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end
the
Low pay
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UNISON

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Sharon is imprisoning the Palestinians

THE WALL MUST FALL

VICTORY TO THE INTIFADA!

Last month Israeli helicopter gunships blew Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin to smithereens. 100,000 angry mourners attended his funeral a few hours later.

His assassination was illegal under international law. But America blocked a United Nations resolution condemning the act - and, in the Middle East, America is the law.

Now, Israel intends to speed up its encirclement of the Palestinians. It is constructing a wall, 650km long and eight metres high, almost entirely on stolen Palestinian land.

Deliberately humiliating and destructive, the wall carves villages in two, cuts off farmers from their fields and their markets, blocks off students from their schools.

What's left of the Palestinian homeland - which Jack Straw and co. told us was the positive outcome, justifying the war on Iraq - will, in fact, be the largest concentration camp on earth. Without an economy, infrastructure or security, it will remain at the mercy of Israel.

The irony that such a wall is claimed to be needed to protect descendants of the Warsaw Ghetto - a walled-in Jewish prison that heroically rose up against the Nazis - could not be greater. Nor more cruel. The wall will not bring peace, but prolong injustice and therefore war.

This fact is grasped not only by the Palestinians, but also by a growing minority of Israeli Jews. Together, they mount joint demonstrations, and civil disobedience campaigns aimed at pulling down the wall.

Today, they may lack the numbers and the tools to complete the job. But they are the future.

The two-state solution that sounds so democratic on paper looks like this in reality. It can deliver neither peace nor justice. Which is why workers and youth across the world should support those heroically trying to tear down this monument to oppression.

**NATIONAL
RALLY
1.30PM
SAT 15 MAY
TRAFALGAR
SQUARE
LONDON**

Called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

New Labour sets out to break civil service union

By a PCS member

The civil service pay dispute took a new twist on Budget Day when Gordon Brown announced an all-out attack on the PCS union. Brown, the union leaders' favourite to succeed Tony Blair, gleefully declared, with no consultation, that more than 40,000 civil servants would lose their jobs in the next few years.

Under these plans, the Department for Work and Pensions – the most heavily unionised and militant government office – would lose 30,000 staff, nearly one in four. A further 10,500 jobs would go when Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise merge; and 1,460 jobs (about one third of its HQ staff) are to go from the small Department for Education and Skills.

This is on top of a 2.5 per cent cut in each department's administration budget, which will necessarily lead to job cuts, and the planned relocation of 20,000 staff out of the South East. The latter will be as good as compulsory redundancy with many families unable to relocate.

Brown believes these measures will save £20bn to invest in schools and hospitals. A nice try at making low paid civil servants the enemies of decent welfare services.

But a closer look at these figures shows that the sums do not add up. A more realistic scenario is the outsourcing of civil service jobs – which traditionally have decentish working conditions and final salary pensions – to private companies who employ poorly paid workers with less



Pickets from the PCS January two day strike: they've been waiting too long to come back out

employment protection and worse conditions.

So why is New Labour doing this? TUC leader Brendan Barber claims it is a cynical ploy to steal the Tories' and Lib Dems' thunder ahead of the next general election. Partly true, but there is more to it than that.

First, the neoliberal agenda of privatising public services will be advanced; firms are salivating at the prospect of profitable contracts. Second, the government hopes to decimate the PCS, which has been growing significantly over the past few years, is starting to fight back for decent pay and is led by someone whom New Labour regard

as an unreconstructed communist.

If the PCS can be broken, it will make it easier to face down other public sector workers in the years ahead. This will keep down government spending so that the rich will not have to face tax rises.

Solidarity from the TUC has been conspicuous by its absence. Brendan Barber praised the Budget and the strongest criticism the TUC came out with was that the job cuts would cause "a collapse of morale among remaining staff and could have a serious impact on the delivery of frontline services". No mention of the lives this will devastate or the long-term impact

on the rest of the public sector.

The pay dispute has now turned into a fight for survival. But this has left the PCS unsure of its next move. As we go to press, it looks likely that a two-day strike on 13-14 April will go ahead.

But this is hardly a strategy.

The pay dispute must be linked to the job cuts, with the goals of the strike broadening to encompass the withdrawal of the cuts package.

With this in mind, the union should agitate for escalation to an all-out, indefinite strike. Delay and hesitation will only dissipate workers' anger and militancy, while an all-out strike can concentrate the battle, being more effective and costing strikers less in lost pay than a drawn-out campaign. If activists believe we cannot win such a vote tomorrow, we should wait for only the time it takes to get militants around all the workplaces to win the vote.

PCS members also need to get out onto the streets and expose the low-pay scandal in the civil service, which disproportionately affects women and ethnic minorities. PCS members should take their payslips and income support books (which many of them claim in order to supplement their poverty wages) out onto street stalls, and invite other workers to compare them to the parliamentary accounts of Alistair Darling's pay, his non-executive directorships, his consultancies and his after-dinner speaking fees.

There is no reason why the public, once they understand what's at stake, should not give civil servants as much support as

they did to the firefighters. Don't forget that they too were vilified as Saddam's fifth columnists, getting paid for sleepovers, discriminating against women. But a militant publicity campaign succeeded in winning the battle for the hearts, and in keeping members actively involved in the dispute.

Rank and file members are right to criticise the leadership for waiting two and a half months between the first and second set of strikes. They should build workplace and local cross-departmental strike committees so that, never again, should the members be left waiting, losing momentum and morale.

Indeed, strikers should revive the tactic of wildcat walkouts, refusing to return to work on 15 April, or jumping the gun. The PCS leadership should tacitly encourage such actions, which worked so well for the post workers and the Basildon DWP workers at the start of the dispute.

If the government resorts to the anti-union laws to block any of these tactics – broadening the terms of the dispute, moving to an indefinite strike, linking the departments or taking unofficial action – then it is clear: just like the FBU in 2002-03, the PCS has become a target for a union-busting government. If that happens every trade unionist in the land should demand that Brendan Barber translates his words into action, and that the whole movement stand shoulder to shoulder with the PCS.

- For an all-out strike
No return to work until all sections have won their pay claim in full
- No job cuts
- For wildcat walkouts if the officials won't act
- Call on the other unions and workers for support

Brown's upturn disguises deepening poverty below

By Stuart King

Delivering his budget, Gordon Brown was supremely confident. Deriding the Tories and the majority of economic commentators who had rubbished his predicted growth rates of 2-2.5 per cent, he pointed out that not only had the economy grown by 2.3 per cent in 2003 but that it was heading for growth of 3-3.5 per cent in 2004 and 2005. He had presided over, he pointed out, the longest period of sustained economic growth "for 200 years".

Certainly Britain's economic performance stands out in the world. It is the strongest of any of the top economies and contrasts with its EU rivals, which have been suffering stagnation and growing unemployment in the past period.

The ability of the British economy, once the "sick man of Europe", to power ahead has led to a spate of "How is it done?" articles amongst economic pundits. *The Economist*, predictably, puts it down to "the flexibility... created by 18 years of deregulation under the Tories" – an argument that carefully ignores the economic mess the Tories got into in the early 1990s.

One aspect of this argument is certainly true. The defeats, inflicted on the working class by Thatcher, ushered in a period of dramatic retreat by the workers' movement.

It established the capitalists' right to hire

and fire at will. Mass redundancies in the 1980s pushed unemployment into the millions. Trade unionism disappeared from whole areas of the economy. Wages were pushed down while profits were restored to levels at which international capital was happy to re-invest.

This is the sort of "flexibility" the bosses strive for and, far from being challenged by Blair or Brown, it has been embraced and touted as a "model" for the rest of Europe.

But New Labour added something to the Tory recipe for growth. Firstly, Brown set out to reduce social security spending. The "welfare to work" agenda was central, aiming to cut the numbers of claimants – first the unemployed, then lone parents, and later those on sickness and disability benefits. Considerable subsidies were given to employers and, via the tax system, less considerable ones to those moving into work – working families tax credits.

Secondly, the government followed an old-fashioned Keynesian policy. In its first term New Labour stuck to Tory public spending limits. Brown piled up surpluses from tax revenues, paying off debt. When the world economy started to falter and recession loomed, Brown opened the taps of public spending.

These policies have proved remarkably successful: unemployment has fallen to 4.9 per cent, while numbers in employment

have risen by 1.7 million.

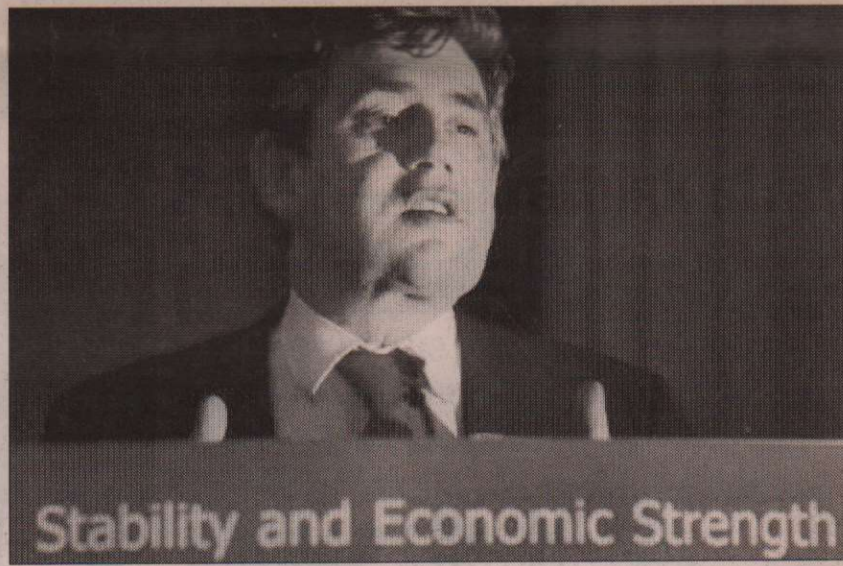
The increased public spending plans – which the Tories and others claimed were "unsustainable" – continue for the moment. Public spending has grown by 5 per cent above the rate of inflation since 2000. Education spending, for example, will rise from £59bn now to £77bn in 2007-08. In 1997 education spending accounted for 4.4 per cent of national income; by 2007-08 it will rise to 5.6 per cent. Health spending is going up in a similar fashion, by 10 per cent a year until 2008.

This massive extra spending by government has helped sustain the economy through a period of stagnant world growth, which has seen demand for British goods abroad falter.

It has also fed into wages. While inflation has been running at between 2 and 2.5 per cent since 1997, wage increases have been running at between 3 and 3.5 per cent. Public sector earnings growth has been even higher at between 4 and 4.5 per cent.

Yet these apparently positive figures, of declining unemployment and rising wages, disguise enormous disparities in income and wealth. The gap between the rich and poor is growing, not diminishing.

It is not just that this government has presided over the most explosive growth of directors' and executive pay, much of it taxed at minimal levels thanks to low rates and tax avoidance. It is also a growing polar-



isation in wages between the skilled and technical jobs, and the unskilled ones.

A significant proportion of the working class is condemned to extremely low-paid and insecure jobs in catering, shops, cleaning, caring, call centres etc. Mostly non-unionised, often staffed by migrant workers, women and young people, millions of workers have missed out on the gains of the last decade. Indeed this highly "flexible" and sackable workforce is the basis of huge profits.

A backhanded recognition of this scandalous situation was the announcement in the Budget of the extension of the minimum wage to 16 and 17-year-olds: they are to be guaranteed the princely sum of £3.00 an hour!

Gordon Brown's success depends above all on a sustained upturn in the world economy. He is financing his spending plans partly by borrowing – an extra £37.5bn this year. More than half the growth forecast is based on consumer spending, itself fuelled by credit card borrowing and strong house prices.

The balance of payment deficit – the difference between exports and imports – has mushroomed and won't fall until 2005. Brown hopes that, as the rest of the world economy recovers, exports will increase, tax revenues will rise and borrowing will go down.

Already, however, he is starting to take measures in case it doesn't. Increases in public spending are planned to slow to 2.5 per cent a year after 2005, half the current yearly increase, while interest rates are being slowly increased to rein in consumer borrowing. Massive cuts are planned in civil service jobs.

But such measures would be small beer if the world economy moved into recession. A sudden rise in unemployment could drive hundreds of thousands of indebted consumers and home owners into a dramatic retrenchment, creating a spiralling recession. Gordon Brown – soon to be the country's longest-ever serving chancellor – is gambling his reputation on the unlikely prospect that the USA will drive the world economy ahead in the next few years.

Neither Fortress Europe nor Bush's Empire but a workers' Europe in a socialist world

The electoral downfall of Tony Blair's closest ally in Europe, the right wing conservative Spanish premier José María Aznar, has led to enthusiastic talk of another push to agree a constitution for the recently enlarged European Union. Blair thought that, with Spain, Italy and Poland as allies, he had forces sufficient to block Germany and France's push for a constitution giving greater powers to the EU.

Blair, knowing his vulnerability on Europe to the Murdoch press (aka public opinion), sought to delay and water down these proposals. Britain - deeply wedded to its lucrative alliance with the US Empire - is playing the role of spoiler, ensuring that "Europe" remains primarily an open and deregulated market, rather than a rival to the transatlantic colossus.

But the workers of Europe do not have to choose between the "Empire" of Bush or the Fortress Europe of Chirac and Schroeder, still less the "perfidious Albion" of Tony Blair, snatching tasty morsels the two big beasts let fall when they snarl at one another.

We have to recognise that all these projects of our rulers can only be realised at the cost of the working people of the world. Why? Because all of them are based on the aggrandisement of a system of increasing exploitation and oppression - capitalism.

This is the system that condemns most of the world's population to grinding poverty. 1.2 billion of the world's citizens subsist on less than a dollar a day; the income gap between the richest fifth of the world's population and the poorest fifth has risen from 30:1 fifty years ago to 74:1 today. The debt burden of the poor countries now stands at \$2.5 trillion. The European Union is a political and economic cartel to retain its share of this plunder and grab more. We can have no loyalty to this Europe any more than to the US Global Empire.

Just as the slave trade shipped millions of Africans to the Americas, so today's "economic migrants" and refugees from the economic collapse and wars caused by imperialism are vilified when they try to cross Europe's borders and superexploited inside them. As with the African slaves of old many perish before they reach their destination. Over 4,000 have been drowned, suffocated, or crushed trying to cross Europe's frontiers over the last ten years: frontiers which capital leaps over at the click of a computer mouse.

The rulers of the expanding European Union talk constantly of the dangers of being swamped by waves of immigration. They are trying to free themselves from the solemnly worded covenants which their predecessors signed in Geneva in 1951 on the basic human right to asylum. Instead they are talking of "camps" (prisons) for asylum seekers, deals with "safe countries" to which the unwanted refugees can be deported. At the same time they talk of the need for "managed" immigration based on the economic needs of the recipient countries.

Thus they are happy enough if economic crises and wars drive skilled computer programmers, doctors, nurses, teachers, skilled builders to come to Europe to fill the gaps in industry and the social services. They do not mind a bit exploiting the skills which were so painfully and expensively acquired, and are so desperately needed in their home countries, to provide them with relatively cheap labour in Europe.

But it is not only the workers from the East or the South who are exploited. In Europe itself a wave of attacks on pension rights, healthcare, social insurance and education has been launched simultaneously in 2003. The European Union, with Germany, Britain and France at the helm, has started to follow this through with attacks on working rights - actively promoting insecure employment (what the French call pre-

carité), no or low protective laws, cuts in pensions, health and education provision, plus, of course, privatisation, and wage and job cuts.

Europe's bosses want to put their workers on American rations, with privatised healthcare and education, the barest of labour regulations, a meagre welfare safety net and conditions for the poor that rival those in the global south. To do that they set out to turn the reformist parties of the labour movement into neoliberal clones of the conservative parties. Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder show how far they have got and how successful they have been. These parties in government have been only too willing to carry out their master's wishes.

Of course, some of Europe's workers already toil in such conditions and worse: migrant labour, driven in desperation to our shores by the effects of globalisation's economic tyranny in their homelands or by its accompanying wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Middle East. Even the expansion of the EU eastwards, essential for capital's freedom to capture new markets, is reciprocated by a block on labour's freedom to move westwards.

Europe's bosses actually need these immigrants - in our hospitals, on our building sites and farms - to take the jobs and the conditions native labour has refused accept, and to supplement our ageing workforce. And yet, they are denied basic rights - to live where they like and with their families, to legal protection, to democratic rights. Gastarbeiter, sans papiers, clandestini now make up 5-10 per cent of Europe's population.

They are not peripheral to Europe's economy; nor are they side issues for the workers' and anti-capitalist movements. We must welcome these victims of globalisation into our ranks, seeing them not as competitors for scarce supply of jobs, housing, social services, but as sisters and brothers in the fight for social justice and a socialised economy

which meets all our needs.

The last year has seen a sharp increase in working class struggles and mobilisations, right across Europe with several one day general strikes in Italy, mass strikes in France and Austria. But most of these struggles ended in a rotten compromise with the government, often involving serious concessions in workers' rights by the union leaders. In Germany two giant unions - IG Metall and the service sector union ver.di, each of them with two and a half million members, failed to press home the advantage secured by enthusiastic mobilisations, and ended with concessions or outright defeat.

In France, the major militant union federations, the CGT and G10 Solidaire, squandered the potential of a huge social movement against Chirac and Raffarin. In Italy, likewise, repeated one-day general strikes, huge demonstrations and waves of wildcat strikes have brought no tangible results against Berlusconi.

The fact is that pure economic, trade union struggle cannot stop the capitalist offensive any more than opportunist electoralism can. The failure of the one often leads straight back to the other. We can see this in the revival of the discredited Social Democrats in Spain and France. New parties are needed for a broad and militant generation of young workers and anti-capitalists.

Nor are the "far" left in the anti-capitalist movement offering a strategy centred on struggle and building new combat parties of the working class. In France and Britain, for example, they have done little or nothing to follow up the call of the Paris Assembly of the Social Movements for a Europe-wide day of action on 2nd and 3rd April - though signs are better in Germany and Austria that the call will lead to strikes and demonstrations.

But in Britain and France the Socialist Workers Party and the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire seem too busy chasing the

mirage of a "big breakthrough" in the European elections. They have allowed the French and British union bureaucrats off the hook by hardly pushing for this action at all. Perhaps when they are sitting amid the ashes of their electoral illusions it will dawn on them what a critical opportunity they missed.

Alongside the struggle to defend the social gains of Europe's workers we need to defend Europe's racial and national minorities. The national governments and the millionaire media subject them to a relentless barrage of hate. Beyond this official and "respectable" racism - undertaken by our rulers to poison class consciousness and split and divide the forces who might otherwise unite against them - stand the forces of the far right, populist and fascist.

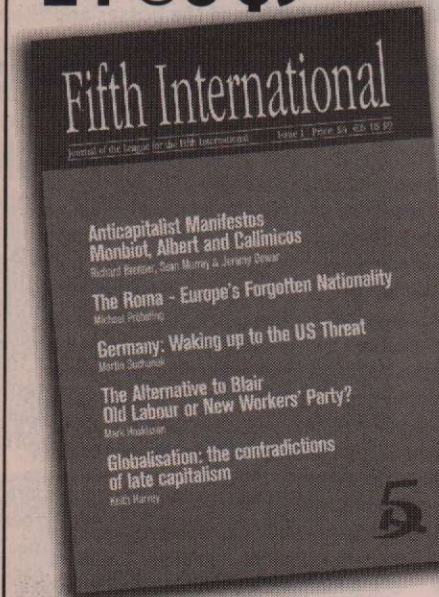
Election results for this "fringe" are already alarming. The French Front National has consolidated 18% of the electorate, whereas the far left, for all its boasting of a breakthrough and its adoption of an old style reformist electoral programme, has fallen back to less than one third of this figure. What is needed to combat the right is first and foremost not insipid liberal anti-fascist propaganda such as Unite is churning out, nor a populist here today gone tomorrow electoral "alternative" like Respect, but a new combat party that fights capitalism, racism and the fascist scum in the workplace, the communities and on the streets.

It must win millions of workers to a bold revolutionary action programme:

- One which declares war on the imperialist "wars on terror", demands the withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and the Middle East.
- One which defends our social gains, public services and jobs against privatisation and rationalisation.
- One that defends our democratic rights against the so-called anti-terrorist measures.
- One which makes the corporations and the rich pay for the defence and extension of public services, for putting all the unemployed back to work and for affording all the poorly paid and insecurely employed decent working and living conditions.
- One which tears down the prison walls of fortress Europe and gives asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants seeking work the right to enter and enjoy full civil rights within the EU.
- One which gives the peoples of Europe denied the right to self-determination (the Basques, all the Irish of the 32 Counties, the Kurds, the Roma, etc.) their democratic rights, including the right to their own state, should they so wish.
- One which elects a sovereign constituent assembly which can establish a republican and socialist United States of Europe.
- One which sees the class struggle in Europe as but an integral part of a worldwide social revolution whereby capitalism can be smashed and a socialist world created on its ruins.

Journal of the League for the Fifth International

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Anticapitalist manifestos: Monbiot, Albert and Callinicos

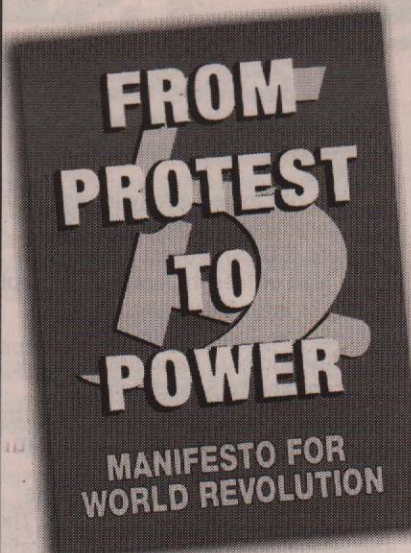
The Roma: Europe's Forgotten Nationality

Germany: Waking up to the US Threat

The Alternative to Blair: Old Labour or New Workers Party?

Globalisation: The contradictions of late capitalism

Programme of the League for the Fifth International - £1.50 €2.50



All history proves that the capitalists will never relinquish their property peacefully - to claim otherwise in the age of 'Shock and Awe' is either hopeless naivety or wilful deception. There is only one way: their apparatus of state repression must be overthrown by force. The capitalists' monopoly of military power - armies, police and security forces, prison systems, civil servants, judiciaries - must be smashed to pieces and replaced with the rule of the working people themselves.

This can be done - the majority of humanity can cast off the tiny minority of parasites. It will take mass organisation, an unambiguous strategy and, when the hour strikes, courageous and ruthless action.

Some may balk at this, but the alternative to revolution is not decades of undisturbed peace. Basing a global civilisation on the empowerment of a few thousand and the impoverishment of six billion is like lodging depth charges in the planetary core. If the logic of capitalism is left to unfold, our world will be torn apart by starvation, disease, poverty, environmental catastrophe, and war.

In the struggle against capitalism, greater energy is equivalent to greater humanity. For with the suppression of our exploiters and an end to the tyranny of profit, human history can truly begin.

How can we organise to stop the fascists

Sandra Gates and Simon Hannon look how the TUC-backed Unite Against Fascism campaign plans to stop the British National Party in the June elections

Many working class people, rightly, feel betrayed by New Labour. Picking up where the Tories left off, it has continued to privatise public services, selling off schools, hospitals and council houses. It has introduced university fees. It continues to attack public sector workers, like the firefighters, and has announced plans to sack 40,000 civil servants. It has overseen the further erosion of Britain's traditional manufacturing industries. It went to war on Iraq in the face of overwhelming public opposition. Under the guise of the war on terror, it has introduced a whole range of draconian laws that attack civil liberties and further increase the powers of the police and security services.

But Blair's government has conveniently found itself a scapegoat for all the ills in Britain – asylum seekers. Asylum seekers have become the scapegoats for the inequalities in 21st century Britain, when, in fact, it is Labour's policies which have widened the gap between rich and poor.

David Blunkett may like to talk tough about the British National Party being a Nazi front (which it is) but he is responsible for making much of their propaganda sound mainstream.

The xenophobic lies spread by the BNP, blaming ethnic minority and immigrant communities for shortages in housing and healthcare, and for rising council taxes, have been uncritically accepted by many

desperate people because these same lies are repeated by the media and Ministers, letting the government off the hook.

Under these conditions it is no surprise that the fascist BNP is growing and having success in local elections up and down the country. The electoral breakthrough last year was predictable because Labour's policies have increasingly given stock to the vile lies of the BNP. At the same time, Labour has failed to address many of the key issues facing working class communities.

The growth of the BNP has set alarm bells ringing in the union movement, among the black and Asian communities, and on the left. This has led to the launch of Unite Against Fascism (UAF), an alliance whose aim is "alerting British society to the rising threat of the extreme right" and to "unite the broadest possible spectrum of society to counter this threat" (UAF Website).

Large launch meetings have been held around the country, regular leafleting and organising meetings have been held in various cities and lots of famous people have been trooped up to speak on public platforms against the menace of the BNP and other "extreme right" parties. So far, 21 trade union general secretaries have signed up to Unite, something the Anti-Nazi League never achieved. All socialists should support the setting up of a broad united front campaign to organise against the growing fascist threat.

But what does Unite offer anti-fascists that can actually stop the electoral success of the BNP, stem its growth and ultimately wipe it off the face of the earth?

If you take a look at any BNP leaflet or paper, the same arguments crop up: asylum seekers, refugees, immigration, housing, and crime. The BNP poses solutions to all these problems, they pose right wing, racist solutions. They give a race answer to the issues that working class people in Britain face today. If we are going to stop people from voting for them, we must pose a class answer, one that actually deals with questions of immigration, housing and jobs from a socialist and working class perspective.

This is what Unite fails to do. A Unite leaflet does not mention how we can fight for solutions to housing, better jobs and improved public service; it does not try and give a sympathetic argument around the issue of immigration; and on the key question of asylum it is silent. Unite leaflets have only called on people not vote for the BNP because they are Nazis, racists, deny the holocaust, hate trade unions, hate young people, have terrorist connections and have contempt for our democracy.

This is all well and true – but the BNP is not issuing these statements in its leaflets. In this very important sense, Unite's strategy is inadequate. The danger of all this is, that the BNP can paint themselves as anti-establishment underdogs, saying what everyone knows is true but is too afraid to say out

loud. They can point to all the anti-Nazi literature, and claim it is a smear campaign.

Indeed, the UAF is not only backed by a considerable number of Labour MPs and trade unionists but by two Tories and an Ulster Unionist as well! As the UAF website states: "We believe that this dangerous situation requires a new and united response from all those dedicated to freedom and democracy."

Unite poses anti-fascism in a simple electoral equation – maximise the vote against the BNP and keep them from office. This is the same policy that the far left in France adopted when faced with the Presidential race between Le Pen and Chirac – "Fight Le Pen in the Ballot box!" Which could only mean vote for the capitalist Chirac.

This is not a class answer to fascism; calling on workers to vote for anyone in order to stop the fascists does not deal with the policies of the government and Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat councils that lead to the rise of the BNP.



Unite's timid electoral message

Working class people have totally different class interests to Sir Teddy Taylor and the other Tory dignitaries who have signed up to Unite. The Tories fear losing votes to a party even more right wing than them!

The trade union general secretaries on the other hand are committed to having the Labour government re-elected. They will shield Labour's racist and anti-working class record from criticism and therefore they too are happy just to focus on minimising the BNP's electoral success.

If Unite doesn't tackle the arguments of the BNP head on and pose class answers to the problems in British society, it will fail to stop the fascist threat.

On the ground Unite is made up of trade unionists and working class anti-racist activists and will attract all those who want to fight racism and defend the rights of asylum seekers.

In the local groups (where we won't see the trade union general secretaries, the b-list celebrities and the Tory politicians) Unite should go onto the estates, into the workplaces and to the football stadiums that the BNP is targeting, and answer their lies. We must argue with the workers who mistakenly see the BNP as a party acting in their interests. We must also make the issue of asylum seekers central to any campaign against the BNP because that is the issue that is central to their campaign.

The blame for the run down estates, bad public services, poverty pensions and low paid jobs lies squarely on the capitalist system and the Labour government that rules in the interests of the bosses and their system.

By not waiting until election time, but doing this now, we will begin to recruit those working class people who want to see off the fascists into our campaign, and to organise them. Make no mistake: if the BNP see the anti-fascists beginning to recruit people on their patch and make it more difficult for them to win with their racist arguments, we will soon see their masks slip.

And as they do, we will have to organise ourselves into groups prepared to defend communities from attack and go on the offensive and stop the BNP from campaigning, canvassing and leafleting. Again, something the Teddy Taylors of this world will run a mile from.

But, unless Unite groups are prepared to take whatever action is necessary to beat the BNP – and that will inevitably mean action which will see its "respectable" backers back off – it will fail to stop the fascists' electoral advance.

BNP: a growing menace

Last year, the British National Party (BNP) won 17 seats in local council elections. This year, they hope to make a serious breakthrough and expect to gain more than 60 seats and hope to win at least one seat on the Greater London Assembly. The major prize will be if they succeed in gaining an MEP in the European Elections because the extra money and opportunities provided by the position would enable the fascists to spread their filth even further.

The electoral successes were the culmination of a year of steady growth built on provoking racial tensions by spreading myths and lies in a number of working class communities in the north-west of England. They made half-hearted efforts in some London boroughs but were unable to make a new breakthrough since the defeat of Derek Beacon on the Isle of Dogs in 1993.

They are attempting to repackage themselves as a respectable party concerned with local issues. They regularly campaign on law and order, for example. Part of the campaign to be seen as champions of the disenfranchised has seen them take part in marches with Fathers4Justice and senior citizens campaigning against council tax rises. One of their youth organisers is running as editor of the Salford version of the



The BNP protesting outside the NUJ offices in London (left) and the anti-fascist counter demo (right)

Manchester student newspaper.

In the past few weeks, they have also particularly targeted Tipton in the hope that the release of the three young men, who had been imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, would build on support they have in the area. Nick Griffin visited Pollockshields, the area of Glasgow with the largest number of Asians, after a white teenager was beaten to death in mid-March.

They called a rally outside the launch of Manchester's anti-fascist campaign with the intention of intimidating those attending. On that occasion, however, they were outnumbered and could easily have been driven from the street.

They intend to hold one all-London event every month until June in addition to borough-based activities.

They are planning a St George's Day "family festival" in Essex, which will attract many of their east London activists.

They organised a rally in response to a Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS) protest outside the Daily Mail offices in January. A couple of weeks later they called demos outside the Commission for Racial Equality and NUJ headquarters.

According to Searchlight, their London organisation is wracked with divisions and infighting. Apparently this is due to a split in loyalties between the new leadership of the party and the old guard of thugs. The magazine describes one London rally ending in physical fights and accusations of theft. Nevertheless, their influence seems to be growing

in the "white flight" regions around the borders of London and Essex.

The BNP has gained confidence from its electoral successes. It hopes to get 5 per cent of the vote in London, which will assure it one London Assembly member. Their mayoral candidate is a postal worker, dubbed Mr Clean, one of a number of new fresh faces pushed forward to present a veneer of respectability.

As ethnic minority communities and left-wing activists in the north of England have discovered, electoral success for the BNP is always followed up by terror campaigns on the streets.

This is why we need to monitor the fascists' electoral moves and stop them gaining a platform from which they can spew their filth.

After the Madrid Bombing

Dear comrades

I wanted to say a few words after my visit to Spain.

I arrived two days after the bombs in Madrid, and one day before the most divisive general election since before the civil war of 1936. The atmosphere was so charged it felt like a fascist state was re-forming.

But it was not to be. The socialists (PSOE) were about to snatch power from the ruling Popular Party (PP), preventing real trouble from erupting.

More than 200 people had just died in bomb attacks that the PP was determined to pin on ETA – despite their denials. Anti-government demonstrations had been banned in the run-up to the election, but people were spontaneously gathering outside the offices of the PP to demand an end to the lies and political manipulation of the atrocities.

The PP blamed ETA, but it was more and more likely that it was a radical Islamic group retaliating for the invasion of Iraq. This would do the PP no good in the election at all. There was even talk that the election could be called off – inevitably rumours began to spread.

A day after the attack a baker was shot dead by an off-duty policeman in the Basque region because he refused to put up a black ribbon in his shop window. The funeral march the following day was attacked by the police, which sparked more demonstrations and clashes.

Spanish society had been vividly polarised. Marches against the terror attacks turned into marches for "Peace", and then they became furious denunciations of the government. Prime Minister Aznar responded, echoing Bush: "You're either with us, or you're with the terrorists."

Last year the Peace flags were hanging visibly around squares and from balconies – between 80 and 90-plus percent in Spain were always against the war. Now there are black ribbons everywhere, mourning the dead. But they too were political – those ribbons on a Spanish flag signified a chauvinist opposition to ETA, while symbolising something quite different on a Catalan or a Peace flag.

In a bar in Barcelona, on the Saturday night before the election, a woman shouts at the TV and to the bar owner that: "they knew it was Al-Qa'ida all along." The bar owner turns up the TV and the busy place falls eerily silent as the new PP leader-in-waiting announces that the current demonstrations are illegal and people must go home – a shocked and animated burst of conversation fills the bar once again.

Some just sit in silence, staring at the drowned-out TV.

The majority of people were angry with the government and the state for their lies and their manipulation, and they turned out to vote in huge numbers. But the overwhelming defeat for the PP is celebrated quietly as people take stock and go back to mourning the dead. They are now waiting for the delivery of promises of a better future – especially the promise to pull out of Iraq (unless they can secure a UN mandate to stay?).

Workers and youth have been let down by the PSOE before and these disappointments are fresh in their minds – Spain on 15 March, 2004 has, of course, nothing like the deluded euphoria that greeted the UK Labour Party landslide of 1 May, 1997.

The international demonstrations against the war on Iraq the following weekend were especially pertinent in Spain. And the large

turn-out illustrates that people know full well they must keep up the pressure on any government for them to stick to their word.

The scale of the spin and the lies from the outgoing PP becomes clear in the following week. The Spanish will remember this lying government's last gasp for survival for as long as they remember the hideous crimes of 11 March, 2004.

In contrast to the muted celebrations in Spain, the defeat of war criminal Aznar's PP will be watched with horror by the other governments with blood on their hands: Bush, Blair, Howard and Berlusconi have been sent a powerful message by the Spanish anti-war movement.

The "War against Terrorism" has produced "Terrorism against the War", exposing the ridiculous mantra of the US/UK for what it is. It never feels good to say "We told you so", but the fact is, we did. The few years have seen so much futile death and pointless suffering. When will it end? Our governments don't want it to – a never-ending "war" suits them just fine.

But now their war has been brought home to the European imperialists. At the same time, our fight against those criminal governments that kill in our name has just won an important victory. We should expect more attacks, more wars, but also more progress and political defeats for the warmongers, liars and state terrorists.

The stakes have been raised.

I want to end by praising the Spanish for their courage, strength and generosity. Their ability to see through the lies and to consistently call for 'peace not war', especially in their time of grief, is an inspiration to us all. I hope we would respond in the same way.

In solidarity
Max

United anti-capitalists win student elections at Manchester University

James Thorne, a Workers Power supporter, was campaign co-ordinator for the United Anti-Capitalists, an alliance contesting the Manchester University Students' Union elections.

Anti-capitalists have been elected to four of the eight full-time positions on the executive of the University of Manchester Union. Activists from Workers Power (WP), the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the Socialist Party (SP), as well as independent anti-capitalists, pooled their funds and their labour to build an alliance. We worked on each others' campaign materials, and provided morale-boosting hot food and refreshments for the candidates campaigning from dawn till dusk on the three long days of polling. The Socialist Kitchen set up outside the Union

became a major attraction!

Elected by a clear majority were: Kate Byron (independent anti-capitalist), Robin Burrett (SWP), and Carlos Orjuela (SLP). Rob Owen (SWP) came second to Benson Osawe for Academic Affairs Officer; however Osawe is expected to go to the NUS as a national officer, vacating the post for Owen. Our biggest disappointment was the defeat of International Solidarity Movement veteran Chris West.

Chris's experience, patience and good humour played no small part in the success of the team as a whole; sadly he himself was defeated, although by a mere 35 votes (from a turnout of some 3,000). Also elected were Mamoon Yusaf and Tamanna Rahman, both of the Islamic Society, and Amelia Lee (a member of the Co-operative Party) to posts

which we did not contest.

"March separately, strike together": working together on the elections proved to be a fine opportunity for deepening our understanding of each other, both politically and personally. Even better, the united left put the Labour and Tory students to rout. Not one of their candidates were elected, despite their having formed an unholy alliance, with a co-ordinated campaign against our "lunatic fringe". Unfortunately, for them, students preferred our strongly anti-fees, anti-war, anti-racist platform, and the tactics with which we proposed to implement it. Look forward to seeing a bolder Manchester Union when the new executive takes office in June.

James Thorne
Manchester Workers Power supporter

Fighting Back and Forging Links in Leicester

Dear comrades

Having suspended the indefinite strike (see Workers Power, March 2004), it was not too surprising that Leicester College Natfhe branch voted, after four weeks of negotiations that hadn't shifted management's position much, to accept the deal on offer. A deal which steals four days' holidays, offers little in return and still leaves hundreds of sessional staff without real hope of significant improvement.

What was more surprising was, first, the readiness of some on the left to accentuate the supposed positive aspects and argue for acceptance. And second the size of the militant minority who refused to agree to the deal. Although the branch meeting was attended by several members who hadn't even adhered to trade union democracy by

joining the strike, there was a minority of around a quarter who refused to accept the new contract. Despite the set-backs, which shouldn't be denied, this bodes well for the future of the branch.

There is clearly a significant militant minority who are not prepared to be bullied by management or conned by the union bureaucrats. This was reflected in the number of copies of Workers Power snapped up after the meeting, contributing to a total of around 40 sold at the college during the dispute.

In another encouraging development in Leicester, a series of preparatory meetings are being held in the city in the run-up to the launch of the Leicester Social Forum. These have drawn in representatives of a variety of groups including trade unions,

the Indian Workers Association, refugee groups, CND and several other political and campaigning groups including the Green Party and the SWP (a member of the latter having agreed, in principle, to act as treasurer).

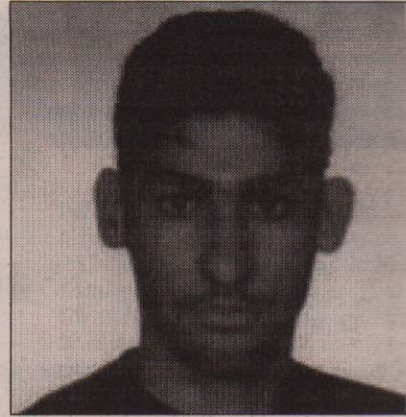
It has been agreed to propose to the launch meeting that LSF be delegate-based (whilst welcoming individuals) and that decisions should be taken by consensus where possible and by voting where necessary.

It is planned to launch Leicester Social Forum in early May and it could be a major advance in terms of uniting the various progressive forces in the city and mobilising for the forthcoming European Social Forum in London.

Yours in comradeship
Bernard Harper

Twelve Stolen Years Twelve Angry Days

Mario Bango is a 21-year-old Roma from Slovakia. He has been in prison since March 2001 for the "crime" of defending his younger



brother when they were brutally attacked by a neo-nazi skinhead. Mario has been sentenced to 12 years without parole for attempted murder. Next month supporters of the campaign to release Mario are calling for 12 days of action to highlight the injustice of this case (details below). In the following interview, Mario speaks out about his "crime" and politically-motivated punishment.

Interview with Mario Bango was conducted by the League for the Fifth International.

Q: What were you charged with?

Three years ago, my brother was attacked by the notorious skinhead Branislav Slamka. When I tried to help my brother, a struggle began. The neo-nazi fell on the ground and got a serious head injury. I immediately called the police and an ambulance. Then I was arrested on the spot. Several weeks later Slamka died from a medical error: the doctors had overlooked a blood clot in his brain. I was kept in prison until the trial began.

Q: How did your trial proceed?

The judgement is clearly politically motivated. The judge made no secret of his prejudice against me. It was characteristic of the whole trial that the relatives of Slamka were represented by Robert Fico, chairman of the racist and right-populist party Smer. The sentence – 12 years imprisonment – is absurd. I defended my brother against an attack.

Q: What are the conditions like in prison?

It is not exactly easy. In the beginning, prison guards who sympathise with the neo-nazis threatened to make my life a living hell. That changed as a result of pressure from the international solidarity campaign. Since then I have been left alone. The worst part is that I can only see visitors for less than one hour per month and only receive one package every three months.

Q: Do you manage to get news about the international solidarity campaign?

From letters, my lawyer, and the few visits I receive, I am partially informed. The support of hundreds of organisations from around the world motivates me greatly. The fact that Slovakian President Rudolf Schuster had to answer the protest letters addressed to him shows the strength of the international pressure. In Slovakia, unfortunately, the situation is different. In the media there was a smear campaign against my brother and me: we were thieves, who the "upstanding citizen" – i.e. the neo-nazi – was trying to stop from pick-pocketing. That is the typical way Roma are portrayed in the media. Characteristic of the racist climate is the fact that the Slovakian parliament, on the motion of an MP from the conservative-nationalist HZDS, held a minute of silence for the dead neo-nazi.

Q: Are Roma often the victims of attacks?

My brother was attacked once before by neo-nazis and had to spend two weeks in the hospital. Roma are basically fair game. Just two examples: 51-year-old Koral Sendrej was beaten to death at a police station and a young man Milan Daniel was killed by three skinheads with baseball bats. When asked why they had murdered him, the skinheads replied "because he was a Roma!"

Write to Mario:

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

On 1 May Slovakia will become a part of the European Union. We can use this opportunity to highlight Mario's case and the denial of a fair trial, which contravenes human rights. We are asking all supporters of the FREE MARIO BANGO CAMPAIGN to organise actions in countries across the world on the 12 days following Slovakia's entry to the EU.

12 DAYS OF PROTEST FOR MARIO BANGO

- Day 1: MAY DAY: Day of National Action for Mario
- Day 2: Hold a meeting explaining Mario's case
- Day 3: Press day – send press releases to every paper
- Day 4: Day of poster
- Day 5: Send postcards of protest to the Slovakian authorities
- Day 6: Day of graffiti
- Day 7: Day of petitioning for Mario's release (at work/school)
- Day 8: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LOCAL ACTION
- Day 9: Day of fundraising for Mario
- Day 10: Day of stickering
- Day 11: Day of letter-writing to Mario
- Day 12: Hand in petitions to embassies/government offices

Contact the Campaign:

<http://www.worldrevolution.org.uk/pages/campaigns/freemario.html>
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/LFfiles/Mario-index.html>
Telephone: 020 7820 1363

Write to Mario Bango campaign: BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Campaign for new workers party launched in Liverpool

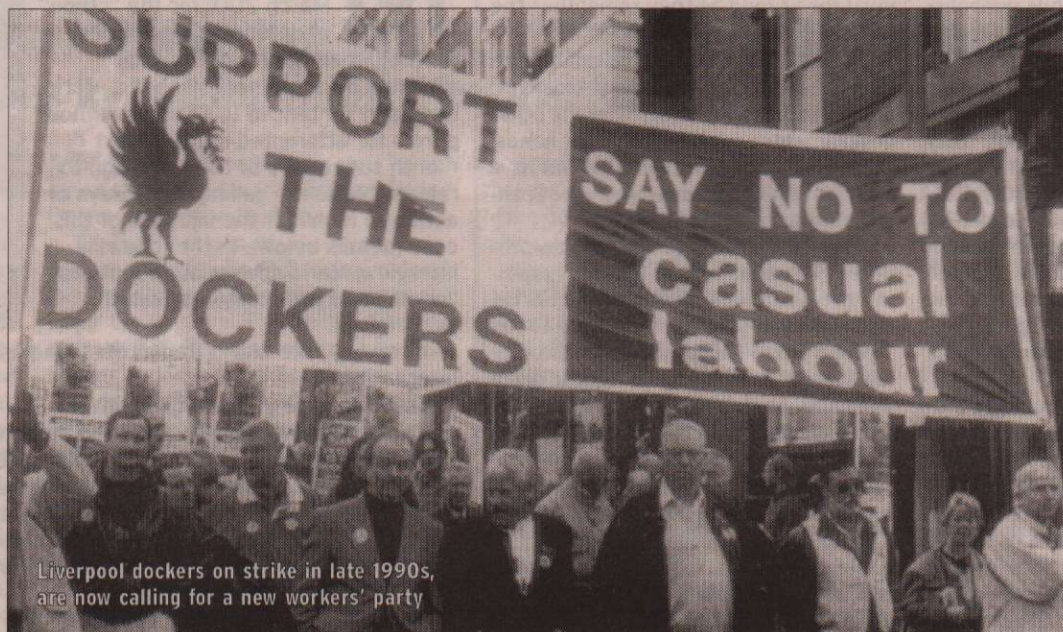
By Mark Hoskisson

Last month, the Socialist Alliance's last conference formally dissolved itself. A motion from the Socialist Workers Party and their dutiful servants in the International Socialist Group ruled that the alliance would not stand any candidates in the forthcoming elections. All work is now subordinated to building Respect, the Unity Coalition.

But while the SWP were winding up the Socialist Alliance, a group representing the 47 surcharged Liverpool councillors (from the struggles with Thatcher in the 1980s) and the sacked Liverpool dockers (who fought a protracted strike in defence of jobs and union rights in the 1990s) met in Liverpool last month to set up the Campaign for a Mass Party of the Working Class.

Last July, Workers Power left the Socialist Alliance when the SWP's manoeuvre to build a non-socialist bloc was made public. We were told at the July 2003 SA National Council, that the SWP was in favour of replacing the alliance with a Peace and Justice movement with various middle class forces, including representatives from the Mosques. To show that they were serious about this retreat from class politics they packed meetings to overthrow the entire leadership of the Birmingham Socialist Alliance, including prominent trade unionist and victimised firefighter Steve Godward. This leadership had made clear its opposition to the abandonment of a working class perspective. So, it had to go.

This proved beyond doubt that the SWP had effectively destroyed the alliance and it was right to split it there and then. The failure to do this by the comrades of the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform



Liverpool dockers on strike in late 1990s, are now calling for a new workers' party

allowed the SWP to use the alliance as a cover as they set about constructing the successor to the Peace and Justice popular front, Respect.

The SWP's destruction of the Socialist Alliance should serve as a warning to all working class militants – especially those in the Waterloo and Manchester RMT branches who have misguidedly agreed to give it support in the Euro and London elections on 10 June. This sect is not the slightest bit interested in creating a democratic working class party. If Respect bombs badly in the June elections, as is likely given that all its hoped-for allies have told it to get lost, the SWP will move on to a new front and dump Respect just as quickly as they embraced it.

Militants seriously interested in building a workers' party now need to regroup

and re-organise. This process has already begun.

In addition to the councillors and the dockers, Liverpool's Campaign for a Mass Party of the Working Class also includes the Socialist Party and looks set to attract comrades from the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform and a number of local organisations.

A second meeting of the campaign in Liverpool in late March, chaired by former dockers' leader Jimmy Nolan, was attended by about sixty socialists and working class militants and discussed the prospects for expanding the campaign beyond Liverpool.

It examined the lessons of previous attempts to build a workers party and drew important lessons. The experience of Arthur Scargill's totally undemocratic Socialist

Labour Party and of the SWP's parasitic take-over and destruction of the Socialist Alliance led many speakers to stress the centrality of democracy. And, in contrast to Respect, all those who spoke stressed that anything that comes out of this initiative would be working class and socialist.

Some speakers pointed to the inadequacy of the campaign's initial statement – in particular the absence of anti-war and anti-racist demands. In addition, the statement explicitly espouses the old Labour Party Clause IV. To adopt this would be to close in advance the necessary debate on programme that a new workers party must have. During the discussion it became evident that the organisers regarded the statement as provisional and that a future programme for the campaign would be open to amendment.

Workers Power wants to participate fully in this process. We will argue throughout for combining unity in action on militant policies in defence of working people, their rights and social gains with an honest and open debate on programme. In the course of fighting for a new workers party we think it is possible to convince growing numbers of militants that we need to move forward to a revolutionary programme, not back-

wards to an old reformist one.

The meeting itself gives reasons for optimism. In contrast to the SWP-run conferences where three-minute soundbites pass for debate, it was a model of working class democracy with all viewpoints being put, at some length, listened to, and thought about by worker militants serious about the task they were undertaking.

Speakers from various groups, including Workers Power, urged the campaign to target the trade unions as the basis of any new party, especially given the RMT's historic break with Labour. This point was given added weight by the announcement by Merseyside FBU chairperson, Ian Foulkes, that he was present in an official capacity, sent as a delegate from the Brigade Committee. He pointed out that after the FBU conference it was entirely possible that more sections of his union would back the new campaign. This was greeted with loud applause from the meeting.

The most striking aspect of the meeting was the degree of optimism. Moreover, the eyes of the militants were not primarily fixed on the 10 June election. They were fixed on a timetable of events that tried to connect with ever wider sections of the working class – the communities, the workplaces, and the estates.

A major rally is now planned for Liverpool, and attempts to get a similar campaign going in other areas has been agreed. A list of unions is being drawn up for the campaign to target.

Notwithstanding our criticisms of the founding statement, Workers Power welcomes this development. The chance exists to begin a real campaign for a working class party, one that will reduce the SWP's misfired electoral adventures to a mere footnote in the history of the British working class movement.

Assembly of social movements vital to ESF success

The demonstrations against the war on 15 February were called by the Assembly of Social Movements. So why are leading figures in the WSF trying to undermine it, asks *Dave Stockton*

The Assembly of the Social Movements is a vital element of the European Social Forum. In Florence in November 2002 this Assembly called for the millions strong 15 February day of action against the threatened war in Iraq. This remains the most widely-known and concrete achievement of the ESF.

Unbelievably, however, leading figures in the movement, led by Bernard Cassen of Attac and Chico Whitaker of the Brazilian Workers Party, insist that the world and regional social forums remain strictly "a space and not a movement". They want to drive the assemblies out of the WSF and ESF.

They must not succeed. Any movement which turned its back on its major achievements would quite simply declare its own bankruptcy. It is significant that Greater London Authority representatives reported that the TUC "hated" the Paris declaration of the Assembly, presumably because it called for a European wide day of action against the European Union's offensive on

workers' social gains.

It is good that the TUC is willing to sponsor and part-fund the London ESF but we must not give in to self-censorship in order not to offend the touchy bureaucrats of Congress House. Far from retreating from our enormous achievement in building an anti-capitalist and anti-war movement, we need to take this movement forward and build a real international organisation.

The Assembly of the Social Movements is critical to the whole development of the movement precisely because it is the only body which can adopt decisions. Under the Porto Alegre Principles only such assemblies can issue calls to action, not the social forums themselves.

The ESF should – as the Porto Alegre Principles explicitly allow for – actively facilitate the holding of assemblies of women, trade unionists, youth, etc. This could be done either immediately before or during the forum. The seminars and workshops, as well as these assemblies, should then feed in proposals to it.

A daily coordination, open to all, should meet to produce a draft declaration. Indeed a preliminary draft should be agreed by the European preparatory assemblies. During the ESF the coordination should collect in proposals coming from the meetings of the forum. Any major contentious points in the final declaration should be voted on by the Assembly.

In this way, the ESF can be much more than a "space" in which existing initiatives conduct an inconclusive discussion. The European social movements – including the unions and political organisations which have been fighting neoliberalism and war on the streets – MUST have the opportunity to propose, debate and decide on ACTION.

If we do this in London the ESF can once again – like it was in Florence, 2002 – be a launching pad for a real movement for united action, one in which the desire of millions another world can be turned into a concrete strategy for achieving this.

For a self organised youth space and a youth assembly

The proposal for a self-organised youth space within Alexandra Palace at the heart of the ESF is a good one. It would attract large numbers of the school students and youth who were so central to the mass anti-war protests in Britain and the great actions in Gothenburg, Genoa, Evian and Thessaloniki. The youth should run their own section of the ESF, not in order to ghettoise them, but to amplify their voice and to encourage their fullest participation in the whole event.

The specific oppression that young people face in society is rooted in the family, the schools and the workplaces, which exploit "cheap" labour. This is reflected in authoritarian regimes in schools and workplaces, in terribly low, "sub-minimum" wages. They are denied the vote till they are 18, but welcomed into the armed forces two years before that. They are generally neglected by the unions, leaving them subject to bullying and intimidation by their employers, and subjected to police harassment on the streets.

Yet in spite – or rather because – of all this, young people are in the front ranks of every social and political revolt. So why

are they condemned to the same backseat role as in the school, the workplace and the state, when it comes to our movement?

If the ESF replicates this repulsive patriarchal, authoritarian relationship in its structures then – as in Paris last year – young people will not appear on the platforms and have absolutely no control over the shape of the event. The ESF rightly rejects institutionalised inequality when it comes to black people and women but seems, so far at least, to want to do nothing to counteract the social oppression of youth.

The way to allow young people real self-determination in the ESF is to give them control of their own distinct area or space – for meetings, exhibitions, networking and partying! The ESF should issue a clear statement that it fears neither their independence of spirit nor their radicalism in action, but welcomes and encourages both. Added to our championing of the cause of women and the immigrant communities, the asylum seekers and sans papiers, this will strengthen our challenge to every form of oppression that the system creates and reinforces.

As teachers gather for their annual conference Government sets new low for school standards

**By Kate Ford (Hackney
NUT in a personal capacity)**

The last few years have not been good for teachers. New Labour has carried out a war of attrition which could, within the next decade, threaten the very existence of the teaching unions.

On the key issues – testing, workforce remodelling, pensions and pay – the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has failed to stop the government's onslaught.

The result of the national ballot of primary teachers for a boycott of government tests for 11 year olds (SATs) was a disaster. What happened? First the union was wrong to only ballot in the primary schools. In some schools only one or two teachers would have been taking the action. Charles Clarke recognised this, sending letters to head teachers advising them to intimidate their staff into voting "no". Secondly the requirement for a 50 per cent turnout was higher than the threshold Thatcher's anti-trade union laws set. With the massive turnover of teachers, membership lists were out of date.

Workforce remodelling

The government, alongside Unison and all the teaching unions apart from the NUT, is setting about radical change in the staffing of state schools. Qualified teachers will be replaced by much cheaper, unqualified learning assistants. In a document leaked to the press, the Department for Education and Skills put forward the possibility of schools having only one qualified teacher – the head teacher – plus unqualified teaching assistants. From the government which pledged smaller class sizes, they are now considering classes of up to 60 pupils. Using information technology, lesson plans written by qualified teachers would be delivered and supervised by low paid workers.

This year's government imposed three-year pay "deal" is probably the most serious attempt to drive down our salaries yet seen. And it accompanies a major attack on our pension rights which will mean teachers being forced to continue working until they are 65.

The pay settlement will mean a cut in

real terms for most teachers. In addition management allowances have been frozen. Teachers on the top of the upper pay scale will be faced with more performance management hurdles if they want to progress. Already classroom teachers have to apply to get onto the upper scale; access will, in the future, be even more restricted, with teachers having to pass two performance management reviews.

Beyond that, a new Excellent Teacher scheme will only be open to 20 per cent of those well established within the upper pay scale. In order to qualify as an Excellent Teacher, candidates will have to study for additional qualifications and undergo yet more stringent tests.

For the government this all means cuts in the pay bill and more money to fund the workforce remodelling. For the union, this settlement means more tests, less pay, less teachers and more divisions. Combined it represent the most significant attack on teachers since the NUT was established.

And yet the union seems completely paralysed, faced with these attacks. We clearly need national strike action to fight for a decent pay settlement, to defend national agreements,

to defend pensions and the right to retire at 60. Given the government's intransigence we may need all-out action to win. But no one else, not even forces on the left of the union, is arguing for this kind of action.

We are paying the price for years of inaction on pay. Even the limited London pay campaign consisted of just two one-day strikes, months apart, without any campaign in between. The final pay deal itself was completely divisive.

The left

Throughout, the left in the union has played a less than honourable role. The Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union (CDFU) blocked with the executive majority to stop action over pay. On occasions, the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) has attempted to kick-start some action, but it was complicit in calling off the performance-related pay boycott. In the end, the STA and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) even urged people to participate.

Virtually the whole of the left endorsed the executive strategy on the SATs boycott, which led to needless division between primary and secondary teachers. Again

the SWP, CDFU and STA were complicit in this debacle. They agreed with the strategy and failed to criticise the executive.

Rank and File

When we are defeated by bureaucratic manoeuvres and set up by flawed strategies, there is no organisation that can challenge the sell-outs. This is a result of the failure of to build a genuine rank and file organisation in the NUT.

During the London pay campaign Workers Power teachers, alongside Hackney NUT, argued for the establishment of a rank and file committee to control the campaign. Leading members of the STA argued against this idea and the SWP did nothing to help build it. Yet, if such a committee had been built, then it would have been far more difficult for the Executive to sell out.

For years the STA and CDFU have concentrated all their efforts on capturing leading positions inside the union. While there is nothing wrong with the left attempting to replace the current right wing, it is not the most important thing. Failure to enthuse members and maintain strong school union groups has meant the

number of activists has fallen. The wing doesn't care whether the membership is active, as long as we pay our dues. Those who want a strong fighting union should care.

What we need more than ever in the NUT is a rank and file organisation. Such an organisation could be built around a rank and file committee, prepared to organise local and national strike action. The members, not the bureaucrats or arrogant "left" leaders, should control such action. It is a but important principle in the trade union movement that the workers, who take the action and put their jobs on the line, should be the people who control that action.

Local committees alone would not be sufficient to take on the government's strategy. But they could start the much needed transformation of the union:

- Active school groups able to make decisions and take decisions over action.
- Officials, paid the wage of an average teacher, elected annually and recallable.
- A rank and file movement prepared to go beyond the day-to-day battles, towards transformation of society as a whole.



From classroom to class struggle

The government's neoliberal policies on education constitute an attack on the whole of the working class.

Selection and specialist schools outside of local education authority control, performance related pay and the replacement of teachers with unqualified assistants, overcrowded classrooms and school budget cuts... all amount to a two-tier education system.

If you're middle class and live in a leafy suburb (or can drive to one) - you can give your child a decent education; if you're working class and live on a council estate - expect to see your child denied the attention and resources necessary for a real choice in his/her direction in life.

By turning state education into a "commodity" parents' purchasing power becomes decisive in determining the quality of the "choice" on offer.

Most teachers, and the vast majority of NUT activists, are painfully aware of this fact. So are parents and school students themselves. But the NUT - and, far less, the other teacher unions - refuses to dial these allies into its campaign strategies.

As a result, the government and heads are able to paint militant teachers' action as anti-parent or anti-youth - despite our aims being progressive.

NUT activists need to draw school students and parents into each and every campaign, explaining the issues at stake and working towards a socialist solution: teachers, parents and school student control of the education system.

Vote Martin Powell-Davies for general secretary

Many of the left activists within the NUT will be no doubt be asking why the left has two candidates in the general secretary elections.

In November, an open conference of the NUT left was held to agree a left candidate. This was a step forward, as was the decision to debate an agreed programme first before considering the three proposed candidates.

Alex Kenny of the STA clearly won the first round of voting, and at this point another member of the STA, Martin Powell-Davies of the Socialist Party, withdrew, throwing his support behind Alex. It was clear that Alex would easily win a majority in the second round, defeating the CDFU candidate Ian Murch. However before the vote could be taken Murch and the CDFU walked out.

Shortly after the meeting Murch announced his intention to stand. He, not anyone else, split the left.

A few weeks later, the STA took an extraordinary and

cowardly decision. They withdrew Alex Kenny, and on a very close vote agreed to support Murch. At this point Martin Powell-Davies announced that, in the light of Kenny's withdrawal, he would stand.

We now have two candidates who both lost a vote. One ignored the vote; the other abided by that vote until it became invalid. In this situation, there is a compelling case to back the candidate willing to abide by democratic decisions.

We do so also on the basis of the platforms being put forward by the candidates. While we have some important criticisms of Powell-Davies' programme, it is clearly to the left of Ian Murch's.

Murch's election statement is entirely bland and evasive. On his website he outlines his strategy. On SATs we have to "spell out more clearly" our case against them. We should "campaign" for pensions. The

union needs to be "better organised at the centre", no mention of a better organised membership. The word "strike" is nowhere to be seen. Instead, Murch replicates the rotten "strategy" of the existing leadership with its endless surveys and consultation exercises. These are mechanisms for inhibiting rather than inspiring struggle.

Murch's evasiveness is most apparent in his comments about a campaign against "unjust war". Is this a coded reference to the war against Iraq? Whatever Murch's views on this issue, he is clearly not prepared to share them with the membership!

Martin Powell-Davies, on the other hand, is standing as a "teachers' leader on a teacher's salary". He states his willingness to appeal to the membership "over the heads of the current majority on the National Executive" and makes clear his opposition to "war and

occupation in Iraq".

But Martin needs to go further in spelling out need to transform the union. Just one person in bureaucracy taking a teacher's salary isn't going to the sell-outs.

While his 12-point programme identifies many of the key issues affecting NUT members, his strategy for tackling them is far too limited. There is a commitment to a new ballot to boycott SATs and to support strike action to oppose the use of unqualified staff to replace teachers. But more extensive strike action is needed to defeat the pay freeze and performance management and to defend pensions.

While encouraging NUT members to support Martin Powell-Davies' campaign, we also urge them to demand a clear commitment from him to a fighting strategy that can defeat the attacks they face.

The collapse of the

Kate Foster continues our series on the history of the workers Internationals

Conceived in war, born in revolution, the Third or Communist International came to an ignominious end in yet another war, in 1943. Its degeneration, which set in after its fourth Congress in 1922, was rooted in defeats for workers internationally and in the triumph of Stalinism in the USSR.

The Communist International - often called the Comintern - was formed in the first years of the Russian Revolution. Its first congress took place in March 1919. The International began its life, as Leon Trotsky wrote, with the "revolutionary charge" of the October Revolution. The existence of the Third International was always intimately entwined with the fate of this revolution.

In the first years of its existence, the Comintern was the motor force for many significant achievements for the world working class - the defence of the October Revolution in Russia against imperialist encirclement and internal counter-revolution; the establishment of communist parties around the world; the development of revolutionary policy on the trade unions; the struggle against imperialism and national oppression; the building of revolutionary women's and youth movements; the tactic of the united front and the workers' government; and many other issues.

The Communist International set out both to defend the October Revolution in Russia and to spread the revolution internationally. In the first few years both seemed possible, even inevitable. For the Bolsheviks these aims were inextricably linked. They saw their revolution as only the bridgehead, the first step of a world revolution. Speaking at the Third Congress in 1921, Lenin said:

"It was clear to us that without aid from the international world revolution, a victory of the proletarian revolution is impossible. Even prior to the revolution, as well as after it, we thought that the revolution would also occur either immediately or at least very soon in other backward countries and in the more highly developed capitalist countries, otherwise we would perish. Notwithstanding that conviction, we did our utmost to preserve the Soviet system under any circumstances and at all costs, because we know that we are working not only for ourselves but also for the international revolution."

In the early years of the Third International the prospects for the spread of international revolution seemed excellent. Workers in the more developed capitalist countries emerged from the First World War revolted by the senseless slaughter of that war and inspired by the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia. In Bavaria and Hungary there were briefly soviet governments. In Trotsky's words soon after the end of the war, Russia's western horizon seemed to blaze red with the fires of revolution.

Tactical retreat

The Third Congress in June 1921 took place in an atmosphere of retreat and partial defeats. At the time of the Second Congress the Red Army, attacked by the Poles at the instigation of French imperialism, repulsed them and went over to the offensive, striking towards Warsaw. Lenin's hope was that the Polish workers would rise in revolution and that a link could be made with the German Communists who had recovered from defeat and were becoming stronger and stronger. It was not to be. The Red army had to retreat from Poland, which from now on was in the hands of a solidly pro-imperialist government.

In 1920 too the Italian workers suffered



Lenin speaking at the Third Congress in June 1921

a major defeat that was to pave the way for Mussolini's rise to power. In March 1921 another premature rising in Germany, organised by the CP, had been put down. "The absolute truth is that without a revolution in Germany, we shall perish." Lenin's words spoken over three years earlier, months after the October Revolution must have hung heavily on the International's delegates meeting in the summer of 1921.

Within Russia itself the Bolsheviks were also forced to execute a strategic retreat on a political, economic and international level. Revolt against the privations and restriction of four years of civil war was evident in the Kronstadt rising of 1921 and the challenge from within the Bolshevik Party of the Workers' Opposition, which included such leading figures as Alexandra Kollontai. In response, at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921, the leadership introduced a ban on political factions within the party. This was declared to be only a temporary limitation on democratic centralism. But it introduced a party regime where internal debate was to become increasingly difficult - eventually impossible. The temporary ban was never lifted.

At the economic level, the Bolsheviks were forced to make a major concession to the market economy, i.e. capitalism, with the New Economic Policy (NEP). Following the ravages of imperialist war, the civil war with the brutal but unavoidable measures of 'war communism', the Russian economy was on its knees; industry was grinding to a halt. In the period after the revolution production of steel had fallen from 4.2 million tonnes to 183,000 tonnes. In the countryside food production was falling to starvation levels.

The NEP aimed at encouraging the peasants to produce food for a controlled private market. It achieved some rapid and spectacular results. The economy was stabilised. In 1922 and in 1923 industrial production doubled. But there was a cost. The restoration of elements of the markets led to an expansion of power of the rich peasants or Kulaks. Whilst food production improved, sections of the peasantry were able to "enrich" themselves and they provided a social base for right wing elements within the Communist Party.

At a social level, another very significant phenomenon was occurring - the growth of a powerful bureaucracy. This came partly from the old Tsarist state bureaucracy, which the civil war and the decimation of the working class had made impossible to replace with workers' self-administration. But it came in part from the hundreds

of thousands of working class party members drawn into state and military administration. Only the expansion of the productive forces in Russia and therefore of the working class and the spread of the revolution to advanced capitalist countries could have offset or reversed this tendency to bureaucratisation.

On this basis workers' democracy, real power of the soviets over the state and the economy could have flourished and dissolved the growing caste of bureaucrats. Neither occurred in time. This bureaucracy was to provide the social base for the development of Stalinism. Lenin had accepted that economic policies such as NEP were a step back, not a step on the road to socialism. And the longer they waited on that road, the larger the bureaucracy would become.

Trotsky used the analogy of the policeman to explain the role bureaucracy plays: "The basis of bureaucratic rule is poverty of society in objects of consumption with the resulting struggle of each against all." If we have only a limited supply of goods, then the workers must queue. If the workers queue, a policeman is required to keep order in the queue. The workers hate the queue; the policeman owes his livelihood to the queue. Who wants to keep the queue? The bureaucrat."

The retreat could also be seen at an international level. The Soviet Union began to protect itself and re-establish trade relations with a flurry of international treaties with their erstwhile imperialist enemies. After the revolution, foreign trade had fallen from 2.9 billion roubles to 30 million. In the early months of 1921 the Soviet government signed treaties with Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey and Britain. In April 1922 they signed the Rapallo Treaty with Germany.

The Bolshevik Party itself had not emerged unscathed from the civil war. Tens of thousands of the most experienced and committed revolutionaries and the vanguard of the workers in the factories had been killed fighting to defend the revolution in the civil war. In the last days of Lenin's conscious life he became alarmed at the spread of bureaucratisation in the state and the party. He tried to alert Trotsky to this danger. The latter was slow to act, but when finally convinced put himself at the head of an anti-bureaucratic Left opposition. Following the death of Lenin, party membership was opened up in the so-called 'Lenin Levy'. The promoter of this policy was Grigory Zinoviev, the president of the Communist International. His close ally Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin formed a block to exclude Trotsky from

any effective say in the direction of the Russian Communist party or the International. Rather than attacking bureaucracy and promoting a revival of party and soviet democracy, they defended the bureaucratic regime.

The levy flooded the party with tens of thousands of new members, some extremely opportunist and owing their positions to the new bureaucrats. By 1929, of the 1.5 million members of the CCCP only 8,000 had joined the party before 1917 and only 130,000 had joined before the end of the civil war.

As events across the world, and particularly in Germany, failed to spread the revolution outside of Russia, so the Russian CP increasingly dominated the leadership of the Comintern. And the increasing dominance of the Stalinist clique and their theory of socialism in one country then led to disastrous policies within the International, which in turn led to appalling defeats.

Every defeat strengthened the bureaucracy, the Stalinists and the right wing within the Bolshevik Party. Each defeat weakened the revolutionary opposition that looked to international revolution to strengthen the struggle for socialist development in a backward and isolated Russia. As Trotsky recognised, the defeat of the German revolution in 1923 which ended a mighty revolutionary period in that country, had disastrous consequences for those who were attempting to organise against the development of the bureaucracy under Stalin.

In The Third International After Lenin he said: "The first onslaught against the opposition was perpetrated immediately after the defeat of the German revolution and served, as it were, as a supplement of this defeat. This onslaught would have been utterly impossible with a victory of the German proletariat which would have raised extraordinarily the self-confidence of the proletariat of the USSR and therefore also its power of resistance to the pressure of the bourgeois classes, internally as well as externally, and to the party bureaucracy which transmits this pressure."



Stalin introduced the Theory of Socialism in one country

The Fifth Comintern Congress in June 1924 revolved around the international response to the defeat of the German Revolution. The International began to turn against some of the key programmatic gains established by the Fourth Congress such as the theses on the united front and the workers' government tactic. It was at the Fifth Congress that Zinoviev, not Stalin, first characterised social democracy as a wing of fascism - "social fascism".

One of the key decisions of the Fifth Congress was the move to 'Bolshevise' the CPs outside of Russia. From this point on the International, rather than

Third International

being a genuine forum of debate and discussion distilling the lessons of the struggle from all over the world into policies and tactics, became a means of imposing the party line and regime of the Russian party on those in every other country. This shift at an organisational level was soon to be codified at the theoretical level by Stalin as he and his clique developed the theory of socialism in one country. Completely contradicting the internationalism of Lenin, the Stalinists now began to argue that it would be possible to build a socialist society in one country, provided that this country was protected against intervention and invasion from capitalism.

All opposition to the new theory was to be stamped out. In December 1925 at the Fourteenth Congress of the Soviet CP, Stalin, in alliance with the right wing under Bukharin, defeated the centre-left around Zinoviev. Although Zinoviev's prestige as the leader of the Comintern had been utilised to defeat the Left Opposition in 1923/4, he was now surplus to requirements. Zinoviev was quickly removed as head of the International and Bukharin put in charge.

The Anglo-Russian Committee

The consequences of the growing hegemony of Stalin and socialism in one country was soon to be experienced in the role of the British Communist Party in the General Strike of 1926.

With the support of the Communist International the British Communist Party helped establish the Anglo-Russian Committee in 1925. This was a bloc between the British TUC and the Russian Trade Unions. For the TUC leaders an alliance with the soviet trade unions provided them with prestige and a left cover - if the soviets were willing to join with them, how could they possibly betray the workers? The British CP was forced to curtail its criticism of the TUC leaders.

In 1926 Stalin explained the role of the Anglo-Russian Committee thus: "The task of this bloc consists in organising a broad movement of the working class against new imperialist wars and generally against an intervention in our country (especially) on the part of the mightiest of the imperialist power of Europe, on the part of England in particular." Its task was to help defend Russia, not aid the British class struggle.

Predictably, when the TUC was forced into calling a general strike in support of the miners in 1926 it shamefully sold out the strike within nine days despite its being absolutely solid. The miners were forced to fight on alone and go down to defeat.

The defeat of the British General Strike was soon overshadowed by a greater betrayal in China. In the early 1920s the Chinese communists, with the International's approval, had joined the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) alliance. The KMT received Russian military aid and support in its fight to free the country from warlordism and imperialist occupation. But Stalin and Bukharin turned this united front against imperialism into an alliance that subordinated the Chinese communists to the bourgeois leadership of Chiang Kai Shek. In the words of a Comintern Executive resolution from 1926 the KMT was "a revolutionary bloc of workers, peasants, intellectuals and urban democracy" which was fighting for a "revolutionary-democratic government".

Despite increasing repression of Communists by the KMT the CI insisted on maintaining the alliance. In 1926 the Politburo of the Russian CP even voted for the KMT to be admitted to the CI with only



Dockers picket in the 1926 general strike. The Third International failed to warn of a TUC sellout because of the Anglo-Russian Committee

Trotsky voting against. In April 1927 as the KMT-led armies approached the city of Shanghai the workers rose up, led by the CP, and overthrew the warlord regime. Chiang Kai Shek, when his forces had entered the city, proceeded to massacre the communists and the trade unionists, showing the imperialists that China was 'safe' in his hands. The Chinese CP took nearly two decades to recover from this defeat.

The theory of socialism in one country at an international level was nothing less than a disaster for the world working class. The theory established a vicious circle from which the Comintern could never escape. The Soviet Union must be protected, the working class struggle in other countries must be subordinated to the interests of the Soviet Union, and then the resulting inevitable defeats of the working class meant that greater effort was needed to protect the Soviet Union.

As Trotsky pointed out in his criticism of a draft programme written by Bukharin for the Sixth Congress of the International:

"The new doctrine proclaims that socialism can be built on the basis of a national state if only there is no intervention. From this there can and must follow (notwithstanding all pompous declarations in the draft programme) a collaborationist policy towards the foreign bourgeoisie with the object of averting intervention, as this will guarantee the construction of socialism.... The task of the parties in the Comintern assumes, therefore, an auxiliary character; their mission to protect the USSR from intervention and not to fight for the conquest of power."

Trotsky used the preparation for the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 as a final chance to expose the Stalinists' criminal policies. Trotsky was now ousted from the leadership and expelled from the party on trumped-up charges. He criticised the draft programme, which codified the policy of socialism in one country within the International. The new programme concluded that socialism was indeed possible in one country alone:

"Hence it follows that the international proletarian revolutions must not be regarded as a single, simultaneous, and universal act. Hence it follows that the victory of socialism is at first possible in a few, or even in one isolated capitalist country."

As Trotsky pointed out the second part of this formulation would suggest that somehow countries developed not unevenly but entirely independently from each other.

Trotsky's appeal against his expulsion from

the International was rejected at the congress, as were his criticisms of the draft programme. But his final attempts to challenge Stalinism from within were not entirely useless. At the congress one of the delegates serving on the programme commission, James P. Cannon, was very impressed by Trotsky's arguments. Later he was to become a key figure in building the Trotskyist movement in the United States.

At the very point at which Trotsky had been politically defeated, his analysis of the problems facing Russia was vindicated. The longer-term effects of NEP were providing the material base for the emergence of a vast bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. As the richer peasants, the Kulaks, grew richer, industry began to lag behind. One of the key questions for the Left Opposition in 1923 was the need for a massive industrialisation directed by a democratic plan. Trotsky warned of a potential 'scissors crisis' as agricultural prices rose and industrial production fell. He was to be proved correct. 1928 saw the realisation of Trotsky's prediction of a scissors crisis. The Kulaks were hoarding food in the countryside in order to increase prices and avoid only getting the prices set by the government. Meanwhile workers in the cities began to face the prospect of hunger if not starvation.

The response of Stalinism to the crisis was a 180 degree turn against the peasants, a ferocious zigzag characteristic of the way in which Stalin changed the 'party line'. Stalin broke with Bukharin and the right centrists and adopted a crude, distorted version of the solution proposed by the Left Opposition five years earlier - industrialisation minus workers democracy. A policy of forced collectivisation was introduced, a virtual civil war against the peasants, causing massive dislocation in the rural economy. Militarised methods of working were introduced to increase industrial production, and bureaucratic planning with a complete absence of any democratic control by the workers, dominated the economy - a system that was to become famously able to put a man into space but not to supply an equal number of left and right shoes!

The zigzag internally was reflected internationally. The Sixth Congress in 1928 introduced the 'Third Period' into the policy of the Comintern. The period of capitalist stabilisation was over, the final crisis of capitalism was at hand. The social democrats, now characterised as 'social fascists', became the main enemy rather than the fascists and the united front could only

be entered into "from below" by ignoring and going around the existing leaders of the workers movement. By now the Comintern had become little more than the foreign policy arm of the Soviet state and the new line was duly implemented by subservient CPs around the world.

The German disaster

In the early 1930s the German Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party commanded far more electoral support than the German fascists. However, the Comintern policy on 'social fascism' meant that the German communists did not call for and build a united front with other workers' organisations. The working class forces were divided and separately they were not able to physically confront and smash the fascists. Of course, the Social Democrats were equally to blame for this disaster, clinging to policies of collaboration with the Liberals and even conservatives to block the road to fascism by coalitions with the bourgeoisie.

The leaders of the German CP, under the guidance of the International, were almost blasé about the fascist threat. According to their worldview, if the crisis of capitalism got deeper, if the capitalists were forced to overthrow a democratic gov-



The failure of the German Communists to prevent the rise of Hitler was the final act of betrayal for Trotsky

ernment and install a fascist one, then this was simply a sign that things were developing in a way favourable to communist forces. Remmele, one of the leading members of the German CP, said "Let Hitler take office, he will soon go bankrupt, and then it will be our day."

For many, including Trotsky, this was the final act of betrayal. Millions were to die as a result of Hitler's rise to power; the German Communist Party, one of the largest parties in the CI, was annihilated. In 1933 Trotsky declared that the Communist International was dead for revolution. He turned his efforts to building a new International. The Fourth International was founded in 1938.

The Third International was to continue for another ten years and yet another 180 degree turn was on its way. When the reality of the Nazis in power and the threat they posed to the Soviet Union finally became clear to Stalin, the International was abruptly dragged from the ultra-left back to the ultra-right. In 1934 Stalin signed a pact with France, the Stalin-Laval pact, ending a year later in the policy of the Popular Front, which would continue up

to the start of the Second World War and, with a brief intermission, to the final years of the CI.

The policy of the popular front was formally adopted by the Seventh Congress of the Third International in 1935. Under the terms of the popular front, the Soviet Union would unite with the anti-fascist forces of the bourgeoisie. Of course, this was never to be a unity of equals. The communist parties in the imperialist countries were ordered to do nothing that would offend the bourgeoisie. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie were more than happy to use the communist parties to obstruct any and every aspect of class struggle against their governments.

In 1936 a massive French strike wave was derailed in order to protect the popular front. The French workers were amongst the first to suffer; many more would follow. In the Spanish Civil War, the popular front policy led to the CP's siding with the anti-Franco bourgeois forces. And they did not simply support the bourgeoisie but actively fought the revolutionaries, disarming and disbanding workers' militias and workers' councils, slaughtering those militants, revolutionaries and anarchists who refused to toe the line.

In his most comprehensive work on the rise of Stalinism and the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky encapsulates the role that the International was to play in its final years: "The less the Communist International is capable of threatening the positions of capital, the more political credit is given to the Kremlin government in the eyes of the French, Czechoslovak, and other bourgeoisies. Thus the strength of the bureaucracy, both domestic and international, is in inverse proportion to the strength of the Soviet Union as a socialist state and a fighting base of the proletarian revolution."

Once war broke out, Stalin fulfilled his role of protecting capitalism internationally. In the USA and Britain strikes which of course would harm the war effort were condemned. In India the national liberation struggle had to be sacrificed for the sake of protecting the alliance with the British. In his final act of betrayal, Stalin had the Third International formally dissolved in May 1943. In practice it had been dead for a decade.

Could the terminal decline of the CI have been avoided? Almost certainly, the history of the Comintern would have been very different if the German and other revolutionary situations had come to fruition in the 1920s. And history may have held a different story if the Left Opposition had succeeded in the battle against the bureaucracy and shifted the forces of revolution into expanding industrial production and democratic planning in 1923/4.

However, once the Stalinists had taken power in the USSR and were able to run Soviet policy according to the theory of socialism in one country, the fate of the Communist International was sealed. The triumph of this theory sounded the death knell for the international.

The Stalinists tied the International and the future of the world working class hand and foot to the international bourgeoisie. The working class paid dearly for the betrayal. Trotsky wrote in *The Revolution Betrayed* "The Third International was born of an indignant protest against social patriotism. But the revolutionary charge placed in it by the October revolution is long ago expended."

When the great revolutionary powerhouse of October shut down, the lights of the Comintern, which should have shone like a beacon, went out.

French socialists stage comeback in regional elections



The far left LO & LCR got slightly less than 5 per cent

By Mathieu Roux

Two years ago, Lionel Jospin, the Socialist Party (PS) candidate, failed to reach the second round of the French Presidential election, leaving right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac to face the fascist Le Pen in a no-win, no-choice situation.

At the time, the collapse in the PS and Communist votes, coupled with a record 10 per cent for the two far-left candidates, led many to think that French reformism was dead and almost buried.

But the recent regional elections saw a massive swing towards the reformists: starting with control of just four regions they now have a majority in 19 of the 22 assemblies.

The electorate gave a massive slap in the face to the right-wing Raffarin government's nakedly neoliberal policies: tax reductions for the rich, huge bribes to politically key sections of the influential French petit-bourgeoisie and, above all, the application of a "reform" programme which threatens all the post-war gains of the French working class.

Two years ago, surfing on Chirac's 80 per cent victory, the right wing got a massive majority in the subsequent parliamentary elections. The reformists were in ruins and the far left triumphant. That popular support for Chirac rapidly evaporated as he broke virtually all his campaign promises and set up one of the most anti-working class governments for decades.

Virtually every sector of the French population has suffered, from the youth, who have seen their rights and jobs trampled upon, to public sector workers, who, at a stroke, now have to work an extra 30 months before retirement, to teachers whose working conditions have been attacked, and the poor and unemployed who are paying higher taxes or have had their meagre benefits cancelled.

The last two years have seen huge anti-government movements, as public sector workers, teachers, cultural workers and even scientific researchers have taken unprecedented action. Chirac's second term has been branded by brazen class self-interest.

But decisively, with the partial exception of the researchers (their struggle is still continuing) all these movements have been defeated, through the cowardice and complicity of the union leaders and the inability of the French far left to grasp the necessary steps that would make it possible to forge a new leadership.

In these circumstances, French workers have done the only thing they could: they have voted for the reformists. But this is not the product of a left turn by the reformists.

Over the last two years the old parties of the Gauche Plurielle have been riven by personal faction struggles and by a programmatic vacuum. Far from leading the fight against Chirac and Raffarin, they have been squabbling on the sidelines, their backs

turned away from the many demonstrations that have coursed through the streets.

The explanation of the return of the reformists is simple. After the humiliating defeat of Jospin in 2002, many first-time far-left voters expressed their regret, claiming that they would have voted for Jospin "if only they had known" what was going to happen.

The tendency to vote Gauche Plurielle in the first round was reinforced by a scandalously anti-democratic "reform", which meant that any list with less than 10 per cent of the vote in the first round could not go through to the second round: the vote was thus wasted.

The other explanation lies in the lacklustre performance of Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) over the last two years. Neither together nor apart were LO and the LCR able to provide a clear lead to last year's mass public sector strikes. LO in particular sniggered at the call for a general strike, preferring business as usual. These tired fakery fear nothing more than a real movement upsetting their routines.

The LCR responded in a far more vigorous and vital way, but they still failed to forge both the structures and the programme necessary to win the struggle, take the leadership out of the hands of the reformists and lay the basis for a new workers party.

As a result, reformism returned to the fore. Faced with a choice of two electoralist campaigns, one which could win (the reformists) and the other of which could not (LO-LCR), workers did the obvious thing. In this sense, LO and LCR were the architects of their own defeat: overall they got slightly less than 5 per cent.

Sadly, by squandering the very real and urgent opportunity of the last two years, they have probably condemned the French working class to another cycle of reformist rule, at the very least in the regions which the PS and their allies have won.

After raising the public sector retirement age, Chirac has now vowed to take on the major issue for the French capitalist class: the massive health system. The last time he tried this, in 1995, he nearly provoked a general strike. In the next few months he has promised to hit harder and more decisively. This attack will be the equivalent of the British miners' strike for the French working class: it will be a fight the workers must win, or the consequences will be disastrous.

Small Trotskyist organisations do not often have a chance to influence events. It is vital that the militants of LO and the LCR - and those who voted for them - draw the lessons of the last two years and apply them to the coming struggles. They should reject any suggestion that the June European elections becomes the overriding priority; instead, that priority must be to develop the social forums and revive last year's co-ordinations (councils of action) as real organising centres against Chirac's attacks.

That way, the June elections can become a barometer of the class struggle as a whole, rather than an end in themselves.

League for the Fifth International Madrid massacre

The bombings in Madrid last month are further proof that, however hard he tries, Blair cannot draw a line under the war on Iraq. The repercussions of that war will resound globally for some time to come, and the 200 plus dead in Spain are the latest innocent victims of imperialist policies. If we unravel the events surrounding the bombings and the election a few days later we can hope to achieve a better understanding of how and why it happened.

Aznar was one of a handful of EU leaders who supported Bush and Blair's war drive. He agreed to allow US planes to use Spanish air bases and also provided diplomatic support in the run up to war. Aznar was one of the main crusaders in the West in support of the war on terror, he used it as an excuse to ban Basque political parties and attack civil rights in Spain. After the invasion Spain committed 1,300 troops to "peace keeping duties" and pledged to help with the "reconstruction (plunder) of Iraq".

Al-Qa'ida made it clear in recent communiqués that it would target Spain (along with the UK and other pro-war countries) in revenge for its support for the invasion. These threats were carried out on the 11th March when a series of co-ordinated bombs tore apart commuter trains in Madrid, killing workers and children on their way to school.

The League for the Fifth International condemns these reactionary bombings that are killing the very people that those suffering from imperialist aggression need to be convincing. The targets were ordinary people, not the state or the army, and, as such, this is an act of terrorism that is totally unsupportable.

Al-Qa'ida

These bombings could mark the beginning of a new stage of development for Al-



Qa'ida in Europe. It is hard to know how much it has grown since the invasion of Iraq, but most anti-terrorist analysts conclude that it is somewhere between "a lot" and "massively". Al-Qa'ida had around 2000 members before the war in a highly centralised co-ordinated network of cells that was based mainly in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Now it is a much larger more amor-

phous organisation, with no clear command structure, an organisation that can afford to lose cells because they are much more detached from the main body. The arrest or hounding of their leaders and prominent organisers (the ones trained by the CIA in the 1980s) means that the organisation now has a lot more activists with a lot less skill in carrying out the kind of daring well planned and carefully co-ordi-

Who are the Basques?

By Simon Hannon

The "Basque question" has been all over the news again, as the outgoing Spanish government tried to pin the blame for the Madrid bombings on ETA, the Basque separatist guerrilla group.

It later turned out to be Al-Qa'ida, launching a bombing campaign in Europe to punish states that supported the war in Iraq, a fact which premier José Maria Aznar, who took Spain into the war on Iraq, tried to cover up. The Spanish electorate rightly saw through this cynical manoeuvre and punished Aznar by throwing him out of office.

But who are the Basques and why have some of their political organisations been waging a militant, violent struggle against the Spanish state?

The Basque country - Euskadi - straddles the border of north-west Spain and south-west France. It has a population of around six million people, who have their own language - unrelated to any of the Indo-European languages - and their own distinct culture and traditions.

Throughout the history of modern

Spain, the Basque people have never been allowed to exercise their right to self-determination. During the fascist Franco regime the repression faced by the Spanish working class in general was fierce but within the Basque country it was even worse.

Alongside this "normal" level of fascist political repression, the Basques also faced national oppression. Their language was suppressed, their names were "translated" into Spanish and the Basque flag was banned. Any organised expression of national identity was met with state violence.

While the post-Franco regime has allowed certain levels of autonomy the basic question of whether or not the Basque people want independence has never been posed. The Spanish state has made it clear, since the fall of Franco, that should the Basque people wish to separate from Spain, they would not be allowed to do so. Spain and France have never allowed either a combination of the provinces or all seven Basque provinces to have a free vote on this question.

The post-Franco constitution declared the "indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, common and indivisible fatherland of all Spaniards". This was a betrayal of the democratic rights of the Basques, and the

Basque National party called for an abstention from the plebiscite that was used to ratify the constitution. 56 per cent of the population of the three provinces of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) did not vote, of those that did, 68.8% ratified the Constitution much lower than the nationwide average.

ETA responded by declaring the resultant Pact of Moncloa illegal - as did all the Basque parties and movements - refusing to recognise the legitimacy of a plebiscite in which only 44 per cent of the population participated.

The Aznar government was in the process of making any attempts to hold a referendum on the question of self-determination illegal. This was after Basque regional leader Juan Jose Ibarretxe suggested a referendum on sharing sovereignty with Spain in the BAC, creating a "state of free association". Aznar stated in 2002, "There is not going to be any room for breaking away. No one is going to impose an illegal regime" - that it, unless he did the imposing.

In fact the Partido Popular government curtailed even further the democratic and national rights of the Basque popula-

statement

sweeps socialists to power



nated attacks that Al-Qa'ida is well known for. The Al-Qa'ida bombing campaigns that we will see in future are much more likely to be simple and "quick" attacks, such as the bombings that they organised in Spain.

The election

What happened in Spain after the bombings was something that is going to scare Blair immensely. As George Galloway

said on the 20 March demonstration, "the people of Spain marched – then they voted". The Popular Party tried to blame ETA because they hoped that it would whip up Spanish chauvinist feeling among the Spanish workers, increasing the vote for the PP and allowing them to carry out even more reactionary measures against the Basque people.

After the bombings, the Aznar admin-

istration had tried to cover up the real culprits by blaming ETA, even though there was very little evidence to support it. It emerged on Saturday evening just before the polls opened that Aznar's Popular Party was lying to cover up the obvious fact. Al-Qa'ida had carried out the bombings to punish Spain for its support the war.

The last year of pro-war, pro-liberalisation measures, attacks on civil liberties

and lies erupted into a massive backlash on the streets as thousands demonstrated all across Spain, long into the night, and the next day they marched to the ballot box. Aznar's Popular Party quickly became unpopular and was swept from power.

What now?

The party that benefited from the anti-war feeling was the Socialist Party (PSOE) that had opposed the war and said it would recall the troops if elected. The victory of the PSOE reflects the tremendous groundswell of opposition of the Spanish workers and youth to war, neoliberalism and the lying hypocrisy of modern bourgeois politics. The PSOE is a party deeply connected to the Spanish working class movement – it is the party to which the masses naturally turned in their furious determination to rid themselves of Aznar. But it is a party which pursues a pro-capitalist policy, a party that is bound by a thousand ties to the rich financiers and industrialists of Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao.

The PSOE is a party that large sections of the working class has faith in, and it is one that can bring in moderate reforms for the working class, but it is also one that we cannot trust. The workers and youth who supported it in the elections must be wary of these charlatan socialists, and must keep the pressure on them to carry out their promises when in power.

We cannot be complacent: the PSOE has several reactionary policies, including on the Basques, to whom they will not grant the right to self-determination. The PSOE even supported the banning of their political parties, calling them "terrorists".

The Basques must work alongside the workers and youth in Spain to place demands on these leaders, but importantly the militant Basque nationalist movement should call an immediate cease-fire

in the "armed struggle" in order to enable them to open a dialogue, not with the treacherous Spanish chauvinist politicians in Madrid, but the workers and youth of all parts of the country, who have repeatedly shown their anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist aspirations.

These masses – and above all the youth – can be won to the fight for full self-determination for the Basque people. Indeed there are many democratic and social demands of the masses that need to be addressed – including an end to the reactionary Spanish monarchy, the privileges of the Catholic Church and the neoliberal "reforms" of Spain's public services which were enthusiastically backed by Aznar.

Only by keeping the pressure on the PSOE, through militant demonstrations and protests and by seeking to overthrow the entire military industrial complex in Spain can the workers of Spain and the Basque country really punish the new world order. Bush, Blair and Al-Qa'ida did not want the PSOE to get into power in Spain; they will fear the power of the organised working class in a revolution even more!

We call for:

- Spanish troops out of Iraq NOW; no delays, no further complicity in the imperialist occupation.
- US bases out of Spain – Spain out of Nato.
- Referendum in the Basque country – a single question for all inhabitants: "Do you wish to secede from the Spanish state and form an independent Basque state?"
- Abolish the monarchy – republic now.
- Reverse neoliberal cuts and privatisation – tax the rich to fund services.
- Nationalise the monopolies and major corporations under workers' control without compensation.
- No coalitions with bourgeois parties. For a government of the PSOE and the United Left

tion. Measures have included the banning of political organisations, preventing candidates from standing in elections, censorship (closing down both press and internet sites), the seizing of assets and freezing of bank accounts, confiscation of property and offices of Basque organisations and the use of State of Exception laws to prevent "congregation".

Alongside this the state routinely uses anti-terrorist laws, continues to harass members of militant Basque nationalist organisations and has even been taken to task by a European Union commission that investigated allegations of torture. This commission found solid evidence that the police and Guardia Civil regularly use beatings, suffocation and electric shock techniques on nationalist prisoners.

The latest offensive against ETA and Basque nationalist groups started in 2002, gathering pace undoubtedly because Aznar saw the opportunity to strike a serious blow following 9/11. In May 2003 the US State Department declared Batasuna and its predecessors Euskal Herritarrok and Herri Batasuna (HB) as terrorist organisations. The following month the European Union followed suit.

The origins of ETA's military campaign lie in the resistance to the Franco regime. Alongside actions of the mass political movements ETA carried out armed actions. These actions commonly included the assassination of senior Franco politicians or army and police officers or the kid-

napping of major industrialists. In that sense it was a campaign of individual terrorism but as part of a mass movement of resistance to Franco.

After Franco's death, the main workers' parties the PSOE and PCE (socialist and communist parties) accepted limitations on democracy in order not to "provoke" the Ultras, the remaining elements within the state, especially the army, who wanted to return to a fascist dictatorship. This agreement was a betrayal of the Spanish workers as a whole but it was particularly bitter in the Basque areas.

ETA remained illegal and even though other political prisoners were released under an amnesty none of ETA's prisoners were released who had been involved in 'blood crimes'. The refusal to grant an amnesty to ETA prisoners while murderous Francoist police and army officials not only remained at liberty but in their positions was a key reason why ETA refused to call a ceasefire.

The Spanish state has continued to use violent means to destroy the nationalist movement: most notably the death squads of the GAL.

All socialists and democrats should critically support the mass Basque movements and campaigns for democratic rights and against state repression. We also call for an amnesty for all political prisoners. Indeed, in any conflict between the Spanish state and ETA, we will critically support ETA. A state that uses death squads to terrorise the

Basque people has no right to detain either those accused of being ETA activists or actual ETA members.

The ETA strategy today is principally aimed at securing negotiations on the questions of the prisoners and self-determination. It is not aimed at mobilising the Basque people, and even the wider Spanish population around national, democratic, economic and social demands. It therefore turns its back on – and systematically alienates – the one social force that can win its demands, the working class.

At best, ETA relegates the movements and organisations of the masses to a supporting role in the struggle. At worst, it enables the Spanish bourgeoisie to unite all classes around the popular demand "against terrorism". This has led to mass demonstrations throughout Spain, and even in the Basque country against ETA.

For this reason we call on ETA to declare a ceasefire while at the same time warning that any peace process with the Spanish capitalist state would be a cul-de-sac. In addition the call for a ceasefire does not mean that the working class or the oppressed renounce in any way the right to organise their own military defence.

Instead, what is needed is a strategy which mobilises the working class of both the Basque country and the whole of Spain around democratic, national, economic and social demands, leading to the goal of a socialist revolution.

The right to self-determination and the call for independence

While Workers Power supports the right to self-determination, we believe that the majority of Basques do not actually want to secede from Spain. None of the parties and movements that are in favour of separation have ever commanded a majority of support in the BAC or the other Basque provinces. The parties in favour of separation have even less support in the province of Navarra and among the Basque provinces in France.

Despite this, election results and opinion polls clearly demonstrate that the majority of the population in the BAC, and a minority in the other provinces, consider that they are not just another region of Spain or France.

These people do not wish to separate but they do want to

exercise their right to self-determination. The question of Basque independence can only be resolved, however, by the Basques winning the right to freely decide whether they want independence from Spain, the status quo or greater autonomy within Spain.

In such circumstances, socialists should not advocate the fight for independence of the Basque country, but should take up the democratic and national questions. We fight against all manifestations of repression and restrictions on democratic rights, and urge the workers' movement in the whole of Spain (and France) to come to the aid of their Basque brothers and sisters.

As Marx said: "A nation which oppresses another nation can never itself be free".

Philip Guston: an American artist in changing times

The Royal Academy of Arts is showing a retrospective of Philip Guston's work. Guston was typical of his generation, moving from large-scale public murals to abstract painting. However, as *Warren Groppe* explains, it is his return to figurative painting in the late 1960s that sets him apart

Guston was perhaps the most politically driven of all those artists who later went on to become abstract expressionists. He produced anti-fascist paintings; secured prestigious public mural commissions under the New Deal; and, unlike any of the others, his interest in mural art drew him to Mexico. The attempt to understand this shift from a politically radical art practice in his earlier years through to an abstract one by the 1950s entails a closer examination of the fortunes of the US Communist Party (CPUSA) in the period of the Popular Front, the influence it had upon young artists radicalised by the Depression, and the move from a federally sponsored mural art of the New Deal period through to the post-war consolidation of the commercial gallery system.

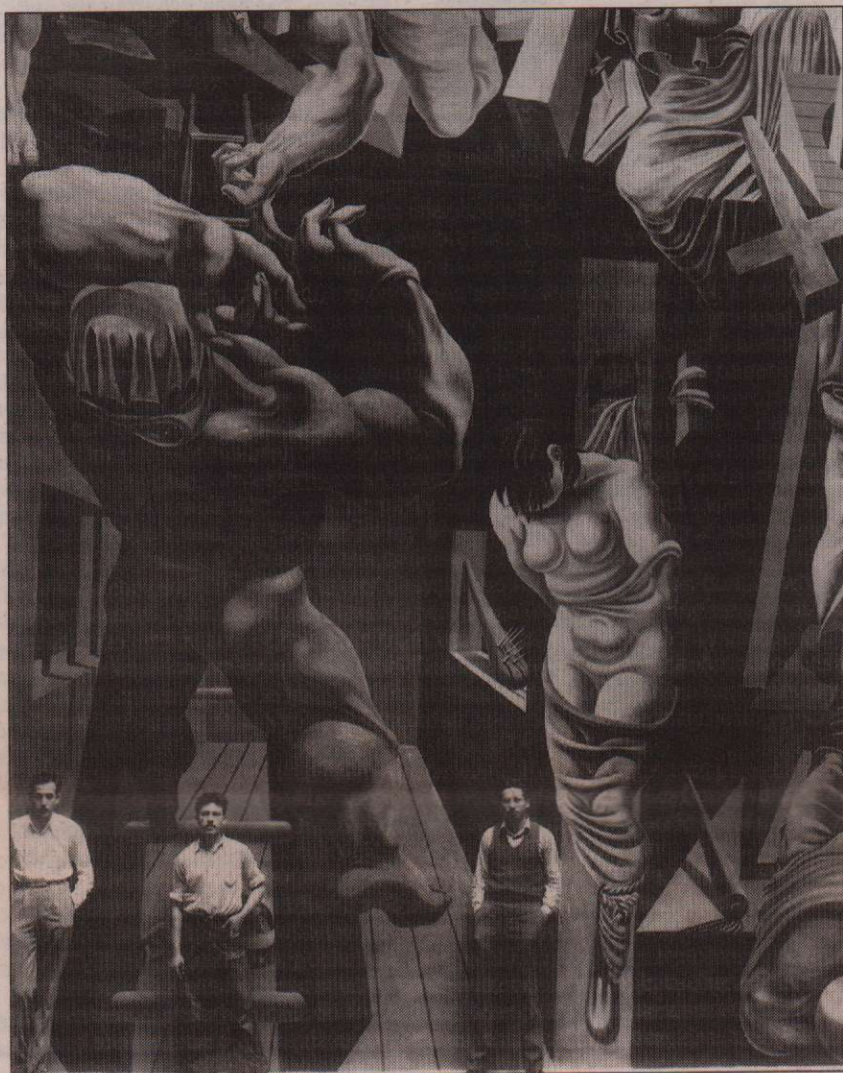
Like many of his contemporaries, Guston was a second generation East European immigrant, born Philip Goldstein in Montreal, Canada, in 1913, the son of Russian-Jewish parents from Odessa. In 1919 the family moved to Los Angeles, where Guston's father committed suicide in 1924 leaving his wife to raise seven children by herself. His earliest interest seems to have been in comic strips and in 1926 his mother gave him a correspondence course with the Cleveland School of Cartooning for his birthday.

The following year he enrolled at Manuel Arts High School in Los Angeles, where he befriended Jackson Pollock. Here the two of them fell under the influence of the eccentric art teacher Schwankovsky who introduced them to modern art and encouraged formal experimentation. The school was nevertheless generally quite conservative, and Guston and Pollock were expelled in early 1929 for their involvement in producing a pamphlet attacking the authoritarian nature of the school's regime.

Whilst Pollock was later readmitted, Guston took up a fellowship at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. It was around this time that he became a member of the Hollywood John Reed Club (JRC), named after the radical American journalist who took part in the Russian Revolution. Inaugurated within days of the stock-market crash of 1929 by the CPUSA, under instructions from Moscow, this was one of the clubs which were to be a cultural vehicle to align 'all honest writers and artists... with the working class in its struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation'.

It was as a member of the JRC that Guston first came across the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). They were to become the focus of much of his figurative work in the 1930s, such as *Drawing for Conspirators*, and would later reappear in his work in the 1960s-70s, such as *Edge of Town* and *The Studio*, all of which appear in the exhibition.

The Los Angeles police had its own Red Squad, headed by the infamous Captain William 'Red' Hynes, who collaborated with the KKK to terrorise and intimidate communists and labour activists. Guston himself experienced this violence when he was involved in a strike that was smashed up by the Klan, and in February 1933 Red Squad heavies destroyed portable murals on the theme of 'The American Negro' produced by JRC members, including one by Guston on the Scottsboro case (in which nine African American youths were framed and sentenced to execution for the rape of a white woman in



Alabama). His first solo exhibition included a whole series of pictures on the theme of the KKK which were again vandalised by local thugs.

It was through the Club that Guston met David Alfaro Siqueiros who arrived on the West Coast in early 1932, having been flung out of Mexico. His reputation as a staunch Stalinist and revolutionary muralist preceded him, and communist artists eagerly joined his Bloc of Mural Painters to assist him in the three murals that he produced before he was kicked out of the US. Reportedly, Guston would watch Siqueiros working at night after having finished his work as a truck driver for the day.

Inspired by the Mexican example of state funded mural painting, the JRC artists called upon the New Deal government to augment the Depression-devastated American art market and sponsor the arts as both an economic aid to the unemployed artist, and as a cultural and artistic resource for the community.

The campaign was a success, and in late 1933 President Roosevelt initiated the first of the federal art projects which, by the time of their demise during the war, would account for an estimated \$40 million of New Deal welfare spending. Guston and his friend from the Otis Art League, Reuben Kadish, were taken on by the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) in late 1933 to produce a mural for the Frank Wiggins Trade School.

Encouraged by this experience, Kadish, who had been a member of Siqueiros' Bloc, wrote to the Mexican to ask whether there was work for Guston and him south of the border. The response was encouraging and the pair of them, with their poet friend Jules Langsner,

travelled down to Mexico City. They were given a wall with 1,024 square feet in the former summer palace of the Emperor Maximilian in the state capital of Morelia, where they produced the impressive *The Struggle Against Terror*, an antifascist mural strongly influenced by the work of Siqueiros. A two-page review in *Time* magazine quoted Siqueiros describing them as 'the most promising painters in either the US or Mexico'.

After returning to the States Guston moved east to New York, on the advice of Pollock, and found further state-funded commissions under the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA/FAP) and the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture, the successors to the PWAP which closed in early 1934.

This work culminated in his WPA/FAP mural *Maintaining America's Skills* at the New York World's Fair of 1939-40 and his prestigious Section mural for the Social Security Building in Washington DC, *Reconstruction and the Well-Being of the Family* of 1942.

It is a pity that, although it would obviously have been near impossible to exhibit his mural work in the Royal Academy exhibition, the accompanying literature gives little indication of the fact that Guston was an important exemplar of public mural art throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.

Whilst the political iconography of his government-sponsored murals was necessarily tame in comparison to the work done in Mexico, Guston would continue his more radical work elsewhere, producing his *Bombardment* tondo of 1937 in protest at the fascist bombing of Guernica (most famously depicted by Picasso). This was exhibited at the Exhibi-



Clockwise from the top:

Bombardment

Edge of Town

Guston and Reuben Kadish (with the poet Jules Langsner) in front of their mural *The Struggle Against Terror*, 1934, in Morelia, Mexico

tion in Defence of World Democracy, Dedicated to the Peoples of Spain and China, organised by the CPUSA-sponsored American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism, the Popular Front successor to the more sectarian JRC.

This shift from a Siqueiros influenced radical art practice to a New Deal Americanism in his government murals was symptomatic of a broader shift in communist strategy signalled by the adoption of the Popular Front. And Guston's break with a propagandistic mural art was accelerated by further shifts in the wider political landscape as this left-liberal pact disintegrated under the contradictions thrown up by the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Finland the following year.

With the closure of the Federal Art Project during the Second World War, and the collapse of communist-sponsored cultural vehicles such as the American Artists Congress, Guston's art, like that of his friend Pollock, would become increasingly pessimistic, moving from direct political critique to an imagery indicating a more generalised unease with the state of mankind, as exemplified in works such as *If This Be Not I* of 1945. From here he moved increasingly towards complete abstraction, easel painting as opposed to murals, as evidenced in his work of the 1950s such as *For M*.

Such works quickly found their place in a newly invigorated commercial art market that prospered during the post-war economic boom, and were exhibited abroad under the auspices of state agencies such as the CIA as evidence of the freedom allowed to American artists during the Cold War. The political, cultural, and institutional transformations of the 1940s combined to make the propagandistic art of the 1930s seem hopelessly passé, and Guston reinvented himself as an abstract expressionist accordingly.

Alongside the likes of Pollock and Rothko, Guston's abstract work was collected by the rich and powerful as the latest and greatest

manifestation of modern abstract art – American and not French, thereby underlining America's new found domination of the international art market in the post-war years.

Yet despite his success as an abstract artist, Guston's art was to radically shift once more in the late 1960s in a return to figurative politics. In explaining this reversal, Guston pointed to the importance of Vietnam and the countercultural politics of the late 1960s: "In 1967-68 I became very disturbed by the war and the demonstrations. They became my subject matter."

Abstraction was just not up to the task: "What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything – and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue."

This is the context in which we have to situate the series of caricatures of the KKK in the late 1960s, mentioned above, and those of Richard Nixon in the mid-1970s, represented in the exhibition by works such as *San Clemente* of 1975 – a scathing, scatological depiction of Nixon with a phlebitis-induced swollen left leg.

This turn from a hopelessly appropriated abstract aesthetic to a figurative one, continued until his death in 1980, proved too shocking for many at the time. Yet arch-conservatives such as Hilton Kramer clearly understood what was at stake, reading these new works as a return to a critical art practice, reminiscent of the 1930s, if in a form more suitable to the times. It comes as no surprise that on exhibiting these new works in 1970 Guston was again criticised by the right. In certain ways his art had come full circle.

Artists inspired by the anti-capitalist movement today should take a stroll down to the fusty old Royal Academy (only £3 for unwaged, open till 12th April) and check out how a radical from a previous generation put his work to the service of the movement. Apart from anything else, the exhibition is also deeply moving.

Kosova: independence not ethnic cleansing

Marcus Chamoun

In 1999, the Serbian regime of Slobodan Milosevic began a murderous campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Albanian majority in Kosova, in an effort to crush Albanian demands for independence from Serbia. The Nato imperialist powers exploited the crisis to launch a war against Serbia and occupy Kosova. In the aftermath, two-thirds of Kosova's Serb minority fled, leaving 100,000 Serbs surrounded by about 1.8 million hostile Kosovan Albanians.

The events of the few weeks have demonstrated that revolutionary socialists were right to support the right of the Kosovan Albanians to self-determination. They were also right to oppose an imperialist intervention that has done nothing to advance this right, despite the "humanitarian" gloss placed on it by British and US politicians.

On 17 March, ethnic Albanians rioted in the divided town of Metrovica after the drowning of three Albanian children apparently chased by Serbs into a nearby river. As the violence spread to other areas, including the Kosovan capital, Pristina, Nato announced that it would send reinforcements to "keep the peace" and separate Serbs from Albanians.

An estimated 31 people have been killed and hundreds injured in the tit-for-tat incidents that followed. In the Serbian capital Belgrade, nationalist mobs clashed with riot police and torched a 17th century mosque – the only place of worship for Muslims in the city. Meanwhile, Albanians in Kosova burned down Serb homes and 15 churches, including a 14th century Serbian monastery.

That sections of the Kosovan Albanians are conducting what amounts to a pogrom against the Serb minority is something that socialists should condemn. Serbian forces today no longer control the territory, are

not killing Albanian civilians or suppressing democratic freedoms, and are not enlisting the support of Serb civilians to do so. However, we should also recognise that these events are themselves the product of Albanian frustration at the denial of their national rights – not by the Serb minority, but by the Nato imperialists.

Kosova remains technically a part of Serbia, albeit governed by a United Nations interim administration pending a decision on its final status. Despite election results in 2002 that returned a large majority for pro-independence candidates, independence for Kosova does not feature on the agendas of the Nato imperialists, who have wrestled with various formulas that would allow its return to Serbia with some form of negotiated autonomy.

Recent elections in Serbia produced a victory for extreme nationalists determined to keep Kosova part of Serbia, but without enough seats to form a government. The more moderately nationalist government of Vojislav Kostunica, supported by members of Milosevic's former ruling party, came to power calling instead for the ethnic partition of Kosova. This has prompted Albanian hardliners from the KLA, the former guerrilla force that fought Milosevic's regime, to talk of forming military units in response.

This is what lies behind the recent violence on both sides. The Serb nationalists (both those in government and outside) hope to exploit the suffering of their compatriots to press their case for the restoration of Serbian authority, at the very least in the half-Serb town of Metrovica and the northernmost part of Kosova, where most of its Serb minority are concentrated. The calculation of some Albanian nationalists is evidently that the more Serbs that are forced out of the rest of the country, the more land will be left over for them when Nato and Serbia negotiate a carve-up.



An ethnic Albanian girl walks by the ruins of an ancient Serb Orthodox monastery destroyed in recent clashes between ethnic Albanians and Serbs

This is a dangerous and bloody dead-end for Albanian national rights in Kosova. The partition of the territory – regardless of who is given the greater share – will not lead to national self-determination for the Albanian majority, but to ever-increased dependence on the imperialist powers, who will pose as the "protectors" of whichever national group is being targeted for violence, and as the guardians of "peace and stability" in the Balkans.

In particular, the denial of Serbian rights in Kosova – to remain peacefully in the country, to use their own language and maintain their own cultural institutions – will serve to strengthen chauvinism among the Albanians. After all, Milosevic was able to secure his grip on Serbia by his denial of Albanian rights in Kosova. The Albanian majority will be able to assert their own national rights if they deny outside powers the pretext to interfere with them. And that means extending the same rights to Serbian and other non-Albanian minorities.

Even an undivided and "independent" Kosova under Western "protection" will remain an unstable and impoverished statelet, in which the frustration of the national rights of all will find occasional outlets in the form of senseless interethnic blood-letting. Under Lord Paddy Ashdown's overlordship in neighbouring Bosnia, the city of Mostar remains divided between Croats and Muslims, Muslim refugees are unable to return to their former homes in the Serbian region ("Republike Srpska"), and living standards have plummeted.

The real enemies of all the peoples in the Balkans are the Western multinationals and the armies that serve to protect their interests in the name of "humanitarian" concerns, and who encourage national hatreds by playing off one small nation against another.

Ultimately, the only way to assure the national rights of all of the Balkan peoples will be through a federation of workers' states. The first step in this direction will be a struggle to end imperialist intervention in the region. While the nationalists of various stripes will use this crisis to advance their plans for partition and ethnic conflict, and the liberal imperialists will use it to demonstrate the increased need for their "peace-keeping", we should use it to renew our demand for imperialism to withdraw from the Balkans. Those of us in Britain can start by demanding the withdrawal of British troops from Kosova and Bosnia, and by supporting Albanian national self-determination.

South Africa: repression of anti-privatisation activists

The ANC government, despite the historic achievement of majority rule and the enshrining of rights to basic services in its constitution, is ignoring those very rights in pursuance of a neoliberal agenda. Huge price increases following the privatisation of water and electricity are plunging the country's poorest communities into ever greater poverty. For the worst off, this means the withdrawal of these services altogether.

The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) was established in July 2000 by activists and organisations, and has affiliates from the unions, communities, students and the left. The APF declares its role to be "[the uniting of] struggles against privatisation in the workplace and community . . . [the linking of] workers' struggles for a living wage and jobs with community struggles for housing, water, electricity and fair rates and taxes."

The success of the APF in uniting resistance to government policy has led to state repression. We print below an edited version of a statement from the African Liberation Support Campaign Network (ALISC) which shows the pressures being brought to bear on the APF.

The African Liberation Support Campaign Network condemns the arrests in Johannesburg on Sunday 21 March 2004 of 52 members of the Anti-Privatisation Forum. The 52 were released the next day after being charged with participating in an illegal gathering. They include key members of the APF leadership such as



chairperson John Appolis and deputy secretary Rob Rees. The arrest came after representatives from the APF in Soweto and other communities were forcibly prevented from boarding buses that would take them to Constitution Hill for a peaceful demonstration of the Coalition Against Water Privatisation. Police then opened fire on APF representatives as they tried to follow their detained comrades to Johannesburg Central Police Station.

Permission for the demonstration was refused by the Johannesburg police on the basis of the apartheid-era Gatherings Act, the police claiming that the demonstration would lead to acts of violence, seriously disrupt traffic, and constitute a potential threat to "law and order".

What is happening in South Africa reflects the neo-colonial conditions of "flag and anthem independence" where the masses wonder whether all the sacrifices they've made in struggle have been of any worth.

African Liberation Support Campaign Network
Contact: Explo Nani-Kofi nkexplo@yahoo.co.uk

Boycott Coca-Cola

On 22 July 2003, Sinaltrainal (the Colombian Food and Drinks Workers' Union) called for an international boycott of Coca-Cola. The multinational stands accused of complicity in the assassination of eight Sinaltrainal trade union leaders in Colombia since 1990. Many other leaders have been imprisoned, tortured, forcibly displaced and exiled.

The boycott is supported by the World Social Forum, the principal trade union federations in Colombia, and numerous social organisations around the world. In solidarity with Sinaltrainal, the United Steel Workers Union in the USA has brought a court case against the company; a US judge has ruled that there is enough evidence for a case to continue against Coca-Cola's Colombian subsidiaries.

The following item provides the latest news on the union's struggles in Colombia

On 15 March, 30 Coca-Cola workers began a hunger strike in front of eight Coke bottling plants, including one in the capital, Bogotá. Juan Carlos Galvis, a local union official, has said: "If we lose the fight against Coca-Cola, we will first lose our union, next our jobs and then our lives."

On September 9th 2003, Coca-Cola Femsa, Coca-Cola's largest Colombian bottler in which Coke has a 46.4 per cent stake, closed down production at 11 of their 16 plants. Since then,

they've pressurised more than 500 workers into "voluntarily resigning". Most of the union members have refused to resign and the company has escalated the pressure against them. The Colombian Ministry of Social Protection (Labour) authorised Coca-Cola Femsa's plans to dismiss 91 workers – 70 per cent of whom are union members.

The Campaign To Stop Killer Coke supports the union's call for Coca-Cola Femsa to relocate those workers, in line with its obligations under collective bargaining agreements and as directed by the Colombian courts.

On behalf of the workers and their families, please send the strongest possible message to the Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta and Coca-Cola FEMSA in Colombia. Sample messages and further details can be found at the sites and contact addresses below.

In Solidarity
Ray Rogers

Campaign To Stop Killer Coke
<http://www.killercoke.org/>

StopKillerCoke@aol.com
(USA Tel 212-979-8320)

<http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk/>
(UK Tel 07743 743 041)

Defend the Aborigines, stamp out police racism

By Lisa Farrell

On the night of Saturday 14 February, Thomas "TJ" Hickey, an indigenous youth living in Redfern in Sydney, impaled himself on a steel rod while escaping a police chase on his girlfriend's bicycle.

Police were quick to arrive on the scene.

Against all basic first aid advice, they pulled Thomas off the rod. This exacerbated the bleeding from the wound to his throat and chest.

Instead of trying to stop the bleeding, the police proceeded to search Thomas. They had time to call police backup, but it took a 14-year-old girl nearby to call the ambulance.

Later that night, Thomas died in hospital. Medical officials have confirmed that the police actions worsened an already serious injury. The death was a shock to his family and the Aboriginal community of the Redfern block (the estate where in Aborigines mainly live in Sydney). Police harassment and violence is not new to the black residents of Redfern, but no one expected Thomas Hickey to die on a quick errand to the local shops.

Repression

Thomas was fearful of the police, which is not surprising. The night before his death, his girlfriend had been riding her bicycle through the area when police tried to drag her into their car for no reason.

The history of Redfern is one of brutal police repression. Under 24-hour surveillance by more than 100 police patrols, Aboriginal youth are used to taking back streets to avoid harassment.

Black residents are regularly strip

searched on the street, a practice which is supposedly illegal but used to intimidate and threaten the community.

Youth are particularly targeted. In the past 18 months it is reported that one youth was taken by cops and tormented by being forced to play Russian roulette.

Lyll Munro, a long term leader of the black community of Redfern, told Sydney Radio 2UE: "You could interview every Aboriginal kid...from the block...and the majority will tell you to your face...that they've been bashed by the police."

A resident of the area for nine years, Victoria Dunbar, recently stated, that last year "the police put a 7.30pm curfew on most of the young people. The kids couldn't go to basketball or football practice."

The fightback

The day after TJ's accident, police drove through Redfern, tormenting the residents over the boy's death. Police presence increased through the day and by 4pm they were setting up roadblocks in a deliberate campaign of provocation.

Around 100 Aboriginal youth responded by arming themselves with bottles, bricks, firecrackers and Molotov cocktails. The police then brought in hundreds of fully kitted out riot cops, complete with dogs.

The police ultimately won the battle of Redfern, but for nine hours courageous youth kept the police at bay. For many, it was the first time that they stood and fought the police together instead of being picked up individually.

The media and government have run a smear campaign that has been used to justify the arrest of 40 people and calls to "bulldoze the block".

But the young residents had every right to take the action they did - their only "crime" was to defend their community against police and state racism and harassment, including decades of local police brutality, and more than two centuries of oppression and abuse from consecutive Australian governments.

As Lyll Munro has publicly stated, these youth should be congratulated for standing up for their rights, not demonised.

The Block

The backdrop to all this is the drive from profit-hungry developers to gain further control over land in Redfern. The suburb is next to the city. It is prime real estate that the state government has wanted to claim back and sell for more than a decade.

Despite the years of neglect and decay, indigenous people have refused to hand over the land. To this day the housing is a proud symbol of indigenous resistance, and the power of union solidarity.

In the 1970s the New South Wales Builders' Labourer Federation (BLF) and the plumbers union joined forces with Aboriginal squatters in the area, to re-build three houses, and form what was to become the Block. When developers threatened the residents, the BLF instigated bans against the companies behind this push.

The area became the first successful land rights case in Australia, with Aboriginal control and public funding being granted by the Gough Whitlam government in 1970s.

Racism

Police harassment is not unique to Redfern. Recent years have seen

the increase in police harassment of Arab, African and Asian youth in suburb after suburb across Australia. Mosques have been burned down in Sydney and Melbourne, women are too scared to walk alone in daylight, an African youth was beaten into unconsciousness while being held by police in Melbourne, and Arab youth regularly attacked and harassed by racists - including those in uniform - in suburbs of Sydney.

The Australian government's response to 9/11, its contribution to the occupation of both Afghanistan and Iraq and the appalling treatment of asylum seekers have all contributed to this rise in racism.

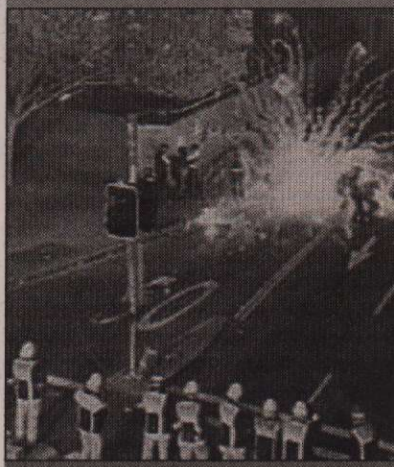
The Australian government has moved onto the ground of the far right One Nation party, in saying racism is OK. And just like in Britain, this government's approach has given a green light for police brutality.

But there has also been resistance. The refugee rights movement in Australia has grown from strength to strength, even physically tearing down fences to free refugees. During the antiwar protests in 2003, Sydney high school students, mainly Arab, braved significant police repression in insisting on their right to march.

We are starting to see the new face of antiracism in Australia.

As Darcy Byrne from Sydney's Balmain Youth Organisation explained at a recent Socialist Alliance meeting: "Solidarity is needed not only because Aborigines are under attack, but also because black and poor non-Aboriginal youth share a common experience - police harassment."

And through this common experience, a common resistance is growing.



Aboriginal youth fightback against police racism and the killing of Thomas Hickey (bottom) on the Redfern estate in Sydney.

For more information see the following websites based in Australia:
www.onesolutionrevolution.org
sydney.indymedia.org
www.socialist-alliance.org

Labor Party adopts troops out demand

By Carlene Watson

"We'd be hoping to have the troops back by Christmas" - Federal Australian Labor Party leader Mark Latham, laying down a pledge that has made Australia's role in the Iraq conflict into an election issue.

It must be the last thing that Prime Minister John Howard and the ruling Liberal Party/National Party government could want. Especially as Howard initially promised a sceptical Australian public that the troops would be withdrawn as soon as the hostilities were over. But 850 troops remain in Iraq for the foreseeable future, according to Howard.

The question of Australia's role in the conflict could be make or break for Latham and the ALP. He is clearly stating his own position, rather than one decided by the party, though the rest of the party has fallen into line behind him.

The US Ambassador to Australia, Tom

Scieffer, has jumped into the fray. Latham has been accused by Scieffer of opening Australia up to terrorist attack with his comments, and been directly asked to reconsider.

But it's the National Party MPs who have really gone over the top. National's Senate leader Ron Boswell said: "Mr Latham probably should be nominated for the Al-Qa'ida cup."

However, linking anti-war sentiment directly to terrorism is not something just for the most conservative and loony fringes of Australian politics.

Foreign minister Alexander Downer last week suggested that Australian federal police commissioner Mick Keelty had voiced Al-Qa'ida propaganda, when he argued that Australia's participation in the war on Iraq had increased the threat of terrorism to the country.

Though Keelty had to apologise, he was probably voicing what many people, in the aftermath of the Spanish bombings, were thinking. As, indeed, they thought in the

aftermath of the Bali bombing when 69 per cent of Australians believed that Howard's support for US policy contributed directly to the bombing.

And this must be exactly what Latham is counting on. He has a reputation for being a straight talker and for not being afraid to engage in verbal and occasionally physical slanging matches. He was a risky choice for the ALP as leader because of this tendency.

But his promise to bring the troops home and his willingness to stand up to Howard, Downer and the biggest bully of them all, the US, is likely to be a vote-winner.

Labor is ahead of the Liberals in the opinion polls by 55 per cent to 45 per cent.

And Howard is clearly in damage-control mode, appealing to the worst kinds of Australian nationalism: "The leader of the opposition talks about an exit strategy. We do not have a cut-and-run strategy... it is not the Australian way to cut and run. It is the Australian way to stay and

do the job and see it through."

Latham's promise to withdraw the troops at Christmas is a clever move. There will be some kind of election in June in Iraq, though it is certain to be not very democratic. After that, it'll be a lot harder to argue that Australian troops are needed for security in Iraq. Instead, Latham is able to argue, they are needed for security at home.

Christmas is far enough away for the situation to radically change and for him to be able to go back on his promise, while in the mean time making a big splash with remarks that are particularly popular after the terror attacks in Madrid.

Even people who might have been in favour of the war, or at least of Australian troops playing some role, may believe that by Christmas Australia's need to support a continuing US occupation should be minimal.

So, does pledging to withdraw Australian troops make Mark Latham a leftist anti-war activist and friend of the people? Not any more than the Liberal Democrats' anti-war

stance in the UK makes Charles Kennedy an opponent of the capitalist order.

Latham is a great fan of Tony Blair's Third Way and during his time as Mayor in western Sydney contracted out council jobs to private companies. He's no friend to the unions or workers, despite his suburban working class rhetoric. Like Zapatero in Spain, he is simply reading the electoral mood and saying the right things. There are many reasons for believing that Latham's ALP will not be much better for workers than the Liberal Party has been.

But his pledge to withdraw the troops is a concrete commitment from the ALP, which it must be forced to honour. It's a promise about an issue that many people feel very passionately about. Thousands of Australians marched and rallied on 20 March - a sign that the war is still an issue for many people. Latham may win the election, but if he doesn't come through with this promise in particular, he will stand revealed in his true colours.

Ariel Sharon is to pull Israeli troops and settlers out of the Gaza strip, handing it over to the Palestinians. But hand in hand with this apparent generosity goes an increased offensive against militants, writes *Keith Harvey*

Sharon's 'peace deal' means more deaths

Sharon, start preparing your body bags". This was the embittered cry of mourners at the 200,000 strong funeral procession for Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, late last month. Assassinated by an Israeli helicopter gunship in Gaza, he was the most important Palestinian leader after Yasser Arafat. He is the most prominent leader to be killed by Israel since the assassination of the PLO second-in-command Abu Jihad in Tunis in 1988.

The United States refused to denounce the killing and vetoed a UN security council resolution condemning the assassination. Instead, it chose to confirm a Sharon-Bush summit for 14 April in Washington.

Sheikh Yassin, the founder of Hamas, was an easy target. He refused to hide his whereabouts. He was confined to a wheelchair. An ailing 67 year old, he was not expected to live long anyway. So why kill him and why now?

Sharon's Israeli government has decided on a dual course of action. It wants to pull out of the Gaza Strip; home to more than one million Palestinians, most unemployed, many in refugee camps and dependent on UN handouts. Over the next two years, he envisages removing the 7,500 Jewish settlers that currently control 30 per cent of the Gaza strip.

Sharon, the butcher of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Lebanon in the 1980s, and the architect of the settlement programmes in the 1990s, has concluded that Israel has little to gain by hanging onto the Gaza. It is a stronghold of Hamas and the most militant sector of the Palestinian people.

But in order to placate sceptics and zealots in his government outraged by the withdrawal plans, Sharon's cabinet

has decided to murder each and every Hamas leader it can find in the period ahead. He is determined that Israeli withdrawal will not be seen by the Palestinians as a victory, like Israel's pull-out from southern Lebanon in 2000 was. This led to a strengthening of the main Islamist force there – Hezbollah.

The planned evacuation from Gaza has to be seen in the broader context of the Sharon government's attempt to create facts on the ground and impose a final settlement on the Palestinians.

There are essentially three Zionist options being debated. The first – still a minority but virulent strand – is the forcible transfer of the Palestinians from the Gaza and West Bank, probably to Jordan. This is the preferred option of the 398,000 Jewish settlers that live on land stolen from Palestinians during the past 37 years. Half of these settlers – generally from the ex-USSR – have been settled in the past 15 years. Most of them see all the land of Palestine as "rightfully" theirs – on no other

grounds than their religious fanaticism.

However, support for the reactionary settlers inside Israel is waning. Most of the population would like to see them withdrawn, if it will achieve a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians.

The second option is a two-state solution – the traditional strategy of the Israeli Zionist left (like Peace Now and Gush Shalom), and the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation for the past 20 years. They want a Jewish state broadly within Israel's pre-1967 borders, while granting the Palestinians "self-determination" within a dependent West Bank and Gaza.

The Israeli "peace" movement is motivated by its desire to see Jews in Israel gain a measure of security, not by a desire to see the rights of the Palestinians respected. They refuse to accept that Palestinians should have any right of return to the lands they were expelled from in 1948, for example. And they hope that a two-state solution based on 1967 borders would take the sting out of the more radical elements in the Palestinian movement (like Hamas) who advocate an Islamic Palestinian state in the whole historic Palestine – including Israel.

The main fault line in this option – as a "democratic solution" – is that it insists on an ethnic Jewish state for the Israelis. This can be nothing other than an anti-democratic entity for the 20 per cent (and growing) Palestinian-Arab second-class citizens of Israel.

It also completely ignores the fact that Israel has since 1967 only been able to maintain the internal unity of its Jewish population through its policy of occupation and settlement-building, buying off minorities by granting them privileges at the expense of the Palestinians.

Any significant withdrawal from West Bank settlements would result in ethnic and class conflict with those sections of Israeli Jewish society whose livelihood depends on the spoils of occupation. The occupation may cost Israel its security, but an end to the occupation would cost it the cross-class unity of its Jewish population and possibly also the state's Jewish-exclusivist character.

In fact, Sharon is actively seeking to impose the only "realistic" – and most reactionary – variant of the two-state solution, one that is shaped by accommodation to the settlers. Israel informed the United States last month that it is prepared to withdraw from the entire Gaza Strip and six settlements in the West Bank. These are small settlements whose evacuation would provide more territorial continuity and roads to the Palestinians in a relatively large area of the northern West Bank.

Meanwhile, construction on the "secu-



Sharon and Bush share a joke

city wall" continues apace, stealing yet more land from the Palestinians in the West Bank, in order to protect the settlements already there, and leaving the Palestinians with a mockery of a "state" made up of discontinuous bits of land surrounded by Israeli checkpoints. Moreover, this would be a "state" that would have no sovereignty over its borders, airspace, or the right to arm itself.

No political force within Zionism will confront and dismantle the Jewish settlements. The Law of Return, which encourages Jews from around the world to settle in Israel, is fundamental to Israel's claim to be the "State of the Jewish People". But, barring a major wave of anti-semitism, the only way to attract significant numbers of Jewish immigrants is by promising them a west-

ern standard of living. Since there is little scope for settling new immigrants within Israel's pre-1967 borders, occupation and annexation of large swathes of the West Bank are essential.

The third option is for one single bi-national state. In the last year this has become increasingly aired and debated within Israeli and Palestinian society. On the one side, the Palestinian leadership has noted that the Sharon government refuses to negotiate over a genuine and viable state for the Palestinian people, and that the US refuses to force Israel to the negotiating table. They have increasingly hinted that, if this situation continues, then they may renounce their goal of a separate Palestinian state, and strive for rights and the votes inside one bi-national state.

They know that demography is on their side. The source of settlers is drying up and the Palestinian population in Israel and the occupied territories will form a majority before too long. This would be a major shift in strategy, effectively turning a struggle for national self-determination into an anti-apartheid struggle in which an oppressed majority struggle for their democratic rights against a minority.

Parts of the PLO leadership, including jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, hinted at this possible shift if Israel refuses to negotiate. In closing remarks at his trial, Barghouti warned Israelis that if they did not relinquish control of the territories, they would bury the Jewish state, saying that "if the occupation does not end unilaterally or through negotiations, then there is only one solution: one state for two peoples."

They reason that this struggle would force the Israelis to shoulder the burden of occupation, and mobilise international opinion behind the Palestinians as it was behind the black South Africans in the 1980s.

This prospect has also led some on the Zionist right to embrace a one-state solution. They argue for the construction of one state now, while the Jews are still in a majority, so they can set the rules and constitution of such a state in a way that would entrench the privileges of the Jewish population. Naturally, such a "pre-emptive", Jewish-dominated bi-national state would be inherently anti-democratic.

A democratic and just one-state solution is possible in Palestine. It requires that the Israelis recognise the historic wrong done to the Palestinians and recognises the right of Palestinians to return to their stolen lands. It requires that the Jews abandon all legal and economic privileges over the other inhabitants of the country.

But this requires the revolutionary overthrow of Zionism by the combined forces of those Jewish workers, who can be broken from it, and their oppressed Palestinian comrades. It also requires the expropriation of private property in industry and land, as only in this way can equity and prosperity be guaranteed for all citizens. It is also the only way to make irrelevant the irreconcilable claims to land, through the nationalisation of land and the co-operative working of it for all small farmers.

Palestinians rethink strategy

In the wake of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's assassination, a group of prominent Palestinians including Hanan Ashrawi and Sari Nusseibeh, placed an advertisement in the PLO's *al-Ayyam* newspaper condemning the murder and appealing for calm, writes *Marcus Chamoun*

While not calling upon the armed groups to disarm, and defending their right to resist the occupation, they nevertheless called upon Palestinians to "repress their rage and rise once again in a widespread popular intifada, that is based on clear goals and constructive rhetoric, with the fate of our people steered by the masses". They go on to say that "such an intifada would deny Sharon the opportunity to continue unleashing his assault against our people and would hinder his ability to impose his destructive agenda."

We can agree with such an assessment. The strategy of targeting Israeli civilians, and an uprising which has failed to build mass resistance is and always was flawed. The failure of Hamas to strike back at Israel following the assassination of its leader is being interpreted by Sharon as a sign of its weakness. Any uprising that relies upon armed force alone will inevitably face defeat when confronted with an immensely more powerful enemy.

The task of the moment is for the Palestinian resistance to re-group to pursue mass forms of struggle against the

occupation. The spontaneous mass protests that have broken out over the construction of the Wall in West Bank could be a starting-point for such a struggle. And, at least initially, such a change in strategy would have to mean the suspension of armed activity.

This need not mean a surrender, but an orderly retreat that would allow the Palestinians to make use of their strongest weapon – the involvement of the whole people, including workers, women and religious minorities, in undermining the occupation.

However, at this point we must part company with Ashrawi and Nusseibeh. As leading representatives of the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the West Bank, their agenda is a return to peaceful negotiations like those that followed the first Intifada and preceded the Oslo accords. Their emphasis, at least for western consumption, is therefore on the peaceful character of such a struggle, and not on its mass character.

By contrast, we believe that the "peaceful" (that is, unarmed) character of the first Intifada was one of its weaknesses, not one of its strengths. It allowed the Israeli state to kill Palestinians with impunity, and to exploit their exhaustion to force the PLO to sign the disastrous Oslo accords. The responsibility of the armed resistance groups must be to put their arms to use in defending the mass actions.

Scottish nursery nurses battle low pay with an indefinite strike

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Issue 285

Indefinite strikes are still a rare thing in Britain. But some 4,700 low-paid local authority nursery workers across Scotland have spent the whole of March on strike in an historic battle against low pay - and they're still fighting as April starts.

The mainly female UNISON members voted by a four-to-one margin in early February for a dramatic escalation in their long-running dispute with the New Labour-dominated Scottish local authority bosses' organisation, CoSLA. The last significant review of pay for nursery nurses in Scotland took place in 1988 - nearly 16 years ago. Currently, nursery staff on the basic grade have starting salaries of just £10,000, while workers who have spent more than 10 years in the job receive a mere £13,896. In recent years their jobs have become more demanding, with an increasing emphasis on child protection and support for vulnerable families.

The demand is for a national pay deal for all nursery nurses with pay starting at £14,000 and rising to £18,000. The council bosses have been both resisting the amount demanded and trying to divide the nurses by offering local deals. Unfortunately, the UNISON leadership, while continuing to insist publicly that only a national settlement is acceptable to members, has been involved at local level in negotiating deals. In a positive move a week into the all-out strike Angus Council nursery nurses rejected a deal negotiated by their local officials which had kept them out of the strike. This meant over 100 more nurses joined the strike for a national deal and a better offer.

National union officials were clearly shocked by the level of anger among members who had tried 10 months of limited industrial action. Widespread protests and lobbies resulted in a huge "yes" vote on a high turn-out. The strike has continued to be a very active one and is having a considerable effect on national Scottish politics. On the fifth day of the all-out, indefinite action several thousand strikers and their supporters marched through the streets of Glasgow for a rally addressed by the union's general secretary, Dave Prentis. Their protest included a sit-down outside the City Hall and George Square, scene in the past for bitter working class battles.

Pickets have been out visiting workplaces to argue their case and large collections have been taken all over Scotland. A 600-strong



lobby of the Scottish Parliament was held on 11 March, the day the Scottish Socialist Party moved a resolution in support of the strikers. Typically only one Labour MSP dared vote in support of the nurses and the resolution was voted down 77 to 44. One thing that has particularly incensed the strikers is that Scottish local councillors, the same bosses denying their claim, are about to award themselves a 'national pay claim' of £25,000 a year across Scotland. One rule as usual for the bosses, another for the workers.

Prentis, when he was in Glasgow, hailed the strikers for their "brave and dignified" conduct of the dispute. But warm words on a flying visit from London will not win a fight where the employers are clearly keen to ditch national pay bargaining and are prepared to encourage the parents of disabled children to denounce the strikers in the media.

By late March 11 of the 32 Scottish councils had reached agreement with UNISON officials, while council bosses in Glasgow and Edinburgh had indicated that they were prepared to resume negotiations, pushing CoSLA into an offer of new talks. There is a real danger that UNISON leaders might

decide to cut a deal that falls short of the national pay claim to end what they see as an expensive strike for the union.

The union shells out £15 a day in strike pay, which clearly needs to be supplemented by donations from trade unionists across Scotland and the whole of Britain. Thus far, strikers have conducted two fundraising tours of UNISON branches and other workplaces across London, with visits to the North West of England already planned.

This is a great start and shows that the UNISON United Left is making a positive difference in organising speaking tours and raising the profile of the strike across branches and regions. In addition to the financial support, though, the strikers also need to up the pressure on the CoSLA bosses and the surest way of doing this is to fight for a day of solidarity action, including strikes in defiance of the anti-union laws, across local authorities and the public sector in Scotland generally. Activists should be making the arguments now for such a show of support that would reverberate from the Edinburgh parliament down to Gordon Brown's Downing Street residence.

The nursery nurses' fight presents a great

opportunity to turn the May Day bank holiday weekend and transform it into a real celebration of working class struggle in the here and now. If the strike has not been won by then the whole of Scotland should be brought out on 4 May in a workers' extension to the weekend, with rallies up and down Scotland.

Meanwhile, in England and Wales, local government workers are facing a major attack on pay, terms and conditions, revealed in the bosses' offer of a three-year pay deal that offers an average wage rise of 11 pence an hour. Rank and file members need to start fighting for a national ballot for strike action as soon as possible, and take a leaf from the Scottish nursery workers by raising the call from the outset for an indefinite strike to win.

● The nursery nurses urgently need money to continue and win this battle. Please make cheques payable to "Nursery Nurses' Campaign Fund" and send them to Unison, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX. To arrange for a speaker from the strike at your union/community group meeting, phone 07986 422 203.

“ I'm saying to people that the government has got £6 billion for war, yet they say they can't pay us a decent wage. The employers and the Scottish Executive thought we were just a bunch of women who would give up after a couple of days. Well, we've shown we won't be trodden on.

It's clear to me now that one big reason why they won't give us the regrading and pay rise we deserve is that it will set an example for others. They are worried other people might jump on the bandwagon. I say, 'Good.' In fact, other people shouldn't wait but should get on the bandwagon now. ”

Margaret Kopicki, a nursery nurse at Torbain nursery, Kirkcaldy

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