

# workers power

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against  
global  
capitalism

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...suddenly the scabs  
changed sides, waving the  
union banner and putting  
on strike t-shirts...

**berlin**

...the junk  
bond  
dealers  
ran for  
the  
exits...

**new york**

**THE  
SUMMER  
OF  
REVOLT**

Hurry up - it's started!

...every  
where  
there  
was  
graffiti:  
'general  
strike'...

**seville**

...they occupied the factory,  
sewing clothes by day,  
standing guard by night...

**buenos aires**



# Fight Blair's union bureaucrats

Over the past few months we have seen the two faces of British trade unionism. What a contrast between them. In the strikes by rail workers, teachers, lecturers, journalists and local government workers and on the demonstrations by firefighters there is the face of militant renewal. At the forefront stand young workers – tired of low pay and privatisation, angry at New Labour's disdain for their welfare and prepared to fight.

This anger has also taken a political form – with militants questioning the unions' relationship to the Labour Party. Many have asked, why do we hand over millions to a party that is not only attacking us but that is harassing our young people, scapegoating asylum seekers and building friendly relations with right wing reptiles like Berlusconi and Aznar? As a result there have been moves in a number of unions to democratise the political fund, cut donations to Labour and, most recently in the RMT, withdraw support from union sponsored MPs who refuse to support union policies.

But the butt-ugly face of the trade union bureaucracy has also been on display. The cellar dwellers of the union HQs have been busying themselves with an offensive against the left to curb the growing mood for action and stamp on the moves to open the political funds to organisations that support the trade unions, like the Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance.

This offensive has taken many forms – and it has not only been launched by the right. Of course the hard right – Ken Jackson in Amicus and Barry Reamsbottom in the PCS – have been the most brazen. Jackson supporters have been involved in alleged vote rigging activities to undermine the campaign of Derek Simpson, who is standing against Jackson in the union's election for general secretary. Derek Simpson has been put on trumped up disciplinary charges by Jackson.

Barry Reamsbottom tried to overthrow the perfectly democratic and legitimate election of Mark Serwotka as general secretary of the PCS in a coup that has, so far, stalled. The contempt for union democracy by Reamsbottom was breathtaking, but not surprising. This is what Blairite democracy in the unions looks like.

But the attack has not only come from the hard right. The Socialist Alliance's campaign to democratise the political fund had enjoyed success in both the FBU and Unison. It was gaining ground in the CWU and Aslef too. The campaign did not pro-

pose disaffiliation from Labour, merely that the funds be controlled by the membership and be allowed to reflect the political choices of the membership. Because this political challenge to New Labour coincided with a rising wave of action the entire bureaucracy took fright.

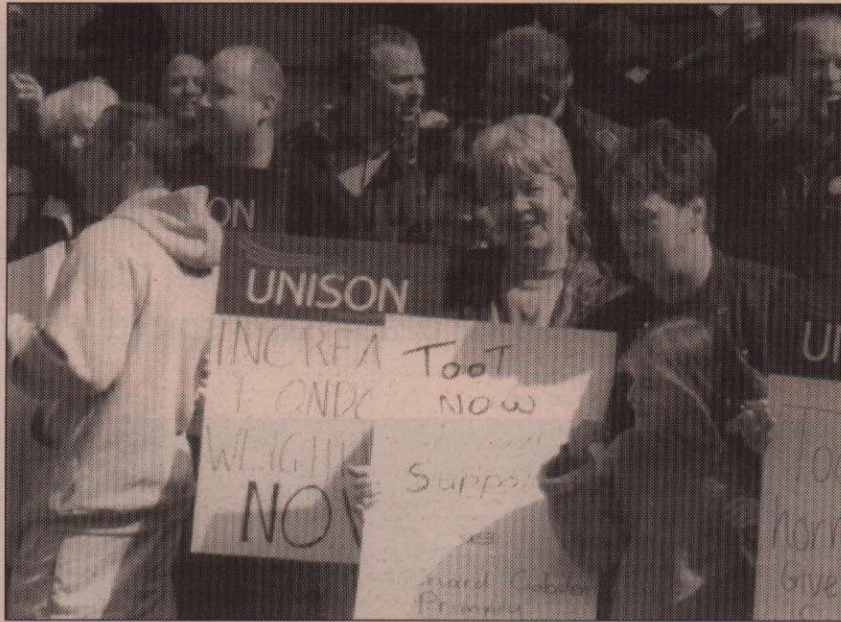
On the "left" Gilchrist in the FBU, Rix in Aslef and Billy Hayes in the CWU denounced the Socialist Alliance for wanting to plunge the unions into the political wilderness. Rix branded the Socialist Alliance – falsely – as wanting to break the link now, and then said our call for the democratisation of the fund "will break the labour movement, we'd be doing the Tories' jobs for them." This is an old, and cheap trick – distort your opponents' argument, link them with the Tories and close the debate.

Gilchrist used similar arguments inside the FBU, but he also brought along John Monks who blamed the Socialist Alliance for allowing the Nazis to triumph in Burnley. This slander – from a man who has the power to call a national demo against the BNP in Burnley but who hasn't lifted a finger – was part of the reason the FBU overturned its previous conference decision to democratise the fund.

Alongside this campaign of vilification and slander, the bureaucrats have also been targeting militants. In East London teachers have been threatened with expulsion from the NUT by Doug McAvooy. Their crime? Refusing to cross a Unison picket line (see page opposite). In the FBU two firefighters have been suspended for alleged electoral irregularities. This is a fit-up. They just happen to be leading militants involved in an election campaign on behalf of a Socialist Alliance supporter in the FBU against a pro-Labour candidate, Mick Shaw.

The bureaucratic offensive has so far contained the rebellion against Labour's automatic monopoly of the political fund in most unions. Though Unison conference voted to censure its leadership for failing to implement a review of its links with Labour and pressure from the membership has forced a number of bureaucrats into taking diversionary action, by cutting the amount of money they give to Labour.

But the one union that has not buckled under the pressure is the RMT. While it was not actually democratising its fund it was radically restructuring its relationship with Labour. Bob Crow was elected as general secretary of the RMT because he promised to fight the effects of privatisation, campaign for renationalisation of the railways and



Local government workers on strike over London weighting

oppose the part-privatisation of the London Underground. His members wanted a fight – a fact demonstrated in the number of rail strikes over the last period.

At its recent conference, the RMT made the largest proportionate cut in funding to Labour of any union. But it also demanded that Labour MPs sponsored by the union – to the tune of thousands of pounds – actually fight for union policies inside the Labour Party. This decision – so obvious, elementary and democratic that it should have been custom and practice in the labour movement years ago – has provoked a huge row with New Labour.

John Prescott has resigned his membership of the RMT. Robin Cook has denounced the union for trying to blackmail him. And Alan Milburn, in the most forthright statement yet by a leading Labour politician, responded by saying "We can't and will not act as proxies for the trade union movement ... The historical relationship between Labour and the trade union frankly hasn't always been beer and sandwiches at Number 10."

This is a clear signal from Labour that it will not tolerate what it regards as union interference in its plans to attack the public sector, allow the railway companies to continue to put profits before safety and efficiency and to turn a blind eye to the problems of low pay and overwork that are blighting the lives of public sector workers.

It is also a downright cheek. Labour was

created by the trade unions to represent them in parliament. Over the past 102 years the unions have paid probably billions to keep the party afloat (unions gave Labour £8.5 million during the period from mid-February 2001 to 31 December 2001). At the last election the unions organised the party's entire transport for the campaign and supplied more than 100 full timers for target seats. Labour would not be in office – now or ever before – without the votes and campaigning efforts of trade unionists.

Yet when a trade union asks that the party implement a union policy – the renationalisation of the railways, which, by the way, Labour had promised to do before 1997 – Milburn, Prescott, Cook and Blair all tell that union to get stuffed. No wonder Bob Crow announced, "Next year there will be a debate on whether we are in the Labour Party or not".

This conflict will not go away – despite the best efforts of the pro-Labour bureaucrats. The reason is simple: at the heart of the debate is not just the issue of democracy and control over the political fund, but a battle over the policies and direction of New Labour. The Blairites are set on a course of attacking the trade unions:

- In the post they are planning to cut 30,000 jobs and open Royal Mail to competition
- They are pushing ahead with the part privatisation of London Underground
- In the NHS, PFI is going through and Labour, against the demands of the unions,

is paving the way to a two-tier workforce, with many of those transferred to the private sector getting lower pay and worse conditions

- In education, local government, the colleges and the fire service Labour is holding out against pay demands
- Across the private sector Labour is pushing ahead with its plans to make the British labour force the most flexible, least protected and most subjected to anti-union laws in Europe.

New Labour is out to shaft the unions. To do this they aim to break the renewed fighting of the rank and file. This is why they are colluding with the bureaucracy – which itself is terrified of an upsurge in action which would threaten its control – to witch hunt militants, curb the moves towards the democratisation of the political fund, undermine left leaders like Serwotka and Crow and attack union democracy.

We need to meet this onslaught head on. The urgent tasks of militants in the period ahead are:

- Building support for all workers taking action and rebuilding the traditions of solidarity that means all workers respecting picket lines
- Organising networks at a rank and file level of all workers – within and across workplaces and unions – capable of rebuilding shop and office floor organisation, recruiting new forces to the unions, holding the line in disputes and organising action independently of the bureaucracy if, ultimately, that proves necessary
- Campaigning for the democratisation of the unions – all major decisions to be taken by mass meetings, all officials subject to regular election, recallability and paid the average wage of those they represent
- Building the Socialist Alliance campaign to democratise the political fund as a step towards building a mass socialist, working class alternative to New Labour
- Building a rank and file movement – committed to democracy and class struggle – in every union so that we can throw out the time servers, take on the bosses and build trade unions that really do, as Mark Serwotka said, act like unions "not building societies".

These tasks can be started now. But to carry them forward we need organised groups of revolutionary socialists in every union. That is why we ask every trade union and workplace activist reading our paper to sign up to our Agitator Network. The bigger we are the further we will get.

## Unison conference: Prentis blocks action

At this year's Unison conference the bureaucracy made sure that any calls for action in the fight against New Labour's privatisation drive were defeated. The campaign will be wordy, worthy and a waste of members' money. Last year Prentis promised action over racism and the rise of the right in the North West in return for the left dropping calls for affiliation to the ANL and CDAS.

What did we get? No demo, some leaflets, no discussions with CDAS as promised, but instead a stitch up of the ANL – with the National Black Members' Committee setting rigid criteria for affiliation that no other organisation has to meet.

Prentis' constant jibes against the left, his attack on the call for a demo by appealing to delegates not to vote for an action when only three members and a dog turn up and his support for the current pay disputes amounting merely to a passing reference, all underline what we said last year – we have no cause to trust Prentis. He is a Blairite bureaucrat desperate to cling onto his place at the New Labour table.

Prentis and his cronies didn't win any ground on the rules amendments. They tried a pre-emptive attempt to gag NEC members

from speaking ... against a rule change that would gag dissident NEC members. But they did manage to pull conference behind them by denouncing the ANL as sectarian, undemocratic and not sufficiently anti-racist. Affiliation was rejected. They managed to pull off the same smears against CDAS and even the Stop the War Coalition.

A motion to oppose the war against terrorism was passed but only with qualifications – profound suspicion of the Stop the War Coalition that will probably amount to an excuse not to affiliate.

The United Left has to build a much stronger organisation in order to take forward the fight over the political fund and for action on pay and privatisation, especially as all section and the national conferences rejected the bureaucracy's deal with Labour over the two tier workforce proposals.

Building co-ordinated action against privatisation to counter the back door acceptance of it in our union is crucial in the months ahead. Likewise we must ensure that the coming strike (17 July) on pay and any subsequent actions on London Weighting, are big, militant and become the springboards for more extensive action.

Last year's conference decided to review the structure of the union's political funds. Unison has two: a political fund affiliated to Labour, the APF, and a general unaffiliated fund, the GPF. Members can pay into one both or neither.

The leadership delayed the review. It extended it for a year and reluctantly began a desultory consultation exercise. This year's conference passed a composite motion that states: "This Conference believes that there has been a deliberate attempt by the National Executive Council to frustrate the wishes of Conference by failing to carry out consultation in time to report to this year's conference...the NEC is instructed to treat this review as an absolute priority in the coming year."

Ground was also won over the form the consultation will take – a full, balanced debate conducted at all level of the union has been agreed. T

his was the major victory for the left at Conference and signals that we have are winning the argument on the need to democratise the APF. Now we need to carry through the debate and win a real reform of the fund.

## AGITATOR 5 OUT NOW!

The latest *Agitator* is out and full of news, analysis and views of key militants.

We also want to hear about what's going on in your workplace and about your union. We want you to write for it, distribute it and join the Agitator network – to make it a bulletin for you.

So contact us now on 020 7820 1363 or email [agitator@workerspower.com](mailto:agitator@workerspower.com). You can also download copies from [www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com)



# Stop the corporate killers - justice for Simon Jones

Companies are getting away with murder. Years of attacks on trade union rights and health and safety has seen the number of people killed at work rise. But one death has inspired a campaign to change this. *Andy Yorke reports*

In 1998 Simon Jones was killed in an accident at work, destined to be just another statistic buried away in some government department. Instead this young worker has become an icon for all those killed by employers cutting corners to make more money in Britain plc.

A campaign kicked off by Simon's family and supporters of the anti-capitalist newsheet *Schnews* has doggedly kept up the heat on the government through the courts, lobbying parliament, and direct action. Their aim was to get the company responsible for his death, Euromin, done for corporate manslaughter and its general manager imprisoned. As their slogan says, "People like Simon Jones get killed at work all the time and nothing gets done about it. Not this time."

Activists from the campaign have occupied the docks where Simon Jones was killed, bridges, and temp agencies. They shut down the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for a day after a debate on casualisation in Parliament was getting nowhere - most MPs, including Labour MPs didn't even bother to show up. As one Liverpool docker said, while taking part in the occupation of Euromin dock, "A few years ago, it would have been workers coming out to shut that dock, not protesters going in".

Big companies have "restructured", replacing full-time, permanent jobs with "flexible" labour: temps, part-time and casual workers waiting "on call" to be phoned up to work at a moments notice. There are 1.7 million temps working in Britain, cheap and sackable, with the agency taking half the wages. Some are "permatemps", working for months, even years, without a secure contract.

Public or private, the trend is to keep only a core permanent staff, supplementing them with part-timers and agency workers, while private subcontractors provide the cleaners, caterers, security, and other auxiliary staff. For instance, the RMT estimates that the number of permanent staff employed on the track has fallen from 31,000 to as low as 15,000 since privatisation, to be replaced by an army of casual workers employed by more than 1000 subcontractors, many badly trained.

It's highly profitable: one major maintenance company, Jarvis, has doubled its annual profits to a record £45.8 million, with its rail division as one of its most successful operations. That's the big picture. What it means to those of us who do the work is longer hours on worse pay, and less entitlement to holidays, pensions, and maternity benefits. Increased workload and speed-ups, quotas, and hustle are routine. Health and safety goes out the window.

Michael Mungovan, a 22 year old student, was working with minimal training for a subcontractor doing maintenance on the rail. Working near Vauxhall on one of the busiest rail interchanges of Britain without adequate supervision, he was killed within 3 days of starting. Six fatal train crashes since 1996 have killed more than 80 people. The number of members of the public killed by corporations is shooting through the roof, with more than 200 in the last year alone.

The average fine levied on an employer



## Sacrificed for profit Simon Jones

**Simon Jones was a young student at Sussex University and involved in the direct action movement as a protestor and volunteer at Schnews, the anticapitalist newsheet. Taking a year out, he was on the Job Seekers Allowance and hassled into taking a job or face losing his benefits. The temp agency he signed up to, Personnel Selection, sent him without any training to a job he was completely unfit for, to work on the docks as a stevedore, one of the most dangerous jobs in Britain, on 24 April 1998.**

**The work set up was an accident waiting to happen. Simon was given no instructions by anyone in a position of responsibility and the grab he was working with was modified without a risk assessment - at the order of the company's general manager, James Martell - so that chains were welded inside it. This meant that precious work time wouldn't be "wasted" changing the attachment from grab to hook as the job changed.**

**The crane driver couldn't see Simon in the hold, and the link between the two was a Polish seaman who couldn't speak English. Within hours of starting Simon was dead, his head caught in a grab. A campaign of direct action by the family and anti-capitalists based around Schnews forced the CPS to try the case. In November 2001 the court acquitted Euromin and James Martell its general manager of manslaughter, but found them guilty of two counts of breaching health and safety regulations and fined £50,000.**

**Reportedly James Martell laughed out loud when he was informed that he could be prosecuted for Simon's death. Sadly, he was proved right. He has never sent any condolences to the family.**

for a death at work is less than £2,000! That's petty cash for most businesses. It pays companies not to invest in health and safety, so they just have to cough up a few pennies under the unlikely circumstances that they get fined. The message is clear: how can you kill someone and get away with it scot free? Be a capitalist.

Two hundred and fifteen people were killed at work last year - though the gov-

ernment keeps the figure artificially low by not including certain categories, such as those killed at sea or deaths because of the supply or use of flammable gas. More than 27,000 workers suffered serious injuries, many of whom will never be able to work again. Yet only 15 per cent of serious injuries and fatalities are investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The government is seriously relaxed about us getting hurt at work.

**It was only due to the vocal, high publicity Simon Jones Campaign that the Crown Prosecution Service was forced to backtrack from their obstruction, by an appeal judge who found their refusal to take the case "baffling" and "beggared belief"**

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Labour promised increased funding for the HSE - then admitted that even with the

extra money, HSE resources still wouldn't be enough to investigate and prosecute more than a fraction of cases. On a completely exceptional HSE inspection blitz of 223 London building sites in May, half were so dangerous that they had to stop work on the spot!

The HSE had one inspector for every dock, hospital, local authority, and defence establishment in the South of England at

the time of Simon Jones' death. The inspector had visited the Euromin dock only once before, in 1994, and then only because of a complaint. That shows what the real situation is. As a result of this lack of resources only 30 per cent of workplace death cases end in a prosecution of a company.

The HSE has no transparency to its procedures, and the process is full of delays. Its interest is to minimise the death-at-work statistics to make it look like it's doing the job. It is so toothless that though the HSE along with the government requested health

and safety assessments from the top 350 companies of Britain, 40 per cent haven't even bothered to respond!

Right now the police are responsible for initially investigating a workplace death alongside the HSE and, if there is a likely criminal case of manslaughter, passing it on to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) consistently blocks the prosecution of employers for manslaughter on "insufficient evidence. It was only because of the vocal, high publicity Simon Jones Campaign that the CPS was forced to backtrack from their obstruction, by an appeal judge who found their refusal to take the case "baffling" and "beggared belief".

Out of the thousands of workers and members of the public dead since 1992, the CPS have brought prosecutions for manslaughter in a measly 45 cases, 10 of which have resulted in convictions.

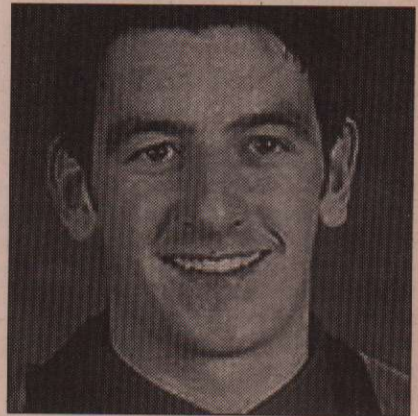
As the law stands it is very difficult to convict a company for corporate manslaughter. Labour promised a new offence of "corporate killing" that would make it easier to convict and stiffer fines. But directors or managers will have to be prosecuted in a separate additional case, and the Home Office has made it known that it considers it punishment enough merely to disqualify convicted directors from holding a position again. Prison is the only thing that will make the suits think twice before skimping on health and safety. And companies won't be liable for workers they kill overseas, in sweatshops for instance. The real joke is that years-on after all those promises, they're still "consulting". So much for being tough on crime!

In addition Labour, which sees more police and punitive laws as the way forward for every other problem under the sun, actually wants to take the police out of investigating deaths at work. What that really means is a two-track values system whereby corporate killing will be a less serious crime than any other manslaughter or murder. The HSE, a regulatory agency without much experience in criminal cases, will investigate corporate murder all on its lonesome - and it can't even keep up with its workload now!

What the government is really hoping for is to bury these cases even deeper so their corporate buddies can get off scot free. That said, the police aren't the answer. They don't protect workers from death or help us achieve justice - whenever we organise against casualisation and exploitation they bust up our demos and picket lines. They are the front-line defenders of casualisation, and on 29 July, four Simon Jones activists will be in court: they were arrested by Brighton police during a peaceful protest outside Euromin docks a week after its general manager Martell walked away a free man.

Capitalism is justice turned inside out. While fighting for adequate funding of the HSE and kicking the employers' representatives out of it, we need independent commissions set up directly by the trade union movement and campaign organisations to investigate these cases. They should demand full funding, along with complete independence and control of their investigations.

## Michael Mungovan



"As far as I am concerned my son was murdered" - Mrs. Mungovan

Michael Mungovan was a 22 year old student at Brunel University, West London and a talented athlete. Michael worked part time for an employment agency which doubled as a railway maintenance subcontractor, McGinley Recruitment Services, which was being used in turn as a subcontractor to Balfour Beatty Rail Maintenance Ltd, which maintained the line for Railtrack.

Michael was given nine hours in a classroom and then two shifts of work experience on an isolated track in the countryside of Oxfordshire before being put to work on track near Vauxhall station in South London, one of the busiest rail interchanges in Britain. He was part of a two-man team securing track for maintenance, but his colleague did not have the relevant supervision, and the work gang's track leader was away with another team.

Michael didn't have a valid track safety card either. On his third day of work he was struck from behind by a train travelling 50 miles an hour and killed instantly. That was 9 October 2000. An inquest jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing on 22 May this year. His family said he had "no chance" on the busy network and that privatisation of the railways had led to a "low regard for human life."

Both Balfour Beatty and other contractors like Jarvis have a list of HSE convictions as long as your arm for death and serious injuries of workers. Both want to take over the London Underground as part of a consortium.

## SIMON JONES FILM TOUR

The Simon Jones Memorial campaign are organising a film tour in June and July. So far there 20 dates booked including London, Bristol, Sheffield and Leeds. If you want to see the film or organise a screening near you then contact the campaign at [www.simon-jones.org.uk](http://www.simon-jones.org.uk) If you wish to buy the 25 minute film then send £5 to Simon Jones memorial campaign, PO Box 2,600, Brighton BN2 2DX

# The Great Pensions Robbery

Rachel Hanson looks at how companies are planning to steal the pension that workers have been paying into

What do you have that's worth a quarter of a million pounds? And what would you do if your employer was planning to take it from you?

If you are a member of a final salary occupational pension scheme, you may well have it – and the chances are that your employers they are planning to steal it, if they haven't already done so. "It" is the pension benefit you have built up under your employer's scheme. And if the subject of pensions has long been the most effective sleeping pill on the market, it is time to wake up to what is a potential catastrophe for millions of workers in retirement.

More than half of all workers are still relying on the state as the sole provider of their pension. These workers are most at risk because the government has already broken its link to wages and has stated its intention to phase it out completely.

The remainder are in private schemes of varying sorts, provided by their employer, which will secure further benefit. These occupational arrangements, which are voluntary, fall into four categories:

- Defined Benefit (generally, but not always, Final Salary).
- Defined Contribution or Money Purchase.
- Group Personal Pension Plan.
- Stakeholder Plan (a low-cost Personal Pension Plan, targeted at the lower-paid).

In addition to this, employees may, where their employer does not provide a scheme, take out an individual personal pension or stakeholder plans, the contributions to which attract tax relief. Pensions companies reveal that stakeholder pensions, which New Labour was hoping would pave the way to the scrapping of the state pension, are barely being taken up and, where they are, it is the middle class who are using them as another savings tax break. In fact they open-

ly advise middle and low income workers against stakeholders.

At the last Government Actuary's Department survey, 10.3 million people – 46 per cent of the workforce – were in one or other of the four types of scheme. Scheme membership is not enjoyed by all equally – public sector employees, higher-paid and full-time workers and men are more likely to be members. In the private sector, the bigger the company the more likely it is to provide a pension scheme and that scheme is more likely, too, to be a Defined Benefit (DB) scheme.

The fundamental difference between a DB scheme and any of the other three types is that it guarantees an amount of pension at retirement that is based on the member's salary and number of years' service. The others invest the employee's and employer's contributions in a range of funds, the pension secured being that which can be bought at prevailing rates using the value of the invested funds at retirement.

A major benefit of being in a DB scheme is that the employer also contributes significantly to it. And this brings us to the heart of the issue. For pensions are not cheap: the estimated cost of providing a pension of two-thirds of salary at retirement is 24 per cent of salary for each year between the ages of 25 and 65 for men, and an even greater amount for longer-living women. On the average wage of £23,513, this works out at £108.50 per week.

Clearly, no-one can afford that, and in fact most pension schemes levy only a 5 or 6 per cent contribution on their members. The balance comes from the employer. And with a DB scheme, where the full cost of a guaranteed pension amount has to be met at retirement, regardless of investment conditions, that balance can be significant (see

## The average level of employer contribution to the various types of arrangement are as follows:

Defined Benefit:	over 15% of salary
Defined Contribution:	6%
GPPP:	5% or less
Stakeholder:	less than 1%

table). And this is where the theft of your most valuable asset comes in: employers, including very prominent firms such as Marks & Spencer, Boots, BA and Abbey National, are closing down their DB schemes at an alarming rate and offering in their place far inferior arrangements. The difference to employees is chilling: the 9 per cent gap works out at an extra £40 or more per week for a worker on an average wage.

And that's not taking into account the fact that all of the risk of investment is shifted from the employer to the employee. This again can make a huge difference. All the major pension funds – Standard Life, CGNU, Prudential, Scottish Widows – cut their final dividends by between 15 and 25 per cent earlier this year because of the falling stock market. For those with no defined benefit, this translates into a huge cut in pension without any notice or comeback. Retirement cottage on the Isle of Wight? Try a bed-sit in Birkenhead!

Most employers are only closing their DB schemes to new entrants while existing members retain their guaranteed pension (for the moment). This will inevitably lead to yet another tier of inequality in the hierarchy of retirement provision – from the Fat Cats and MPs at the top, right down to the poverty provided courtesy of a Basic State Pension of £3,926 per annum.

So far, all of this affects only private sector schemes. The public sector is secure against these changes. Or is it? The Local Government scheme is funded unlike, say, the Civil Service scheme, not from taxation but from local authority budgets. In the face of chronic underfunding, for how long will local authorities be able to pay their pensions bill?

And then there's privatisation. A recent court ruling determined that pension benefits are not covered by the TUPE agreements that are supposed to protect existing rights and conditions to workers transferred into the private sector through contracting out. It is not at all fanciful to imagine that, a few years down the road, the benefits of NHS, Teachers or Local Government schemes will be taken from hundreds and thousands of workers affected by the sell-off of our public services.

So what do we do? The TUC and engineering union Amicus, which have been to the fore in publicising this issue, are typically toothless in the solutions they suggest:

- A degree of compulsion on employers to make a minimum contribution to pension schemes, sweetened by tax breaks.
- Making it compulsory for workers to take out a private pension if they are not in an occupational scheme, while making the rest

accept raised contribution rates or lower pension rates.

● A target level of pension from both state and private sources between a minimum level of the current Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and a maximum level of pre-retirement pay.

These solutions are totally inadequate. British bosses already enjoy the lowest corporate and income tax rates in Europe. They should be forced to cough up for workers who have given the best years of their life to their profitable enterprises through a general and massive hike in company taxes.

It is also highly irresponsible to argue that workers be forced onto private pension schemes. Any Equitable Life pension holder will tell you that their policies are not worth the paper they are printed on. While Equitable slashed the value of their pensions and imposed huge penalties on anyone trying to leave the sinking ship, these pirates awarded themselves six-figure bonuses!

Instead workers should demand that all the pension funds are nationalised into a single state fund and placed under trade union control.

We should demand that all pensioners are guaranteed a decent income based on the European Union's threshold set at two-thirds of the average wage: £16,000 a year.

This will involve a fight. More than 200 members of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) at Caparo plants in Scunthorpe and Tredegar, South Wales, are about to start an overtime ban over the closure of their DB scheme – the first industrial action in Britain over pensions. They have also voted to strike if need be.

This is the kind of action that the TUC and Amicus should be organising if we are to stop the great pensions robbery.

# A history of sexual oppression

Homosexuality is currently illegal in 70 countries. In seven states the death sentence applies – all using the justification of Islamic sharia law. An estimated two hundred people a year are executed for participating in gay sex in Iran, and there have been recent executions in Afghanistan under the Taliban and in Saudi Arabia.

Vanessa Baird's global and historical survey of sexual diversity charts both the horrendous oppression suffered by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people through the centuries and the struggles against that oppression.

She provides fascinating evidence that "sexual and gender non-conformists have existed since time immemorial [and] at times they have enjoyed a considerable degree of social acceptance", for example in such diverse parts of the world as China, Kenya, aboriginal Australia, in medieval Islamic societies, among Native Americans. She also graphically illustrates how such people have been persecuted, their histories virtually eradicated and how

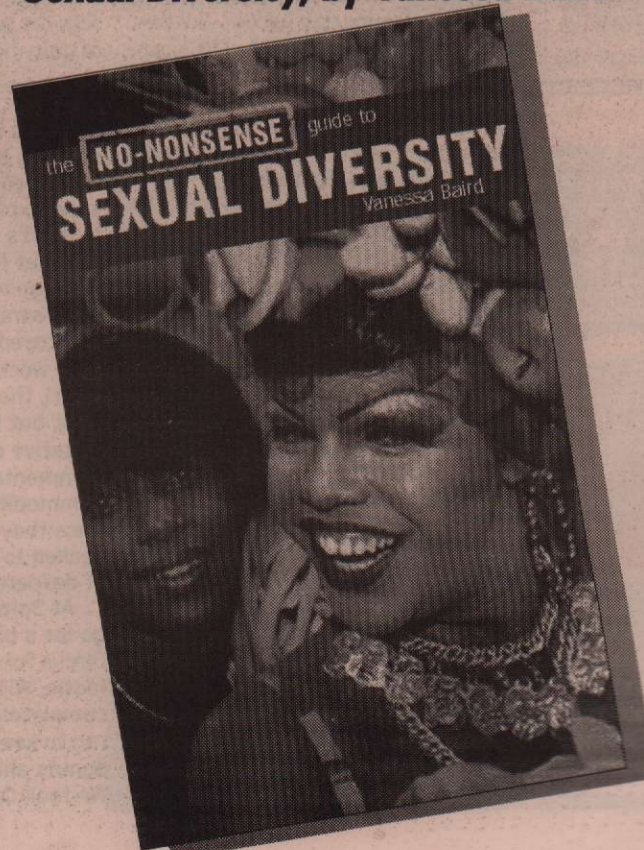
they have been used as scapegoats for all the ills of society.

The idea of a "gay plague" is apparently nothing new. In a 14th century crackdown on "sodomites" in Italy, Saint Bernadino of Sienna "argued that sodomites caused plague and sodomisers actively spread poison through the city." And the consequences for sodomy in medieval Europe were beatings, castration and even being burnt at the stake – explicitly linking sexual "deviancy" with the religious deviancy of heretics.

Baird uses the concept of "globalisation" to look at the growth and spread of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movements, activism and acceptance around the world citing examples, among others, of anti-discrimination legislation in Ecuador, a eunuch being elected to parliament in India and a Lesbian Women's Centre opening in Cuba.

She analyses the economic impact of globalisation on people's lives and ability to protest. For the vast majority of the world's population "privacy is a luxury" and while on the

## Alison Hudson reviews *The No Nonsense Guide to Sexual Diversity*, by Vanessa Baird



one hand the family can be the source of oppression, lack of state welfare provision means the family is also an important means of survival.

If sexually oppressed people in the semi-colonial world are forced to leave the protection of the family due to homophobia then they are usually also forced into homelessness and prostitution. Alternatively, people make compromises – living within the family, marrying, having children but having same sex lovers as well – sometimes fairly openly and with a degree of cultural acceptance, for example, men in Peru, Mozambique and India.

Baird does not fall into the trap of "good rich world, bad poor world". Alongside the "globalising" of visibility of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people she also acknowledges that the backlash, the wave of "fundamentalising" in response to organisation and activity, is not solely concentrated in the developing world but is extremely vibrant in Bible Belt USA with its homophobic murders and "ex-gay"

conversion movement. Not only that but in the section on science she points out the horrific "cures", surgical and psychological, that have been dreamed up by western scientists in order to deal with the sexually deviant and that continue to this day in the form of gender reassignment surgery performed on babies whose genitalia does not conform to the supposed ideal.

Packed with invaluable information, including a country by country summary of laws that affect sexual minorities the book is a riveting read. Wrongly, however, she pins her hopes for liberation on progressive legislation, changing attitudes among police forces etc. and the power of bodies such as the UN to adopt and enforce anti-discrimination and human rights treaties.

Every progressive reform should be supported and fought for – but the path to liberation lies along a fight to the death with the regimes and institutions of global capital, not pressure on them.

# What can we learn from

By *Jeremy Dewar*, steering committee member, Globalise Resistance

Italy has been chosen as the venue for the European Social Forum in November this year. It is a fitting choice. In the 12 months since the cold-blooded murder of Carlo Giuliani during the protests at the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy has seen a growing wave of class struggles.

Hundreds of thousands marching against the imperialist war in Afghanistan; the dismantling of the Bologna refugee detention centre; 12 million on general strike against the abolition of labour protection laws; hundreds of volunteers going out to Palestine to offer political and physical support against the Zionist occupation.

Even the state machinery is at war with itself, as Silvio Berlusconi's government and the police seek to end the judiciary's independence while some magistrates try to bring Carlo's murderer and the torturers of Genoa to justice.

At the heart of all these struggles have been the social forums.

Unsurprisingly, this has opened up a debate throughout the anti-capitalist movement. From the United States to South Africa and beyond, activists have asked, can we learn from the Italian experience?

In Britain too, this question dominated the recent Globalise Resistance conference and is being constantly raised in campaigns and among activists like the SOAS Stop the War Group. Do we need social forums in Britain? Is Britain ready for social forums? Can you import structures from another country's class struggle?

## The Italian Job

But before we can answer these questions it is important to establish what social forums are.

Social forums were established in most cities across Italy after the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2000, to which hundreds of Italians went and from which they took their name, and in the run-up to the G8 protests in Genoa in July. They were initially based on social centres, squatted activity bases shared by militants from the Ya Basta! Associations, members of the Partito Rifondazione Comunista, rank and file trade unionists, anti-racists and anti-fascists. But they also, especially in Genoa itself, drew in wider forces of the anti-capitalist movement – anti-debt campaigners, environmentalists, anti-corruption activists.

After Berlusconi's election, which brought Gianfranco Fini's "post-fascist" National Alliance and Umberto Bossi's Northern Leagues into government, the social forums grew again as the working class and important sections of the middle class woke up to the dangers posed by the new government. This was the time when the FIOM metal workers' union staged a number of warning strikes – independently of the social forums but feeding into them as well. Nevertheless, they remained still essentially mobilising committees for Genoa.

It wasn't until after Genoa – and the tragic murder of Carlo Giuliani himself – that the social forums exploded into vibrancy. They mobilised thousands more to catch last minute trains and coaches to swell the ranks of Saturday's mass demonstration the day after Carlo's death with hurriedly made banners reading, "Assassini!" In the following week hundreds of thousands marched in cities across the country, protesting at the police's brutal handling of the protesters.

Social forums were thrown together all over the place, even in small towns. Inspired by Carlo's parents who courageously called on people to remember their son by making a stand, by doing something. This time the social forums were not just talking shops and mobilising committees, they were about taking action today, tomorrow as well. The movement had a martyr and it ignited a passionate urgency to the cause.

## An open space

So what are these social forums? They are often described by Italian activists themselves as an "open space" to be filled by the participants, or referred to as the "movement of the movements".

The forums encourage the participation of every strand of the anti-capitalist movement because they do not demand that every campaign dissolves itself into the forum, they do not try to impose conditions on each others' activity and priorities, they do not set the agenda from above. There are no centralised membership lists, but rather everyone is welcome so long as they abide by the democratic ethos of the forums that every individual, every small campaign or group enjoys the same rights and respect as the largest and most socially powerful body.



Genoa, July 2001

Indeed, this is one of the hallmarks of the anti-capitalist movement itself. The Seattle anti-World Trade Organisation protests in 1999 drew in every organisation that had worked out for themselves that the great institutions of global capitalism were at the root of the injustice, the wanton destruction and the hatred that they were fighting. The famous alliance of the teamsters (truckers) and the turtles (environmentalists) was born out of a mutual respect for each others' struggle and active solidarity.

## The working class

Of course, the Italian social forums did not grow without disputes. In particular the attention they received from the PRC was the cause of much consternation. Activists rightly saw this as an opportunist turn by Faustino Bertinotti, the PRC's leader, to broaden his electoral base among a new layer of young class fighters. But they were equally right to accept the PRC's par-

ticipation so long as it acted within the democratic framework of the forums. To do otherwise would have been to condemn the social forums to the fringes of civil society – and in the process to violate the same democratic principles they were attempting to defend. Vigilance and gaining influence over the PRC's rank and file is the preferred tactic against potential bureaucratisation.

The growing involvement of the trade unions also posed questions for the social forums. When I attended a 500-strong anti-capitalist conference at the Leoncavallo social centre in Milan in March, 2000, my suggestion that the trade unions – despite their hierarchical structures and their bureaucratic leaderships – should be drawn into the movement was treated with scepticism and even derision. Now FIOM and the major federations, CGIL and CSIL, are active in the social forums.

In fact, the Italian social forums have seen the highest and most dynamic form of unity between the anti-capitalist and

workers' movements.

Crucial to this alliance has been the defence of Article 18 of the labour law, which safeguards workers in workplaces of over 15 employees from random dismissal. This is essential in a country with no unemployment benefit. Long before the major unions took up the cudgels against Berlusconi's proposed attack on Article 18 rank and file trade unionists, supported by the social forums, called a hugely successful unofficial general strike which saw 100,000

In the months that followed the unions were forced to call a national demonstration which attracted two million and a 12million-strong general strike. And even then the social forums went further than the official leadership, calling for the extension of Article 18 to cover all workers and for the establishment of unemployment benefit. The forums proved that they could start the ball rolling and rock the government, even if they are as yet unable to prevent the reformist leaders

# World Cup result: No Sweat 3 Nike 0

'A little less conversation and a little more action' is the words of the Elvis song used in its £90 million advertising campaign for the World Cup. And that's exactly what the No Sweat! activists protesting outside NikeTown in Oxford Circus on Saturday June 15th were demanding: a little less PR spin and a little more action on a code of conduct in its contracted factories around the world.

While most people were in the pub celebrating England's victory over Denmark in the World Cup, about 50 protestors were giving the red card to Nike for its lack of action on giving its millions of workers worldwide decent living and working conditions. With the Elvis soundtrack backing us up, we exposed Nike shoppers, explaining the conditions that Nike workers slave under.

For example, children as young as 8 or 9 years old in India and Pakistan are forced to put together

footballs for the World Cup. These children are paid 18p for a ball that's marketed for £64. That is superexploitation.

That's slave labour. Instead of being at the peak of their fitness, teenage workers will be old within a few years, their bodies and health destroyed by the conditions that they work under. Like Ronaldo and Henri, they've sold their youth to Nike, but they won't retire to a life of lucrative crisp adverts or TV commentating. They are disposable commodities to these companies; once they are worn out they will be sacked to be replaced by another set of desperately poor people.

At 3pm, the protestors decided to go for a bit of action and take Oxford Circus for an impromptu game of footie. Wicked! The cops were completely wrong footed and had to run to keep up (maybe a little less donuts and a little more exercise). We took Oxford Street and headed

down to Hyde Park to continue our match.

But the cops panicked and started trying to shove us back on the pavement. They were being very aggressive to a very peaceful demonstration. As we neared Marble Arch, three cops jumped on one of the protestors as he walked along the pavement. Then they tried to forcibly disperse the rest of us, saying 'Now you've had your little protest, so go home.' Condescension - a step too far.

We didn't go home. We sat in the park planning our next action and providing legal support for our captive comrade.

Get involved in the No Sweat! campaign. There are actions happening all over the UK, so get in touch and we can let you know what's happening. Or better yet, set up an action in your own area!

END SAVE LABOUR! END CHILD LABOUR!

# Italy's 'social forums'?

from selling out, as Sergio Cofferatti of the CGIL has since done.

## The united front

It is impossible to understand the real impact of the social forums, however, simply by focusing on the big events. The headline achievements of the movement of the movements would be impossible without real dynamic organisations at the base.

Social forums exist not just in the major cities but even in small towns. The participants vary considerably – some have unions and political parties heavily involved, others don't. Immigrant, lesbian and gay, middle class anti-corruption campaigners... all participate to varying degrees according to their vibrancy in different places.

See for yourself: type in "social forums" on the [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) website and click on "Translate this page" on a few of the forum websites. You'll find they generally meet weekly and update their sites with local activities and ongoing debates. A lesbian and gay march in Rome, a new anti-fascist initiative in Legnago, the list of actions is endless, each widening the base and deepening the influence of the forums. Groups which would otherwise remain dormant in between periods of high activity are kept together, their members politicised and their actions amplified by the forums.

It is this that makes the social forums real united fronts – of trade unions, parties. Or rather, they are united fronts of united fronts. Are there other examples of such bodies in the history of our movement? Yes, there are. The Russian soviets that sprang up in 1905 and again in 1917 were precisely such organisations – though they were more powerful because they were based on delegates who could demonstrate the real strength of opinion on matters and go away and carry out decisions immediately, whereas social forums are based on a more primitive form of democracy where what is decided and done depends on who turns up.

At first, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were hostile to the soviets, seeing them as non-party (i.e. non-revolutionary) organisations that could block or deflect the course of the struggle. But they quickly changed their minds when they realised that – far from being anti-party bodies – the united front of the united fronts was the vehicle in which the party could spread its influence and win leadership of the masses. It is this potential that makes the social forums particularly important for Marx-

ists. While the emergence of such phenomena does not lead inexorably to a revolutionary conclusion it is impossible to see revolutions develop successfully without them. And each time we let such opportunities pass us by, we teach the class bad lessons and ingrain sectionalism rather than class consciousness.

## Who's against?

The Socialist Workers Party is the main opponent of building social forums in Britain now. What are their arguments?

The SWP says it is wrong, if not impossible, to import structures from another national terrain of struggle and impose them "from above" on a quite different correlation of forces. This is both untrue and a distortion of our arguments.

As Karl Marx pointed out in the Communist Manifesto, the working class is a world class whose conditions converge and national differences wither away precisely because capitalism is a world system that tears up local social relations and replaces them with the rule of the market. This explains how trade unionism was exported from the most advanced capitalist system, Britain, and established across Europe and then the world.

The working class of Europe did not say, let's wait until we have huge factories and millions of workers before we try and impose trade unions on them. They built them, but adapted them to suit their own specific conditions. So we had anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, unions attached to particular parties, industrial rather than craft based unions and so on. How much easier is it to import structures from better organised countries now with globalisation and similar if not identical attacks across the world: flexible working, privatisation, welfare cuts, anti-union laws, environmental destruction. The Italians didn't coin the word Blairism for nothing!

So too with social forums. We don't need to "copy" the Italian model to the letter. Indeed, they vary so widely within Italy, which model would we copy? Rather, we need to take the essence of the social forums – the creation of an open space, a movement of the movements – and build similar structures here. After all, this is how Lenin and Leon Trotsky tried to "export" soviets: base them on factory committees in Germany, on the shop stewards' movement in Britain, they said, but develop the essence of the soviets within them.

Maybe the level of class struggle is not high enough in Britain to sustain social

forums. Would it not just be a case of the left talking to themselves? Chris Bambery of the SWP's Central Committee even suggested to the Globalise Resistance conference that we should build social forums once we have three or four trade union general secretaries and NGOs on board.

This both underplays the level of class struggle and consciousness in Britain and misunderstands the relationship between the rank and file and their leaders.

There is a rising class struggle in Britain. Strikes are back on the agenda, lefts are being elected in the unions, rank and file initiatives are growing. The Socialist Alliances scored well in the local elections, council housing privatisations have been consistently blocked by mass mobilisations. Sizeable movements have been built to oppose the "war against terrorism" and the Zionist occupation of Palestine and Asian youth have defended themselves on the streets against the far right.

We don't want to impose social forums on these struggles. We want to encourage them to meet once a week, exchange information and plan common actions. Many of them involve the same people anyway so why not meet together? As they execute bigger, bolder and more effective actions so others will, if made welcome, join in. The reformist and liberal leaders will, on the other hand, only seek to enter the movement insofar as it grows. They prefer the distant offices of the TUC and Jubilee Plus, far removed from rank and file pressure. To seek their approval first would be the deathknell of social forums in Britain and the very opposite of the Italian experience.

Of course we can't simply announce the arrival of social forums. They have to be built up slowly, patiently but openly. What we need now is to declare our aim, build up trust among different layers of activists, show the worth of such a method of organising – and only when we have succeeded in drawing in significant forces declare ourselves social forums.

What is the SWP's alternative? Build the existing campaigns – Stop the War, Socialist Alliance, Globalise Resistance, Anti-Nazi League, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, Campaign to Defend Council Housing, rank and file union bodies. When they are strong and vibrant, then we can build social forums.

There is a problem with this first step one, then step two approach. Rather than uniting the struggles, it compartmentalises them.

Take the question of asylum seekers. At election time their defence is a major calling card of the Socialist Alliance, but its priority is the mobilisation and recruitment of workers at the polls – and asylum seekers cannot vote.

They are the key target of the far right leading to lies and hatred in the Mail and local hate rags and physical attacks from far right gangs. The ANL counters the lies and, to a limited extent, mobilises against the far right's marches and election campaigns. But it remains reactive and limits itself to warnings about fascism when the current and bigger danger is racism and deprived working class communities turning in desperation to racist "solutions".

Refugees are a direct by-product of wars and globalisation, which demands the free movement of capital and commodities and the endless supply of cheap labour in the global south (and hence their inability to migrate). Yet neither Stop the War, nor Globalise Resistance focus on asylum seekers because that's not their main turf either. As a result, CDAS is the weakest of the existing campaigns – as can be seen by last month's disappointing national demonstration, which attracted just 2,000 – and Tony Blair can feel comfortable leading the charge against them in the European Union.

Even worse, all these campaigns are dominated on the ground by the SWP. When an election ends and a war begins, the Socialist Alliances are denuded as SWP members pour into STW groups – and visa versa. As a major anti-capitalist protest approaches and far right activity recedes, GR multiplies its forces and the ANL stops meeting – and the other way round. No wonder none of them have achieved a decisive breakthrough. They are turned on and off like a tap.

This is what turns many activists against the SWP-dominated campaigns. It is not just – or not initially – an anti-party sentiment, though the SWP's refusal to build forums where activists who see the need to go beyond single-issue campaigning but are not ready to join a revolutionary party can develop their skills and understanding

does engender suspicion. The campaigns become seen as simply, or mainly recruiting tools for the SWP.

## Party and class

Indeed, the SWP's hostility to building social forums in Britain stems from its misunderstanding of the relationship between party and class. It is a misunderstanding that will continue to may cost them dearly in the years ahead and prevent the development of the class struggle if it is not corrected.

Of course, the SWP is not monolithic. There are divisions and different strands of opinion. On the one side there are those who believe the party can only grow through party-controlled fronts drawing activists into its orbit, politicising them and then offering them participation in the wider struggle if they join up. If they don't, forget them and move on. Only the party can join up the struggles.

On the other side, some believe that united fronts with non-party members in the leadership, if possible as a majority, are the way forward. But get them on board and keep them from jumping ship they believe it is necessary for the SWP to curtail its criticisms of non-socialist ideologies and to censor its own voice.

This is why the ANL calls for state bans on fascist rallies but the SWP don't and don't even fight within the ANL for a change in policy! Only the party can fight for consistently revolutionary policies. Both wings of the SWP are, therefore, dead set against the development of social forums. This is not to say that they won't relate to social forums if they emerge or seek to build them from above if the European Social Forum draws in major trade union and NGO forces.

But they will remain opposed to the creation of open spaces. Open in two senses of the word: not controlled by any one group; and open-ended to the possibility of dynamic and organic development.

Workers Power is committed to this project and we encourage all activists inside or outside the SWP to join us in fighting for it.

## Build the European Social Forum

The European Social Forum (ESF) will take place 7-10 November in Florence, Italy. The discussions at the ESF will decide the future of anti-globalisation movement: whether it will become a reformist movement or take steps to become a revolutionary movement. The ESF will have forums and debates and a large general conference each morning. To join the revolutionary anti-capitalist delegation contact [esf@workerspower.com](mailto:esf@workerspower.com)



# Seville strikes back!

Spain shuddered to a standstill as the EU leaders assembled for a beanfeast. Eyewitness report from Revolution.

By the Revo contingent, Seville Spain. Summer. 2002. The weather's hot but politics are heading to boil over as shown in the middle week of June. The week of protest at the EU Summit began with a general strike across Spain on the eve of the summit and ended with over a hundred thousand people from across Europe coming together in Seville to protest against a fortress Europe.

"No one is illegal" was the demand of the masses of people on the streets of Seville. But that wasn't the agenda of the European summit. Meeting behind a chainlink fence and a personal protection force of over 9,000 police, Blair, Aznar and Berlusconi attempted to tighten control on immigrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees to make it harder for them to come to any port in Europe. There is even talk of patrolling the Mediterranean with gunships to prevent "swamping" by illegal immigrants.

Since June 15th, 575 illegal immigrants have been occupying the Pablo Olivade University here in Seville. These workers, mostly from Senegal, Morocco and Algeria, are demanding that the government sort out their papers and the whole system for granting papers to immigrants. Many have lived in Spain for many years, but have no papers to prove it. This means that at any moment they can be rounded up and deported. It is a life of insecurity and low pay.

They are demanding the right to be legal citizens and enjoy the same rights as everyone else. Their occupation lasted throughout the EU Summit and is still continuing.



Police attack protestors in Seville

The Spanish general strike was a massive success in Seville, as it was across Spain. In the first big strike since the centre-right government of Aznar came to power 6 years ago, the unions decided that enough is enough and took a stand against reforms to unemployed workers rights. The reform forces the unemployed to take any job that is offered (up to 30km away) or they risk losing their benefit.

The build-up to the strike was felt all across Spain. Everywhere was graffiti: J20 Huelga general. Workers in the northern Basque and Navarre regions held an advance strike on Wednesday, with unionists placing barricades across roads and railway lines, some of which were set ablaze. There were effigies hanging in the Malaga train station. Over 100,000 people participated in the

CCOO/UGT communist trade union demonstration in Seville. In Madrid, this number was over 500,000, Barcelona was 300,000 and Valencia 60,000.

The government attempted to downplay the numbers involved in the strike, saying that only 17% of the workforce was on strike. But union leaders calculate a figure closer to 80%. There were clashes with the police in Madrid where the police attacked a picket line, over 100 people were arrested and one police officer died while leading a baton charge. The job centre in Barcelona was partially bricked up.

On Friday people started arriving in Seville for the autonomous actions and in preparation for the big demonstration on Saturday. The police had set up road blocks coming into Seville to harass protestors.

Again, as in Barcelona, the Spanish government suspended the Schengen agreement of free travel within Europe and closed the borders. Over 400 Portuguese activists were held at the border and there have been reports of beatings.

The day was filled with smaller actions: a dancing march in support of indigenous people in struggle; a naked protest against the banking system; and an anti-militarisation puzzle. In the evening, there was an Reclaim the Streets street party and a student demonstration; both suffered from heavy police repression. Also in the evening, the Caravan March of Social Resistance arrived in Seville. This was a 500 km march of illegal immigrants and unemployed workers.

On Saturday, before the big demo, a group of about 50 people occupied the el

Salvador church in support of the 575 illegal immigrants occupying the university. In the midst of the occupation, a wedding party arrived at the church. When the wedding service was over, the police moved in to push the demonstrators off the church steps and back into the square.

The police attacked two demonstrators quite severely, but the other demonstrators managed to link arms and hold the police back. The bride and groom came out and waved to the protestors as they cheered them on. Surreal.

Saturday night people from all across Spain flooded to Seville for the demonstration against capitalism and war, against a fortress Europe and for a social Europe. Over 100,000 people came to participate in the demonstration, which started gathering at 8pm at the train station.

Trade union, socialist, communist, anarchist, green banners were flying high. The mood was festive. While the march waited to set out, the protestors called out "Agua! Agua!" to the residents of the apartment blocks and they showered the protestors with water. One woman lowered a hose down so that people could fill up their water bottles.

The spirit of the demonstration was a mix of internationalist, camaraderie and determination.

Yep, things are heating up and people all across Europe are showing they know who the villains are. Not the refugees, not the unemployed, not the man next door that is eking out a similar existence; but the big bosses and the politicians that back them up. Let's make them sweat.

## Scabs join the picket line, police turn tail. A day in the life of a Berlin picket...

By Gruppe Arbeitermacht, Germany

On Monday 17 June, Germany's building workers began their first national strike in nearly fifty years. The date was not accidental. On the 17 June, 1953, a building workers' strike in East Berlin nearly overthrew the Stalinist regime in East Germany.

The current strike also has a lot of potential because it comes just weeks after the big engineering strike and alongside very fierce conflicts in the service and public sectors involving wholesale trade, local government workers and the banking sector.

After re-unification of the country in 1990, the building industry saw a massive offensive by the bosses as they forced through deregulation and wage-cutting. The current dispute is the result of their attempt to take their attack further: they are refusing decent minimum wages, trying to abolish the five-day week and do away with payment according to qualification.

Because trade union organisation suffered after re-unification, with to job insecurity in the east and massive use of cheap labour from eastern Europe, the bosses are confident that they can push through this attack. In recent conflicts, they have used much tougher tactics than are usual in "social partnership" Germany, so everybody knew what to expect from them in an all-out strike.

In Berlin, GAM and Revo supporters formed a "mobile solidarity committee" during the metal workers' strike - and again now in this strike. So we were present from the beginning, organising some practical solidarity that was much appreciated by the workers (as a result we were the only group that was invited to speak at their central meeting place.

On Wednesday 19 June the most important confrontation of the dispute so far took place: At 5:30 in the morning many strikers and supporters were called to one of the biggest construction sites in Berlin, the so-called "Beisheim-Center", which is the last big complex on the "Potsdamer Platz" - the project to rebuild the centre of pre-war Berlin. There we were sent to a big gate normally used for trucks.

This gate had been secured since Tuesday by about 50 workers, identified as the picket line by their red shirts.

No one could even dare to enter the building site, but already this early in the morning, about 50 potential scabs were waiting in the background. Then suddenly, at 6.30, one of the bosses of the site turned up with a police officer by his side, showing a court order, that defined every act which obstructed people who wanted to work from entering the site as a criminal act.

At about 7.00, several police buses arrived, and high-ranking officers gathered around the boss. The workers, now numbering some 150 because they had called in other local sites, reacted by immediately occupying the approach road, thereby obstructing the traffic and making it impossible for police to get through any more of their buses.

There has been no police action against official strikes in Germany for decades - so in the speeches aimed at the police formations, they were reminded, and warned, what had happened on the 17 June 1953!

Most of the scabs were Portuguese workers, who had been heavily pressurised by threats and promises by the bosses. However, on the picket line there were several black workers from Mozambique, who were able to



explain the strike to the would be scabs in Portuguese. Suddenly, at 7.20, about 25 of the Portuguese changed sides, waving the union flag and putting on the picket-line-shirts! An enormous cheer went up, and the slogan "Hoch die internationale Soildarität" was

chanted! At 7.40, 50 police officers with helmets and truncheons formed an attack line and the workers were again told via megaphone that they were breaching the law. The workers shouted back: "here rules workers power!"

In the meantime, more and more strikers were arriving and there was more contact with the remaining scabs. Suddenly all of them moved away, and the whole line-up of state power was reduced to pure caricature. Having no scabs to protect, they had to retreat and march away under the "friendly" farewells from the workers. Victory was ours!

Once again, not a stone was moved on Berlin's biggest construction site, causing several million of losses for the over confident bosses.

While all this is certainly a great success, it also shows how determined the bosses are to break this strike. They even engaged hundreds of private security forces to defend their construction sites against occupation.

The start of the strike shows that it will be a decisive one for Germany. Here the strikers have to fight in the worst economic conditions and are confronted by a determined opponent that is fully backed by the bosses' state. So this strike not only needs full solidarity from other German trade unions.

The international composition of the work force on the construction sites makes international solidarity absolutely essential. One of the best results of the first strike days is that the Portuguese building workers' union has supported the strike and is backing all the workers that join the actions of their German colleagues. Acts like this are helping to build the core of a new international class-struggle spirit!



# Corporate collapse: is this a great time, or what?

"IS THIS a great time, or what?" That was the advertising sting of American telecoms company Worldcom during the dot-com boom. As the corporation grew from its humble origins to become the USA's biggest telephone company, its slogan seemed to sum up the mood of American capitalism.

It had shrugged off the Asian economic meltdown of 1997 and stock markets were booming. There was a "new paradigm" of high productivity, low inflation and a communications revolution that would make sure the "great time" went on forever.

Now Worldcom's words have come back to haunt the capitalist system. The company – already in deep financial trouble – admitted a \$4bn fraud and faces bankruptcy. Its shares were once worth \$180bn. The day before the fraud came to light they were worth \$2.5bn. The day after, even that figure had fallen by 90 per cent.

Coming on top of the scandal at Enron – and less well publicised scams at American big names like Tyco and Global Crossing – the Worldcom fraud had even hardened pro-capitalists shaking their heads in disbelief. Confidence in America as a place to do business – and the whole "Anglo-Saxon" model of capitalism, has been shaken to its foundations.

While stock markets did not crash in the immediate aftermath, confidence crashed. People who make their money buying and selling the debts of troubled companies – so called "junk bonds" – ran for the exits. Systemic failure, while not probable, is now pencilled in as possible in the scenario planning of the giant finance houses. Because nobody knows how many more Tycos, Enrons and Worldcoms there really are.

Worldcom's collapse puts the lid on a whole phase of capitalism in which a cyclical upswing had been mistaken for a permanent improvement. It wasn't just the bank accounts of the rich that felt the benefits: their ideology, their self belief, also gained a massive boost. Now, as boom turns to bust, the whole ideology of capitalist triumph generated in the late 1990s is falling apart.

Worldcom was the brainchild of one Bernie Ebbers. A former basketball coach and nightclub bouncer, his life before Worldcom had much of the feel of an Elmore Leonard novel. Then, on the back of a hotel serviette, he and finance wizard Scott Sullivan had the idea for a giant telecoms company.

America had two already. But deregulation – the breaking up of state-approved monopolies – had forced them to fragment. So Ebbers, started building the new company by acquiring bits of the old ones and stitching them together with Internet Service Providers. After 60 acquisitions, Ebbers had built a new monopoly: he controlled about two-thirds of all US internet traffic, including the "original" Internet company Compuserve.

Where did Ebbers' money come from? The giant investment bank Salomon Brothers. How could they make money by buying other companies – in a market where the value of internet and telecoms companies was already starting to inflate? By doing fancy accounting deals at the point of acquisition, whereby they took a big loss all at once and everything else looked like profit. Why did nobody spot this might be a scam? Their accountants were Arthur Andersen, the now disgraced Enron audi-

**Frank Kellermann** looks at the rise and fall of Worldcom, America's biggest telephone company, and what it means for capitalism

tors, who specialised in "aggressive accounting" practices like this. Why did the stock market not smell a rat? The guru of telecoms analysis in the USA, one Jack Grubman, worked for Salomon Brothers.

Ebbers biggest acquisition was of the company MCI. That had been built up in the 1980s by financier Michael Milken, who invented junk bonds then went to jail when it was discovered he was a fraudster. Some of Milken's key acolytes stayed on within MCI. Milken ally Bert Roberts was chairman of Worldcom, and did deals with Milken even after he left prison. But to the press Ebbers was a hero. With no hint of irony at all, telecoms expert George Gilder wrote in the Wall Street Journal:

"Mr. Ebbers will be the salvation of the Internet ... Like John D. Rockefeller and Michael Milken before him, Mr. Ebbers has shown the magic of entrepreneurial vision and guts ... He is a hero of the dimensions of Rockefeller and Mr. Milken."

The hype around Worldcom wasn't just the icing on the cake. It was essential to its business model. Because while internet traffic and telecoms calls were growing, and Worldcom was laying down thousands of miles of fibre-optic cable to carry it all, the price of data traffic was falling. Only if Worldcom could go on growing faster than prices fell could it make any money. And it could only go on growing if its share price kept rising faster than the companies it wanted to buy. It would use its shares as a kind of paper money to buy smaller companies.

According to Christopher Byron of the website MSNBC: "It was obvious from the start that WorldCom could grow only to the extent that rising stock prices made the takeover value of its own currency more valuable. But the acquisition of MCI – which heaped all MCI's debt atop all of Worldcom's, then added \$6.1 billion more in the financing – meant the stock price would quickly collapse once the market as a whole began to weaken."

And that is what happened. There was too much cable, too many debts, not enough Internet traffic. Even before April 2000, Worldcom's share price began to slide. But meanwhile, the rest of the financial world had been going even crazier.

Worldcom was at least a real company. It owned the basic infrastructure of 21st century economy: the high speed telecommunications lines. But from late 1998 to mid 2000 there was an irrational mania for companies that were very unreal. Bankers and a large part of the American public poured money into Internet businesses.

In the first place, the Internet was and is a revolutionary invention. But for much of its life serious capitalists had always told each other – it's a great communication tool but you'll never make any money out of it.

But in the late 1990s the mass market for internet use took off – made possible partly through the falling prices that were the result of all the rival infrastructures being built. On the back of that, businesses sprung up claiming to be exploiting the internet to tap into hitherto undiscovered sources of profit. You could slash the transaction cost of buying – famously



"Hey, this was not supposed to happen!" Chicago currency traders sell the dollar as Enron, Worldcom and Xerox knock 10 cents off its value in a month. American capitalists are being shown to be a bunch of liars.

when a big business buys a pencil worth 1p it can spend between 10 and 50p making the purchase. "E-procurement" would slash costs. Then there was "e-commerce" – catalogue selling but over the internet. That would reduce warehouse and inventory costs. "E-banking" would remove the need for all those costly bank branches and workers. And so the illusion continued.

But where was the money coming from to be poured into all these businesses – many of them like Worldcom sketched on the back of an envelope? After the Asian crisis, which nearly devastated the world's stock markets, there was a concerted effort by the G7 governments to bail out the world economy.

Effectively they printed money and virtually gave it away through low interest rates, debt write offs and tax cuts. So there was easy money sloshing around. Next, Asia, including Japan, looked like a basket case. So the obvious place for investors was America. Demand for com-

panies to invest in outstripped the number of companies in existence. When demand outstrips supply the price goes up. So the tech bubble on the stock markets began.

But as well as the supply and demand factor, not to say the stupidity factor, there was an element of rationality in the dotcom bubble.

The argument was that the internet really would – if not now then later – fundamentally transform the economy in the same way that railways or the combustion engine had done. If shares were trading at 40 times their "rational" value, it was a reflection of a new economic revolution, said the supporters of the new economy theory.

Endless technological innovation would – indeed had begun to – produce growth without inflation, as productivity increases picked up from the 1 or 2 per cent a year they had been since the 1970s. The theory was even supported by US government statistics. Very sceptical at first, the US depart-

ment of commerce eventually came round to the productivity miracle theory. And indeed there was some truth in it: especially in the high tech industries, but also across manufacturing industry, the application of new IT and telecoms technology was lifting productivity.

But the productivity argument got lost once it became clear that the bubble was irrational. Shares plummeted in April 2000 and went on falling. It was a long slide not a crash, but Wall Street has destroyed about one third of America's wealth over the last two years.

And the share collapse inevitably spelled disaster for Worldcom. We do not know how or when they started cooking the books. We do not know how complicit the analysts and the accountants were. But at some point, collapsing profits and rising debts must have prompted Ebbers to start fiddling the figures.

And that is what is now scaring corporate America. Most of the dotcoms are long gone. But it's now clear that a lot of real live companies, dealing in real and sometimes vital commodities, used the share price bubble to fiddle the figures.

Enron used "off balance sheet" accounting. It hid its debts to keep its share price high. When found out, it collapsed – the biggest bankruptcy in US history. The Bush administration had been bankrolled by Enron and had gone along with its demands for deregulation in the energy industry. And it had been audited by Arthur Andersen.

Worldcom used simple fraud – counting short term costs as long term costs so they wouldn't show up on the profit figures. It was a previous Republican president they had to thank: President Reagan, for deregulating the telecoms industry in the 1980s. And they too were audited by Andersen.

So they're starting to ask: who else fiddled the figures to inflate the share price?

The system of stock and shares allows companies to expand in a seemingly limitless fashion. They don't have to rely on the profits generated by themselves in order to grow; they don't end up handing the company to a bank. The rise of share-based capitalism inaugurated a century long period of breakneck growth punctuated by two long periods of near stagnation. The reason being that when growth happens, share prices grow faster than the economy; generating a boom, a bubble and then a crash.

And just as a share boom allows capitalism to grow faster than is rational, it allows it to collapse more deeply than is rational too. Good companies are destroyed by bad. Wise investors wiped out by fools.

That is the essence of finance capitalism, as Marxists have been telling people for over 100 years.

Capitalism without finance capitalism is now impossible: the "Anglo-Saxon" model, a religion based on the worship of share prices, is not an imposition or a corrupt excess: it is the core of the system.

The last two years have seen the capitalists' wealth collapse. The last six months have seen their ideology collapse. Anti-capitalists commanded both the attention and derision of the mainstream establishment because they had a moral case against the system but not an economic one.

Now we've got both moral and economic justification for saying: scrap this system. Is this a great time, or what?

The Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) reports on recent developments in Argentina including the brutal police assault on an office of the United Left on June 26 in which two "Piqueteros" - street protesters - were killed. Forty thousand demonstrators marched to the presidential palace in protest. This led to a climbdown by president Duhalde who was forced to arrest the policemen concerned and denounced their actions. The events show that the government and police are preparing the ground to attack the workers occupying their factories and popular assemblies in the hope that they can isolate them from the mass of the population. The screw will tighten unless a mass offensive against Duhalde is launched.

**I**N MAY, President Duhalde's new economics minister, Roberto Lavagna (the sixth Argentine economics minister in 14 months) promised to sign a deal with the IMF by June. Not long after, a phone conversation with the IMF's number two, Anne Krueger, put paid to his optimism. Since December when Argentina defaulted on its \$140 billion government debt, the IMF has been blocking access to loans until the Government fulfils its conditions.

One of these, that the state governments stop running large deficits and issuing their own "currencies" to pay their workers, appears now to have been achieved. In June the province of Santa Fe joined Buenos Aires and Cordoba in agreeing to cut its deficit by 60 per cent. These three provinces dominate Argentina's economy and the cuts are predicted to result in big job losses. Some estimate up to 500,000 jobs will go. But this was not enough for the IMF.

They have two other major concerns. They want the repeal of parts of a Bankruptcy Law which gave some protection to indebted companies from being taken over by foreign firms. It's an anathema to the IMF which wants complete freedom for the multinationals to buy up Argentine firms at knock down prices.

Another struggle has been over an Economic Subversion Law which gave judges wide ranging powers to investigate banks if they tried to avoid exchange controls.

The IMF wants Duhalde to veto these laws which threaten the international banks' freedom to spirit billions out of the country - as they did just before the Government froze bank accounts. Duhalde is in a cleft stick. The IMF's prescriptions will deepen the recession and allow the multinationals to benefit from the fire sale of national assets that will result. But he is faced with growing resistance in the streets and from the unions, and with wafer thin majorities for his policies in the Peronist dominated congress.

The banking crisis remains the most intractable. An attempt to swindle depositors out of the remains of their deposits, by offering government bonds in exchange (a measure favoured by the IMF) was too much for Duhalde to swallow. It led to the resignation of his last economics minister who proposed it. When the "corralito" or freeze on deposits was introduced it effected an estimated \$40 billion of savings.

After the devaluation of the peso by 70 per cent these are now worth only about \$8 bn. Lavagna is trying to get the banks to decide whether to give back the deposits or give bonds - and neither the banks nor the IMF like it. As a result the IMF declined to send a team to Buenos Aires in June, and Lavagna is now talking about a deal in July.

No doubt the "exploratory" team the IMF is now promising will come up with new demands when the letter of intent is signed. The ongoing crisis has led to new speculation about Duhalde's ability to survive until planned elections in autumn 2003. Some Peronist governors have been suggesting bringing forward the election to early 2003.

The former president Carlos Menem - a bitter opponent of Duhalde within the deeply split Peronist party - has thrown his hat into the ring. Duhalde is pinning his hopes on an agreement with the IMF

# IMF puts the screws on Argentina

PTS Statement: 27 June 2002

## ACTIVE NATIONAL STRIKE NOW

Two piqueteros murdered by police bullets, tens of wounded- some very seriously, many detained: these are the results of deliberate repressive action by the government of president Duhalde and Buenos Aires governor Solá. They are the brutal face of complying to the letter with the orders of the IMF.

For a week chancellor Ruckauf, head of cabinet Atanasof, secretary of security Juan José Álvarez and the presidential spokesman Amadeo have been threatening to take a "firm hand" with street blockades.

The repression developed - with a wave of detentions and persecutions in Avellaneda against unemployed people, women and young demonstrators - into the violent entry into the premises of the United Left without judicial warrant. They even used repression at the doors of the Fiorito hospital, and the police are concealing information on the injured and the dead. There were 188 prisoners, 50 women among them two militants of our party, the PTS, who had to be released yesterday because of the popular response to the repression.

This is a government of murder and hunger, a servant of the IMF. It is following in the footsteps of de la Rúa - ending in its own days of bloodshed.

The union leaders who are collaborating with Duhalde in the consultative councils, the leaders of the CGTs as well as the CTA-CCC, must stop subordinating themselves to Duhalde. The CTA has called for a national day of action today but it is not calling for participation in the mobilisation organised by the piqueteros and human rights organisations, and the Left parties, from the Congress to the Plaza de Mayo, nor does it propose a plan of struggle to confront the repression of the government.

### Coordination Now!

The activists of the popular assemblies, the piquetero movements, the militant workers of the occupied factories - like the ceramic workers of Zanon who today blocked route 7 in Neuquen - or the Brukman textile workers who are mobilising with the piqueteros - and all those who participated in this day of action- must now close ranks.

We must unite and coordinate our actions. Today's rallies and the demonstration at the Plaza de Mayo are the first steps. We must demand that the leaders of the unions break off the truce, break off all collaboration with Duhalde and immediately call a nation-wide united and active strike.

We need to set up an Independent Commission to investigate the repression of June 26, with the force of plenary sessions, headed by the comrades of the CTD Aníbal Verón, the Bloque Piquetero, the Barrios de Pie and the MIJD, along with human rights organisations and deputies like Luis Zamora.

Together we must create regional coordination bodies, and all other necessary measures for united action to open the road to an active general strike with mass pickets, in order to defeat the government and the IMF.

■ Jail the murderers and those responsible for the repression of the piqueteros!

■ Free all the imprisoned protesters immediately!

■ Call an active national strike, with street blockades all over the country!

■ Down with Duhalde and the IMF!

that, he hopes, will restore foreign business confidence. The economy continues to nose dive. Industrial production was down 14.8 per cent in the year to April, inflation was 20 per cent in the first four months of this year and is expected to reach 80 or 90 per cent by the years end.

Job losses continue to mount. Official unemployment stands at 24 per cent. the National Institute of Statistics believes that 50 per cent of the 36 million Argentine population are now below the official poverty line. Two of the major unions called general strikes against government policies in May: the dissident CGT on the 22nd, and a much bigger strike called by the CTA on the 29th.

The official CGT remains tied to the Peronist government and has refused to call

actions against its policies. Duhalde has moved to shore up his support from this quarter by giving the Labour Ministry to Graciela Camano, the wife of a CGT radical in the senate. In the week of the general strikes he also extended the freeze on layoffs in the big firms for another six months as a concession to his CGT supporters. But Duhalde's room for maneuver is growing smaller.

A deal with the IMF on their terms could be the final nail in his coffin, but only if there is a united response from the unions and the popular assemblies. The divisive policies of the trade union bureaucracies will continue to weaken the movement unless the workers can force them into a united struggle to bring down the austerity government of Duhalde.

## How the police murdered Dario Santillan...



Dario (in white cap) tends fellow picket shot by police, in the United Left centre, Buenos Aires, after a mass blockade of a road bridge by unemployed workers...



Police break into the centre, waving pistols and rifles



Moments later an armed policeman stands above Dario. He is still alive.



He is dragged away by two armed policemen



Now, outside, he is dead. Another picket, Maximiliano Costeki died on the same day.

## Textile workers occupy their factory

A few blocks from the Congress building in Buenos Aires, 54 women clothing workers in the Brukman factory are carrying on manufacturing under workers control. They have won support right across Argentina.

Alongside the ceramic workers of Zanon in the provincial city of Neuquen (see Workers Power No 262) they have become a focus for a wave of resistance by workers faced with factory closures and sackings. More than one hundred occupations and work-ins are under way in Argentina today. Workers from schools, bakeries, printshops and newspapers have said no to their bosses attempts to dump them and run off with the fruits of their labour.

Although the factory has capacity for around 1,000 employees, over the last year in only 115 workers were still employed. A large part of the production facilities were unused.

The boss slashed the workers wages - and delayed payment. The situation became unbearable.

In December the workers' patience came to an end. On 18 December, they demanded their back pay. Yet when the workers arrived for a meeting with management they found the boss, the personnel manager and even the secretaries, had all disappeared, leaving huge numbers of documents, scattered around, in what was obviously a headlong flight.

They occupied the factory simply to prevent the management from removing the machinery, sewing clothes in the daytime and taking turns standing guard at night.

Today the Brukman workers are calling for the nationalisation of the firm and continuation of production under workers control

They have learned, however, that the problems of its business are in no way a one-off. They are shared by millions of Argentine workers. That's why they have supported numerous protests by the unemployed, and took part in the general strikes. A contingent of the Brukman-women in their blue overalls have become a regular feature on many demonstrations

The Brukman workers have not only defended their own jobs. They have spearheaded a nationwide fightback. In April more than 700 people attended the first Gathering in Defence of the Occupied Factories, called by the workers of Brukman, Zanon and the Ceramic Union of Neuquen.

They launched an initiative together with the Zanon workers publish a militant workers' newspaper called Nuestra Lucha (Our Struggle). The newspaper carries reports and articles about workers' struggles in Argentina and is supported by and involves numerous other workers in conflict with their employers. The newspaper already has a circulation of 20,000 and attracts a wide readership.

## Solidarity with the Brukman sit-in

Send messages of support to

■ Fábrica Brukman, Avenida Jujuy 554, Buenos Aires, Argentina

■ email address [jjforevergo@terra.com.ar](mailto:jjforevergo@terra.com.ar)

■ For regular website information on the Brukman and other occupations go to <http://argentina.indymedia.org>

■ In the UK send money for the strike fund to the Argentina Solidarity Campaign. Phone 07960 398152 for details.

# 'Two-stage' timewarp is a trap for Palestinian left

Following the assassination by Israel of Abu Ali Mustafa, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in the West Bank, and the jailing of its current leader, Ahmad Saadat, for his alleged role in the revenge assassination of the far-right Israeli tourism minister, Rehavam Zeevi, the PFLP has enjoyed a significant revival. Its popularity has been boosted by its involvement in armed actions against Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

The PFLP has opposed the Oslo sell-out from the beginning and fights for one secular state in the whole of Palestine. Those Palestinian youth and students who want to resist the occupation, refuse to accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel, but who are unable to accept the reactionary politics of Hamas gravitate towards the PFLP.

The origins of the PFLP lie in the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), founded in 1952 by George Habash. He was one of a generation of educated Palestinians who felt humiliated by the conquest of their country by Zionist settler-colonists in 1948 and bitter towards the Arab regimes who had been complicit in Palestine's division and its people's continued displacement.

Habash argued that the unnatural divisions imposed upon the "Arab nation" by British and French imperialism had created untenable states with regimes that had no interest in defending Palestine from Zionism. Israel had been able to exploit these inter-Arab divisions in war, with disastrous results for the Palestinian people.

The solution that he and others proposed was "Arab unity" – a revolution in the Arab states to re-unite the Arab nation and wage a popular war to liberate Palestine.

The origins of the ANM's leadership was among the exiled Palestinian middle class, who, despite their education, found their social aspirations blocked by their refugee status. While they denounced the "bourgeois" and "semi-feudal" Arab regimes, their political programme contained very little about the class struggle or socialism – their social radicalism being confined to secularism and bourgeois democracy. The agent of their proposed revolution was to be the "Arab masses" – a broad and vague entity defined in non-class terms.

The ANM supported the reluctant symbol of "Arab unity", Gamal Abdul Nasser, whose Free Officer Movement had seized power in Egypt in 1952. Nasser's prestige had rocketed following the 1956 attack on Egypt by Britain, France and Israel in response to his nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Habash had been in Damascus in 1957 when the short-lived United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria came into being, and in his own words became an avid convert to Nasserism and pan-Arabism – although Nasser himself wished to maintain good relations with other Arab states, rather than overthrow them.

Habash's movement soon came into competition with Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement. Fatah had been founded in Kuwait in 1959 after an initial existence as an agitational group around the newspaper *Filastinuna* ("Our Palestine"). Its leadership's social base was among the exiled Palestinian bourgeoisie who had acquired wealth and social status in the oil-rich Gulf states, but whose statelessness prevented them from consolidating themselves as a "normal" national bourgeoisie ruling

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has historically been the largest organisation on the Palestinian left. **Mark Robbins** examines its politics and history.

over and exploiting "their own" workers.

This, too, coloured their politics. Inspired by the Algerian movement for independence from France, they advocated an armed guerrilla struggle to liberate Palestine – one that acted independently of the Arab states, and that would be conducted solely by Palestinians, albeit with external Arab support. While they spoke of a "democratic secular state" for Muslims, Christians and Jews, it was clear that their proposed state would be a capitalist country like every other Arab country.

They declared that the Palestinians refused "to let the Arab governments represent them in their lethargy, diplomacy and defeatism", and that they would conduct their own struggle – but also that they would not interfere in the "internal affairs" of other Arab countries. This advocacy of a purely Palestinian revolution won Fatah the backing of the most conservative Arab regimes – whose biggest fear was that the dispossessed Palestinians would come to represent a revolutionary threat to their rule.

The Kuwaiti and Saudi monarchies in particular began to offer the Fatah move-

ment arms and finance – obtained through a compulsory "liberation tax" on all Palestinians living within their territory. In 1965, Fatah launched the first military operation in its "liberation war", pursuing a guerrilla strategy that the ANM denounced as an irrelevance. Habash soon found himself outflanked by Arafat.

At first sight, it might seem that Fatah's strategy was more conservative than that of the ANM – refusing to sanction the overthrow of the reactionary Arab regimes whose dependence on imperialism condemned the region to backwardness, poverty and division amid incalculable wealth. But the ANM's illusions in Nasser as the "leader" of the "Arab revolution" meant that their strategy effectively amounted to waiting for the much-vaunted goal of "Arab unity" before any constructive struggle to liberate Palestine.

With each diplomatic failure of the Arab regimes to resolve the "refugee problem", and each indication of their lack of will to wage a popular war, the prestige of Fatah rose while that of all the regimes diminished – Nasser's included.

The Six-Day war of June 1967 finally

broke the back of Nasserism – as Israel imposed a humiliating military defeat on the front-line Arab states and expanded its territory to include the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Fatah seemed vindicated – with its guerrilla war acquiring new relevance as an armed resistance to the Israeli occupation.

The ANM shrunk, and was forced to reinvent itself as a purely "Palestinian" movement – the PFLP – adopting Fatah's guerrilla strategy wholesale while maintaining its call for "Arab unity" and an "Arab revolution".

Following a further series of splits, the former anti-communist Habash adopted a Maoist-influenced "Marxist-Leninism", which extolled guerrilla struggle for "national liberation" while maintaining a Stalinist theory of the "revolution in stages". Whereas previously, Habash had a vision of first, Arab unity and, then, Palestinian liberation, he now spoke about the "class struggle" which would lead first, to a "national-democratic" revolution, and then, to socialism – at some distant point in the future.

The task of Palestinian revolutionaries – and their Arab allies – was to make an alliance with "progressive" bourgeois forces to achieve national liberation. The aim was not to overthrow capitalism by the working class and thereby end private property in production. As a result the PFLP's vision of "socialism" was petit-bourgeois, that is to say, it was a conception of society based on small farmers and businesses. In this sense their politics were very similar to those of the Provisional wing of the Irish Republican movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

The bankruptcy of this new strategy was soon revealed. In Jordan, where Palestinians were a majority of the population, the growing guerrilla movement threatened to overthrow the rule of King Hussein – whose Hashemite dynasty had been placed in power by British imperialism in the 1920s, and which had repeatedly connived with Zionism to thwart Palestinian national aspirations.

Arafat, in line with his policy of "non-interference" in the "internal affairs" of the Arab states, tried to reach an accommodation with the Hashemites – but this was not enough to satisfy Hussein's regime, and in any case Arafat could not restrain the armed Palestinian masses.

Habash, in keeping with his call for an "Arab revolution", advocated the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy – with the slogan "from Damascus to Jerusalem via Amman" – but his opposition to a social revolution as an integral part of the national liberation struggle meant that he could not link this call up with support for the growing economic and social struggles of the urban workers and poor.

The result was a bloodbath – "Black September" – the month in 1970 when King Hussein's army moved to smash the Palestinian guerrillas and re-impose pro-imperialist "stability". The lesson that Fatah drew was that the challenge by the PLO to the Jordanian regime was a mistake – a diversion from the struggle for Palestine. The conclusion the PFLP drew was that the Jordanian monarchy, above all other Arab regimes, was an obstacle to the Palestinian revolution and had to be overthrown. Neither saw the working class as an independent factor in leading the revolution.

In the wake of their defeat in Jordan, the Palestinian fedayeen (guerrillas) were displaced to Lebanon, where they pursued the same strategy of cross-border raids into Israeli-held territory. In the process, they challenged the rule of the Christian Maronite minority in Lebanon, and in 1975 became involved in a civil war between the Maronites, on the one side, and the Muslim, Druze and secular nationalist forces of Lebanon's non-Christian majority, on the other.

In the meantime, Arafat had begun to seek international respectability, and came to advocate a "two-state solution" – in which the territory Israel acquired in 1967 would become an independent Palestinian state – to be achieved through a combination of diplomatic negotiations and guerrilla struggle.

The PFLP rightly denounced this proposal – which would have created a powerless mini-state dominated by Israel and acting to police the Palestinians on behalf of world imperialism, as well as leaving the Palestinian refugees outside its borders in the lurch. But it had not learnt the lessons of the 1970 defeat – that only a workers' revolution drawing in the masses of all the Arab states and overthrowing capitalism could prevent the regimes turning their armies or even a section of their own people against the Palestinians.

The inevitable defeat in Lebanon was much more bloody than that in Jordan. In 1976, acting to "police" the region and gaining America's favour in the process, the Ba'athist Syrian regime turned on its former Palestinian and Lebanese leftist allies to save the minority Christian Lebanese government. The then Israeli defence minister, Yitzhak Rabin, gloated that Syrian troops succeeded in killing more fedayeen in Lebanon than Israel had managed since the beginning of the guerrilla war.

Israel's subsequent invasion of Lebanon in 1982 – intended to deal a final death-blow to Palestinian nationalism – resulted in the slaughter of tens of thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians by indiscriminate Israeli aerial bombardment, the massacre of 2,000 Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatilla, the almost complete disarmament and dispersal of the fedayeen, and the exile of the PLO leadership and its institutions to Tunis. This defeat paved the way for the PLO's turn towards a negotiated settlement based upon a two-state solution.

The struggle then became focused on the Occupied Territories – where a mass uprising (the Intifada) broke out in 1987. The PFLP opposed the Oslo accords which followed the defeat and exhaustion of the first Intifada, and has played an important role in the uprising that began in September 2000.

But it remains trapped in a guerrilla strategy which cannot mobilise the mass of the population against the Israeli occupation, which pits a largely unarmed people against the most powerful military machine in the region. Above all, it cannot make the connection between the struggle for a free Palestine and the struggle for a socialist Palestine as part of a socialist federation of the Middle East.

Only a revolutionary socialist party which inextricably links the struggle of the Palestinian nation to the struggle of the working class of the region as a whole can do that – and in so doing overcome the legacy of the many defeats of the past.



PFLP poster, with RPG launcher, guns and party symbol

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George Bush's call for the Palestinians to depose Yasser Arafat is a green light to the Israeli army

# Bush's peace means war on the Palestinians

On June 24 George W Bush chose the White House lawn as the venue to depose Yasser Arafat as leader of the Palestinian people.

As Israeli tanks and troops continued to occupy and blast every major city and town on the West Bank, the US president effectively de-recognised the Palestine National Authority proclaiming that until it carried out "democratic reforms" and "ended corruption" it would not be recognised by the US government.

This declaration of war on the Palestinian people by the American Empire was duly hailed as a bold new "peace plan" by the rest of the G8 leaders when they gathered on a mountain top resort near Calgary, Canada - secure alike from al-Qa'ida and anticapitalist demonstrators.

Blair, Chirac, Schroeder and Putin clearly hate Bush's new move. It scuppers their carefully constructed Middle East "peace process" and threatens their own economic interests in the region. They are members of a contact group that is supposed to oversee this process. Yet Bush unilaterally wrecks this whole process and they dare not say a word openly.

In fact, whenever Bush pontificates they are reduced to expressing their warm appreciation of the sage words of a man they all know to be an foreign policy ignoramus with the attention span typical of a spoiled idiot son of an oil billionaire. They have to act like tributary kings or proconsuls at the court of the American emperor.

Bush has thus given the green light to the Israelis to continue reoccupying the territories accorded to the Palestinian Authority since the Oslo Accords and destroying its armed forces. Israel is free to assassinate the Palestinian leaders and probably to expel Arafat or even arrange his murder "by one of his own aides."

Bush has insisted on the installation of



Bush's policies will ensure more misery for the Palestinian people

new leaders "not compromised by terror" - that is ones trained by the CIA and approved by the Israelis. Ariel Sharon gleefully proclaimed that Bush's speech marked "the end of the Arafat era."

All this garbage about "reform", "ending corruption" and "democratic elections" is pretty rich coming from the bought-and-sold representative of US Big Oil corporations who was not even elected with a majority of the votes - thanks to the chicanery of his brother the governor of Florida

Bush has designated the Palestine National Authority as a, de facto, terrorist

organisation just as Sharon has been demanding since his election. Yet Bush's total espousal of the actions of the Zionist terrorist state "in its own defence", and the expansionist policy of its mass murderer premier, has hardly caused a murmur of protest from the rulers of the Arab world. They too are relegated to an even humbler role at the Emperor's court.

Even the *New York Times* observed that "Mr Bush seemed to be telling Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that he is free to reoccupy the entire West Bank until a new, democratic Palestine emerges".

It went on to muse: "How the Pales-

tinians can be expected to carry out elections or reform themselves while in a total lockdown by the Israeli military remains something of a mystery."

The answer quite simply: it is that they are not. What would a "Palestinian provisional state" be like? Its president would have to be vetted and approved by Washington and Tel Aviv. Its "market economy" would be run by the International Monetary Fund.

Its security forces would controlled by the CIA and Mossad and aimed at any Palestinian freedom fighters who survived the setting up of this helpless Bantustan. Zion-

ist settlements would continue to eat holes in this Swiss cheese of a statelet. The permanent national humiliation of the Palestinians would be complete.

This is the fate of all countries and peoples who do not fit in with the rulers of the USA and their assorted vassals around the globe. The American global Empire is an empire of tyranny and super-exploitation. It has concerted the most of the rulers of the world into its subordinated "allies" or direct agents.

But as a result of this it is converting the working and exploited peoples of the world into its enemies. "Why do they hate us so much?" the US media said after September 11. The "they" they meant was the terrorists and the "we" the people of the United States. But the phrase can be posed and answered in a different way.

Everyone who is a victim of IMF globalised corporate power, every people whose right to self-determination and self government is trampled on by the US and its allies in the EU and Russia has a very good reason to hate this system.

Among the haters are the US workers thrown out of their jobs by the tiny clique of billionaires who run "their" country, plus the anticapitalist and anti war demonstrators.

The American Empire rotted by its inner corruption - will fall. It will fall not by hopeless and self-defeating acts of terrorism like September 11 but by an uprising of its own wage slaves and its new colonies around the globe.

Its policemen will be driven out by angry workers, the poor, the youth in a huge, spreading, global movement of revolt.

Supporting the cause of the Palestinian people is the acid test for those seriously determined to bring down this Evil Empire and to dethrone its Evil Emperor.

● See page 11 for more on Palestine

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