that drives the modern economy they would have to write it themselves. And that, almost incredibly, is what a few thousand "hack-

ers", led by a Finnish student named Linus Torvalds, did in the 1990s.

Torvalds assembled a community of programmers working over the internet to produce Linux – an operating system that many say is better than Microsoft Windows or Apple's Macintosh. Meanwhile, subgroups of the open source movement have written the programs that run much of the Internet.

While open source has yet to drive monopoly-owned software out of business, it is being taken seriously by individual capitalists – and even governments like China and France that have a nationalist axe to grind against US-backed IT corporations.

But the IT giants have fought back. Much of Moody's book is an account of the guerrilla war between hackers and the big battalions of Microsoft and its ilk. Another battle involves repeated attempts to commercialise Linux by adding on paid for services to the essentially free software.

Open source projects, according to Moody, are not just about software. They are also about "freedom, sharing and community; they are about creation, beauty and what hackers call fun. They are about the code within that is at the root of all that is best in us, that rebels against the worst, and that will exist as long as humanity endures".

This anti-corporate, non-hierarchical philosophy fits closely with the political vision of the anti-capitalist movement – which has embraced Linux's adoption as an article of faith on the numerous protest websites. But it also

faces the same contradictions and dilemmas as the anti-capitalist movement.

Sections of the IT industry have muscled in on Linux as a lever for reforming, while defending, the system it was meant to challenge.

IBM for example has recently made a strategic turn to backing Linux – as a thinly veiled way to gain a competitive edge against Microsoft. And the French and Chinese governments have not embraced Linux out of a desire for joy and freedom: they need it because they want to maintain more strategic freedom of action with technology than outright US puppets like Britain.

So open source activists are faced with the dilemma that their tireless efforts may actually prove just a weapon for one capitalist against another rather than a way of liberating the world from the IT bloodsuckers.

Inventing a free alternative to software monopolies is only part of the solution: taking into state ownership monopolies like Microsoft, Sun, Siemens and ICL could stop them holding the rest of humanity to ransom, massively reduce the cost and timescales of technical innovation, and make all software open source.

Without this, the Linux movement will share the fate of previous utopian movements that tried to construct a free and sharing society within capitalism rather than on its ashes.

OBITUARY

Socialist and rail union activist Rob Dawber died on 20 February. Rob was a member of *Workers Liberty* and a militant in the rail union RMT. He died after a long battle against the lung disease mesothelioma contracted after exposure to asbestos at work.

Rob was told he would be dead within a year. But, as his comrades from *Workers Liberty* explained, "he fought his disease as he fought every other struggle – personal and political – with tenacity, humour and dignity".

As well as remaining active in the struggle for a socialist alternative to New Labour, Rob wrote a film about rail privatisation and its effect on track workers. The film, directed by Ken Loach, has just been completed.

Workers Power sends its condolences to Rob's comrades, family and friends. We have stood side by side with Rob in struggles in South Yorkshire ranging from anti-fascist demos, the steel strike and the miners' strike in the 1980s, the anti-poll tax movement, right through to today's campaigns.

A memorial meeting for Rob Dawber has been organised on Sunday 18 March in the Memorial Hall at the back of the City Hall, Sheffield, time to be announced. For full details ring 020 7207 3997

Drug monopolies deny South Africans basic HIV treatment

This month a group of the world's biggest drug companies are set to begin a court action against the South African government. At issue is the right of drug multinationals to extort huge profits from their monopoly on AIDS treatment drugs. The firms involved include: Boehringer-Ingelheim, GlaxoSmithKline, Merck, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Roche.

In an open letter to governments, the South African Treatment Action Campaign and NGO Action for South Africa said the drug giants are "fighting a law, that was passed by the South African parliament and approved by Nelson Mandela, which would allow life-saving medicines to be imported from countries where they are cheaper.

"They claim that the law infringes intellectual property rights. "Nearly five million South Africans are living with HIV. But few can afford the drugs which have enabled richer countries to transform the disease from a killer into a manageable illness.

"These companies, with the support of some Western governments, are protecting their monopolies at the expense of millions of lives. This legal action shows that the pharmaceutical industry is more concerned with staving off competition and protecting their high profit margins than with genuinely increasing access to medicines."

WHAT WE THINK

The drug companies should be nationalised without compensation. A socialist government would hand over all the drug patents of the multinationals for free use by the poorest countries in the world
To add your name to the protest email: campaigns@actsa.org

As the RMT union rebalots its members for strikes over Tube privatisation, *Workers Power* spoke with an RMT militant on the Bakerloo line. We can't name him due to anti-whistleblowing rules

'Tube sell-off can be beaten if we work together'

WP: Can you tell us the background to your dispute?

Whistleblower: Our dispute, jointly organised with ASLEF, is centred on four basic demands. We are fighting the government's privatisation of London Underground's infrastructure, stations and signalling into three separate "Infracos" under the PPP. These demands are:

- A single unified command over health and safety through a joint safety body involving the RMT and ASLEF unions jointly with LU and the Infracos.

- No undermining of the terms and conditions of workers to the detriment of safety.

- No compulsory transfer of workers to the private sector.

- No compulsory redundancies and the maintenance of safe staffing levels.

Since October 1999 the Underground has been under Shadow Running with Infracos taking over responsibility in preparation for privatisation – for the repair, construction, and maintenance of safety critical equipment on the underground track, signals and stations. While the strikes are not directly against the PPP itself – that would be "illegal" – they are against the effects and results of the PPP so far.

Already we have considerably longer delays in fixing and replacing equipment, as different companies pass the buck to their sub-contractors – the number have increased dramatically – supposedly in the interest of cost effectiveness. The Northern Line City Branch track repair project saw sub-contractors put the wrong bolts on the replacement rails. This damaged more than 50 trains and caused a complete early evening shutdown of the line for months.

WP: What is the relationship between the two main unions and what is the overall strength of union organisation on the Tube?

ASLEF, a drivers-only union, has about 2,000 members on the Tube, who have historically crossed RMT picket lines and sometimes vice versa. The RMT organises 7,000 workers in all grades including about 1,000 drivers, some signal workers, while the rest are station staff.

ASLEF called off the following two strike days on the basis that LU had conceded to our first demand on the joint safety body. This was greeted with confusion and some astonishment by RMT members, given the sacrifice made and the risks taken in giving what was technically illegal support to an ASLEF strike. As one Covent Garden branch member said – "when you have your opponent by the balls you don't let go until you've won".

Mick Blackburn, Assistant General Secretary of ASLEF, made it plain that he was opposed to the anti-union laws, and stressed that there was a new leadership in his union. The days of crossing RMT picket lines is a thing of the past. Both union leaders had toured the picket lines together and gone as far they could within the confines of the law.

WP: How have the anti-union laws affected your ability to organise the strike action?

Our members voted 9 to 1 for strike action in one of the largest turnouts ever

for an RMT ballot (48 per cent) only to have the High Court's Lord Justice Gibbs outlaw the strike on the basis that the union must comply with the new Employment Act. It states that unions must give the bosses not only notice of when they will strike but where its members are to strike and in what numbers.

This New Labour law means that no union can take a legal strike, whatever the ballot result, without the bosses challenging it in the High Court.

Judge Gibbs remarked that ASLEF should also have been taken to court. LU chose, however, to divide and rule, hoping that RMT members would cross ASLEF picket lines. They didn't. About 4,000 out of 7,000 RMT members failed to report for work. The majority of pickets were RMT members. The next day LU tried to take several RMT leaders and activists including Bob Crow (Assistant General Secretary) and Brian Munro (Bakerloo Line Branch Secretary) to court for breaking the injunction for damages.

ASLEF refused to negotiate without the legal threats to the RMT being lifted. After nearly 10 hours LU were forced to concede, not only this but also to drop all disciplinary issues arising out of the action, both official and unofficial, and we even got paid. The truth is that the strength of solidarity and unity in the strike forced the bosses and the government to take notice and grant concessions. LU lost £4 million in revenue. An estimated £1 billion or more was lost to London businesses. We took on the courts, the anti-union laws, defied them and got away with it.

WP: How do you think you can use the election spotlight to your advantage?

We are using the re-ballot to make the point that unity won the first strike and concessions from the LU management. However, a series of strikes perfectly timed for the election campaign period would put pressure on New Labour to drop PPP. Our leaders are saying: "Two more one-day strikes could do it". But hang on a minute! I remember them giving these guarantees of no loss of jobs in the transfer over to the train operating companies, no compulsory redundancies; same wages and conditions under TUPE. Yet 10 years on, nearly 100,000 railworkers have left the industry.

Many of us resent the fact that the RMT is giving Labour £60,000 for the election without consulting the membership. And with our rule book, we can't do anything else. Even though I am a Labour Party member I don't want union money going to anti-union and pro-privatisation Labour candidates. Out of the 13 RMT-sponsored MPs only Gwynneth Dunwoody supports our positions.

Our resistance on PPP is in common with Unison members fighting PFI in hospitals and Best Value in local councils, with fire-fighters facing station closures, and air-traffic controllers who are to be privatised in April. If we win, then a key government policy will start to crack. Privatisation – in all its guises – can be beaten if we work together.

The election is the perfect time to put that to the test.

Blair bombs Iraq; Straw slams the door on Kurds

We are told Britain bombed Iraq because Saddam's a tyrant, and then that all Kurdish refugees are bogus. *GR McColl* examines the strange logic of bomber Blair and calls for an end to Britain's bombing of Iraq

Before Tony Blair and George Bush unleashed their mid-February air raid on Baghdad, Jack Straw's Home Office had adopted a blanket policy of refusing political asylum to Iraqi Kurds. While Blair was determined to prove himself as the loyal sidekick of the US Air Force, Straw was busily pandering to the vicious racism of the tabloid press.

Within hours of the bombing of Baghdad, a vessel, abandoned by its crew, floundered on France's southern coast. On board were 900 Kurds from Iraq and Turkey, packed into a rusting hulk with little food and no toilet facilities. Jack Straw had a swift response to the arrival of these desperate refugees on European shores: they would not be allowed into Britain. He gained at least the temporary approval of *The Sun* – but prompted even former Tory chancellor Kenneth Clarke to complain he was being too right-wing.

The British and US governments have always quoted Saddam Hussein's brutal persecution of Iraq's Kurdish population as an excuse for more than a decade of bombing and sanctions against Iraq.

February's events were a stark reminder of the sick hypocrisy of politicians in Washington and London. For imperialist "statesmen" the Kurdish people are disposable pawns on the chessboard of global strategy.

The US, British and other European governments have turned a blind eye to the dirty war waged by the Turk-

WHAT WE THINK

- Britain should open its doors to refugees – they are welcome here.

- All immigration controls are racist – a socialist government would scrap them all.

- Scrap the voucher scheme and provide full benefits and citizenship rights to refugees – including the right to work.

- Britain should pull its troops out of the Gulf and leave Nato.

- Stop the bombing of Iraq now. Every victory for Nato is a defeat for those fighting imperialism in the Middle East and a defeat for workers here.

ish military against the Kurdish population, not to mention the brutal persecution of political prisoners in its jails. Turkey, of course, is a key ally of Nato. Bases on Turkish soil have often been the staging posts for bombing raids against Iraq, while Turkish troops have made incursions into Iraq to hunt down PKK guerrillas.

The Home Office, however, has effectively declared northern Iraq to be "safe" for the Kurds. This is despite millions of unexploded landmines dotting the region's landscape; despite Saddam's regime of "extrajudicial" murder; and

despite the fact that workers' organisations in the region are repeatedly jailed and murdered by Kurdish right-wing nationalist and Islamist parties.

At the same time, Jack Straw has launched an attack on the principles contained in the United Nations' 1951 convention on refugee rights.

Under Straw's proposals those seeking asylum in the UK will have to apply from outside of Britain. There would also be an extension of the white list, a list of countries deemed "safe", introduced by the Tories, to the EU and no refugees will be let in from these countries.

Just like the 58 Chinese men and women who perished in the back of an overheated lorry at Dover, the Kurds who were cut adrift in French waters were victims of smugglers, trafficking in human misery. But the framework of immigration controls erected by Britain and other EU member states drives desperate people into the arms of these unscrupulous criminals.

Meanwhile, the Home Office has earmarked millions to construct more detention cells at holding pens like Harmondsworth. Detention without trial forms an ever more important part of the "welcome" the British government metes out to asylum seekers.

Of course, you don't have to be white and European to gain legal entry to the UK. If you have £1 million to spend on bailing out a failing New Labour project, extended leave to remain in Britain might be within your grasp.

There is a rising tide of protest against the New Labour's racist response to the asylum question.

The Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS) is staging a series of rallies across Britain in the run-up to the general election – in addition to its ongoing campaign against the asylum voucher scheme. CDAS will be working with students and trade unionists to target Sodexho, the French-based multinational that operates the Home Office's voucher scheme.

For more information on the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers and its activities go to the website at: www.defend-asylum.org.uk

"Stop them playing the race card"

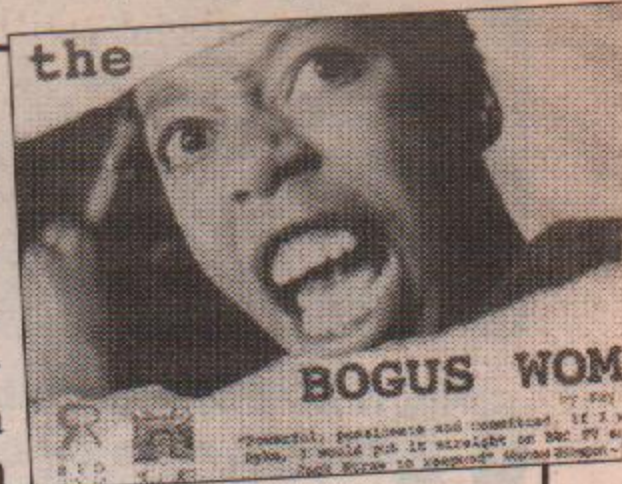
**Organised by the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, Monday 19 March, 7.30 pm
Tony Benn, Andy Gilchrist, General Secretary,
Fire Brigades Union plus refugee speakers
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC2**

**Saturday 24 March, 1.00 pm, demonstration
in Trafalgar Square: Speak out against racism:
Defend asylum seekers.**

An exceptional piece of hard-hitting political theatre, *The Bogus Woman*, has just finished a four-week run at London's Bush Theatre. The production now sets off on a national tour, culminating in five nights at The Tron theatre in Glasgow. It has also been recorded for broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

The play draws on a series of interviews with asylum seekers, many of whom had been held at the Campfield detention centre in Oxfordshire, to depict the soul-destroying experience of a young woman fleeing a war-torn African country. The play is a staggering indictment of state racism in New Labour Britain. See it!

Tour dates:
16-17 March, Hudawi Cultural Centre, Huddersfield
20 March, 21 South Street, Reading
21 March, The MAC theatre, Birmingham
22 March, The Castle Theatre, Wellingborough
22-23 March, The Royal Exchange (Studio), Manchester
26-27 March, New Vic Studio, Bristol
29-30 March, The Junction, Cambridge
31 March, Taachi Morris Arts Centre, Taunton
3-7 April, The Tron, Glasgow.



FEEDBACK ■ Contact us on 020 7793 1468

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International

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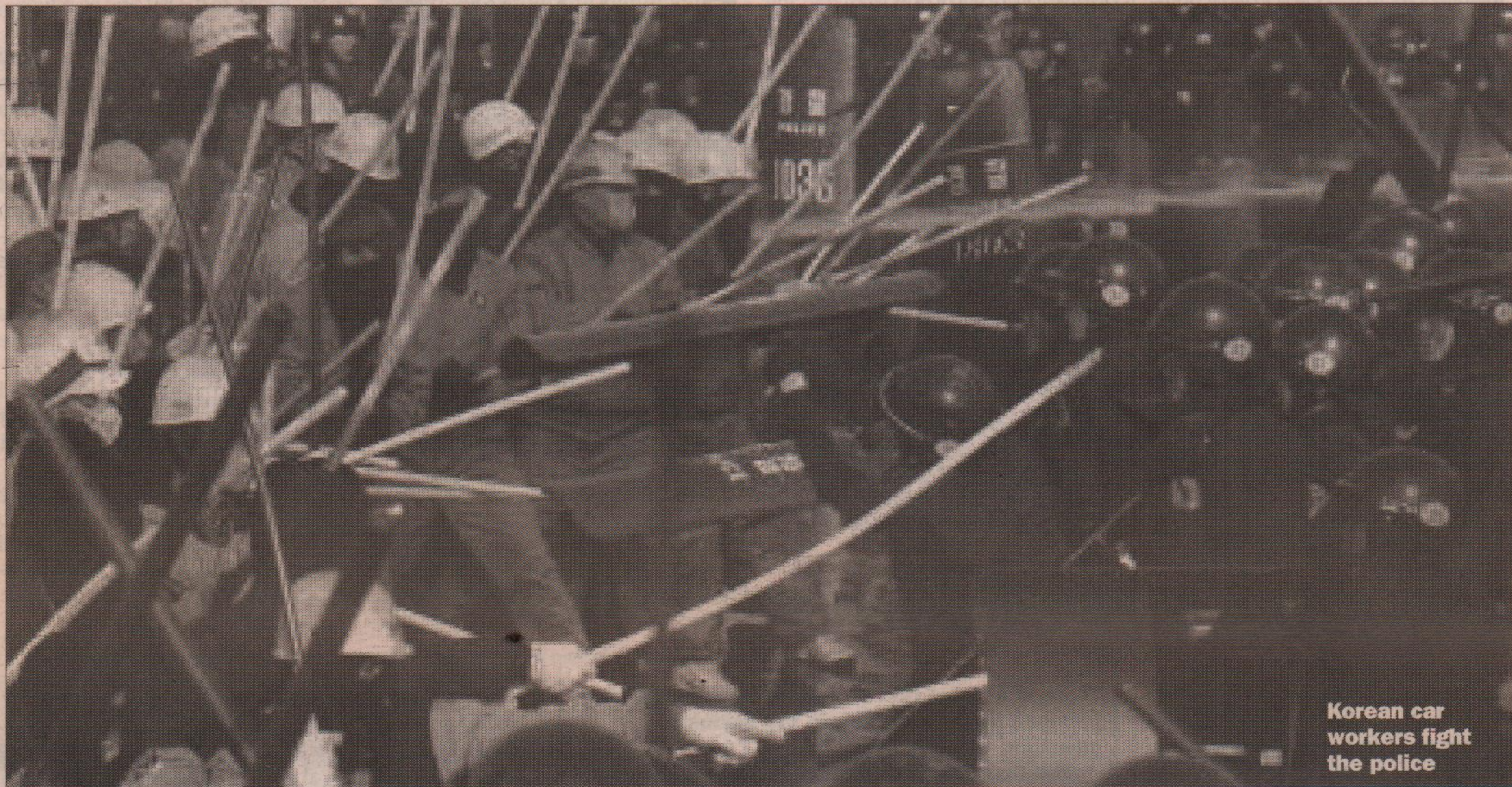
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AS CAR GIANTS HIT GLOBAL CRISIS

This is how you fight for jobs!



Korean car workers fight the police

On 20 February striking auto workers fought running battles with South Korean riot police, who had moved in to smash up a strike and occupation against job losses at Daewoo.

Four thousand riot cops blocked all the factory gates in Bupyong, outside Seoul, after 600 workers barricaded themselves inside. The occupation in protest at the sacking of 1,750 workers lasted four days.

The police were intending to arrest 30 union leaders who had organised the occupation.

As the police attacked – using excavators to break down barricades – workers set fire to management files and desks. Some torched an empty police bus. Others fought the police with rocks and steel pipes. They even managed to make their own water cannon.

“We will turn Bupyong into a sea of flames until we take back control of the

plant,” a union leader shouted.

Immediate support came when about 1,500 workers at Daewoo's two other major plants, Kunsan and Chanwon, staged sympathy walk-outs. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, with 650,000 members nation-wide, also said it would stage all-out protests against Daewoo's sale to General Motors (GM).

Eventually, the police won the pitched battle by sheer force of numbers and superior equipment, but the protest actions continue.

The job losses at the Bupyong are the result of managers' attempts to cut costs in order to meet the demands of GM, which is looking to take over the near-bankrupt Korean car giant.

Meanwhile, the Daewoo bosses are themselves ensnared in corruption scandals. Thirty-four Daewoo Group executives and accountants have been

indicted for alleged involvement in a multibillion-dollar slush fund.

The heroic actions of the Bupyong auto workers should serve as a warning to the whole Korean ruling class about what will happen if it continues to pursue the austerity measures adopted in the wake of the 1997 crash.

The Daewoo workers' actions are also an object lesson for union bureaucrats across the US and European car industries, who are busily negotiating away jobs, terms and conditions in response to management demands.

Occupations, backed by organised workers' self-defence, are the most effective way to ensure that workers don't pick up the tab for the crisis in the car industry.

For more on the crisis in the global auto industry see:
www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/carcrisis.html

PFI - the fight goes on

MORE THAN 1,000 people took to the streets of Birmingham on 3 March to protest at the rash of privatisation proposals across the West Midlands.

The demo was been called by Unison at the Dudley Group of Hospitals which has staged a series of strikes against a Private Finance Initiative scheme. The march ended with a lobby of Labour MP and Health minister Gisela Stewart's surgery. She could only mutter that she would “pass on the petition”.

Support from around the country included London tube workers and health workers from Newcastle to London. Prior to the march West Midlands FBU and UCATT picketed the *Evening Mail* offices to protest at the lies and hostile coverage of that paper. UCATT has been waging its own struggle against the privatisation of their jobs in the housing repairs and maintenance department.

The demonstration drew support from other local campaigns such as the fight against the privatisation of elderly people's homes and the proposed PFI hospital to replace Selly Oak and Queen Elizabeth.

A Dudley striker said at the rally that the strike could win, but “Unison must call a national day of action”.

Clearly, the strike is far too isolated at the moment, Unison must organise solidarity action now.

Dudley striker Angela Thompson will stand against minister Ian Pearson in Dudley South. There may even be a UCATT candidate against New Labour in Edgbaston. This demonstration showed the growing anger with Blair and marked the start of a united fight back against privatisation in the West Midlands.

Ansty workers up the ante

LAST MONTH Rolls-Royce workers at the Ansty site in Coventry took strike action twice in response to management's plans to re-locate jobs. The workers affected, most of whom are members of the MSF, are in the Energy R&D and Maritime Divisions.

Management want to move the Energy R&D work to Montreal, Canada and the rest to Bristol. It would mean the loss of around 1,300 jobs and the closure of half the Coventry site with disastrous repercussions for the engineering industry in the city.

Coventry has already been hit by the scaling down of jobs at Massey Fergu-

son, the relocation of the Parkside Rolls-Royce site and threats by Jaguar to relocate jobs to Liverpool or the USA.

This comes on top of the decimation of engineering in the city during the 1980s.

Important solidarity has come from Canadian unions around the prospective move to Montreal. They are opposing the move and will not be touching any work from Coventry. An international link has been made and is deepening.

The local stewards have conducted the dispute through one-day strikes, petitioning in the city centre and garnering support from the DTI, local MPs

and local councillors. They have learnt from the dockers by contacting their brothers and sisters in Canada and they have the support of the Bristol Maritime Division, as well as Derby car workers.

They state they are prepared to fight and have put out the call for widespread support.

Send letters of support c/o Amanda Richards, secretary MSF, Rolls Royce Ansty, Coventry CV7 9JR.

Send financial support c/o Coventry Trades Union Council, Koco Building, Unit 15, Arches Industrial Estate, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ. Make cheques to “Ansty DATA Fund”.

Vauxhall: All out action needed

TGWU members at Vauxhall's threatened Luton factory and its Ellesmere Port complex on Merseyside staged a solid one-day strike on 23 February. Nearly 60 per cent of TGWU members at the two plants had voted “Yes” to action in response to Vauxhall bosses' intention to shut the Luton plant. While the majority of AEEU members had voted against striking, most honoured their workmates' picket lines.

Vauxhall management have

made it plain that they are not about to back down. There is an urgent need for the kind of “total action” called for by TGWU convenor, John Jack.

This means activists at both Luton and Ellesmere Port fighting for an all-out, indefinite strike. Such a strike needs to be run by a democratically elected committee, accountable to mass meetings. This lays the basis for further solidarity action across GM's European operation to save Luton and at least 2,000 jobs.