

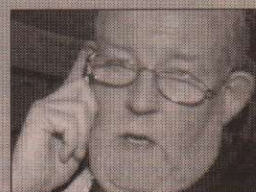
Preparations for protesting at the 2005 G8 summit – pages 4 and 5



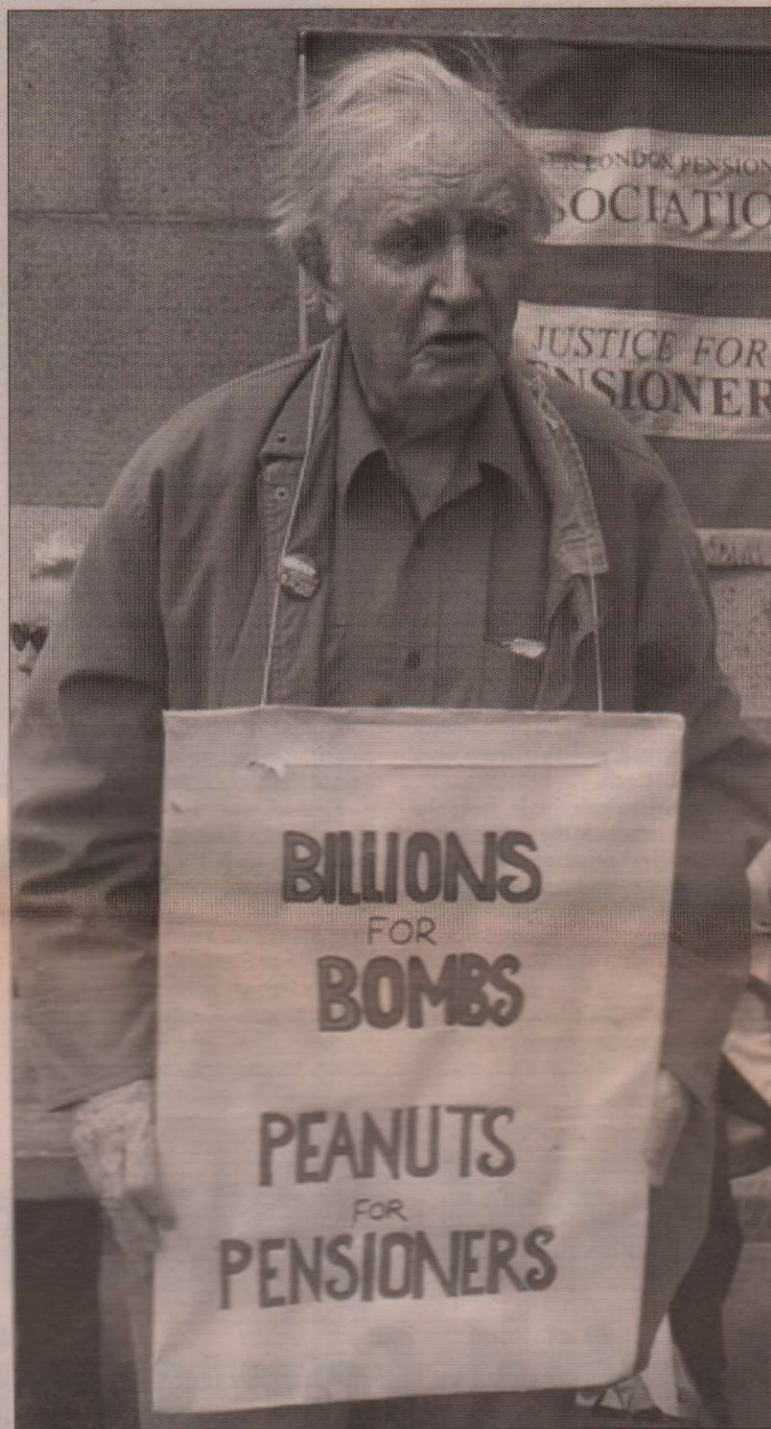
From banquets to barricades – how the 1905 Russian revolution began – page 14



Labour's latest attacks on our civil rights – pages 8 and 9



Labour's great pension robbery



New Labour has launched an all out attack on public sector workers' pensions. Its pensions Green Paper has laid plans for:

- raising the retirement age for all from 60 to 65
- raising the early retirement threshold from 50 to 55
- forcing employees to pay more towards their pension while allowing bosses (councils, the NHS, the government etc) to pay less
- replacing the final salary pension scheme, linked to end of career earnings, with a lower "career average" pension.

Even the Trades Union Congress has been forced to recognise that combined with attacks on final salary pension schemes in the private sector, this is "the first serious attempt to cut pay and conditions since the Second World War."

It is a real kick in the teeth for public sector workers. In return for years of low-paid service to society nurses, teachers, civil servants, local government workers, firefighters, ambulance drivers will all be condemned to work

longer and receive smaller pensions once they are finally allowed to stop working. Many of the low paid will be subjected to pension poverty.

Brendan Barber, the TUC general secretary, described Britain's pension's crisis as the number one issue in election year. Trade unionists, he said, would want to know where the political parties stood on this issue.

Seems like Brendan doesn't read the papers. We know where they stand. And we don't like what any of them are offering.

The Liberal Democrats claim to favour decent pensions, but wherever they run councils, as in Liverpool, they sack so many workers they could probably afford to give the handful left a reasonable slice when they retire.

The Tories favour big pensions - for the big bosses.

Labour is supposed to be the party that supports pensioners. In the 1970s Barbara Castle roused workers to vote for them by promising decent pensions for all and implementing an earnings related state pension. The Tories soon abolished this and Blair and Chancellor Brown

quickly made it clear that New Labour would not be restoring the link between earnings and pensions. The basic state pension has been left to wither throwing millions onto the Chancellor's means tested pensioner benefits.

Now Labour is outdoing the Tories for sheer vindictiveness. It is leaving the obscene million pound plus City pension payouts untouched but is dismantling pension rights for its own low paid workers. Work them till they drop, then pay them a pittance. This is what Brown, Prescott and Blair are offering.

Mind you, Labour's fabled pension generosity does still apply to two sets of public servants - overpaid MPs, who already have the best pension rights in Europe, and the judges, who threatened to resign en masse if the government dared touch their big pensions. Of course the government backed down.

Public sector workers need to use this example and stand up to Labour's pension grab. United and effective strike action across the public sector can throw back this attack, and win decent pensions for all.

• More coverage on page two

Pension double standards

MPs have just voted themselves the most generous of all public sector schemes, with rights to a final salary based pension accruing on a 1/40th basis. MPs only have to work 20 years to achieve a pension worth half their salary compared to a nurse who has to work for 40 years. Today's MPs can look forward to a yearly pension of around £35,000 a year. If Tony Blair remains an MP for another 8 years he will receive a pension of £117,000.

And the top bosses do even better than MPs. Lord Browne of British Petroleum has a pension which is already worth £860,000 a year on top of his £3 million salary package. By the time he retires it will be even greater. Brian Moffat, former chair of Corus steel makers, who sacked more than 10,000 workers saying "we make money not steel", received £300,000 in pension contributions as a reward.

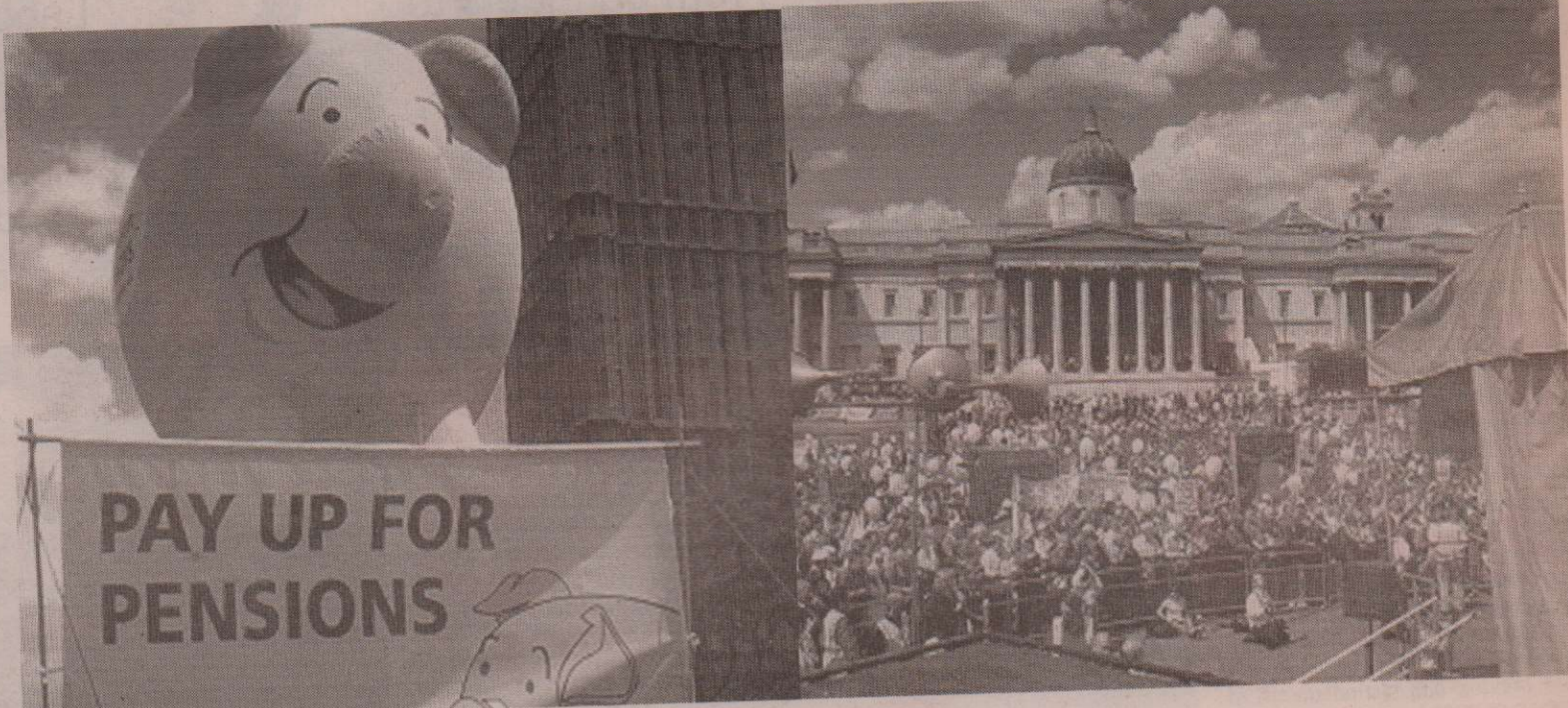
United action for united aims

With so many workers facing a future of poverty in retirement it's time to take action. The TUC itself has muttered something about a day of action in February. What kind of action? Brendan Barber, the TUC general secretary, declines to mention this in his New Year message. The fact is, he is a Labour-loving bureaucrat who will not want anything to rock the boat in an election year. So expect the day of action to be a day of anything but action.

More promising have been the noises coming from the PCS, Unison, the GMB and other unions with public sector members. The left leader of the civil servants' union, Mark Serwotka, was the first to raise the idea of a joint public sector strike and pushed for this at the 15 November rally against redundancies in the civil service. In his speech he pointed out that "Low pay means low pensions with the average civil service pension as little as £5,000 a year."

A joint meeting in mid December discussed the possibility of a strike in the run up to the election. Unison boss, Dave Prentis, warned, "This is a position that Unison cannot accept and will oppose. It will lead to conflict between Unison and the government, if not this year then next." Nothing definite emerged from the December meeting in terms of joint action, but the unions involved are undertaking consultations in order to assess whether or not to call ballots in February and March with action, if agreed, probably in the week starting 21 March.

The problem with this is, given the scale of the attacks in the public sector on jobs, with privatisation schemes, on conditions, pay and pensions, limiting action to a one day strike on the pensions issue alone is not going to defeat this round of attacks. The one day strike by the PCS did not stop Labour's onslaught on jobs. Likewise, Unison's campaign of one day strikes on pay a couple of years back did not deliver the goods.



TUC organised pensions demonstration

The proposed day of action is far enough away from the election to avoid embarrassing Blair in May or June (by which time Unison will be supplying Labour with its usual fleet of vehicles and army of officials to get the vote out). Labour will no doubt return to power claiming a mandate for its "pension reform".

So what should the joint union committee that is planning this campaign do? How could we stop Labour's plans? Here's our New Year message.

First off, mass workplace meetings should elect a team of town/city organisers from each of the unions. They would be charged with organising in every town and city a joint union council to co-ordinate a series of demos, lobbies and protests in the run up to strike action on 21 March. They would campaign in town centres, in the government offices, on council estates, at schools and universities getting the message across about the attack on pensions

from all quarters, winning support from the public for their strike action.

These local councils of action should be opened up to service users, tenants associations, students, pensioner groups and so on. There are already many locally organised pensioners' groups and forums linked to the National Pensioners Convention, campaigning against poverty. These joint councils would also enable public sector workers to link up with private sector workers, many of whom have already faced cuts in their pensions where their companies have switched from final salary to money purchase schemes. These schemes have off loaded responsibility for pension fund shortfalls from the bosses onto the backs of individual workers.

In the unions we must ensure that the ballots for action are won and that the action is open ended. We wouldn't have to go back after one day. Depending on our strong points we could start to bring sections into all out strike -

funding them through the unions and the networks our organisers have built in the localities. We would, to paraphrase the Blairites, begin to co-ordinate "joined up strike action" over joined up issues - no more cuts, no more privatisations, increase pay, defend and extend existing pension rights, tax the rich to fund a massive increase in public spending.

And if the Blairistas stood firm - we would guarantee that come election day not a single civil servant and not a single local government worker would work: no staffing the stations, no counting the ballots. Let them try and run an election without them. Would this be holding the country to ransom? Too true. But in this case those of us demanding the ransom would be the vast majority and those holding out against us a tiny minority.

We could do this a whole lot more effectively if the big talkers at the top of Unison, PCS, GMB cut the talk and

called a public sector wide general strike until our pensions, pay, jobs and services were safe.

With this level of action we could link up with the private sector workers and begin to fight, not only in defence of our existing pensions, but united to win a decent pension for all - not just for the future but for pensioners now. This means we must use the fantastic wealth of the finance and pension companies for the many not the few. If the bosses say there is not enough money there big business should be made to pay for the pension funds from their vast profits. And the richest 1 per cent whose wealth has doubled since New Labour came to power can pay in as well through a wealth tax. The pension funds themselves must be nationalised and the pension funds themselves, that are after all only deferred wages belonging to the workers, should be placed under the direct control of the workers and pensioners.

Local government workers build for strikes over pensions

By GR McColl

A one-day strike by more than 700,000 local authority workers across England and Wales against the Government's attacks on their pension scheme could take place before the widely predicted May general election. Unison, Britain's biggest union, has launched a consultative ballot among its members in councils, which looks set to lead to an official ballot for a series of strikes.

The consultation comes in the wake of a decision by the union's service group executive for local government and a well-supported TUC lobby of Parliament against the proposals in mid-November. The Camden branch witnessed its biggest general meeting in nearly nine years in early December as 200 members packed the borough's council chamber and voted almost unanimously for a resolution backing industrial action by Unison and urging a one day strike across the whole of the public sector in the run up to the general election against the pension attacks.

The feeling in Camden is by no means unique. There is widespread anxiety and anger at proposals that would, with effect from 1 April this year:

- Raise the minimum retirement age for a full pension from 60 to 65.
- Effectively abolish early retirement before age 55.

The Government's attacks on the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), would also include an increase in an employee's contribution from the current 6 to 7 per cent or in some cases as much as 10 per cent for those on higher salaries. Unison has estimated this would cost refuse collectors £1,500 extra a year, social workers £1,300 a year and NHS porters almost £1,000 a year.

Crucially, for many workers on low pay the definition of pensionable pay would also change, taking into account basic rates only and so excluding shift bonuses and similar additional payments for weekend and overtime working. This would be an especially harsh blow, slashing annual pension payouts by some 30 per cent.

New Labour and the other major parties are claiming that the LGPS is in crisis, not least because retired council employees have been so bold as to live longer. The reality is that, with the exception of those authorities that declared a "holiday" on pension contributions in the midst of the stock market boom of the 1990s, there is no immediate problem. The real reason is to decrease public expenditure by eroding the workers conditions.

The consultation exercise is set to close on Friday 21 January. The result cannot be taken for granted. It is crucial that the pro-New Labour bureaucrats who lead the union do not have the excuse of a low turnout for avoiding a strike that could prove a major embarrassment to the Government. Workers Power urges all Unison members to vote "yes" and to press for shop, workplace and branch-wide meetings that outline the nature of the attacks and put the case for strike action up to and including indefinite action.

Where appropriate Unison activists should be encouraging members of other affected unions such as the GMB and T&G to press for ballots in line with Unison's or, alternatively, urging them along with non members to join Unison without delay.

Rank and file activists should learn some lessons from the experience of the French public sector workers in spring 2003: there co-ordination of different sectors and preparation for the strikes by the actual strikers themselves played an important role. The French public sector used co-ordinating bodies to link up different sections of the public sector and this in turn spread to private sector workers. However because the strikers left the control of the action and negotiations in the hands of the union leaders the strikers were sold out.

What we say

- Defend the LGPS - vote "YES" in the ballot.
- For strike action against local government - up to and including indefinite strike action.
- For one day pre election strike action across the whole public sector as a step towards the all-out action needed to win.

Unison activists should link up with other public sector unionists and pensioners groups to form local action committees. From this strong base, they can then begin to assert control at the national level, crucial if the momentum is not to be broken and victory gained

Liverpool social workers' strike: anatomy of a betrayal

After more than four months of all out strike action Liverpool's child care social workers are being forced back to work – by their own union, Unison.

Workers Power was with some of the strikers just before Christmas at a fundraising benefit put on by the newly formed Liverpool Social Forum. The £250 raised was a welcome Christmas present for the strikers.

And there was nothing downbeat about their mood. They were as determined to win as they had been from the first day of the strike back in August.

Just before this benefit a mass meeting of more than 500 Unison members from across the council had discussed how to support the 150 strikers. The meeting was angry at the way the strikers have been treated by Liverpool's Liberal Democrat controlled city council. But they were also angry with the Unison regional officials who were busy trying to engineer a sell out at Acas.

The meeting agreed to call a ballot for city wide action in support of the strikers. In fact the mass meeting was ready for a walk out there and then.

The strike was over management's attempts to introduce cheap, unqualified labour into the child care services. By bullying staff, by unilaterally increasing caseloads, and by undermining union agreements the bosses tried to demoralise the social workers into accepting new terms and conditions.

But the workers, some of them

By Mark Hoskisson

with almost 30 years in the job, did not want to see an important social provision turned into a "one-stop service" covered by untrained staff. They knew that behind the council's move lay two wider objectives – widespread privatisation of social services and derecognition of the union.

For both of these reasons the strikers have stood firm on two issues in the proposed settlement of the strike – they want the management to include the word "qualified staff" and they want a no-victimisation clause.

The very fact that the bosses refused these two demands shows their long-term goals. They want unqualified staff and the right to victimise the strike leaders with impunity.

Every Unison member at the mass meeting could see this too. And they were ready to fight back. Even GMB members who had accepted a settlement on the bosses' terms agreed to re-ballot for action when it became clear that sackings were in the offing. Unfortunately, this decision came too late for some GMB members who have already been made redundant.

The Liverpool dispute has had national implications given the overall crisis of social work across Britain, where understaffed, overworked teams are left to pick up the pieces in the wake of family breakdowns and mental illness, invariably worsened by poverty. But the Unison officials kept the dispute



Jon Rogers, the United Left candidate for Unison general secretary, played an honourable role opposing the sellout

in isolation and did next to nothing to build support for the strikers regionally, much less nationally.

The threat of the strike spreading galvanised the union's bureaucracy into

prompt action – to sell out the original dispute. They immediately conceded on the two main sticking points, so opening the door to the recruitment of unqualified staff and to victimisations.

Unison's bureaucracy – typified by Dave Prentis – is mouthy. It talks a good fight – albeit in the kind of platitudes and clichés that are second nature to desk bound officials. But it is yet to deliver one. And every time a group of members do come out on all out strike, whether in Liverpool or in Scotland's nurseries, the bureaucracy does its best to sell them short.

At the national industrial action committee the regional officials from the North West proposed that the Liv-

erpool strike be ended by 4 January (amended to 11 January) and the majority voted this through. The left attempted to delete the fixed date but were defeated. The right claimed that they were pulling the plug on the strike with the Liverpool branch's blessing – despite the representations of both strikers and members of the city Unison branch at the meeting. Both sets of representatives argued that the dispute was not resolved and that the service and its workforce had to be protected by a clearer agreement.

The bureaucracy ignored all this. They were pleased just to have blocked what could have been a city wide public sector strike in early 2005 that could have turned the tables on the Lib Dems by bringing more sections into dispute with the council.

Unison, through their mouthpiece Stephanie Thomas, announced to the *Liverpool Echo* that: "the strike is over". Shabby. So much for the television ads that tell potential Unison members that they will have the protection of the union. The ad should have said - unless you strike!

One of the strike's leaders, Alec May, expressed the concerns of many when he said: "We are concerned there will be no protection for people like myself."

The way forward for the strikers and for all workers employed by the "Capital of Privatised Culture" is to make sure that the strike ballot agreed in December is activated the minute the managers try and sack a social worker or victimise a striker.

Jon Rogers, the United Left candidate for Unison general secretary, played an honourable role in opposing the sell out of the Liverpool strikers on the nation industrial action committee. Now Rogers and the United Left as a whole must use the campaign as a means of waging war on the bureaucracy generally and transforming Unison into a union that is controlled by its rank and file and really does protect its members by fighting to win.

NUJ launches Fair Pay Now campaign

By Keith Spencer

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has kicked off 2005 with the launch of its "Fair Pay Now" campaign for media workers.

A national NUJ meeting last November called for a series of actions to raise wages in the industry – especially on regional newspapers.

The past couple of years have seen successful action on local papers including strikes. Last year journalists on the Newsquest-owned News Shopper series in south east England won an average 6 per cent increase. Newsquest, which owns 240 papers in the UK, have also faced action at its Bolton and Bradford titles. The *Belfast Telegraph*, part of the Independent group, was also disrupted by strike action last year that secured staff an above inflation pay rise.

Meanwhile, after gaining recognition at the Telegraph group, the NUJ won a pay increase, which included a rise in daily rates from £80 to £110 for freelance staff. Staff had been subjected to a pay freeze as former owner Lord Black plundered the coffers to subsidise his extravagant parties and wife's shopping sprees.

The campaign comes on the back of an NUJ survey of journalists' wages. It found that:

- Nearly half of journalists in the UK earn less than the national average salary of £26,151.

- One in five earn less than the Council of Europe decency threshold of £15,690 a year.
- Female journalists earn just 82 per cent of male colleagues' wages.

The worst employers are the regional newspapers. At the meeting, delegates heard one journalist on a regional paper for 20 years report that he and his family claim tax credits.

Newsquest pays hundreds of its journalists on local papers starting rates of just £12,000 and on local London papers graduate trainees earn 35 per cent less than a graduate trainee for McDonalds.

Yet Newsquest made nearly £70 million profit in the UK in 2002 – up by 80 per cent on the previous year. Its executives were rewarded with a 43 per cent rise in earnings to £1.1 million; yet staff received a below inflation wage rise (a real pay cut) at many of its papers.

Johnston Press made £128 million profit in 2003 yet pays senior journalists on its Lancashire newspapers just £16,000.

Press Association chief executive Paul Potts enjoyed a 67 per cent pay increase last year while the Press Association adverts for sub-editors recommend candidates claim tax credits to top up their wages!

The poor pay stems from derecog-

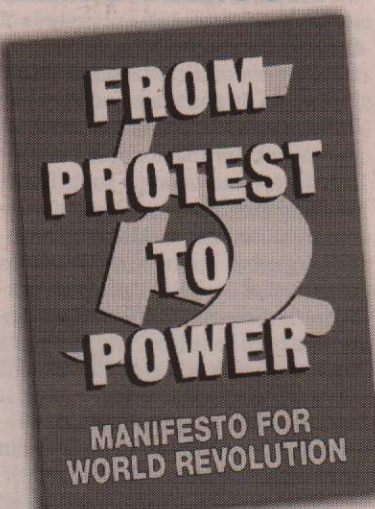
inition of the NUJ across much of the industry during the Thatcher years. There are numerous instances of pay rates stagnating or declining. In 1986 journalists earned nearly a third more than secondary school teachers, now the average is two per cent below teachers. NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear said: "Over the years journalists have lost out on more than £1,500 compared to police officers, almost £5,700 compared to those in higher education, and more than £11,000 to secondary school teachers."

Where the union has regained recognition, wages and conditions have improved markedly. At Reed Business Information in Greater London, which publishes business magazines, rates for journalists start at £23,200 as a result of the union campaigning for a grading structure and higher pay since regaining recognition in 2001.

A national campaign could reverse the decline in wages. But rather than leaving workers on individual newspapers to take action in isolation, the NUJ should co-ordinate and organise action nationally against the big newspaper conglomerates.

Low pay is a disgrace in an industry where shareholders and directors are raking it in. This year media workers should start making the news by striking to win better pay and conditions.

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



Available from Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to MRCI

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 willful 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.

The are G8 we are six billion Plan the protests for 2005

By Andy Yorke

The G8 summit is an annual meeting of the leaders of the eight most powerful countries in the world, and it's coming to Britain 6-8 July 2005 to meet at the posh golf resort of Gleneagles, Scotland. Tony Blair, George Bush, the Russian president Vladimir Putin, butcher of Chechnya, will all be there hobnobbing and plotting the next steps in their bid for global domination - but they won't be alone.

Tens of thousands of protestors from across Europe and the world are planning to converge on the G8 meeting and expose the nature of this secretive summit. Activists are already meeting in Britain to get organised and make the protests a success. Anti-poverty NGOs are organising a demonstration to pressure the G8 governments to "make poverty history", starting off a week of protests that will culminate in attempts to disrupt the summit itself. We need to get the ball rolling now to make the protests against it as effective as possible.

The anticapitalist movement that emerged in 1999 saw increasingly radical demonstrations that sharply exposed global capitalism's poverty and the hypocrisy of the major governments and multinationals behind it. At Gleneagles Tony Blair is determined to give globalisation's image a polish with his own brand of caring capitalism, putting Africa and global warming on the agenda of this G8.

He has set up an Africa Commission of African businessmen and G8 ministers to discuss how more free trade and imperialist intervention can help Africa, while the Kyoto agreement will be brought back from the dead by yet more false promises on action to stop global warming.

Blair's plan is to show that the G8 isn't just about power politics but solving global problems that people are concerned about, as a way of splitting his critics and diverting attention and sympathy away from the protestors. This is a cruel joke: the last time the G8 met in Britain, seven years ago in 1998, they promised to cancel a fraction of the third world debt, just \$100 billion, or less than five per cent of the whole debt of more than \$2 trillion. Yet they haven't even cancelled half of what they promised, while Britain and the US alone have spent over \$100 billion on their war for oil in Iraq!

A coalition of development NGOs and charities called Make Poverty History has been launched to mobilise for the G8 summit, demanding cuts to the third world debt and increased aid. This demonstration will take place on 2 July, the Saturday five days before the G8 meeting starts and over 100 miles from Gleneagles. The danger is that this demonstration will hardly make front page news, let alone history. On its own, it may not make any impact on public consciousness, nor of course the G8 itself.

After all, the huge anti-war demonstrations failed to stop the war because they were not linked to more militant action: strikes and direct action. While a good start to the week of protest this demonstration won't be enough.

In Scotland a second, more promising initiative called the G8 Alternatives



Protests at the G8 Summit in Evian, France 2003

network has been formed. It includes NGOs, campaigns against war and racism, the Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party and trade union bodies such as the Dundee Trades Council, some local union branches, and the TGWU Glasgow district. The aim is to protest at the G8 summit itself with thousands attending, a convergence centre to facilitate this, and a countersummit that debates the G8 and the alternatives to capitalist globalisation. G8 Alternatives is already in touch with ATTAC France, so the protests will be developed in co-operation with the European Social Forum, which called for the protests at its London meeting in November 2004.

Other than a commitment to peaceful protests, the G8 Alternatives is still not clear on what it will organise: will it be a demonstration nearby, or an attempt to block or shut down the G8 meeting as happened in Evian, France at the 2003 G8? The danger given the organisations in charge is that a token demonstration will be organised that fails to confront the G8 and instead ends up as a rally or concert.

Our goal must be to build a mass mobilisation to shut down the G8 in Gleneagles. That is the best way to expose the real nature of these international meetings and restart the debate on globalisation and world poverty.

At the same time, we can regroup the tens of thousands brought onto the streets by the mass anti-war protests of the past five years. Our aim must be to build a real anti-capitalist movement in Britain on the scale and with the inclusiveness of the Italian social forum movement. For that we need to establish deeper and stronger roots in the working class, by involving the trade union movement and local community organisations in the mobilisations to protest at the G8. A call for a blockade of the G8 on the first day of the summit has been issued by Dissent!, a direct action network set up by libertarians to mobilise against the G8 summit. It includes Scottish groups but has libertarian organisations involved from throughout Britain.

It is excellent that a clear, open call for a blockade to shut down the G8 has been issued. But can Dissent! deliver one?

As a network, it is much narrower than the other initiatives, organised at

its core by anarchists and radical activists united by two ideas: a desire to organise direct action to shut the G8 (good) and against any involvement of the Socialist Workers Party or even any socialist groups at all. This sectarianism towards groups that they claim are "authoritarian" for having centralised organisations means that Dissent! will never involve any significant forces from the trade union movement. To attempt to revive the anti-capitalist movement from such small forces, without a major orientation to the labour movement, and to attempt to brand it anarchist to boot, is a recipe for failure.

Instead, our model should be the mass anti-war movement that was built in Britain mass demonstrations and walk-outs, and - at its best - pockets of strikes and work stoppages. We need to build broad anti-G8 groups right from the start, based on supporting and participating in all the protests against the G8, including the blockade. To those pacifists and others who do not want to participate in direct action, we should be able to say, "Fine, you can help organise other aspects of the protest. But don't play into Bush and Blair's hands by splitting the movement."

Such broad mobilising bodies will be the best ground on which to challenge the SWP or trade union bureaucrats over their ideas for a token protest, winning as many people to the idea of a blockade as possible. If we're not even in the same room or on the same email lists as the reformists and vacillating organisations like the SWP, then we certainly won't have any chance of breaking their hold over significant sections of workers and youth.

The same is true about the undoubtedly well-grounded complaint that these organisations strangle movements, by shutting down the space for open-ended political discussion, establishing their own priorities behind closed doors, and then ram them through meetings packed with their own supporters. But at the height of the anti-war movement, such bureaucratic manoeuvres were inoperable as the mass of new - and veteran - activists wanted real debates and brought their own ideas for action.

If we stick with the tactics of the anarchists or the NGOs and trade union leaders, then the G8 protests could turn

out to be a one-off event. That happened after the 18 June protests in London 1999, and after the million strong 15 February demonstration two years ago. If we repeat this pattern with no eye to the future, we will sooner or later demoralise the movement. Then Blair and his robber friends will have seen off the first mass challenge to their rule in the new century.

The key to transforming the G8 protests into the start of something bigger and more permanent is the idea of a countersummit. The G8 Alternatives and a small national gathering of local social forums in December have put out the call for a countersummit, and the idea met with support at the December national Dissent! gathering too.

Our aim should be to bring the movement together in a democratic assembly that can create an ongoing united organisation, and continue to build its local roots. Workers Power supporters are agitating to turn the countersummit into a real UK Social Forum, where

trade unionists, students, NGO activists and others can discuss all the issues facing the movement and debate and amend a declaration of action against the G8. Then the local anti-G8 groups can leave Scotland with a clear and united sense of purpose about what we are going to do next.

But we can't wait for a countersummit in July to begin to achieve this unity in action, we need to start now if we are to come up with as co-ordinated a response to the G8 as possible. We need to assemble all these forces locally - Make Poverty History, G8 Alternatives, Dissent! - along with other local organisations and groups in open, regular meetings to overcome this and set the mobilisation off on the right track.

Tony Blair wants to use the Gleneagles summit to give the G8 a makeover, with a £40,000 logo, a J8 website to cram pro-G8 propaganda about global citizenship down the throats of students, and a caring and sharing agenda on African poverty and climate change to make the G8 capitalist bandwagon look like BandAid. A blockade of the G8 could draw in the radical youth, capture the media's attention and puncture the spin - maybe even drive the capitalists out of town and create a mass anticapitalist movement in Britain. What a G8 opportunity - let's do it!

More meetings of both G8 Alternatives and the Dissent! network will take place in the new year to shape the protests further. Check the websites below for updates. An international meeting to mobilise against the G8 will take place internationally on 26-27 February in Tuebingen in Southern Germany, open to all those involved or interested in radical resistance to the 2005 G8 Summit.

www.esf-democracy.org
www.dissent.org.uk
www.makepovertyhistory.org
www.g8alternatives.org.uk

Anti-Capitalism

SUMMIT SIEGES & SOCIAL FORUMS

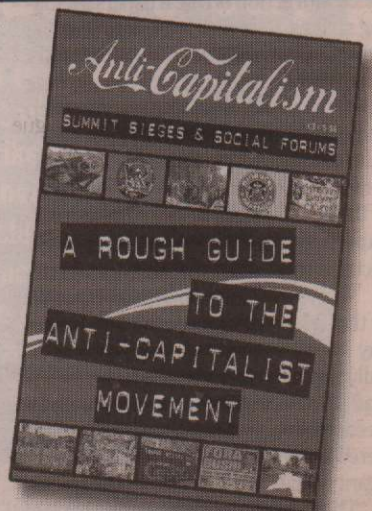
A new pamphlet from the League for the Fifth International.

It surveys the global movement, from its origins in Chiapas and Seattle, through the writings of its principal theorists, and the history of its summit sieges and its social forums.

Unapologetically partisan, it argues that to rid the globe of capitalism, the movement must take a big step towards the formation of a new world party of social revolution.

It is indispensable reading for anyone who wants to make another world not just a possibility, but a reality.

Available now from:
**League for the Fifth International
BCM 7750
London WC1N 3XX**



£3 (GBP) - UK
£4 (GBP) - Europe
£6 (GBP) - Rest of the world
Make cheques payable to: MRCI
Price includes postage and packaging

European Social Forum fails to map out strategy for struggle

By Joy MacReady

An Extraordinary Assembly of the European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Paris, on 18-19 December 2004. Over 300 people from social movements, trade unions and political parties from at least 16 countries participated in the weekend.

Despite the fact that a series of documents, had been submitted via the e-list, from ATTAC-France and Attac Europe, the Italian social forum and others, which evaluated the London ESF and also made proposals for the future of the movement, its organising meetings, the role of parties and so on – the meeting still lacked focus on debating and resolving these issues.

Because there was no structure to the discussion or a way of formally proposing concrete measures – such as a resolution that could be debated and amended – the meeting was once more a near endless parade of points of view. The League for the Fifth International had indeed submitted just such a resolution but it was resolutely ignored, just as our previous attempts to bring something out of the chaos have been since Florence 2002.

Transparency, inclusiveness and democracy were the buzzwords of the extraordinary assembly. The French and Italians uttered their out of the frustration they so evidently felt with the London ESF process and the control over the event exercised by London Mayor Ken Livingstone's officials and the concessions they made to the TUC and the ETUC bureaucrats.

The complete capitulation of the Socialist Workers Party to the Mayor and trade union bureaucrats meant that decisions taken at the European preparatory meetings (the highest decision making body) were often changed or completely ignored by the UK organisers. Thus the final demonstration was advertised as a Stop the War event and no "continentals" were allowed to speak on the platform in Trafalgar Square.

Many critical assessments of the London ESF were circulated on the ESF e-groups prior to Paris. The Italians (including members of the Cobas, Cgil and Fiom unions and Rifondazione Comunista) were the most critical of the British organisers' method, pointing out the inability of the UK committee to overcome the conflicts and tensions that surfaced through the process between the political parties, the unions and the grassroots organisations. The Italians also stressed the need to reconnect the movement to activity, to unite theory and practice.

The French (including Attac, Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire, and the CGT, G10 Solidaire and FSU unions) were also very critical of many of the same aspects. The SWP, on the other hand, with their usual Pollyanna optimism, lauded the London event as an enormous success. SWP leader Alex Callinicos tried to shift the blame for any shortfalls onto the horizontalists (a broad range of libertarian and liberal activists, united by their hostility to party type organisation) and the "tiny sects", whose "violence" they claimed was responsible for any problems that arose.

Indeed, Callinicos' written submission to the debate plumbed new depths, claiming that the anarchist group, the Wombles, had a "history of intermittent violence". Neither he, nor anyone else in the SWP has been able to



Delegates to the meeting in Paris

back up this slander with the slightest shred of evidence. On the contrary, Callinicos went on to suggest that Workers Power members were responsible for "breaking up" the plenary session on the occupation. In fact, our entirely peaceful protest merely demanded the removal of an uninvited Iraqi collaborator from the platform. But, rather than cause a row with the TUC who insisted on his presence, Lindsey German from Stop the War and the SWP wound up the meeting.

Way Forward

Throughout the day, the emphasis remained on the need for radical change within the "methodology" of the ESF process. But it became clear to those who know the code that the different wings of the movement had quite different ideas of what reforms they wanted. The French LCR position – well illustrated by Pierre Khalifa's intervention – wanted the ESF to develop as a political movement, taking on issues like resistance to the attacks on workers social gains, pensions and jobs (the Lisbon agenda) and the European Constitution.

The method behind this proposal is that of the Fourth International. They want the movement to grow over into a kind of international; not to openly fight for a Fifth – revolutionary – International, but to nudge the left reformist, syndicalist and radical mass forces that make up the ESF into a political bloc.

This schema repeats on an international scale the tried and failed tactic of strategically entering the Workers Party (PT) of Brazil, a tactic which has left workers and landless farmers unprepared for Lula's attacks and the FI's section split down the middle. The LCR's "realism" about how far each strand of the movement is prepared to go is in fact a cover for their opportunism and refusal to argue for what they really believe for fear of the reformists running away.

The Italian point of view, put most clearly by Raffaella Bollini, started from the need to re-examine the methodology of the social forum in order for the movement to disseminate itself more widely and spread to and involve

different networks, different struggles. Luciano Muhlbauer warned against the first signs of "institutionalism" in the London ESF process. The Italians want more democracy with stronger and broader local roots, but want to maintain a strictly social, not a political ESF. Piero Bernocchi proposed holding assemblies every two to three months in order to review our activity and prepare for the period ahead.

The SWP, on the other hand, want to preserve the movement as a "united front of a special type," and keep it narrowly focussed on the issue of the Iraq war. Alex Callinicos, with his fulsome praise for Jacques Nikonoff of Attac, made it clear he sympathises with the Stalinists' determination to prevent the ESF transforming itself into a true international movement. Nikonoff can do what he pleases in France as long as he leaves Callinicos with the British franchise. The SWP can easily control its own bogus "anticapitalist movement" in Britain (Globalise Resistance), concentrate on Stop the War and its electoral wing Respect and hope to build their party out of it.

This difference of perspective came to a head in the working group that met on Saturday night. The LCR wanted to synthesise the discussion and come back to the plenary meeting with a set of proposals already agreed and thus avoid a debate between counterposed proposals and a democratic decision, involving all.

The Italians wanted to give all proposals equal voice within the assembly. In the end, Sophie Zafari from the LCR summed up a set of proposals the next day – as usual totally omitting the more radical ones. In this undemocratic process whoever has control of the chair effectively decides for the meeting.

LSI proposals

The League for the Fifth International put forward a resolution to the assembly calling for an elected provisional standing commission (open and transparent so it is clear who is making the decisions) to develop proposals on organisation for the Assembly of the Social Movements to adopt. This commission could also develop and oversee a coherent campaign of

resistance and sustained actions against neo-liberal capitalism, imperialism and war – i.e. an action programme.

In our intervention, we also addressed the problem of representivity that had been raised by a number of others. How can the movement become more democratic? Should the large national and international organisations – unions, confederations, NGOs, networks – hold all the votes? How can radical grassroots activists be included? Should parties be allowed in?

We supported the idea of large organisations, including political parties, having votes in assemblies, but on one condition: that they have a record of and commitment to fighting neoliberalism, racism and war. This will allow us to exert pressure on the official leaders, rather than give them the right to silence us.

We also proposed a drive to set up local units of the movement, social forums, co-ordinations, etc. These forums could do two things: implement the actions decided at national and international level; and allow representation from below at the national and international levels.

Also the standing commission – because it was elected – would have the ability to take decisions and establish priorities for the movement. This would overcome the still very strong tendency to national centredness and look at the movement from a European and indeed a global perspective.

It would avoid such conflicts as the 19 March demonstration, where the Assembly of the Social Movements called for a European mobilisation against neo-liberal attacks and war but the SWP has "opted out" and compelled all the IST sections to hold national anti-war demonstrations.

Although our resolution was not discussed, the need for a commission (though not elected!) was proposed as part of the conclusion announced by Sophie Zafari. Merci!

The commission envisioned would break into two working groups: one would look at the proposal for methodology and the development of the programme; and the other would look at the functioning and preparation of the

European Preparatory Assembly in the run-up to Athens 2006. These working groups would also meet together to discuss their proposals. This commission will meet 15-16 January in Brussels when there will also be a meeting to prepare for the 19 March demonstration.

Forward to Athens

The next ESF will be held in Athens in 2006. There is already some conflicts arising within the Greek movement. Piero Bernocchi argued for a delegation from the European Preparatory Assembly to be active within the Greek process to encourage greater participation and inclusivity in the process.

Other proposals included in the "consensus" were:

- The ESF will be held every 2 years, not annually
- An anti-racist network will meet at each preparatory assembly
- The next ESF preparatory assembly will be held in Athens on 25-7 February

The European Preparatory Assemblies, however, still evade discussion of the really big issues facing our movement. What is to be done to resist the neoliberal offensive of the EU governments of Schröder, Chirac, Berlusconi and Blair? What is to be done to stop the huge corporations downsizing, shifting their operations to low wage and non-union zones and cutting real wages as well? What action needs to be taken to end the occupation of Iraq and Palestine?

Despite having representatives of some of the most left wing unions in Europe present, there was no serious discussion of the problems facing the French, German and Italian workers over the past few months, of the Italian one-day general strike etc. Instead all we got was navel gazing over process. This is truly lamentable.

In spite of the obstructions mounted by the main political forces in the ESF – behind a façade of libertarianism – the League for the Fifth International will continue to argue for a focus on developing a co-ordinated and militant response to our enemies and a radically different structure to make co-ordinated action possible.

Slovak paper mill workers: victimised for union activities

By Joy MacReady

Slovak paper mill workers in Ruzomberok are demanding a raise of 80 pence or €1.25 an hour. Their employer, Neusiedler Corporation, is a division of Mondi Paper and the global giant Anglo American plc, and the giant plant is one of the most efficient and modern paper mills in the world. Yet the multinational pays its Slovakian workers about a third of the pay of fellow workers in the Hungarian sister company and an eighth of the Austrian hourly rate. They are cynically trading on the Slovakian unemployment rate of over 16 per cent and lower living standards in Eastern Europe.

It is vital that trade unionists in Western Europe take solidarity action to ensure that the Slovak workers win their struggle. It is in our interest that conditions are equalised up to the highest level in Europe, rather than allowing the bosses to compete in a race to the bottom.

Neusiedler has reacted to the workers' demands with a campaign of harassment and intimidation against the organisers and supporters of a new independent union, ZOO Papier (ZOOP), which was formed after the official union refused to back the workers' demands.

The new trade union has still not gained recognition from the plant's management. In fact, the company's bosses swiftly sacked five key figures in launching the new union. The dismissals of 14 other workers who joined it were withdrawn after international pressure from other trade unionists and left organisations. But officially

ZOO Papier: an independent trade union

A second issue of the new union's newsletter appeared in late November. It highlights why the Zoop poses a threat not just to management in Ruzomberok but to the bloated and ineffectual Slovak union bureaucracy. A key article explains why the union will not affiliate to the Confederation of Trade Unions - KOZ (Slovakia's biggest Union federation): "The last Congress of the KOZ clearly confirmed that this bureaucratised TU organisation has lost its previous weight. The number of its members is declining - from 1.9 million in 1989 to 570,000 now... Why? The answer is quite simple. The KOZ does not defend the rights of its members and of workers in factories. E.g. the leadership of KOZ didn't even

reply to our letter asking for their help. But why should they when they receive such nice salaries?"

The new trade union, Zoop, at its founding conference, adopted a principle of fighting the bureaucratic elite incapable of any actions to help the rank-and-file unionists.

The "official" or company trade union at the Ruzomberok factory is an affiliate of the KOZ.

Another article "What shall we do next?" mentions the need to send appeals to the Austrian embassies around the world along with an international day of action. Jozef Danis, vice-chair of the factory committee, also asks the workers to create secret trade unions cells in the industrial units of the plant. He

emphasised the need for secret meetings because of the level of intimidation.

The first issue of the newsletter appeared right after Jozef Danis came back from the European Social Forum in October and described the functioning of the Zoop according to its statutes. The officers are elected by all members and not just by the delegates as in the KOZ. The members can recall their mandates every year. The officials' wages will be the workers' average and not three times more, as in the KOZ unions. The draft of any collective agreement between the Zoop and the management will be discussed at the grassroots level first. The Zoop's balance sheets will be immediately accessible to all workers in the factory.

none of the 19 workers have been reinstated.

On 8 November 2004 over 120 workers came out after the morning shift to protest against management's sackings of supporters of the new union.

Yet, management has thus far refused to come to the negotiating table - a meeting between the workers of both Austrian and Slovak factories and management was cancelled in early December. Management claims that the new union is a fraud because it represents only five per cent of the Ruzomberok workforce - yet in this climate of intimidation and fear it is not surprising that many workers will not risk their livelihoods by openly declaring their membership. A more accurate measure of

ZOOP's support can be gauged from the fact that more than half the workforce - 1,223 workers - signed the union's petition for higher wages and in protest at the sackings.

However, events are moving fast.

Last month the Slovak Labour Minister, Ludovít Kaník, carried out an inspection of the factory, concluding that the company was abusing workers' legal rights. He asked the management to reconsider its previous measures. This development, combined with a very critical front page article in the Austrian daily, Die Presse, have sounded alarm bells in the Austrian-Slovak management. There are unconfirmed rumours that the new union will be accepted soon. What is evident is that the managers are quite sensitive

to the negative publicity that this dispute has generated across Europe.

It is imperative that this pressure be maintained until the Ruzomberok paper mill workers win their dispute and to do this will require international solidarity.

On 10 December, International Human Rights Day, pickets were held outside the Neusiedler offices in Vienna, Prague and London to expose Neusiedler's contravention of a basic human right - the right to organise in a trade union. During a press conference, the new union demanded that the plant's managing director, Otto Pichler, resign from office. In London, activists met with the manager of the sales office and made clear that the international campaign would contin-

ue until the company recognises the ZOOP and agrees to the workers' demands including:

- reinstatement of 14 sacked members and five members of the factory committee
- a freeze on all sackings
- the immediate start of negotiations on demands from the original petition and social programme which ZOOP has put forward.

What you can do

1. Send emails of support to sativa@zoznam.sk and noveodbody@post.sk.

2. Send email protests to the company at hovorca@neusiedler.sk, mondibp@mondibp.com, and info@mondibp.com. Also write to the CEO of Mondi BP at guenther.hasler@mondibp.com.

Plus write to company officials in your country:

- Austria: sevice@neusiedler.com
- Britain: infolineuk@neusiedler.com
- Bulgaria: milan.demjanovic@neusiedler.com
- Czech Republic: ivana.capkova@neusiedler.com
- France: commercialmarketing-paris@neusiedler.com
- Germany: infoline@neusiedler.com
- Italy: neusiedler-italia@neusiedler.com
- Netherlands: info@neusiedler.com
- Poland: nscp.polska@neusiedler.com
- Russia: craig.jacobs@neusiedler.com

3. Make a protest call to the director Otto Pichler 0042 144 436 3505.

Finally, the ZOOP has spent all its money. The sacked leaders are completely broke, all with families to support and mortgages. They desperately need solidarity funds. If you want to support these trade unionists in struggle, please send a donation to the following bank account: 10006-13219052/4900 Istrobanka. Slovakia.

Vera Drake

Vera Drake, directed by Mike Leigh, on general release from 7 January, running time: 126 minutes
Review by GR McColl

An austere North London council estate on the edge of winter in 1950 provides the setting for the opening scenes of British director Mike Leigh's latest, rightly lauded film, Vera Drake. Though shot in colour, the movie evokes an occasionally bleak, monochromatic world of post-war rationing and urban poverty that borders on the Dickensian.

Imelda Staunton plays the title character of Vera and gives a performance of remarkable emotional range. Vera is a charlady, a cleaner in domestic service, a common occupation for working class women at the time. She is married to Stan, a Second World War veteran and motor mechanic. Their two adult children, Sid, a buoyant sales clerk, the other, Ethel, a painfully shy factory worker, still live with them. Vera presides with a doughty tenderness in their warm if claustrophobic flat - a sharp contrast with the slightly garish suburban home of their aspirational in-laws. In addition to her job in the homes of London's rich, Vera tends to a chronically ill mother. It appears to

be a world where the recently launched NHS has yet to make the slightest impact. And as most readers will already know Vera Drake is also a backstreet abortionist and so a criminal in the eyes of the British state, 17 years before the 1967 Act made the procedure legal, albeit in still limited circumstances. Vera's mission, as she sees it, is "to help young girls in trouble who have nowhere else to turn".

While the film's subject matter is the world of the backstreet termination, Leigh also continues his preoccupation with social class, whether it's the different trajectories of the Drake siblings or the contrasting lives of Vera's patients and that of Susan Wells, the daughter of one of Vera's employers who suffers rape on a date. The film in no way belittles Susan's ordeal as she must run through a sort of humiliating script before a male psychiatrist will authorise the termination. But it also highlights the dramatic difference between a well appointed private clinic in the Home Counties and the often cramped squalor where Vera seeks to induce miscarriages in young women who've



"made a mistake" or older ones ground down by poverty and childbearing.

Leigh's approach to Vera's clandestine work is slightly detached and there is little in the way of harrowing detail. There are no knitting needles or coathangers. If anything, the film treats the subject matter with understatement, particularly when compared with the brutal vibrancy of Paula Rego's paintings, dealing with the consequences of the criminalisation of abortion in her native Portugal.

Eventually, however, something does go terribly wrong as a young woman develops a near fatal infection after a visit from Vera as her well-scrubbed but primitive tools prove a source of contagion.

A doctor's tip off to police, followed by a grilling of the woman's mother, leads ultimately to Vera's arrest. The police investigation also leads to Vera's erstwhile friend, Lily, who without Vera's knowledge has been turning a tidy sum from the misery of

women desperate to end their pregnancies.

The police involved in interrogating and charging Vera are consummate professionals. They are merely agents of a brutal system and the concluding 20 minutes of the film is extremely harsh, softened only by Stan's enduring love for his wife even as son Sid sits in moralistic judgement. In a career spanning more than three decades this film numbers among Leigh's most subtle and visually sophisticated. Still, some might see it as no more than a well crafted period piece. After all, Vera Drake is not an overt polemic for a woman's right to choose and the character makes no sudden discovery in the dock of a previously concealed eloquence, yet the film has an undeniable and lingering power.

At one level, more than 50 years on, the world the film depicts is partly forgotten and in some ways best so, but few cinematic releases this year will have greater contemporary relevance.

While a second Bush term in the US is certain to usher in still further attacks on abortion rights, in Britain there is the prospect of a private member's bill reducing the time limits for a legal termination. The key sponsor may well be an ardently religious Tory such as Anne Widdecombe, but given the growing antichoice presence in the New Labour cabinet (including new Education Secretary Ruth Kelly) there is a very real possibility that such a bill will gain parliamentary time over the course of the coming 12 months. And who knows - whatever the official policy of Respect on the question - George Galloway might well back such a bill.

Meanwhile, watching the all too plausible tragedy of Vera Drake, we should have a renewed determination among all socialists, feminists and consistent democrats to ensure that there is no return to backstreet abortions and no erosion of hard won reproductive rights.

No to religious bigotry Defend free speech

By Stuart King

The storming of the controversial play *Behzti* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in December by a group of protesting Sikhs is symptomatic of the growing demands of various religions to set limits to freedom of criticism of their faiths.

The management of the theatre had already mistakenly entered into dialogue with Sikh community leaders about removing parts of the play written by a young Sikh woman. Several changes were made, but this just whetted the appetite of the leaders of the Sikh temples who demanded a key scene – a rape in a temple – be changed.

When this was not done the theatre was invaded, windows broken and the play cancelled, supposedly on health and safety grounds. In other words the police put pressure on the management by saying they could not guarantee the theatre's safety. Strange this. Whenever there is a strike or a demonstration there is never a shortage of well equipped police to keep order. Obviously different rules apply to religious bigots.

But it was not just the police who effectively backed the closure. The Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham welcomed the decision. Estelle Morris Labour's arts minister, while saying it was "a sad day" for freedom of speech, declared the theatre had "done the right thing" in allowing itself to be censored. Sikh Labour councillors in Birmingham



Protest outside the Birmingham Repertory

backed the demands of the protesters, while representatives, from organisations such as the Muslim Association of Britain, joined in – denouncing plays and books that were "offensive" to religion.

Religious groups are demanding the right to censor anything their leaders deem offensive to religious belief. At Christmas even a nativity scene involving models of Victoria and David Beck-

ham was considered offensive enough to be attacked and withdrawn from show at Madame Tussaud's.

Of course no consistent democrat can object to religious people having the freedom to denounce such things, write leaflets, argue in the media and boycott writings, plays, TV programmes and paintings they find offensive. But when they seek to prevent the vast majority of largely non religious peo-

ple from seeing or hearing things that might offend religion they are demanding not rights but privileges.

This is an old argument – the Catholic Church might long ago have given up the Inquisition but it has never abandoned attempts to impose its views on society as a whole, from the laughable attempt to ban a film like *Life of Brian* to the much more serious pressure on governments to restrict contraception in schools and abortion rights. The fact that the religious groups now claiming to be offended come from ethnic groups who suffer from racism and real economic and social discrimination should not alter socialists' defence of freedom of expression.

Pandering to this creeping control of religion over secular society the Blair government is eager to bring in a new criminal offence of "incitement to religious hatred". It is in one of the many law and order bills currently before parliament, which will restrict civil liberties. This has thrown many liberal columnists into a fit of soul searching. How can you oppose a measure designed to prevent groups like the BNP stoking up racial hatred using religion as a smokescreen? They point out that we already have a law that outlaws incitement to racial hatred. Should there not, they say, be limits placed on freedom of speech where abuse of religiously defined ethnic minorities is concerned?

This is dangerous nonsense. Has the existence of a law against incitement to racial hatred, in force for decades, done anything to reduce the level of racism or racial harassment in our society? Has it stopped the tabloids whipping up hatred of asylum seekers "swamping the country"? Of course it hasn't. Why? Because racism has to be dealt with everyday, in every workplace, school, housing estate, shop, club and society. It has to be prevented in all its forms from challenging racist slurs, through to erasing racist graffiti and physically preventing racist attacks.

It is not the state, nor its notoriously racist police, that can tackle such racism but rather the workers organ-

ised in, and fighting for, anti racist trade unions. It is the minority communities themselves organised for self defence alongside the anti racists and trade unions that can stop racist attacks.

Of course the law can and should outlaw discrimination but even this is only effective where workers and minority communities are organised to expose and combat it. It can also deal with racist attacks and incitement to attack, these indeed are already offences in law – the problem is the police are unwilling or incapable of enforcing them.

But what about the BNP? Shouldn't we support a law that prevents them spreading lies and encouraging hatred against Muslims for example. No, the only effective way to prevent the BNP spewing out its racist filth and encouraging attacks on minority communities is to physically break up their meetings and drive them out of our areas. We must not allow them to organise and should aim to drive away their soft supporters out of fear for their physical safety.

There should be no freedom of speech for fascists aiming to destroy workers rights and to treat racial minorities as sub human. And who will prevent us taking such action against the fascists? The police and the state. And who will denounce us? The very same hand wringing liberal columnists who demand laws to deal with the BNP.

Religion needs no more privileges – there are too many in British society already. Thanks to their revolutions and republican constitutions, in America and France there exists a separation between church and state and church and school. In Britain despite the very small number of active believers, radio and television schedules are stuffed with services and clerics are regularly asked for their opinions on the most varied questions. The government went out of its way to seek support of the churches for its legislation on "living wills" for example.

The House of Lords has a quota of bishops and a few rabbis. It is absolutely true that imams and Hindu and Sikh temple leaders are in short supply. But the answer is not to add them too but to close down the whole unelected reactionary chamber altogether. The legal privileges of the established church should be completely abolished, as should the unofficial privileges accorded to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The teaching of religion and the holding of religious assemblies in schools should be discontinued. The antiquated blasphemy laws should be swept away not replaced by a modern one. Freedom of speech in the theatres, comedy clubs, in the cinemas and on the street must be defended at all costs.

Give Bush a hot reception

By Kuldip Bajwa

With under a month to the Iraqi elections for the Transitional National Assembly resistance to the occupation is on the increase. Daily attacks have seen a spiralling death toll for the US/UK occupation and Iraqi security forces.

In late December in one of the most successful strikes, insurgents killed at least 24 soldiers and injured more than 60 at a US military base in the Northern town of Mosul.

Already the increase in the level of resistance is having an impact. Arabic TV channel Al-Jazeera has reported the resignation of 700 election workers in Mosul and the largest Sunni political grouping, the Iraqi Islamic Party, has pulled out of the elections and called for a boycott, claiming the situation in Central and Northern Iraq makes a free vote impossible.

Without the participation of the Iraq's large Sunni minority it will be difficult for the authorities to claim any credibility for this election.

In Britain, following the devastation of Fallujah and the upcoming general election, opposition to the occupation is once again becoming a key issue, capable of mobilising thousands.

The Stop the War Coalition (STWC) has planned a series of events and mobilisations leading up to a planned national demonstration on March 19th. This date clashes with a central pan-European demonstration against war, racism, and against a neo-liberal Europe

in Brussels.

The decision to hold the demonstration on the same day echoes the divisions seen at the ESF where some of the British participants led by the SWP counterposed opposition to the war to a campaign against the neo-liberal offensive of the EU and its national governments.

But with George Bush's visit to Europe now confirmed for February 21st-25th the emphasis must surely now shift. Bush is due to land in London to meet Tony Blair before flying on to NATO headquarters in Brussels and then on to Germany and Slovakia where he will meet Vladimir Putin.

George Bush's last visit to Britain saw huge protests, culminating in a demonstration of over 300,000 on a weekday afternoon/evening. His visit this time around can again act as a catalyst for mobilising the thousands who continue to oppose the occupation.

The level of public support experienced by activists campaigning on the streets during the recent attack on Fallujah shows that there are still a huge number of people who believe that no progressive role is being played by US/UK occupation forces. The Military Families Against the War initiative set up on November, and by relatives of those serving in Iraq or who have lost loved ones, shows that opposition to the occupation remains broad and is deepening.

The recent one day conference organised by Iraqi Occupation Focus, attended by over 350 participants also shows that there is a willingness

amongst people to work together whilst debating the way forward for the movement.

Already the STWC has been building for a national day of action on February 15th, the second anniversary of the 2 million strong demonstration in central London before the start of the war. A call for direct action has been made, with the aim of allowing everyone "to take some form of anti-war action, in their communities and workplaces". But with Bush due on the 21st any day of action should coincide with Bush's visit to Downing Street. Demonstrators should blockade Whitehall to remind Bush that despite his reelection he will be fought all the way, not just by the Iraqi resistance but by the resistance to his war plans back home and wherever he goes. Young people should march out of their schools and colleges to confront Bush and Blair.

For rank and file trade unionists too, it is time for action. Time to re-assert total opposition to the occupation and war decided on by most union conferences last year but miserably betrayed by their leaders at the Labour Party conference. They capitulated to pressure from the government, using the wretched excuse that the collaborationist Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions was not even demanding a timetable for withdrawal. Once again we will have to give a lead to such "leaders." We should put the pressure on them now to support their members and take action, including strikes, in opposition to the Butcher of Fallujah's visit.

Journal of the League for the Fifth International No. 2

£4 €6 \$9



Available from Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to MRCI

The Great Miners' Strike: 1984-85

Lula: The World Bank's president

The Basque national question

Negri and Hardt's Empire: a review

'Americanise or bust': The challenges facing Europe

Communist principles of youth organisation

A reformist utopia: the Tobin Tax

Hard Labour: more powers to c

Jeremy Dewar reports on Labour's newest law and order policies

"It is ultimately up to Parliament to decide whether and how we should amend the law. I will not be revoking the certificates or releasing detainees, whom I have reason to believe are a significant threat to our security."

Within hours of his appointment, new Home Secretary Charles Clarke confirmed that he will continue to trash the few remaining legal safeguards afforded to citizens, and to destroy the lives of the most vulnerable people in our society. In this case, nine foreigners who have been held, and in some cases driven to mental illness, for three years inside Belmarsh prison, without any right to know what offence they are suspected of, what evidence there is against them, or when they might be released.

Under Clarke, such draconian powers, the true legacy of his predecessor David Blunkett, will not be diluted. Like Blunkett, Clarke was quick to pose, demagogically, as a champion of democracy and security. The attorney-general Lord Goldsmith (the one who told Tony Blair the invasion of Iraq was legal!) even claimed that the nine Law Lords, who condemned the government for breaching the European Convention on Human Rights, were "undemocratic". Rather than fill this democratic deficit by introducing legislation to elect the judiciary, Labour preferred to arrogantly arrogate all powers unto itself.

Seldom can a new Home Secretary, in his first 24 hours, have more

- succinctly underlined his priorities:
- the creation of an unspecified threat to empower the state.
 - the racist scapegoating of migrants and ethnic minorities.
 - the endless filling of prisons.
 - total contempt for international law.

This wasn't just a one-off performance by Clarke, caught under prepared on his first day in office. On the contrary, the Queen's Speech and subsequent policy leaks have revealed that a third New Labour term could prove to contain at its heart a bigger onslaught on civil liberties than even the previous two.

TOOLING UP THE POLICE

The Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill, along with a Drugs Bill and a Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill, represent a further and significant erosion of civil liberties and extension of the powers of the police, community support officers and local authorities.

At its heart lies the proposal to set up a Serious Organised Crime Agency, which has been likened to the FBI in the US. This will be the first nationwide police force since Thatcher set up the National Reporting Centre during the Great Miners' Strike. Although brought in under the guise of the "war against terror", this Agency will inevitably, like its predecessor, be used primarily against the "enemy within".

Under the Police Bill, the cops will have the right to arrest people on suspicion of any offence. Presently, the police can only arrest suspects if the crime involved may carry a prison

sentence of five years or more. The Police Bill will allow them to detain people on the grounds that they are suspected of offences such as littering or swearing. Once detained, the police will be able to take suspects' fingerprints and DNA samples, and to test for drugs in the bloodstream. Having a banned substance in one's bloodstream, regardless of how it got there, will, if Clarke gets his way, be a crime. Indeed, so

unfortunately, bound to add to the 200 deaths of black people that have occurred in police custody over the past 15 years.

Ominously, another piece of proposed legislation, the Equalities Bill, is due to abolish the Commission for Racial Equality, subsuming it into a broader Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Although this could lead to a better service for oppressed groups, depending on

The Police Bill will allow them to detain people on the grounds that they are suspected of doing anything including offences such as littering or swearing

alarmed is New Labour with recreational drug use that they want to increase the amount of hours the police may detain suspects without charging them to 192 hours, allegedly in order to allow any packages of drugs, swallowed to hide the evidence, to pass through the system. Add to this the proposal to give Community Support Officers the right to carry and use truncheons and CS gas, and to detain suspects for up to half an hour, and it is clear that New Labour plan to give the police the biggest boost to their powers of arrest and detention since the notorious "Sus" laws.

And, of course, it will be black and Asian people who will feel the brunt of these new blows. Already black people are eight times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched. The fact that they can now be detained on the most spurious of grounds is also,

funding, independence and remit, the CRE has often been critical of the government. Its proposed demise could silence that voice, however partial and ineffective it may have been.

TARGETING YOUTH

Antisocial Behaviour Orders have become increasingly popular with local councils, the police and housing associations, and it's easy to see why.

Magistrates can – and do – issue ASBOs on the flimsiest, hearsay evidence; 97 per cent of applications are approved. Best of all, Asbos can be served on anyone over 10 years of age. Half of all Asbos are served against youth.

An Asbo may include a ban on actions that aren't necessarily criminal in themselves; saying the word "grass", playing football, spitting. But breaching an Asbo constitutes a criminal

The identity parade

An authoritarian regime – one where the government ignores the highest court in the land, where arbitrary bans against insignificant acts are granted at a drop of the hat, and where fingerprints and DNA samples can be demanded on the slightest suspicion – would not be complete, of course, without registering the personal details of every individual.

So Labour plans to take another step closer to such a state with its Identity Cards Bill. The Bill, has already passed the first stage in Parliament, will set up a huge database, the National Identity Register (NIR). At a cost to the taxpayer of an estimated £5.5bn, the NIR will hold the name, address and previous addresses, National Insurance and NHS numbers, medical and criminal records of every individual in Britain. Biometric data – retina scans, fingerprints, and so on – will be added as the cards are rolled out.

The NIR will also assign everyone a unique number or code, which will inevitably become the preferred way to identify anyone: by employers, banks, travel operators, phone and internet companies. As this develops, the state will be able to build up, very quickly, a complete profile of anyone they want to keep an eye on: where they go, what they buy, favourite websites, phonebooks. In other words, even before any cards are issued, the right to go about one's pri-

ivate business without the state keeping a record will be effectively abolished.

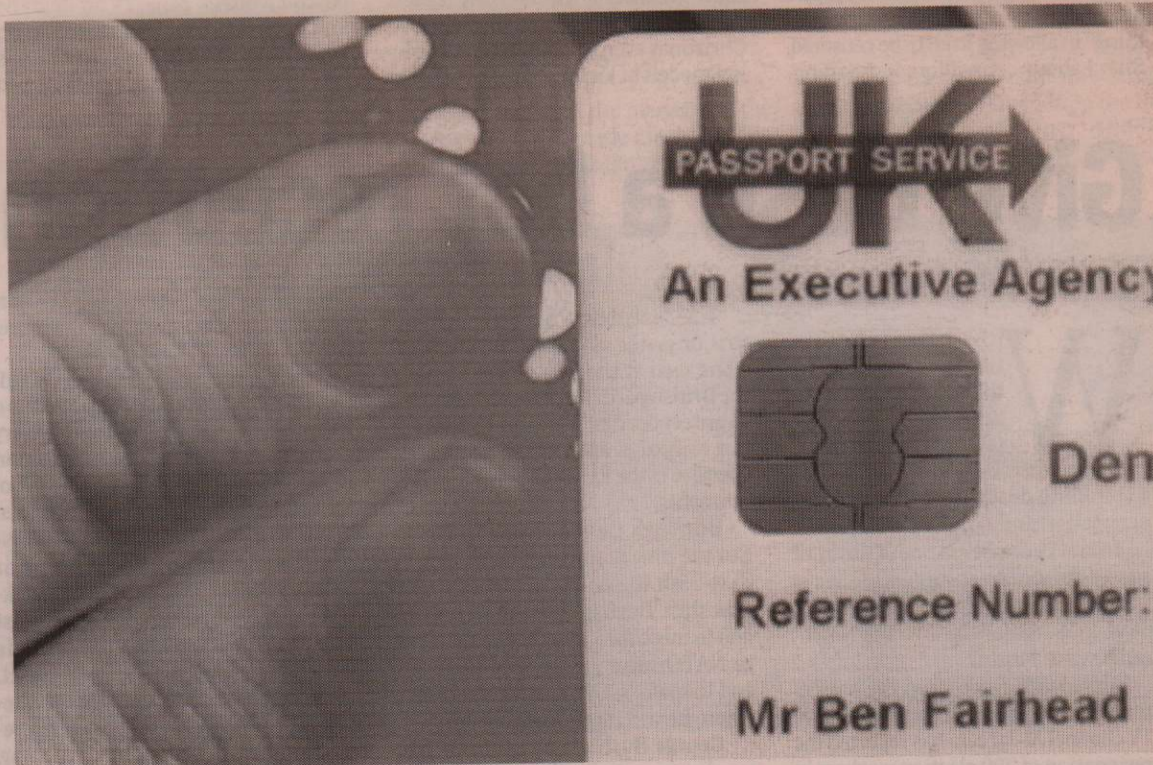
This effect of the NIR is clearly of central importance. That is why there are heavy fines for those who fail to register (£2,500) or update their records (£1,000).

The Bill is typically vague about whether, when and who will be forced to

What is certain is that asylum seekers and migrants will, once again, be the guinea pigs to test the cards

have an ID Card. The Bill simply states that the Home Secretary can, without having to go back to parliament, order any group of people or the whole population to get a card and to carry it on them at all times. Tony Blair is on record as preferring compulsion, and David Blunkett, who drew up the Bill, wants the card to be an "entitlement" card, without which a person may not use public services. This makes it likely, therefore that the scheme will become compulsory, perhaps after a real or made-up security scare. What is certain is that asylum seekers and migrants will, once again, be the guinea pigs to test the cards.

Several campaigns against the Identity Card Bill have already been



launched. Since it attacks everyone in Britain, it has the potential to become a new anti-poll tax rebellion. However, the most prominent campaign, No2ID, is fundamentally flawed.

No2ID is collating information on the Bill and has launched a series of meetings to spread the word and organise local groups. It aims to build a mass campaign of non-registration and non-compliance. It claims to have three million pledges of civil disobedience.

So far, so good. But No2ID has attracted some strange bedfellows. Its website lists not only the Lib Dems, but the UK Independence Party and The Freedom Association among its affiliates.

Both these latter organisations want laws to virtually eliminate immigration and promote British chauvinism in schools and other institutions. The Freedom Association's policies include clos-

ing down public sector pension schemes, making all public services dependent on private insurance payments, and banning public sector strikes. Ironically, in the 1970s and 1980s it supported a notorious blacklist of known union militants, which the bosses used to expel a whole layer of shop stewards from industry.

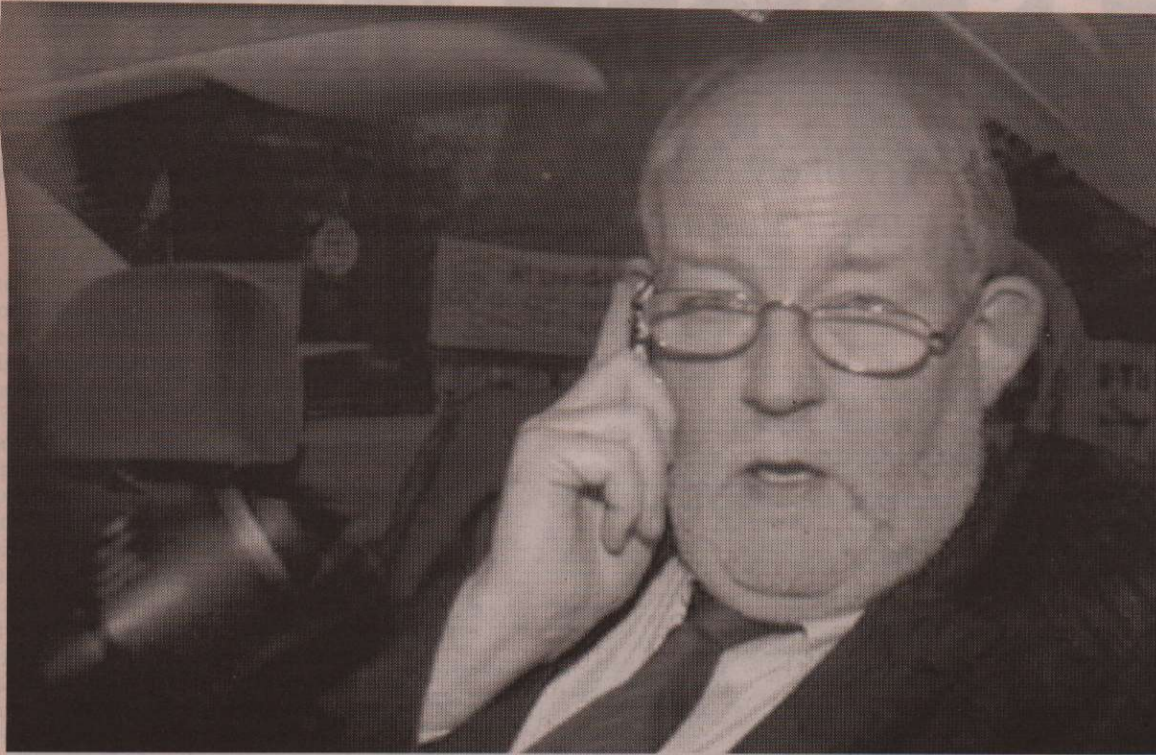
These groups must be driven out of the campaign. Where vibrant local No2ID groups are set up, activists need to demand a founding national conference where activists can learn about the policies of these foul reactionary organisations and vote on whether to allow them into the coalition or to expel them.

This is important because, among the methods a militant anti-ID card campaign may need to employ, trade union action – boycotting work on the

NIR, solidarity strikes in support of those penalised for non-registration, and so on – must feature. The campaign must also act in solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers when ID cards are inevitably used against them. How can this be organised with one of the most virulent anti-union associations and one of the most racist parties involved?

Part of the struggle to defeat the Bill, and link it into a broader fight to smash the "sus" laws, Asbos and the existing restrictions on civil liberties, will have to include a struggle to cleanse our ranks of opportunist far right elements hoping to jump on the bandwagon. If we can do that, Blair, Milburn and Clarke may find out what Thatcher discovered winning elections is not enough to guarantee governments the right to enact their policies; the people can prevent it.

Control, fewer rights to protest



Home Secretary Charles Clarke

offence, despite the lower standards of evidence needed in the initial order, and despite the fact that the offence may not be criminal. Magistrates are encouraged to send offenders to prison (for up to 5 years) or youth detention centre (for up to 2 years) which is where most found "guilty" end up. No wonder New Labour boasts of the biggest prison population in British history.

The rate at which Asbos are grant-

ed has risen dramatically: 2,600 in 2003, compared with just 200 a year in the late 1990s.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill will give 10,000 town and parish councils the right to apply for Asbos. On-the-spot fines of £100 for littering and noisy behaviour will be introduced. Local newspapers and broadcasters will be allowed to "name and shame" under-18s issued with Asbos.

What's so wrong about all this? After all, everybody has at some time cursed antisocial neighbours and wished that someone else would come along and make them stop being a nuisance. In many working class communities a balance between tolerance and responsibility is established through self-imposed norms of behaviour and a pride in their own immediate environment.

Where it has broken down, this

almost invariably coincides with high unemployment, low pay and casual labour, overcrowding and poor housing, few or no recreational facilities. And it has been the politics of the free market, designed to break up and defeat solidarity among working class people that has directly led to increasing levels of antisocial behaviour.

Asbos solve none of these underlying causes, so trenchantly planted by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, and which Blair and Blunkett have never attempted to uproot. Instead, they send another generation of troubled – or simply unlucky – youth into public humiliation, the courts, and detention. Second, they reward intolerance, setting neighbours against each other rather than uniting them against the real antisocial behaviour of employers who shut down factories to seek lower wages abroad, and local and central government that cut services and refuse to renew and repair the housing stock.

Finally, Asbos are a cheap way for local authorities and the police to show they are "doing something" to improve people's lives. An election coming? Unsolved minor crimes mounting? Well, slap a few ASBOs around and let the papers publish the gruesome details. That will keep their minds off more serious matters.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

Tony Blair and his new right-hand man, Alan Milburn, have made it clear that these Bills, announced in last year's Queen's Speech, will form the starting point for New Labour's third

term in government. By pandering to the racist, anti-youth and anti-working class readership of the *Daily Mail*, they hope to outscore the Tories as the authoritarian party because the trade union leaders have – temporarily – scuppered the chances of launching a new workers party this side of the election. New Labour believe that workers will have to vote Labour.

However, the working class does not have to rely on elections to defend its rights and overturn government policy. We have other and, ultimately, more effective methods of struggle. The poll tax was defeated and the hated Margaret Thatcher brought down by such methods: the mass demo, local and national anti-poll tax unions, non-compliance, physical defence against police and bailiffs. This should be our model.

Anti-racist organisations, including the unions, should immediately launch a campaign against the new "sus" and drug laws, which are clearly aimed at further criminalising black and Asian youth. Youth organisations and initiatives need to spearhead the fight against the extension of Asbos, drawing in tenants' associations and the unions behind them.

In both cases, activists need to monitor and expose strikingly unjust uses of the current laws, and fight to overturn ASBOs, bring racist and abusive police officers to justice. This will provide the best backdrop for forcing the government to shelve its proposed legislation – or make it a dead letter, should they proceed.

Labour's plans for the election

By Stuart King

This year is an election year and the campaign kicked off early in November. The Queen's Speech was dominated by promises of more law and order measures, driven, the government said by the threats of terrorism, organised crime, antisocial behaviour and militant protesters.

In fact as Peter Hain informed the press it was largely driven by the need to seize the Tories natural law and order territory – Blair was not going to be outdone by Michael Howard when it came to repressive laws and eroding civil liberties when appealing to "middle England" in the election campaign.

It was left to Gordon Brown to offer some promises to Labour's trade union and working class supporters if they re-elected the government for a third term. The pre-budget concentrated on more support for child care and extending parental leave. The number of child care centres was to increase to 2,500 by 2008 with £100 million added to the budget, 120,000 more places would be added to the million created since 1997.

Brown outlined continued increases in spending on the public sector – by 2008 the education budget would be up to £76.8bn, health to £92 billion, representing real yearly increases since 1998-9 of 5.3 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively. The message was obvious "Vote Labour for better public services, vote Michael Howard for cuts".

But promises are just that – promises. The pre-budget was surrounded by economic reports from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Develop-

ment suggesting that the Chancellor's figures do not add up. Brown has committed himself not to borrow to finance expenditure over the economic cycle (in this case 1999-2006) – his so called Golden Rule. Treasury forecasts claim that by the end of the cycle there will be a surplus, but this is based on optimistic growth forecasts of 3-3.5 per cent in 2005.

The Bank of England and the OECD are more cautious predicting 2-2.5%. Lower growth means a lower tax take and already economists are talking about a £10 billion black hole in the accounts. Brown they say will either have to raise taxes or cut public expenditure. But these problems will emerge safely the other side of the election in May, at the moment Brown can just say he is right and they are wrong.

However Brown realises that the OECD figures may be more accurate and things could get worse. This is no doubt why Brown has already started to reduce expenditure by sacking workers in the civil service – the planned cuts of 104,000 jobs (a fifth of the civil service) are planned to save £21.5bn a year. The pre-budget also announced dramatic cutback in pension provisions for public sector workers – the increase in pension age from 60 to 65 will save billions more, hundreds of thousands of local authority workers will also lose the right to retire with a pension at 55 after 30 years service. A future target are the long term sick and disabled, using active labour market policies ie the stick and the carrot, to push as many as possible back to work and off benefit. But this measure will come after an election victory.

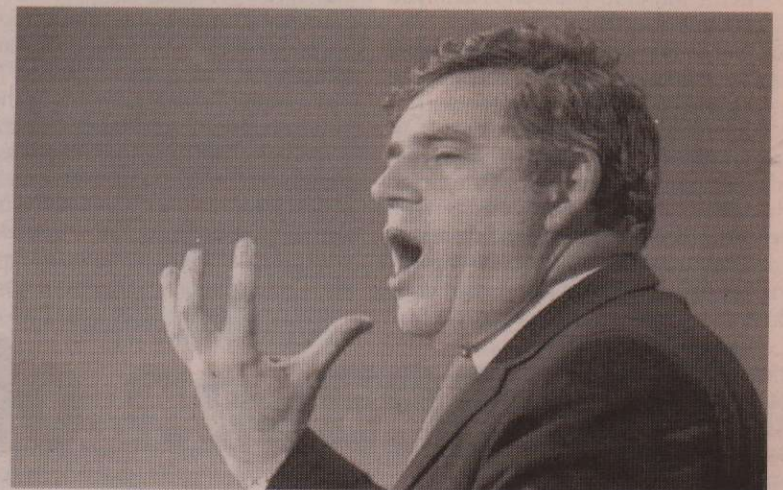
There is no doubt that these attacks on the public sector were encouraged

by the agreement of the big four unions in July (the Warwick Accords) to suspend all criticism in the run up to the elections. The pathetic concessions given to the unions there, on holidays, two-tier workforce and so on pale into insignificance measured against the attack on pensions and the job cuts in the civil service. No doubt the big unions will stick to their side of the deal, undermining any action that might threaten the government before May.

Brown's cuts are only half the story however. Waiting in the wings with his hands on Labour's manifesto for a third term is the arch moderniser and pro marketer Alan Milburn. Milburn has made no secret of the fact that he wants yet more Private Finance Initiative's particularly in the NHS and in education. Milburn believes these fly-by-night capitalists will bring competition and diversity into delivering health and education. In fact they suck enormous profits out of the sector undermine wages and conditions and have a record of cutting and running when things go wrong.

Milburn recently waxed lyrical about the benefits of the market for health and education, "With cash following choice, the schools, hospitals, surgeries and services that do more to a higher standard will earn more. Those that do not, will not." In other words the two-tier system that is already encouraged in education will be extended to health. The middle classes, with the resources and knowledge to search out the best service, will be enabled to exercise choice while the poorer sections of the working class will see their services starved of cash.

There is no doubt the Blairites are riding high at the moment. The Tories are in a mess under Howard, trailing eight points in the opinion polls. They



have been split over ID cards and the question of Europe and the constitution have been removed as a general election issue by the planned referendum that the Blairites don't even want to put a date to.

But Blair's confidence may be misplaced. Masses of people have not forgotten Iraq and the lies over weapons of mass destruction. The carnage everyday in Iraq and the brutal actions by the US and British forces just confirm the belief that the invasion was wrong and the troops should leave. It is the Liberal Democrats who could well gain from this disillusion with Labour. Posing as the party that was against the war and the only major party opposing ID cards, the Liberals hope to win over some of the radical opposition to Labour, while at the same time appealing to Tory voters with free market policies. The groundswell over the war could easily result in many lost seats for Labour, a greatly reduced majority would quick-

ly undermine Blair's position.

A strengthening of the Liberals would be no gain for the workers. They are a party as strongly committed to the anti union laws and neoliberal free market measures as Blair and the Tories.

A new rightist Labour government can be stopped but only if the workers and trade unions break their leaders pact with Blair. If the public sector workers take the lead, using determined strike action to throw back the attacks on pensions and the civil service, Blair can be thrown on the defensive. Inflicting a defeat on the government's plans in the run up to the election would dramatically weaken Blair and strengthen the left.

The key task now is to rally the rank and file in the unions to say no to the pension grab, no to mass sackings in the civil service and no to any peace pact with Blair, Brown and Milburn in the run up to the election.

Palestinian elections aims to pave way for Sharon's 'peace'

With western and Israeli backing Mahmoud Abbas is very likely to be the next Palestinian president. And his election will be the next stage in the creation of a rump Palestinian state, argues *Marcus Chamoun*

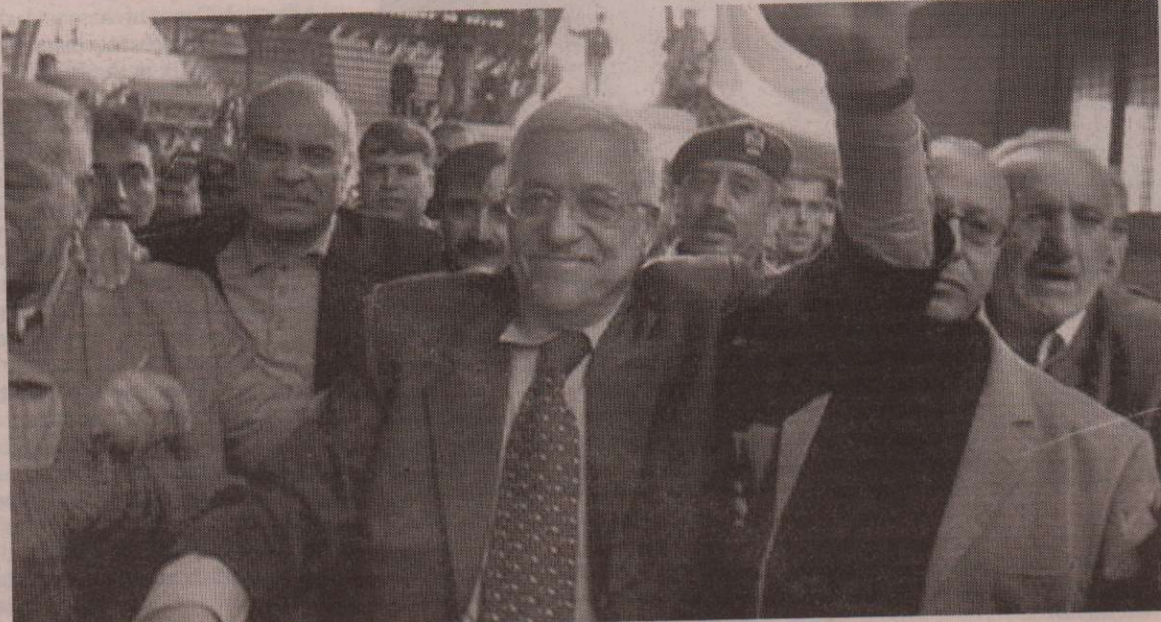
On the 9 January 2005, Palestinians in the occupied territories will elect a president to replace Yasir Arafat in the Palestinian Authority. Mahmoud Abbas, who is now standing as the sole candidate of Fateh, is almost certain to be elected. The one real opportunity the Palestinian people had to publicly debate starkly counterposed visions of the future of their national struggle in these elections was lost with the decision of the jailed Fateh leader, Marwan Barghouti, to withdraw his nomination.

With this decision has also been lost the opportunity to witness the first election in the Arab world for decades in which the victory of one candidate has not been assured in advance.

Despite Israel's claims to be doing everything possible to ensure that the elections take place without interference, and a cosmetic relaxation of travel restrictions on election candidates and their agents, it is clear that the Israeli occupation forces wish to make it as difficult as possible for Abbas' opponents to take part in the elections.

The most likely challenger, the PFLP-backed human rights activist Dr Mustafa Barghouti, has been beaten by Israeli troops at a checkpoint outside Jenin and arrested in East Jerusalem while conducting his campaign. Other candidates have been refused permission to leave Gaza for the West Bank. Even with Abbas' election victory assured, it would seem that Israel wants to allow nothing to stand in the way of its plans and Mahmoud Abbas' place in them.

The story, however, does not end there. Abbas will be elected because the atomised Palestinian voter, will be inclined to vote for "peace"; that is, for an end to the state of siege that has been imposed on the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories since the second intifada began. They may also find some sympathy for Abbas' calls for Palestinian unity



Mahmoud Abbas on the campaign trail

at a time of grave national danger, that is, for an end to the in-fighting between the factions.

This does not mean that the resistance to the occupation will cease. Nor does it mean that the same Palestinian voter will not rally to the resistance when Israeli tanks make incursions into Palestinian cities; assassinate leaders and kill civilians or when Israeli bulldozers demolish homes to make way for the wall that is to symbolise Israel's new system of apartheid.

Nor, in fact, does Abbas have any mass forces at his disposal with which to set about the task demanded of him by his Israeli and US sponsors, that of bringing an end to the resistance. If Arafat, with his moral authority as the historic leader of the Palestinian national struggle, could not use his inflated security services to "clamp down on terrorism", how much less will Abbas be able to use a Palestinian Authority weakened by repeated Israeli attacks and four years of the intifada to the same end.

It is therefore also safe to assume that January's elections will decide very little of substance.

In the background of all this is Ariel Sharon's plan for unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

The logic is simple enough. Israel, by withdrawing from Gaza and abandoning its settlements there, will be able to relieve itself of the burden of maintaining the security of Gaza's settlements, putting its forces to good use elsewhere and using the opportunity to strengthen the strategically much more important Jewish settlements in the West Bank. At the same time, it will receive approval from the international community for its perceived altruism in withdrawing from occupied land, relieving pressure to make further immediate concessions. The Palestinian Authority will take on the burden of managing Gaza's semi-colonial mass poverty, but without anything resembling a Palestinian state in the West Bank. And Abbas will be forced to

accept this as a *fait accompli* and begin future final status negotiations from a position of abject weakness.

On the Israeli side, the chief obstacle to this plan has been the vocal opposition of the settler-inspired right wing and its sympathisers within the ruling Likud party and its coalition partners in government. This is now likely to be overcome as Sharon announces the entry of Israel's Labor party into the ruling coalition and Shimon Peres' appointment as deputy premier. It strengthens the prospects for Sharon's plan on the Israeli side. Abbas, with his record of opposing the intifada from the beginning, and his indications of "pragmatism" with regard to territory, is the ideal candidate to negotiate the acceptance of Palestinian defeat.

A pre-requisite for the execution of this plan is the decisive cessation of armed Palestinian resistance. It is possible, although not at all inevitable, that Abbas may be able to effect this partially by inducing the armed Fateh militants

to maintain an indefinite cease-fire, in return for assurances that they will not be the subject of repression by the Palestinian Authority. Dealing with the militants of Hamas and Islamic Jihad may be much more difficult, despite the Israeli state's apparent success at physically liquidating Hamas' top leadership.

While Hamas has stopped short of calling for a complete boycott of the elections, preferring instead to refrain from standing a candidate of its own, its opposition to the structures created by the Oslo accords means that it is unlikely to accord any legitimacy to an agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It is also very unlikely to maintain a unilateral cease-fire for any great length of time without meaningful Israeli concessions. And without such concessions, the Palestinian Authority will find it very difficult to find a strong base of support for a clampdown on Hamas. The Israeli state will have to continue its own war against Palestinian activists, complaining that the Palestinians are not doing enough to "end terrorism" and so gaining a pretext to avoid making concessions, as before.

In the absence of a mass base to support his actions, therefore, Abbas will increasingly be forced to look for outside help.

The path from the January elections leads inexorably to a South African-style Palestinian bantustan, run by security chiefs who act like warlords and sponsored by enemies of the Palestinian people. But this path need not be the one taken. A resumption of the mass methods of struggle adopted during the first intifada of 1987-92, combined with the heroism and determination of the armed resistance of the second intifada, can divert history from this path. But the key to this will be the self-organisation and self-consciousness of the Palestinian working class. And for this they will need the support, inspiration and solidarity of the global workers' movement.

The season of goodwill in Palestine

Salaam Max reports on Israeli hypocrisy and restrictions imposed on Palestinians during the holiday

Christmas in the Holy Land was always going to be a unique experience, but when the "little town of Bethlehem" continues to be occupied, it makes it all the more unusual. Particularly interesting were attempts by Israel to be seen as acting in the Christmas spirit.

First they announced that Bethlehem would be open for visiting Christians from Israel and abroad. Then it was publicised that Mahmoud Abbas would be able to come for an official visit to the Church of Nativity to attend Midnight Mass; a "privilege" they had consistently denied to Arafat since this Intifada began.

They also announced that Palestinians would be able to apply for a special visitor's permit to Israel during the Christmas period. The only condition is that you have to be a Christian. Many from (predominantly Christian) Beit Sahour and the Bethlehem area made the most of this chance to visit Jerusalem. Many however didn't, for they refuse to recognise the right of Israel to decide when they can and can't visit a city, which they

consider to be their own capital.

The hidden catch was that while you could apply for a special permit, they wouldn't necessarily grant it. A few weeks ago, my colleague had discussed her wish to take her daughter, less than two years old, to the zoo in West Jerusalem. So she swallowed her pride and applied for a visitor's permit. Her family were given the required permission, but she was denied.

Why? Perhaps because she is active in an organisation which works (along with Israelis) to end the occupation; to end the illegal and humiliating system in which Israel grants or denies Palestinians the right to travel in their own country; to end discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, nationality.

At a Christmas party, an internationalist who had come through the Israeli checkpoint into Bethlehem, brought a bag of sweets which were given to them by the Israeli soldiers. It was a gift from the Israeli state, and it included the following note, in English, Hebrew and Arabic:

"Dear tourist,

The State of Israel is glad that you have decided to visit the Holy land during the Christmas season. The heads of the churches in Jerusalem have announced the promotion of pilgrimage to the Holy Land and have signed an appeal to the pilgrims visiting the Holy Land to pray for peace between our nations. As a gesture of goodwill, we request you to give this present to a Palestinian colleague, thus creating a bridge for peace.

Merry Christmas!"

Why not drop this "gesture of goodwill" from the Apache helicopters we regularly hear overhead? Why not throw them from the jeeps that patrol the "security fence" surrounding Bethlehem, instead of throwing sound bombs? They could even have parachuted out bags of sweets from the F16's they used to drop four 1,000lb bombs on the Palestinian Authority compound in Bethlehem in April, 2002.

A bridge for peace is certainly needed, after 56 years of continuous occupation, invasion, dispossession and exile. Somehow I doubt a bag of sweets will be enough. Like the conditions set by Israel for Palestinians to get to Jerusalem dur-

ing this holiday period, these sweets will be hard to swallow, and they leave a bitter aftertaste.

Instead of choking on these empty gestures from Israel, we went on a candle-lit procession in Beit Sahour, to "Light a Candle for Palestinian National Unity," organised by the Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People.

Despite the rain, a good few hundred turned out, marched behind the band, and carried banners which read: "Imprisoned in my land - Stop the Apartheid Wall"; "The Apartheid Wall will fall, as did the Berlin Wall"; and "The Siege of Death Must End."

These were slogans based on real demands of the Palestinian people: they don't want sweets, they want an end to occupation, they want freedom to move, and to live in dignity. The candle-lit procession has become an annual event, and I've no doubt the community of Beit Sahour will stubbornly continue to march until their demands are finally met.

Salaam, Shalom, Peace to all
Max

Iraq: boycott the fake election, end the occupation now

This month's elections in Iraq will take place while cities are bombed and civilians killed and will offer voters the choice of various candidates that accept the occupation. *Bill Jefferies* looks at the alternative

US and British plans for Iraqi elections on 30 January suffered a serious setback at the end of last month when the major Sunni party, the Iraqi Islamic Party, withdrew from the contest, in protest at the continuing violence of the occupation. The Islamists rightly scorned American suggestions that a widespread boycott of the ballot in the Arab Sunni areas could be remedied by the appointment of Sunni representatives.

Indeed, the very idea that a nation can hold free and fair elections when cities are being bombed, citizens arbitrarily arrested, and prisoners tortured is laughable. No matter what the result, the polls will not and cannot pacify the country. Nevertheless, the imperialists and their allies in Iyad Allawi's government will press ahead for two reasons. First, because they have no alternative; second, because their main aim is to split the Iraqi population along religious and ethnic lines.

The forthcoming Iraqi elections reveal the growing danger of sectarian civil war in Iraq. The US, conscious of their failure to establish any significant base in Iraqi society, hopes to use the elections to co-opt the Shi'ite majority population in support of the colonial occupation and in the process isolate the country's Sunni minority and with it the resistance.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the Iraqi Shi'ite's most influential religious leader, has sought to mobilise the community before the vote, seeing it as the best opportunity for long oppressed Shi'ites to gain the power that reflects their majority status.

Sistani has declared voting a duty, and a committee formed under his auspices has set up the United Iraqi Alliance, expected to be the front-runner among 100 groups and individuals competing in the campaign.

The Shi'ite imams cite the experience of the British occupation in 1919, to explain their participation. A Shi'ite rebellion against the colonialists and boycott of the subsequent elections led to the co-option of the Sunnis, who remained in power even after the British withdrawal until the fall of Saddam. However, this historic precedent should serve as a warning not an aspiration; replacing one co-opted group with another will only cement Iraq's status as an imperialist client state.

Unlike the mainstream clergy, Moqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Mahdi army, which led an uprising against the US earlier this year, remains ambivalent about the vote. Moqtada al-Sadr, the son of Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq Sadr who was assassinated in 1999, controls Sadr City, a massive suburb of Baghdad, through a network of patronage and unofficial welfare provision.

His position at the head of a movement based on Baghdad's urban poor poses both a risk and an opportunity for him. He has to be cautious about embracing the US electoral plans for fear of alienating his base, but means he can use this base to negotiate his terms for entering the government.

Sadr boycotted the recent pre-electoral council meeting established by the US after complaining about the mechanisms under which the meeting was

called. But his inconsistency shows exactly why even the most "radical" imams provide no alternative for the Iraqi working class and poor. Sadr will not pursue the fight against the US to the end. While condemning civil strife and sectarianism, he will not throw his militia into the struggle to remove the occupiers.

Unlike the Shi'ites, the leaders of the Sunnis, now excluded from power by the US and fearing domination by both the imperialists and the Shi'ite majority population backed by Iran, have demanded a boycott of the election. They have threatened to attack polling stations, candidates and voters.

Although the resistance consists, in the main, of random acts of rebellion in the form of do-it-yourself armed struggle, organised groups dominated by Islamist and nationalist ideologies make the danger of sectarianism stronger

by the day. While some of the sectarian attacks undertaken against Shi'ite targets are correctly attributed to CIA dirty tricks (it is widely believed in the Arab press that the kidnapping and killing of Margaret Hassan was the work of Allawi's security forces as were earlier attacks on Shi'ite mosques) it is also probable that some of them are the work of fanatics bent on civil war.

Indeed what else do we expect when there is no working class alternative to the Islamist and nationalist fighters? Some on the Iraqi left such as the Worker Communist Party of Iraq remain stubbornly aloof to the independence struggle, condemning both sides equally at a time when rampant unemployment, anarchic chaos and despair are driving whole cities into armed struggle against the US/UK occupiers. While the Iraqi Communist Party is actually in the government.



Election posters being put up in Baghdad

The socialist alternative will not arise spontaneously; it needs to be fought for in every realm of the struggle – including by arms. In fact, the existence of any

peaceful activity is entirely dependent on the willingness and ability of the left to organise its own self-defence. In a country at war, peaceful activity will only be tolerated as long as it poses no threat. If the Iraqi left want to achieve anything, they cannot leave the organisation of a working class militia to some future date when things have settled down. By then it'll be way too late.

It is urgent that the working class come to the head of the national liberation struggle to expel the colonialist occupation. This must include leading a boycott of the elections. The left cannot limit itself to peaceful demonstrations, protests against unemployment and privatisation, and work in the unions, important as all this is. It must expose the emptiness of Islamic rhetoric: that the way of Sharia law leads not to the liberation of the Iraqi people but to an accommodation with the US liberators and their agents like Sistani.

It must attempt to unite the chaotic network of independent cells, which makes up the largely spontaneous resistance fighters, combine them with the unions and unemployed organisations to build a new revolutionary party of the working class.

The heroic work of the Southern Oil Company Union can become a platform for this project. The Socu has now broken from the ICP-dominated Federation and merged with eight other unions to form the Basra Oil Union, the largest single union in Iraq. The Socu has successfully raised wages from 69,000 dinar to 102,000; it boycotted supplies to occupation forces in solidarity with besieged Najaf in August; it has expelled Ba'athists and foreign contractors in preparation for the impending struggle against privatisation.

But the Socu leaders are in danger of drawing the wrong lessons from the malign influence of the ICP by projecting an apolitical, non-party future role for the unions. Such a syndicalist outlook would be a disaster for the working class, as it would leave the field of struggle for political power to various bourgeois and middle class forces, none of which would secure democratic and economic rights for workers, women and youth.

If the working class is not to find itself subject to another semi-disguised dictatorship, or pitted against itself in a sectarian civil war, then it needs its own party to fight for a socialist solution to the burning democratic, economic and security questions facing Iraq today.

The Freedom – Shadows and Hallucinations in Occupied Iraq by Christian Parenti. Review by *Bill Jefferies*

Christian Parenti is a correspondent for *The Nation*, a liberal American weekly, who visited Iraq, on and off, between December 2003 and July 2004 to try to uncover the truth of the US occupation and its effect on the Iraqi people. As such, the subtitle of the book, *Shadows and Hallucinations*, is well chosen because although Parenti offers an offbeat and occasionally enlightening look at the chaos of Iraq today, he never quite nails it.

It's not that he doesn't try. It's simply impossible for him, the westerner, the outsider, the American, to discover the truth of Iraq, a country traumatised by the casual slaughter of occupation and the daily humiliation and suffering dished out by the invading forces.

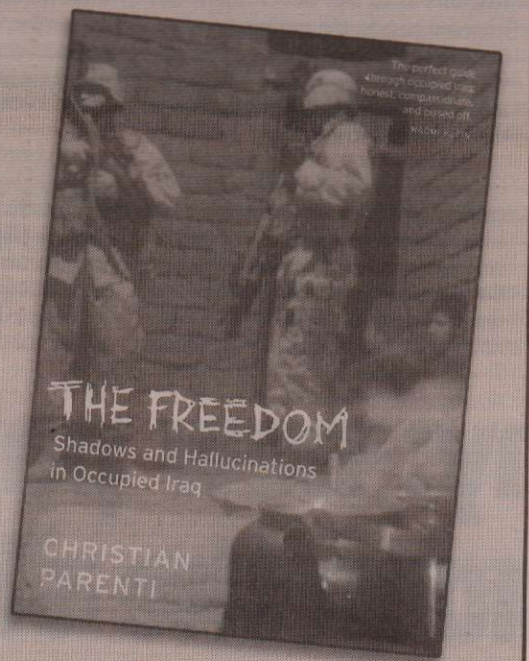
So, instead of a coherent analysis, we get a series of pictures and incidents: "no sweeping analysis... (but) a slice of political feeling and flavour, a snapshot of a time and place". The chaos of Iraq is matched by his chaotic account: no real explanation of the why or how of Iraq, but the implicit observation that war's a hell of a mess for all concerned, the occupiers and the occupied in equal measure.

And unfortunately, because the US forces aren't likely to kill him (intentionally at least), because they're like him, just trying to do their best, he relates to them far more closely than to any of the Iraqis, with the partial exception of his loyal interpreter Akeel.

He notes the rise of political Islam and the impotence of the left in the shape of the Worker Communist Party of Iraq, who in spite of good intentions have no real alternative to the Iraqi resistance. Parenti contrasts the reality of the streets and the plush, air conditioned fantasies of the Coalition Provisional Authority apparatchiks or "occupodians" as he nicknames them, safely ensconced behind the barricades of the Green Zone in the centre of Baghdad.

They have no idea about the number of Iraqi dead, but happily regale the willing hacks of the world with tales of resistance fighters killed and reconstruction projects completed. There isn't even a centralised agency keeping track of reconstruction spending, no mechanism for checking whether reconstruction money allocated gets spent, with the result that one estimate believes only 5 per cent of monies allocated actually result in rebuilding.

He visits the "grunts" – the GIs – sweating it out, alternatively, bored and scared and ecstatic, enjoying their power over life and death and the local Iraqi prostitutes who service the Green Zone. And the resistance.



Here, perhaps, we get a real feel for the nature of the popular uprising sweeping Iraq today. What emerges is a picture of ad hoc cells, loosely co-ordinated if at all, dropping in and out of activity, former military men with a mixture of Islamist and nationalist ideologies, but with no political wing – no Sinn Fein as he puts it – to speak for them.

The resistance fighters insist they are not responsible for the sectarian bombings of Iraqis: "We do not kill Iraqis, unless they are military interpreters or spies." And as Parenti points out, their horizontal organisation is both their strength and weakness. It makes it impossible for the West to root them out of Iraqi society, but also prevents them from undertaking really large scale co-ordinated actions to bring the war to a head. Their lack of a Sinn Fein means there is no political wing to sell them out, but it also prevents them from leading a political struggle based on mass direct action to end the occupation.

The scandal of Abu Ghraib is described, the arbitrary nature of arrest, the desperate but largely unsuccessful attempts of relatives to find out what is happening to those interned. We follow the futile struggle of Abu Sammar Razak for justice for the slaughter of his son Abdel at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Sadr City, left to bleed to death while the GIs watched unmoved.

Yet we get all this but we never discover the truth about Iraq. While the book is snappy and full of incident, what we really need is an Iraqi account of the occupation to illuminate the shadows and lift the hallucinations.

Italian general strike over Berlusconi's budget plans

By Paolo Rosso

On 30 November Italian workers came out on general strike against the latest budget proposals put forward by the right-wing coalition government of Silvio Berlusconi. The strike involved a four hour national stoppage, extended to eight hours in the state sector.

The strike was militant and included 70 demonstrations in the main cities. In Milan, 100,000 workers hit the streets, while in Venice 40,000 people protested despite serious flooding. Airports, banks, hospitals, public transport and post offices were brought to a standstill.

In the last few years Italian workers have suffered from drastically declining living standards, mass redundancies, business bankruptcies, attacks on pensions and reductions in state spending. The workers are being forced to shoulder the costs of Italy's industrial decline, so dramatically exposed by the continuing crises in Fiat and the near bankruptcy of national airline, Alitalia.

Indeed, the strike was long overdue and represents a reappearance of the Italian working class as a major force for the first time since the mass movements of March 2002 and the powerful one-day strike of April that year.

The passivity which marked the intervening months can be partly explained by the change of leadership in CGIL, Italy's biggest union federation. Sergio Cofferati, a left talking old school bureaucrat from the Communist Party tradition, was replaced soon after those events by Guglielmo Epifani from the more bourgeois tradition of the Socialist Party.

Anger came to a head around Berlusconi's budget proposals which involved a series of tax reductions for the well off, a measure which even his own allies, including his new finance minister, admit the state cannot afford. Berlusconi pushed it through by threatening to call new elections, elections his right wing allies knew they would lose out in.

Not only is the government racked by internal divisions, but even the Italian equivalent of the CBI - the organisation of big industrialists, the Confindustria - has abandoned it and is looking for a more serious and stable alternative to dig Italian capitalism out of the mire.

While the general strike was a success, the Italian trade union leaders continue to use such strikes to allow their members to "let off steam". They have no intention of mobilising the real anger and fighting spirit of the workers to drive Berlusconi's crisis ridden government out of office.

Teachers under attack

Not only did the trade union leaders do their best to limit the strike to four-hour shifts but also they deliberately separated it from the ongoing teachers struggle. Government has imposed cuts in the teaching budget, partly by diverting state money to private schools, resulting in a series of attacks on teacher's conditions and resistance to justified wage demands.

Government measures - the Moratti reforms - have included blocking the employment of full-time teachers in state schools, limiting access to universities to those students who pass through the Lyceum high school system (those in the technical institutes now have to do an extra year at school

if they want to go to university) and reducing hours taught in primary and middle schools by six hours a week.

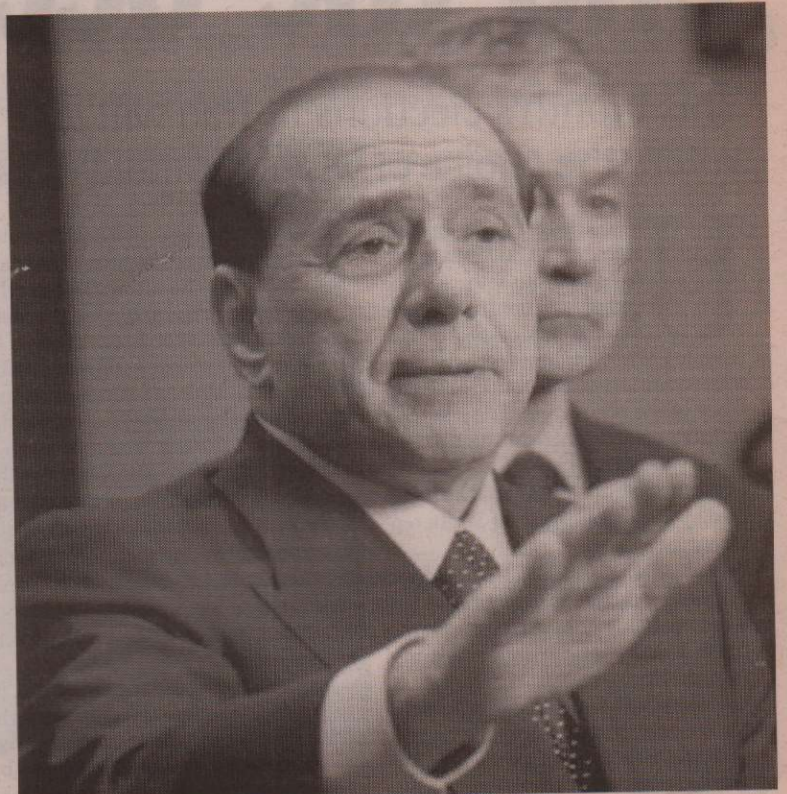
A teacher's strike for an eight per cent wage increase and against the Moratti reforms (supported by students) took place on the 15 November, only a fortnight before the general strike. By separating off this struggle, the union bureaucrats weakened both the teachers' strike and the general strike.

The question of pay is a crucial issue in Italy. The Italian capitalists and petit bourgeois market stallholders used the changeover to the Euro to hike prices, especially on food - inflation reached 60 per cent on some food items. And this took place in a period where the employers and government were on the offensive trying to cut wages and conditions.

Pensions have been another area of struggle where public sector workers have been sold down the river by their leaders. Not only has the number of years needed to work for a pension been increased (from 35 to 40 years) but the guaranteed minimum pension has been fixed at a miserly £350 a month - and even then it is estimated that 4.5 million people live below this minimum.

Berlusconi's government has 18 months to run and the leaders of the trade unions and the reformist workers parties are far more interested in manoeuvring around forming an alternative coalition government than they are in mobilising the workers to bring him down. Indeed, if Berlusconi was driven from office by a general strike, it would be these gentlemen's worst nightmare. A militant workers movement would then expect any incoming government to deliver measures in their interest.

Sergio Cofferati, the ex-leader of the CGIL, one of the big union federations,



was touted for a while as a potential "new left leader" of a alternative coalition to Berlusconi's - one that might have involved the Democratic Left, the Socialists, the Christian Democrats and even Rifondazione Comunista. But Cofferati went off and became mayor of Bologna instead, leaving the field clear for Romani Prodi, the former European Commission President and Christian Democrat. He would be the ideal candidate for sections of the Italian bourgeoisie. His role would be to deliver up the Democratic Left and the leaders of the workers' movement to a government that would demand workers

sacrifices "with a human face".

If the Italian workers want to avoid this they need to build on the success of the November general strike. They sense the weakness of Berlusconi's government but cannot rely on their leaders if they want to finish him off. The Italian workers need to form a new leadership in struggle, organising more effective general strikes and building rank and file led councils of action that can take the struggle out of the hands of the reformist trade union and political leaders. Only on this basis can the workers form a government that really governs in their interests.

Germany: new party has to come out from under the shadow of the SPD

By Martin Suchanek of Arbeitermacht

Two hundred and forty delegates representing 6,000 rank and file members gathered on 20-21 November in Nuremberg to plan the launch of a new left party (WASG) and to map out a campaign for the elections in the state of North Rhine Westphalia.

While the Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit (Election alternative work and social justice) presented itself at its Federal Conference as dynamic and orientated towards the future, there remains confusion and differences over the party's political trajectory.

The discussion on a programme for the new party was postponed, but it was agreed that the executive council should produce a temporary programme for the April 2005 elections in the state of North Rhine Westphalia. The official launch of the party will take place after the elections.

Three out of four members of

the executive council used their report to the conference to distance themselves from the left, whereas they were far more open to the right wing. This is expressed in the term "welfare state party" (Sozialstaatspartei), as executive council member Klaus Ernst above all defines this project. What at first sight appears to be a very cautious bureaucratically worded attempt to position oneself on the side of the working class in the face of the general attack of the capitalists is in reality an attempt to win the liberal minded representatives of the capitalists.

Hundreds of thousands have become politically active in the last two years; they have participated in demonstrations and strikes, often for the first time in their lives. They ask themselves today why so little has been achieved and how the fight should be continued. These have to be the target group of a new party.

Members of Gruppe Arbeitermacht, the German section of the League for the Fifth International, presented an

alternative draft programme. It sets down the just demands of the working class - and in defining these we have much in common with most members of the WASG. They can be fought for by direct action and by building up organs of power against bosses. Others, however, think some of these demands are "unrealistic", especially the call for a workers' militia.

This programme in its whole can only be achieved by a workers' government, based on organs of power of the workers' movement, on factory and neighbourhood committees, on workers' militia and councils and which is prepared and able to smash the bureaucratic state machine and replace it by a soviet-type democracy. Workers' councils like these are not only a means of struggle against the ruling system, they are at the same time the form in which the working people can control society democratically and plan the economy according to the needs of the producers."

When the members of the provisional leadership call our

programme "unrealistic", we pay no heed. We think their proposals like collecting signatures in defence of the constitution are a completely useless way of fighting against the government's cutbacks.

But many of the "lefts" inside the WASG, who balked at our proposals, should seriously ask themselves how, on the one hand, the mass of workers and youth can be won for the new Party and, on the other hand, this party can be socialist or anticapitalist.

What do their demands for "realism" mean? We think that the fear of becoming too "radical" is also a remnant of social democracy. The demand for "realism" is the SPD's answer to the crimes of Stalinism and to the idiocy of the Maoist sects since the 1960s. So the left in the SPD has always succumbed to a strategy of electioneering, accepted the need to participate in governments to prevent "a worse one of the CDU", accepted the need to agree to some welfare cuts in order to "prevent deeper ones"; all this as long as it is allowed to continue to spout

about "democratic socialism" on May Day.

We think a party must be a political leader and must give a clear orientation. It should not look to the least class conscious, but must help them to approach the level of the vanguard. Using unclear formulations might help to deflect attacks by the bourgeois media, but, if we want to win over those whose livelihood is now put in question by the bosses' redundancies, and the social cuts of the government, we need clear answers: who is our enemy, where does their power come from and how can we seize it from them?

With a new party standing in the front line of the battles, many who today think our ideas are unrealistic will start to think about them more deeply.

Therefore we are fighting for a socialist platform inside the WASG. To be a real answer to the betrayal of the SPD, the WASG has to get rid of all the social democratic junk and come out from under the long shadow of the SPD.

US unions think globally

In the aftermath of Bush's re-election, US unions have started debating the way forward. *Frank Kellerman* looks at the radical proposals coming out of one union, the Service Employees International Union

The million dollar ad campaign was booked and ready to roll. The issue: healthcare for every US worker. The target: John Kerry's incoming Democratic administration. Having supported Kerry to the hilt – virtually taking over the Democrat Party machinery with thousands of volunteers in many of the election battlegrounds – the 1.4 million strong Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was ready to demand payback.

But the victory never happened and now the US labour movement finds itself in renewed crisis. Instead of leading a push for healthcare, the SEIU finds itself leading a push to transform the union movement from above to face up to the realities of an America where Bush not only won, but won with the backing of upwards of 35 per cent of unionised workers and even some trade union branches. The SEIU's leader, Andy Stern, has launched a cross union debate that has already produced a tirade of accusations from the right wing of the AFL-CIO (the US equivalent of the TUC) of splitting and "politicising" the unions.

But Stern's "Unite to Win" principles have found growing support in the US unions and for once this is a US debate that looks set to shape the unions in the UK. Stern's union has already opened a London office and is exerting a powerful influence on the "Big Four" general unions in Britain, primarily through the GMB.

The SEIU's leadership seems to have discovered two problems at once: bureaucratism and globalisation. The 10 principles outlined in the Unite to Win document are posed as positive proposals but stand as a tacit indictment of the US unions' current leadership. Union density in the private sector hovers around 10 per cent and as low as 3 per cent across much of the South. Historically, the movement as a whole

has been hampered in fighting the most anti-union employers by a propensity to cut sweetheart partnership deals with the bosses of the declining "smokestack" industries while leaving the new industries unorganised. Hence the first of Stern's demands is for a concerted national campaign to stop the "Walmartisation" of jobs: namely the reduction of wages below poverty levels through a combination of zero hours contracts and encouraging workers to claim benefits.

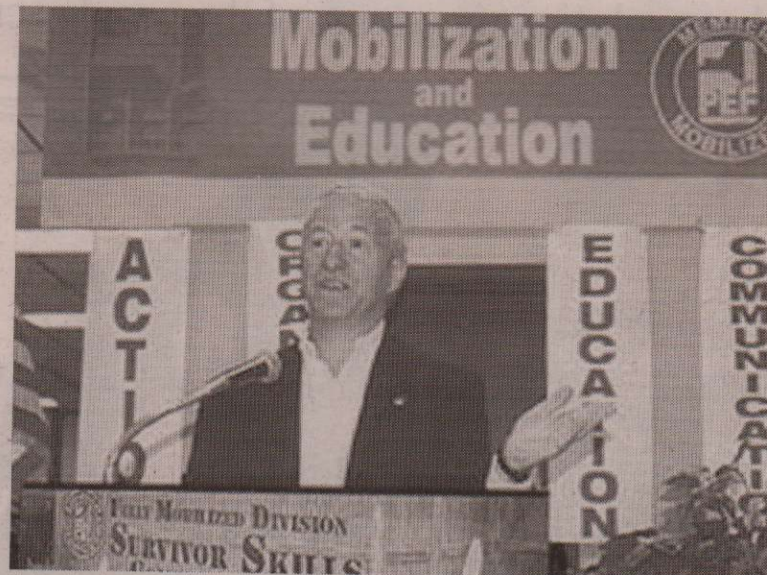
Unions routinely back political candidates who have no commitment to, and indeed oppose union rights. This has to stop, says Stern, a demand that has provoked a backlash from the "good ol' boys" of the union movement against "politicisation".

Unlike in Britain the move towards general unions has all but halted. Stern points out the weakening effects of craft unionism: "Transportation union members are divided into 15 different unions, and the same is true in construction. There are 13 unions with significant numbers of public employees and 9 major unions in manufacturing. Health care union members are divided into more than 30 unions." But Stern does not advocate a turn to general unions, preferring to create global industrial unions.

One of Stern's most radical demands is that: "The AFL-CIO executive council should have the authority to recog-

The SEIU's leader, Andy Stern, has launched a cross union debate that has already produced a tirade of accusations from the right wing of the AFL-CIO (the US equivalent of the TUC) of splitting and "politicising" the unions

nise up to three lead national unions that have the membership, resources, focus, and strategy to win in a defined



Union leader Andy Stern addresses SEIU activists

industry, craft, or employer, and should require that lead unions produce a plan to win for workers in their area of strength."

The rest should either merge or have their members transferred, reordering the union landscape in a one-off realignment of unions with the shape of the corporations they negotiate and fight with.

True union democracy, according to Stern, "is impossible when workers who do the same type of work and deal with the same employers don't have the

ing much stronger links with unions internationally that organise in the sectors and companies it has targeted; so, for example, it is keen to link – and ultimately fuse – its section organising in the security industry with that of the GMB. Likewise in public transport it sees the T&G's section dealing with the British-based First Group as a partner. These proposals go way beyond the usual "tick box internationalism" of the bureaucracy. Stern calls for global unions to deal with global corporations.

The SEIU model calls for 25 per cent of union dues to be spent on organising new workers, 25 per cent on professional propaganda, 25 per cent on training and education, 25 per cent on running the union itself. It is based on a high dues philosophy that has traditionally been opposed within UK unions, but which is more widely accepted in the USA because the actual benefits of union recognition – namely health insurance and a company pension – have more than offset the cost.

Stern is a Democrat but a radical one

and has thus far dodged the question of whether the unions should establish their own party. He has, however, steered the SEIU into supporting the anticapitalist movement and the union is probably the only one to grow under the Bush administration.

Its approach to organising makes the efforts of even the best in the UK look puny. A host of union researchers and even professional lobbyists will target not just a company but a sector: the philosophy is to present the key companies in the sector simultaneously with the demand for a contract – often with fairly minimal benefits and with many of the aspects of a single union deal. They will lobby politicians, banks, and pension funds. Only then will the union's organisers move into action, utilising the tactics depicted in the Ken Loach film *Bread and Roses*.

To anybody buried in a moribund British union branch all this looks revolutionary but it needs to be understood for what it is: a self-reform of the bureaucracy. Stern's scorn for the costly, ineffective bureaucracy also extends to the elected structures of the unions: while there are the trappings of democracy, the real power is wielded by a few at the top and their professional advisers. Stern has even condemned union branch meetings as a waste of resources: an idea that may be attractive to well-paid, do-nothing bureaucrats, but a deathknell for members fighting to save their jobs and livelihoods.

In this the SEIU looks more like an NGO than a union and it is easy to imagine how the structure can prioritise supposed effectiveness over political debate when the latter reaches a point beyond the leadership's "comfort zone" – a point made by critical rank and file activists within the SEIU, who will need to support what is progressive while organising independently from below.

Dollar threat to Bush's economic plans

George W Bush will be splashing out some \$40 million on his second inauguration on 20 January, but in addition to the ongoing war against the US led occupation of Iraq the spectre of large scale economic troubles will be haunting the inaugural balls.

On 28 December the US dollar hit a two-year low against the Euro, nudging below \$1.36. Since early 2002 the dollar has plummeted 37 per cent against the pound and 24 per cent against the Japanese yen. But why has this happened and does it matter?

The reasons are well understood. A couple of years ago the legion of foreign investors and governments that happily pumped \$2.1bn each day into the US got queasy. Between 1995 and 2002 the US economy accounted for 90 per cent of all new global growth. But this growth was not internally financed. The savings of US citizens have declined dramatically; instead, households borrowed on the rising market value of their houses, maxed out their credit cards as interest rates fell and – before the stock markets bombed in 2000-1 – borrowed on the basis of rising stocks.

By Keith Harvey

The money to underpin the growth came instead from abroad; effectively the rest of the world was financing the rising consumption of the US middle classes and more affluent workers. But in return the US economy sucked in imports – especially from a booming China – and provided European and Japanese firms with demand for their exports. This was vital for them since – the UK apart – most of the European Union economies (along with Japan) were experiencing low domestic demand.

Yet the ultimate consequences of this model of global growth were to increase US liabilities to the rest of the world (the current account deficit) and fuel a mushrooming US trade deficit. In the third quarter of 2004 the current account deficit widened to a record \$165 bn or 5.6 per cent of GDP.

Each new record deficit increases the USA's foreign debt burden and the debt service payments. Up until a year or two ago this burden was offset by falling interest rates. But interest rates in the US now have got nowhere to go but up after the savage cuts in the last three years in the wake of the stock market bubble bursting.

Fearing the deficits are unsustainable foreign private investors started to review their preference for US economic assets some time ago; hence, the steady fall in demand for dollar assets has led to the low but sure decline in its price. The Japanese and Chinese governments continue to pour money into the USA to try to slow the dollar's fall since their export orientated economies depend heavily on continued growth in the US.

The key policymakers in the US government, backed by Wall St, are keen to see the dollar fall still further. The lower price of the dollar reduces the value of the dollar denominated debt payments they have to make. If left unchecked, debt service repayments could eventually absorb as much as 4 per cent of the country's GDP each year by 2020 – implying a big drain on US living standards.

Effectively, the US government and main sections of big business are aiming to offload the burden of "rebalancing" the world economy onto its main rivals. Washington refuses to accept that the US middle class needs to stop spending more than it earns, blaming European governments and businesses for not doing more to boost demand in the

comparatively stagnant Eurozone. Likewise the Bush administration demands China revalues its currency to ease pressure on the dollar.

The risk for the US is that the dollar falls lower – much lower – than it wants to simply ease the burden of financing the deficits. If this were to happen then interest rate rises are likely to attract foreign investors back. But this in turn could easily trigger a recession in the US, given the staggering debt burden already chalked up by US consumers. The impact on the rest of the world's economies would be significant, dependent as many of them are on exports to the US.

In the 1980s and 1990s the major imperialist countries agreed on policies to manage the realignment of currency values to prevent trade wars and slump. In 2005, though, the most likely scenario would be a continued fall in the dollar – to \$1.40 against the euro at least. Only then would the major central banks even think of intervening in a co-ordinated way to arrest the slide. Beyond that level, however, and the self-interest of individual imperialist states may trigger a series of one-sided and uncoordinated policy measures that could tip the global economy into recession.

From banquets to barricades - how the 1905 Russian revolution began

Richard Brenner examines the onset of the 1905 Revolution a hundred years ago, and in particular the event that galvanised the revolutionary energy of the people across Russia - Bloody Sunday

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a titanic event that shaped the 20th century and the history of the working class movement.

Though defeated, the 1905 'Dress Rehearsal' was rich in lessons that fed into the strategy and tactics of the Bolshevik Party, leading directly to the successful seizure of power by the Soviets in 1917 and the establishment of the world's first workers' republic. These lessons concern:

- the tasks of the working class in a democratic revolution
- the relationship between the working class and other classes: the liberal bourgeoisie and the peasantry
- the development and role of workers' Soviets
- the power and the limitations of the tactic of the General Strike
- how the working class can undertake an armed uprising
- the role of a Marxist party in a revolution
- the role of a working class International (world party) in a revolution in one country
- the goals of the workers' struggle - what sort of government and what sort of society should the workers aim to create?

A hundred years ago, deep discontent was mounting in Europe's most conservative state. As an unpopular war with Japan led to a series of crushing military reverses, opposition was spreading across the Russian Empire to the autocratic dictatorship of the Tsar.

Few of the leading Marxists in Europe had paid much attention to Russia, regarding it as a backward country with a small industrial working class, a huge peasantry and a reactionary feudal regime based on the all-powerful Tsar, the nobility and a huge state bureaucracy. An exception, however, was the most prominent of the German Marxists and a key figure in the Second International - Karl Kautsky. He believed that Russia was heading for a revolution, and that the outcome of this struggle would have a huge impact on the development of the socialist movement in Europe. In a series of articles he pointed out that Russia had a developing capitalist economy that was coming into sharp contradiction with the outmoded political superstructure of Tsarism. In particular, the war with Japan would drag Tsarism into crisis. But the Russian capitalist class was too weak and too tied to landlordism to see the revolution through to full democracy. In Russia's coming bourgeois revolution, the working class would have to come to the fore as an independent force.

The main thrust of Kautsky's analysis was quickly vindicated. By the end of 1904, smart bourgeois 'society' was in a state of great excitement. The reputation of the Tsar and his ministers had been cruelly undermined by defeats at the hands of the Japanese. A series of banquets organised by the local 'Zemstvo' councils had heard radical speeches from liberal agitators, calling for greater checks and controls over the Tsar, with some speakers going so far as to call for a Constitution or even the election of a Constituent Assembly. Emboldened, the Zemstvos had begun to send petitions to the Tsar.



A cartoon from 1905 depicts the revolution as a woman surrounded by soldiers with bayonets

But of greater concern to the regime was that alongside the liberals' genteel activity, the working class had begun to show signs of involvement in the campaign against autocracy. The workers' party - the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) - was only seven years old and had just a few thousand members. It was severely divided, having split into two almost autonomous factions (the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks) in 1903, a split that was reinforced in December 1904. Yet the RSDWP responded creatively to the Zemstvo campaign. Initially at the proposal of Menshevik leaders, the party called on workers to demonstrate outside the liberals' banquets, calling for broad democratic freedoms and a Constituent Assembly.

Menshevik and bourgeois historians have long claimed that the Bolsheviks opposed the tactic of holding workers' demonstrations at the Zemstvo banquets, only backing them when the Mensheviks' tactics succeeded in rallying thousands of workers across Russia. A closer reading reveals the truth. The Bolsheviks never opposed these demonstrations - but they warned that the Mensheviks wanted to put more emphasis on making speeches to the liberals than on fighting the government and the police in the streets. While the Mensheviks worried that an excessively militant attitude by the workers might frighten the banqueting bourgeois and push them to the right - perhaps even panicking them into calling the police - the Bolshevik leader V. I. Lenin argued that mass workers' demonstrations would not only increase pressure on the liberals but would help mobilise the workers as an independent force. If anyone called the police, then mass militant

workers' demonstrations would be the way to repel them.

And in late 1904 this was just what happened. Large workers demonstrations were held at liberal Zemstvo gatherings: a banquet in Smolensk, the educational society of Nizhni-Novgorod, the Kharkov Law Society, and the Ekaterinodar municipal council. In Odessa, two successive demonstrations were held. 5000 workers and students convened mass meetings calling for democracy. The second protest was broken up by baton-wielding police.

In an effort to calm the mounting wave of popular protest, the Tsar offered an apparent concession - the Decree of December 12. This promised certain vague liberal reforms, such as easing restrictions on the press, but at an unspecified time in the future. Above all, the decree promised no involvement of the people in choosing the government or running the country. It satisfied nobody - it inflamed the opposition.

The liberal campaign in late 1904 had a tremendous impact on working class activists. As N. Simbirsky wrote: "I remember the outpouring of petitions that was sent to Petersburg from all corners of Russia... Petitions poured out in abundance, were printed in newspapers, workers read them and ardently discussed them at their meetings... And then, at workers' meetings there emerged the idea: We must go to the people!" And Abraham Ascher recounts that at a meeting on 28 November, 35 workers leaders met in Petersburg to discuss supporting the intelligentsia's demands for freedom. The proposal was adopted unanimously, "but no one knew how to proceed." An attempt by the RSDWP to call a march in Petersburg ended in a fiasco

- the Bolsheviks accused the Mensheviks of disrupting the mobilisation for factional ends.

When it emerged, mass working class struggle for democracy expressed itself not at first through the RSDWP, let alone through any broad democratic structures, but through an organisation of a very different and indeed highly dubious type. Founded in the capital city under the initiative of the police chief Zubatov, who encouraged the development of pro-Tsarist trade unions, the Assembly of the Russian Factory and Mill Workers of the City of St. Petersburg was headed by an orthodox Priest, Father Georgii Gapon. In return for limiting the Assembly's activities to social and educational initiatives, Gapon received 100 rubles a month from the secret police and their agreement not to harass his members.

Yet Gapon was not just a police stooge. He appears also to have been a naïve idealist, in his own confused and mystical way committed to helping the workers who began to flock to his Assembly organisation. Despite his police connections he came under the influence of liberal activists around the paper *Osvobozhdeniye*, ('Emancipation'), edited by the ex-Marxist intellectual P.B. Struve. Though Gapon at first opposed demonstrations and strikes, as an able organiser, a charismatic speaker and a priest able to appeal to the religious prejudices of the workers, he soon found himself at the head not only of an organisation of nine branches with up to 20,000 members but of a burgeoning movement of direct working class action.

Towards the end of 1904 Gapon broke the statutes of his own organisation and began to admit non-Russian, non-Orthodox and women mem-

bers. Though he kept his ties to the police, he began to draw up plans to prepare a petition to present to the Tsar on behalf of the workers of Russia.

The first week of 1905 saw a strike movement erupt in Petersburg. In December, four workers - all members of Gapon's Assembly - were sacked from one of Petersburg's most important factories, the Putilov arms and shipbuilding plant. When Gapon tried to do a deal with the plant's director, management refused to deal with the assembly. Gapon realised he had to sanction action, or his authority would be undermined.

The Vasilii Island branch of the assembly then met. In Gapon's absence over 600 workers turned up and voted for a strike. It spread fast. On 4 January the Franco-Russian works came out in support. The next day the Shtiglits factory and the Nevskii shipbuilding plant joined in. By 7 January, 382 factories and offices stopped work - 100,000 workers, two-thirds of the Petersburg workforce, were on strike.

The strike leaders realised that they would attract broader support by raising political demands about society at large, as well as economic ones about their own conditions of work. Gapon quickly raised his idea about presenting a petition to the Tsar, which was enthusiastically taken up. He informed the Governor of Petersburg that he was proposing a peaceful procession on Sunday 9 January.

The priest threw himself into frenetic activity; Ascher reports that one day alone he addressed over 50 meetings of workers, delivering short speeches in favour of the march, "arguing that the Tsar was a good man who would help the people once he understood their plight". He explained the contents of the petition and held votes on its programme, which were generally carried overwhelmingly. Many RSDWP members who attended these meetings were struck not only by the contradiction between the petition's democratic content and Gapon's faith in the Tsar, but also by the powerful emotional impact the meetings had on thousands of workers.

The RSDWP warned against workers having faith in Gapon and the Tsar. The Mensheviks pointed out that servants of the Tsar had founded Gapon's organisation; the Bolsheviks called directly for an armed uprising. They issued a leaflet on 8 January, the day before the march, which pointed out that the Tsar would never voluntarily agree to the petition's demands: "Freedom is bought with blood, freedom is won with weapons in a fierce battle. Don't beg from the Tsar, don't even demand from him; don't abase yourselves before our sworn enemy, but eject him from the throne and with him the entire gang around the autocracy - only in this way will it be possible to gain freedom."

At first, the Bolsheviks' intransigence antagonised some of the pro-Gapon workers. They were sometimes shouted down. One Bolshevik correspondent wrote to Lenin's paper *Vperyod* that the 'Zubatovites' would shout down calls for a rising or for the overthrow of the Tsar. But the events of 9 January would change the workers' reverence for the monarch and dramatically vindicate Bolshevik tactics.

For the government was preparing for a savage attack on the procession. On 7 January general Fullon declared that the march would not be tolerated; he moved thousands of troops into the capital. The next day, the regime issued an order to arrest Gapon – but the priest had gone into hiding.

He re-emerged the next day at the head of a vast demonstration. 100,000 workers and democrats turned up; the workers were dressed in their Sunday clothes and many carried Orthodox icons and pictures of the Tsar. There were many women, and families had also brought their children, expecting no trouble.

Surrounded by an honour guard of Assembly workers, Gapon carried the petition, which began:

“Sire: We, the workers and inhabitants of St. Petersburg, of various estates, our wives, children, and our aged, helpless parents, come to Thee, O SIRE, to seek justice and protection. We are impoverished; we are oppressed, overburdened with excessive toil, contemptuously treated... We are suffering in despotism and lawlessness. O SIRE, we have no strength left, and our endurance is at an end. We have reached that frightful moment when death is better than the prolongation of our unbearable sufferings.”

The petition then set out a series of significant reforms, including calls for release of political prisoners, freedom of the press, of association, of speech and of worship, free state education, separation of church and state, abolition of indirect taxation and the introduction of a progressive income tax, transfer of land to the people, “termination of the war in accordance with the will of the people”, workers’ committees in the factories with a veto over all dismissals, an eight-hour day. It then went on to conclude:

“...if Thou withholdest Thy command and failest to respond to our supplications, we will die here on this square before Thy palace.”

And so they did. As the front of the great march reached the Narva Gate, a bugle sounded. The soldiers had been given the signal – they opened fire. Forty people fell. As two of Gapon’s bodyguards died instantly, the priest famously declared “There is no God any longer! There is no Tsar!” before escaping over a hedge.

Wherever the marchers refused to disperse, troops opened fire. The workers’ illusions having been so brutally dispelled, they responded with uncontrollable anger. From then on, the slogans of the day were “Murderers”, “Death or Freedom”, and “You run from the Japanese but kill your own people!”

L. I. Gurevich wrote that on Bloody Sunday, “the Russian Revolution ceased to be the preserve of the conscious upper stratum and began to spread throughout the country, turning into a deeply rooted spontaneous movement.” And it is true that the events changed the character of Russia’s democratic agitation from one taking place under the direction of the liberals through bourgeois channels, into a mass movement of the working class. Though small in number compared with the large industrial proletariats of more developed capitalist nations, the Russian working class was highly concentrated, in large-scale enterprises. Now it came to the fore.

The year ahead saw successive general strikes, peasant uprisings and land seizures, student rebellions, national liberation struggles, mutinies in the army and navy, the creation of hundreds of new trade union and workers’ organisations, the emergence of democratic workers’ committees and Councils of Workers’ Deputies (‘Soviets’), the growth of the RSDWP from a propaganda society into a party of the workers and – in December 1905 – an armed uprising in Moscow under Bolshevik leadership.

A year of revolution had begun.

Germany and the USA defeat Russia in the Ukrainian elections

The new president of Ukraine will undoubtedly be Viktor Yushchenko. In the repeated second round of the elections held on December 26, as the candidate backed by US and German imperialism, to the tune of millions of dollars and euros, he obtained 52 percent of the vote whereas Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, backed by Russia, gained 44 percent. The election turnout was around 75 of the original ballot held on November 21. The so-called “orange revolution” has ended in a turnaround within the Ukrainian elite, the so-called oligarchs, who plundered the state property in the early 1990s.

The real winners are not only these filthy rich oligarchs but the ruling classes of Germany, America and the other imperialist powers. The losers are the industrial workers of Ukraine, most of whom supported Yanukovich and the youth, most of whom supported Yushchenko. The former thought that they were defending their jobs and social services against unbridled neoliberal economic “reform.”

The latter thought that Yushchenko would mean democracy and an end to the semi-police state that has survived the turmoil of the post-Soviet era. Both were deeply mistaken in their chosen champions since both represented the oligarchy of robber capitalists. Now, in order to fight effectively against anti-working class reform and continued police repression they will have to unite in direct action, mass strike action, a real revolution – not the branded nonsense of the orange fiasco.

The shameless attempt by Yanukovich to steal the second round of the presidential elections, on 21 November, gave the pretext for the “orange revolution.”

The mass protests and demonstrations in central Kiev and many other Ukrainian cities were both genuine protests against an attempt to violate the popular will and a shameless intervention by the USA and EU to get the regime they wanted. Yushchenko represents that part of the capitalist elite or oligarchs who wish to carry out a neoliberal “reform” of the economy and eventually join the European Union and NATO.

Of course equally shameless was the failed attempt by Russian president Vladimir Putin to get his candidate elected. Putin has good reason to be alarmed by the “orange revolution”. American troops are stationed in several former Soviet republics in Central Asia under the pretext of fighting the war on terror. In fact the United States is determined to get its hands on the enormous oil reserves of the entire Caspian region. The European capitalists, led in this case by Germany, are equally determined the USA shall not have it all. Indeed they are likely to claim the biggest slice of the pie.

Though it had mass support amongst the population of the western part of the country, the “orange revolution” was enormously inspired – and indeed in part organised – by direct US and EU agencies.

Under Bill Clinton the USA encouraged the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia. In Georgia, last year Bush played the initiating role – using the same approach. Putin had been trying to attract the former Soviet republics – Russia’s “near abroad” – into a “common economic zone”. Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan are central to this attempt at creating an equivalent



Supporters of Viktor Yushchenko outside the Cabinet of Ministers in central Kiev

to NAFTA. Kiev in the hands of a pro-American and pro-European president will sink this project. On an international scale Putin is the big loser.

The Ukrainian opposition had powerful and very generous American and German backers. It has been funded and organised by the two governments as well as their NGOs. US diplomats, including the US ambassador, shamelessly interfered throughout the whole election campaign. Yet the western media reported only Putin’s heavy-handed interventions. In fact both the Republican and Democratic parties and NGOs such as Freedom House and billionaire George Soros’ Open Society Institute have lavished millions of dollars. Officially, the US government has spent \$14m “promoting democracy” in Ukraine.

Using the Serbian based “Centre for Non-violent Resistance” young activists, who originated in the anti-Milosevic student movement, Otpor, have helped train and organise the Ukrainian “Pora” youth movement. In Georgia last year, they also helped set up a student movement called “Khmara”. In Belarus, it was called “Zubr” – though in this case it failed to dislodge the far more repressive regime of “strongman” Alexandr Lukashenko. The US is using this method right across the former-Soviet Union and anywhere regimes resist the demands for an open door for US corporate power and military bases. The next place to watch is probably Moldova.

In some ways the youthful crowds in Georgia and the Ukraine seem to be simply copying the tactics of the anticapitalist movement in the west and indeed the revolutions of 1989-1991 which brought down the Stalinist regimes. But the whole thing is a fake.

The tell-tale signs is that it is far more slick, professional and market-driven than any of these genuine social upheavals. The centre of Kiev was a monochrome orange: flags, overalls, ribbons, all supplied by wealthy supporters. An entire infrastructure – food kitchens, massive TV screens – was paid for by sympathetic businessmen and the large section of the oligarchs – now a majority – who backed Yushchenko. His closest ally, parliamentary deputy Yulia Tymoshenko, made a fortune from the sell off of various state gas concerns. Another early backer and parliamentary deputy is the oligarch Petro

Poroshenko, a confectionery producer and co-owner of the main opposition TV Channel 5.

Yet even during the “revolution” some sections of the population, such as students in Kharkov, rejected the camps of both the foreign-backed oligarchs of Viktor Yushchenko’s orange “revolutionaries” and the blue-and-white supporters of Viktor Yanukovich. They feared a civil war between the two camps and launched a “green” movement called We Are for Peace! Camped out on Kharkov’s central square since 28 November, the students organised a football match between mixed teams from both sides. Dmitry Tkachev, 22, a postgraduate student at Kharkov State University said “we want to make people think whether they are being used by politicians to achieve their self-interested aims.”

Certainly neither side had the interests of the workers or the youth of Ukraine at heart. Certainly the accumulated hatred of the repressive and corrupt Kuchmar regime was fully understandable and Yanukovich was his chosen successor. But after the second round fiasco Kuchmar and the decisive majority of the oligarchs simply changed sides, hoping to modify Yushchenko’s programme so that it did not threaten their corporate power. Doubtless Yushchenko has assured them of this.

But moves towards a more neoliberal regime will not bring freedom and democracy. At best it will mean a pale copy of the “there is no alternative”, tweedledum and tweedledee capitalist politicians of the United States and western Europe, with power firmly in the hands of the bankers and billionaires.

On the other hand, the fears of the workers in the industrial areas of eastern Ukraine are perfectly understandable. But their own oligarchs, even with the backing of Putin and the Russian oligarchs, will also preside over reforms which will bring greater misery for them. During the “orange revolution” they talked of a general strike if Yushchenko won. But if they organise a general strike it must be against the corrupt exploiters right across the country, not their brothers in the west of Ukraine.

The answer is neither the designer orange banners of Yushchenko, or the blue and white flags of Yanukovich.

Nor, for all their proponents sincerity is it the green ones of “peace”. Certainly the workers and peasants of eastern and western Ukraine must not fight each other for cliques of corrupt oligarchs, let alone for George Bush, Gerhard Schroeder or Vladimir Putin. The butcher of Falujah and the butcher of Grozny have nothing to offer Ukrainians beyond sweated labour, the threat of internecine war and tears.

That is why Ukraine’s youth and workers need to unite under the red flags of a real social revolution against the oligarchy and their imperialist backers. They need to say “no” to the bonapartist presidency, to a deal between the oligarchs, to political reforms done behind the backs of the people. On the streets in genuine mass demonstrations, by mass political strike action they should demand immediate elections to a sovereign constitutional assembly. Workers, farmers and youth must form local councils of delegates to wage this fight.

If they can win elections to a constituent assembly then they must, debar the oligarchs and their stooges from standing or from corrupting the candidates, they must ban fascists and anti-semites and create a militia made up of workers and youth to ensure free and fair elections. For this no imperialist “observers” will be necessary.

Delegates elected to the constitutional assembly should be immediately recallable by their electors, if they take measures a majority of them do not want. Revolutionary socialists in Ukraine should argue for a workers and farmers’ republic with no presidency, with the media in the hands of the working citizens, with full freedom for parties recognised by the workers as their own, with no interference from US and EU based institutes.

Revolutionaries should argue that only social ownership of the means of production – the expropriation of all the oligarchy without compensation – can lay the basis for a democratically planned economy. Then the vast majority of the people will be able to work to restore the prosperity and social services of their country. To fight for this outcome a revolutionary workers’ party is a burning necessity.

This is the only truly democratic road that can lead to power for working people.

The Asian Tsunami - not just a natural disaster

The horrific scale of suffering caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster has shocked the world. As we go to press, there are over 150,000 dead and some 5 million homeless in 11 countries. Many are still vulnerable to exposure, water-borne diseases, malnutrition and even starvation. What the final toll will be is difficult to predict.

Over 80,000 of the Indonesian dead have been counted, though in some parts of Aceh they stopped counting the bodies. As one survivor told the BBC, "The dead outnumber the living."

In Sri Lanka official figures record 28,729 killed and about one million people driven from their homes.

In India, the government records 9,067 deaths along the east coast as confirmed but nearly 4,000 more missing in the remote Andaman and Nicobar Islands, just north of Sumatra. Many fishing communities have been wiped out.

In Thailand the government announced that 4,985 people died, including 2,230 foreign tourists. Even in Somalia, farthest from the epicentre, coastal communities were ravaged and at least 200 killed.

Compared with man-made disasters such as the war in Iraq, where 100,000 may have perished since the war began, this tragedy has been (rightly) covered in great detail by the Western media. The reason for this difference is simple. In the case of the tsunami, nature can be blamed. The same imperialist statesmen - George W Bush and Tony Blair - who have murdered nearly as many Iraqis as the tsunami can pose as the very personification of humanity and compassion.

Yet even when it comes to such natural disasters the scale and destructiveness of them, the degree of havoc that they cause are far from being unconnected to social and economic, indeed class realities. Last year many commentators noted that when the Caribbean and the neighbouring countries were struck by extremely destructive hurricanes, the numbers of dead were many times higher in the poorest states of central America and the islands



A mosque is all that is left of a village in the Indonesian province of Aceh

than was the case in the southern United States.

The peasants and fishing villages of these countries suffered differentially greater casualties than their northern neighbours as a direct result of the poor condition of their housing and infrastructure. These in turn are the result of the fact that the USA is an imperialist country exploiting Latin America and preventing its development.

The same applies - indeed, even more so - to the poor farmers and fisherfolk of South East Asia. Their poverty stricken villages with their precarious and flimsily built houses were easily swept away. But in addition to this there is the question of the complete lack of any warning. Certainly the tsunamis advanced with great rapidity, reaching the speed of a passenger jet. But it is simply not true that it was physically impossible to give any warnings.

At least some of this death and destruction could have been prevented or reduced with a system of seismic monitoring buoys such as exists in the Pacific. Officials in Thailand and Indone-

sia have said that a rapid public warning could have saved many lives. But there simply is no international system to track tsunamis in the Indian Ocean.

Such a system would be not be expensive or difficult to install. The USA itself has had such a system for more than half a century. In the Pacific six buoys called tsunameters are equipped with earthquake sensors and measure small changes in water pressure. The meters cost only \$250,000 apiece and are programmed to automatically alert the USA's two tsunami-warning centres in Hawaii and Alaska.

American scientists actually wanted to place two more tsunameters in the Indian Ocean, one near Indonesia, but the plan was dropped through lack of government funding. The reason why no warning system exists in the Indian Ocean is thus obvious. In the Pacific two mighty imperialist countries, the USA and Japan are threatened by Tsunamis. In the Indian Ocean it is "only" poor third world countries which face devastation.

The same horrible double standards

can be seen when we look at the sums raised for disaster relief. Of course it is admirable that millions of pounds have been raised from public appeals. This shows how ordinary working people around the globe spontaneously feel for those in terrible need. But when the resources available are considered, the donations from the major imperialist powers have been miserly - so far (doubtless the response of ordinary people will shame them into improving on this somewhat).

When you compare the figures spent on a real humanitarian cause with those spent on establishing the new world order and assuring profits for Big Oil, Halliburton or Bechtel the picture becomes clear enough.

A week after the event two billion dollars had been subscribed to relief operations by both private appeals and states but this figure is both woefully inadequate to the task at hand and shamefully little when the budgets of the major imperialist countries are considered. As of writing the US government has donated a paltry \$350million.

Yet the Iraq war has cost the United States \$151bn so far, and is running at an average monthly cost of \$5bn.

In fact there would be no need for governments and western banks to send money to the countries affected, if they would only agree to stop receiving money from these countries: in the form of interest payments on their massive foreign debts. Indonesia, for example, the country nearest to and hardest hit by the earthquake and tsunami, has a staggering foreign debt \$132.7 billion (CIA handbook estimate for 2004).

Not only have the Indonesian people repaid these loans many times over through steep interest rates, they never benefitted from them in the first place. On the contrary, the vast bulk of the loans went on arms expenditure to prop up the pro-Western dictator Suharto!

Indonesia is a country where between one third and one half of the population, are living below the poverty line. The small amounts of aid flowing in are nothing compared with the interest flowing out to the western banks and the profits flowing out to their multinational corporations.

Of course it is vital to send money, rescue equipment, medical aid to those in desperate and immediate need. We should do all we can to force our miserly billionaire rulers to cough up everything that is needed to help save the lives of the survivors and restore their homes and livelihoods. But we must also fight to ensure that an early warning system, the equal of that which protects the USA and Japan, is rapidly put in place so that never again does such an event find a population so unprotected.

We should redouble the campaign, right up to the G8 meeting this July to demand a total cancellation of the foreign debt of these countries, indeed all the countries of the so-called Global South. The workers and anticapitalist movement should send aid too, directly to the organisations of the farmers and fishing communities of the region so that the imperialist governments and their tame NGOs do not misuse it to "open up" their economies still more to the multinationals.

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

Even the onset of war did not stop the global revolt against it.

Across the world the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence and Paris, in Asia at Hyderabad and Mumbai, and in South America at Porto Alegre.

Together with the L5I, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New

World Party of Socialist Revolution - the Fifth International.

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against war and capitalism, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or email us at workerspower@btopenworld.com

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
- Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Tel no: _____

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month.

I enclose:

£9.00 UK

£12.00 Europe

£18.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel no: _____

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International (L5I)

Mail: Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 020 7820 1363

Email: workerspower@btopenworld.com

Print: Newsfax, London
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)
ISSN 0263-1121