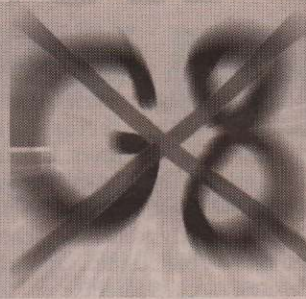


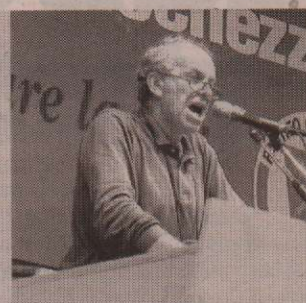
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END GLOBAL POVERTY SHUT DOWN THE G8

Edinburgh 2 - 6 July

In July, the G8 Summit will be meeting at Gleneagles in Scotland. Hundreds of thousands will be in Edinburgh to demand that the leaders of the world's richest countries put an end to the crushing debt the poor countries owe to them.

The other subject of the summit is climate change. Demonstrators will demand action to stop the pollution, which is bringing catastrophe ever nearer.

Everyone who cares about the future of our planet should support these

important protests.

But why should we even have to demand such obviously vital measures? Because the rulers of the world's richest and most powerful nations can only maintain their wealth and power by keeping the rest in poverty.

The world's 70 poorest countries owe the rich \$80 billion. It is crippling them. Yet the assets of the planet's 200 richest people are worth more than the annual income of the poorest 41 per cent of the people.

It is the drive for profit - cut-throat

competition between corporate rivals - that creates such inequality and poverty. Make Poverty History, a coalition of religious groups, trade union and charities, which is backing the Edinburgh demonstration, thinks they will find allies in Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

But Blair and Brown's promises to end world poverty are a cruel hoax.

In Birmingham, 1998, 70,000 people formed a human chain around the city centre. Under their pressure, the G8 then promised big things. Virtually nothing happened. Seven years on the debt

levels are back to where they were before.

The only people who can end global poverty are the poor, themselves.

We need to send a signal to those in the Global South, already in revolt against poverty and imperialist war, that they have the solidarity of workers and youth in the rich, imperialist heartlands.

The demonstrators against the G8 in Genoa in 2001 militantly declared the summit to be illegitimate. They heroically attempted to close it down. That's why people remember it and were inspired by it.

We have the opportunity to encourage people in Africa, Latin America and Asia to dump the debt and drive out the US and UK occupiers.

We have the opportunity to experience our own strength, here in the "rich" West, and take on our own rulers, who are just as prepared to cut our pensions, close our hospitals, remove the benefits of our disabled citizens, as they are to starve the African poor.

That is the real reason to head to Scotland in July in our hundreds of thousands. Join us there!

MAKE CAPITALISM HISTORY!

Labour's hollow victory

By Dave Stockton

Labour has won an historic third term with a clear majority. The Tories barely managed to improve on their 1997 and 2001 results. Blair should have been punching the air on 6 May. Instead, he looked as if he'd been punched on the nose. He had.

Three terms might make history for Labour but to win with just 36 per cent of the vote was also historic: the lowest share of the vote ever by a winning party. Labour's 2001 majority was slashed from 168 to just 67 - a loss of 47 seats. Labour's percentage of the total registered electorate fell from 25 to 21 per cent.

One in seven Labour voters deserted the party - and most of the deserters were working class former loyalists, not recent New Labour converts.

According to Mori pollsters, the national swing of 3 per cent away from Labour masks a 6.5 per cent swing among skilled workers and 4 per cent swing among the unskilled and unemployed. Abstention was also high in these categories: nearly half failed to vote.

Safe Labour seats in the inner cities may have stayed "red" on the map, but swings from Labour to the Liberal Democrats of 10 per cent were common. Labour also lost much of the youth vote. The Liberals captured big student areas, like Manchester Withington, Cardiff Central and Leeds North West.

Why did Labour lose nearly two thirds of its majority at a time of economic stability and rising wages?

George Galloway spoke not only for his own result but for over a million Labour voters who deserted their party: "Mr Blair, this is for Iraq!"

Gordon Brown wanted to fight the election on Labour's economic record. Yet time after time Iraq erupted into election debate: on television debates, radio phone-ins, and the streets. Brown had to defend Blair's "honesty" in invading Iraq. He may live to regret it.

The anti-war vote was mainly expressed through a vote for the only nationwide party that "opposed" the war - the Liberal Democrats. Of course, Charles Kennedy's party was only "anti-war" for about a month before the fighting started 2003.

Indeed, Kennedy - who backed all Blair's other wars, in Bosnia, Kosova and Afghanistan, as well as the "Desert Fox" air raids on Iraq in 1998 - signalled his future decamping to the patriotic lobby even before the war started: "I want to make it absolutely clear that the Lib Dems will be backing our troops... they will have our unqualified support."

The Lib-Dems only returned to criticising the war once the US and UK occupation ran into trouble and once the lies about weapons of mass destruction and the legality of the war began to fall apart.

Nevertheless, they were the weapon nearest to hand for many who wanted to give Blair a bloody nose without letting in a Tory government.

But second to the war - in explaining Labour's lost million voters - was

the mounting opposition to New Labour policies that has built up among public sector workers and public service users. Labour has introduced an internal market and private sub-contractors into the NHS. It is promoting city academies, schools controlled by big business, and "choice" for middle class parents.

It has closed fire stations and increased working time for firefighters. It is planning 100,000 redundancies for civil servants. Thus, many public sector workers - formerly fiercely pro-Labour - registered their protest in large numbers.

Peter Kellner in the *New Statesman* commented: "When people are asked which party they 'generally' identify with - as distinct from how they were voting this month - Labour has a stable 44.32 per cent lead over the Tories, with the Lib Dems on 15 per cent." This indicates that the swing from Labour to the Lib Dems was a protest against the war and other anti-working class measures.

This revolt clearly shows that significant sections of the working class broke from Labour and did so for progressive reasons, even if the positive "alternative" they chose was an utterly wrong one - a capitalist party.

Those Labour supporters who did this, plus those who abstained, were indicating their hostility to Blair and his war policies and trying to weaken his ability to do the same again. It would be completely mistaken to regard these defeats for Labour as constituting a move to the right. It indicates a will-



ingness to fight Blair on the industrial battlefield and to consider breaking from Labour altogether.

Obviously, if identification with the Liberal Democrats was to consolidate or become permanent it would represent a weakening of class consciousness.

However, this has not happened yet.

With a new working class party, workers could not only give Blair a bloody nose, but take up the struggle for a real workers' government. That is the task facing us in Labour's third term.

Will the left Labour MPs fight?

At the beginning of the campaign so frightened was the Labour leadership of a collapse in their heartlands that they allowed Labour left candidates to put a few sentences in their local campaign literature stating their opposition to the war. On average this seems to have done them little

good, though they did not suffer the giant swings that the most prominent pro-war Labour MPs suffered.

One of the most prominent anti-war rebels, Jeremy Corbyn, himself suffered a 10 per cent loss of support. He explained why in the *Morning Star*: "I had difficulty persuading people that a vote for me wasn't an endorsement

of the war."

Nevertheless the reduction of Blair's majority by around 100 makes him much more vulnerable to rebellions by the Labour left and the more radical of Gordon Brown's supporters.

Brown can also claim the credit for the historic third term. "Vote Blair: get Brown," from being a Tory slogan

to scare "middle England" became a promise to Labour supporters to keep them loyal. But even former Brownites, like Clare Short, have warned that a change of leader will not necessarily bring a change of policy. Only too true - some of Labour's worst neoliberal policies such as PFI, the part-privatisation of the tube - are Brownite

through and through.

The overlapping groups which constitute the Labour "hard left" (the Campaign Group of MPs, the Labour Representation Committee and the MPs associated with the RMT, the FBU and the PCS) have been emboldened by Blair's personal "defeat" and are openly calling for him to go as soon as possible. They are talking of a leadership challenge in the autumn, and organising a conference in July to discuss all this.

They should stand against Blair, and attack not only Blair's record but Brown's too. They should put forward the policies they support at rallies in Trafalgar Square: troops out of Iraq now, re-nationalisation of privatised industries, repeal of the anti-asylum laws and the attacks on civil liberties, an end to neoliberal "reforms", the abolition of tuition fees and the raising of state pensions to levels called for by the unions and pensioners' organisations.

Of course they could not possibly win in a party dominated by Blairite and Brownite opportunists. The aim would be to create a solid and sizeable minority in parliament, in the constituency parties and in the unions, willing and able to disrupt Blair and Brown's plans to carry on the attacks on the working class. This would work only if they linked up with the rank and file in the unions and political forces outside of the Labour Party.

But will they get beyond verbal attacks on Blair? Will they challenge him head on? Their attitude to Brown is evasive and confused at best. However, the year ahead will see a deepening conflict within the Labour Party. Those seeking to build a new workers party, a force independent of Blair and Brown, will have to seek unity in action with the Labour left.

Scottish Socialists slump

By GR McColl

The Scottish Socialist Party suffered a serious setback at the polls on 5 May. Compared to the 2001 general election, its share of the vote plunged across the 58 seats it contested. Four years ago it garnered 3.1 per cent of the popular vote, but just 1.9 per cent this time. It salvaged only two deposits across the whole of the country and only one of these in the party's previous Glaswegian strongholds.

Alan McCoombes, the SSP's press and policy co-ordinator, claimed that the "result illustrates the magnitude of the task we face of building a mass socialist party capable of creating an independent socialist Scotland". While undoubtedly true, it does not explain why did the SSP do so badly.

There were undoubtedly several factors. In part its sorry showing was because the anti-war vote that broke from Labour tended to go to the Lib Dems, despite their participation in a coalition with New Labour in the Scottish parliament.

More significant was the party's increasing turn to nationalism.

Alex Salmon's Scottish Nationalists could also claim to be anti-Blair and anti-war. The significance of the "national question" has declined in Scottish politics since the creation of the Edinburgh parliament. Of course, the poll tax boosted Scottish nationalist feelings of resentment because it appeared that the nation was being used as a testing bed for Thatcher's worst policies.

But since then Scotland has been granted a degree of autonomy and clearly is not oppressed by Westminster. The right of the Scottish people to independence should be undeniable - but that's not the same as workers either wanting it or needing it. Quite the opposite.

The SSP has carefully positioned itself to the left of Labour as a reformist, working class party, and to the left of the SNP as a more radical, nationalist party. But it is not qualitatively any different to either of them.

Party activists should open up a debate about where they go from here. In that debate, a new platform, around a revolutionary action programme and the goal of a socialist Britain in a socialist world, needs to be forged.

Proportional representation

Britain has one of the most undemocratic electoral systems in the world. Just look at these facts. The Tories gained 50,000 more votes than Labour in England but got 92 fewer seats. If the number of votes cast reflected the number of seats gained the Liberal Democrats would have 141 seats, not 62. Labour won 159 more seats than the Tories with just 3 per cent more of the vote.

No wonder only six out of 10 voters bothered to cast their ballot. Some MPs now admit that it is time to bring in reforms. Proportional representation (PR) systems, as exist in every other EU country, allow for far more equitable outcomes to elections.

But Labour's policy makers will have none of it. Jack Straw objected in *The Guardian*, "British people prefer strong majority government rather than some mush in the middle." This is the argument of dictators the world over: people like a strong leader.

Tony Blair himself said, "The problem with PR systems is that you often have a result where a small party actually holds the balance of power." Again the contempt of the powerful. Typically, Blair's response has not been to enter serious debate - but

to promote 27 new (totally unelected) life peers to the House of Lords in order to boost Labour's majority!

Socialists condemn parliamentary democracy as a sham. Real power lies not in the debating chambers of Westminster, but with the executives of the banks and mega-corporations, the generals and the judges, the police chiefs and the top civil servants.

However, we are in favour of forcing our rulers to reflect the diversity of political views in a single, annually elected chamber with full sovereign powers. A PR system with no lower limit for the representation of small parties would erode the monopoly Labour undemocratically enjoys over working class politics, and aid the development of a revolutionary socialist party.

Of course, even such a system would be suspended should it ever seriously act against the strategic interests of British imperialism. But it would train the working class and oppressed sections of society in political activity and prepare the way for the revolutionary overthrow of the system of class dictatorship that parliament, of even the most democratic stripe, disguises.

workers power 5

Blair goes straight onto the attack

"The great thing about an election is that you get out and talk to people for week upon week and I have listened and I have learned. I think I have a very clear idea of what the British people now expect from this government for a third term."

Tony Blair's victory speech said it all. Four weeks "listening to the people", four years carrying out what he wants.

According to the *Sunday Times*, there will be "flagship bills on immigration and asylum, violent crime, work and families, education and skills, health improvement and protection and welfare reform" as well as ID cards and fathers' rights.

And he's picked a team to force it through.

Ultra-Blairite bruiser David Blunkett returns to the cabinet as head of Work and Pensions. Patricia Hewitt, who has spent years sucking up to tycoons at the Department of Trade and Industry, will bring them in to "modernise" the NHS. Most controversially, Andrew Adonis, who thought up tuition fees and city academies, is to become the schools minister.

The twin themes uniting all Labour's new policies are social discipline and market discipline.

Pensions Commissioner Adair Turner has already delivered his first report into public sector pensions. It contained few surprises. Workers are living longer, therefore they - not the companies they worked for all their lives and whose profits they created - need to pay the price. The retirement age will be extended year on year, according to medical - or rather financial - projections. Pension entitlements will be constantly revised - downwards. As will workers' contributions - only upwards.

In short, the attack on pensions is back on.

Blunkett's immediate priority, however, is to strip away the rights of up to 2.7 million incapacity benefits claimants. Jobs advisers are to sit in on GP surgeries to ensure mandatory medical examinations give the "right" results.

Patricia Hewitt lost no time signalling her "determination to continue both the direction and pace of reform" in the NHS. She has awarded £3 billion of contracts to private hospitals to carry out 250,000 NHS operations a year and a further £1 billion to treat up to 200,000 patients. More than one in ten NHS operations will be privatised.

Is this patient-led? No, it's profit-led. As private multinationals cherry-pick the most profitable operations to perform, NHS hospitals will be left to deal with the most complex cases. Increased competition will, as Hewitt has admitted, inevitably lead to ward, department and whole hospital closures.

Andrew Adonis will oversee the tightening of private companies' grip on state schools. Capitalists can gain control of schools either through building them, using lucrative Private Finance Initiatives, or taking them over with the equally profitable City Academy schemes. Result? Contracts locking schools into substandard services for 30 years or more, right wing curriculums, pay and job cuts.

TIME TO FIGHT BACK

The big four union leaders' "saviour", Gordon Brown, exposed himself during the election campaign as every bit New Labour as Blair. Unless Blair tries to diddle him out of the succession again not a peep will be heard from him on these policies.

Militants must demand their leaders organise a united response to Labour's third term agenda. But we should not wait for them either. We should start organising the fightback now. Within each union and across the unions too.

Cuts in pensions, hospital closures, entrusting our children's education to business tycoons, kicking the disabled off the dole... these are issues that concern us all. The leaders of the big unions must be forced to fight or make way for those who will. The surest way to do this is to prepare the fight without them by organising the fight from below. We should form action committees in every town and city, linking rank and file delegates of the public sector unions such as nurses, teachers, civil servants and firefighters with others under attack, like pensioners, private sector workers and radical youth.

Labour's slump at the polls showed that millions oppose its attacks on the welfare state. Now let's turn that anger into action.

Blair and Brown have called on their MPs to keep a united front. We need a united front of mass demonstrations, civil disobedience and strikes to resist them.

Respect: rise of a new populist party?

By Jeremy Dewar

One big story of the election night was Respect's victory in Bethnal Green and Bow and strong polling in East London and Birmingham.

This was a powerful indication of both the strength of anti-war feeling and the real potential that exists to channel this into a radical alternative to Labour. The problem with Respect is that it is not channelling this anger in the direction of independent working class political representation.

Respect does not identify itself as a working class party, despite the fact that George Galloway was a long-time Labour MP and the organisational core of Respect is the membership of the Socialist Workers Party. In fact Respect is an alliance between the SWP and a series of religiously based organisations - local mosques and sections of the Muslim Association of Britain. The constituencies where it has made its breakthrough are all strongly Muslim areas.

Of course revolutionaries should not turn their back on Muslim areas. The Muslim population, the majority of whom are working class, is one of the most discriminated against and racially abused in Britain. Revolutionaries always side with the most oppressed and seek to draw them into the workers' movement and into its vanguard.

The error that the SWP made was to seek out an alliance with Muslim people not on the basis of class politics but on a less than working class, less than socialist platform. In Lindsey German's words at its foundation conference, Respect set out to be "less socialist" than the left reformist Socialist Alliance had been.

Respect's political programme was trimmed to win middle class support within the Muslim community. When it comes to the question of the alternative society Respect is fighting for, it dodges the fundamental question: private property or socialised property? The expropriation of the capitalist class as a whole is not and cannot be raised.

Respect's manifesto does have a single paragraph aimed at attracting Old Labour supporters. It talks about the



George Galloway on the Respect bus

"organisation of society in the most open, democratic, participative, and accountable way practicable based on common ownership and democratic control" But ownership of and control over what? This is evasive. At least the famous Labour Party Clause Four called for "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

Mosques, just like churches and synagogues, contain a mixture of working class and middle class people. The SWP talks of how many worshippers in the mosque are workers. This is beside the point. In all religious communities, business people (small or large scale), doctors and lawyers call the shots.

For many decades Jewish and Irish immigrants were overwhelmingly working class too. But no revolutionaries ever thought that they could form an electoral alliance, a proto-party with the synagogues or the catholic churches.

Socialists must be for secular education and women's liberation. All religions embody undemocratic teachings on these issues. Respect was downplaying women's rights from the outset. When it used the slogan "a woman's right to choose" it meant to choose to wear the hijab but not to choose to have an abortion. The Respect election manifesto had "Respect for..." sections for

every sector of the population. But no "Respect for women"!

Galloway stressed whenever he could his profound religious faith and his opposition to abortion. Respect supporters in the mosques advertised these positions as reasons to vote for him. The SWP never uttered a single word of criticism of their allies' socially reactionary views. The best they could be made to do was to claim they were only his personal views. However, Lindsey German hastened to clarify that, when issues like that came up in the House of Commons, Respect was in favour of a free vote, allowing George to follow his conscience.

The fall in support for Labour in key sections of the working class presents massive opportunities for socialists to rally the most progressive sections to a new working class party. Respect's high vote is clear evidence of this. But by channelling this discontent into a cross-class populist vehicle, the SWP and Galloway are frittering away the chance to build a mass working class alternative to Blair.

That's why this paper was absolutely right to oppose the formation of Respect, and to refuse to advocate a vote for Respect candidates. We will continue instead to fight for the foundation of a new working class party, and for a revolutionary socialist programme.

How Galloway won

George Galloway had come under ferocious attack from pro-war apologists in the Independent, Observer and Times. Allegations of anti-Semitism, intimidation and misogyny flew thick and fast. Pro-war Blairite loyalist, Oona King, was depicted as a victim of hard left and Muslim bully boys.

Although there was the odd egg-throwing incident and unproven accusations of physical attack, they had bearing on the outcome.

In fact the most serious incident had nothing to do with the contest between Respect and Labour, but was due to a small fundamentalist group, the self-styled Saviour Sect. Several of their members tried to intimidate Galloway, enraged at his attempt to win votes from Muslims.

Respect quite openly targeted Muslims - and Sikhs and Catholics - as faith groups. At their 350-strong East Ham rally, the line-up of 12 speakers included three Muslim representatives, as well as one from the Sikh community. The audience was reminded that

Galloway was a "man of faith" and "devout Catholic".

There was not a single trade unionist speaker on this platform, aside from Unionist's Michael Gavan in the chair. The meeting broke for prayers - men only, of course. There was hardly a mention of socialism, while the SWP's Lindsey German devoted much of her speech to denouncing Islamophobia.

Clearly the Muslim community at the heart of Bethnal Green & Bow were voting for the candidate who best expressed their vehement hostility towards the war. There was also a widespread desire to get rid of Oona King, who had already faced a tough reselection fight within the local Labour Party.

However, Respect's success cannot be put down solely to the "Muslim vote". Its local branches have started to put down roots and are attracting a small but significant layer of working class activists beyond the ranks of the SWP.

PCS activist Oliur Rahman became the coalition's first elected councillor last summer and has swiftly developed a high

profile as a tenants' champion. A few weeks later SWP member Paul McGarr gained nearly 27 per cent of the poll in the still mainly white Millwall ward.

Galloway has also supported the local FBU in resisting cuts and met with Union members in the local authority incensed over attacks on their pensions.

Respect is hoping for major gains in council elections in Tower Hamlets and Newham next May. The East London results have certainly whetted the SWP's appetite for populist electioneering. Given its success it will not spontaneously move on from this faith-oriented populism.

Nevertheless a revival of struggles, by trade unionists, tenants, anti-racists from all "communities" will open up the social contradictions within the multi-class block that Respect is trying to build.

Such struggles can bring closer a successful fight for an independent working class party and the winning of it to revolutionary socialist politics.

After the election

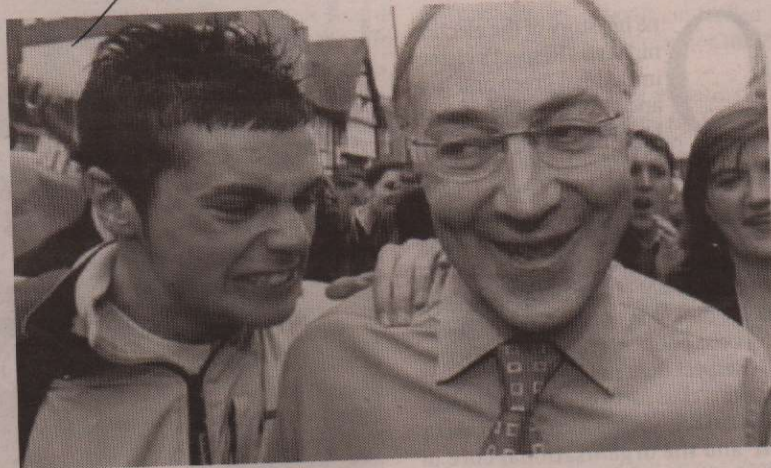
Tories play race card but Howard's a busted flush

For 18 years Britain's Conservatives held sway in Parliament. They formed the government of the day for 35 of the 46 years between 1951 and 1997. But it all seemed a very long time ago by May 2005.

After two drubbings in 1997 and 2001, the Tories' 2005 election campaign just about stopped the rot. Under Michael Howard the party's share of the popular vote stabilised at 33 per cent, with 32 additional seats in the new parliament for a total of 197. A concentrated attack on a series of marginal Labour-held seats in London and the South East yielded some gains, while all but one leading Tory figure saw off the Liberal Democrats' so-called decapitation strategy.

In achieving these modest gains the Tories ran the most vicious populist campaign mounted by a mainstream political party in Britain since the mid-1970s. Michael Howard and co shored up a core middle-class vote in the Home Counties and reversed the dramatic gains recorded by UKIP in the European election last June.

Once again, the Tories proved themselves a thoroughly racist party despite



the election of their first ever, black MP. Their initial campaign poster featured the slogan: "It's not racist to impose limits on immigration: are you thinking what we're thinking?" The insinuating tone was part of a regular Tory theme: in the UK "political correctness" has "run wild". Those who harp on about floods of immigrants are presented as a persecuted silent majority, barred from speaking their minds freely. Hardly! The tabloid papers spew

out racist invective against asylum seekers and other immigrants almost every day of the week.

Unable to offer any real alternative to Tony Blair's New Labour on the economy, on public services or the Iraq war, the Tories found themselves left with just one vote winner - anti-immigrant demagoguery. Relying heavily on the same right-wing populist advisor, credited with gaining John Howard a third term as Australia's prime minister,

the Tories turned to the issue of immigration, again and again.

The Tories called for arbitrary quotas on refugees and migrant workers, process all asylum seekers in offshore centres, and withdraw from the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. In principle, Britain's commitment to the Convention prevents a British government implementing such policies. At one point the Tories were proposing a surcharge on employers who employed workers from overseas.

The son of an immigrant, Michael Howard, was even willing to follow the party's arch-racist of the 1960 and 70s, Enoch Powell, by predicting and implicitly excusing anti-immigrant violence on the streets. Powell famously predicted "rivers of blood" if immigration was not checked. The Tory leader Ted Heath sacked him from the shadow cabinet. Today the Tory leader uses these sorts of arguments himself.

Asked whether he expected a repeat of the 2001 riots in Burnley and Oldham, which were in fact triggered by the fascist BNP, Howard replied: "Yes... [When] immigration is out of control, I think that these anxieties make it more difficult to have good com-

munity relations."

Local Tory candidates have gone even further, espousing the BNP policy of expelling immigrants. Bob Spink, standing in a marginal constituency in Essex, asks, "Which bit of 'Send them back' don't you understand, Mr Blair?"

All too predictably, Labour retreated in the face of the racist onslaught. Blair, tried to undermine the Tories by aping their policies: 600 more border guards, detention and electronic tagging for failed asylum seekers, a points system to ensure only those migrants with the skills set that British capitalism needs can get in, biometric ID cards, etc. All this came in a speech to a handpicked, all-white audience in the port of Dover, where the local press had stoked anti-refugee racism for years.

Yet "too much" immigration is not a problem for the key sections of British capital. Even Sir Digby Jones of the CBI employers' federation has admitted that, "If it was not for immigrant labour, especially in leisure, in tourism, in agriculture, in construction, then frankly many of our businesses would not have the workers we need." The Tories' immigration policies have rendered them dysfunctional in the eyes of Britain's big bosses.

Even some one-time leading Tories such as Tim Yeo and John Bercow recoiled at the tenor and content of Michael Howard's campaign, which was also criticised by the one-time arch-Thatcherite, Michael Portillo. They have concluded that the Tory party remains unelectable and without a fundamental makeover it looks unlikely to be the preferred option for Britain's key bosses any time soon.

Will the IRA go the "extra mile"?

By Keith Harvey

"I want to speak directly to the men and women of Oglai na hEireann, the volunteer soldiers of the Irish Republican Army."

So began Gerry Adams' keynote address to the IRA on 6 April, one month before the 5 May general election.

"In the past I have defended the right of the IRA to engage in armed struggle," he continued, "... that struggle can now be taken forward by other means. Now there is an alternative."

What did Adams hope to gain from this appeal?

For four years the Assembly lurched from crisis to crisis as the unionist parties' conditional support for power-sharing with Sinn Fein and the SDLP hinged on further weapons "decommissioning" and the effective disbandment of the IRA. Two rounds of limited weapons destruction failed to appease the virulently anti-Catholic bigots of the Democratic Unionists.

Naturally, Adams and the IRA were not inclined to complete disarmament so long as policing in the six counties remained firmly under unionist control. Eventually, the Assembly foundered and collapsed over the issue in 2003.

By December 2004 an attempt to relaunch the suspended institutions of devolved government had ended in impasse. Although the IRA declared its readiness to disband, the DUP demanded its public humiliation.

Then, the Northern Irish Bank was robbed to the tune of £26 million. Both Tony Blair and Irish prime minister Bertie Ahern blamed the IRA and accused Sinn Fein of having advanced knowledge of it. Blair subsequently suspended Sinn Fein MPs' Westminster salaries. In response, the IRA's P O'Neill angrily withdrew the decommissioning offer: "We do not intend to remain quiescent within this unacceptable and unstable situation. It has tried our patience to the limit."

The killing of a Sinn Fein supporter outside a Belfast pub led to the subsequent campaign by his family, calling on

Sinn Fein to assist in outing his IRA murderers. In response to Robert McCartney's murder, the Provos have publicly supported the family and reassured eyewitnesses they've nothing to fear from the IRA.

Adams' speech was a careful PR stunt aimed at two audiences. On the one hand, he appealed to core voters, who might have been disillusioned by recent unsavoury events, and middle-class Catholics dithering between SF and the SDLP. It was also very much for George Bush's ears. Sinn Fein took the absence of an invitation to the White House on St Patrick's Day very seriously.

Adams' speech was sold heavily in the US as a major development. But was there anything really new in it? The IRA called its ceasefire 11 years ago and it's been a long time since Sinn Fein embraced "armed struggle".

In reality, there is no hawks-and-doves split within the ranks of mainstream republicanism. No section supports going back to war. The IRA has said it is considering Adams' "appeal". Likely outcomes include a substantial act of decommissioning, a form of words that the war is over, or an announcement about dis-

mantling some IRA structures.

The IRA is unlikely to simply disappear as an organisation. The public will be told one thing, and IRA activists will be reassured that plenty of weapons have been retained and money exists to buy more.

The May general election results saw a further polarisation. In the unionist camp the DUP won nine seats, virtually wiping out the UUP and forcing David Trimble to resign as its leader. They had achieved precisely what they had sought through their intransigence last December.

Sinn Fein made further gains, too, although they did not achieve the predicted wipe-out of the SDLP, largely due to the fact that unionists voted tactically in support of the SDLP to keep Sinn Fein out.

As to the future, the DUP has worked with Sinn Fein councillors and, informally, with its assembly members in the past. They have taken positions in the executive and would do so again. The next months will see talks restart on resurrecting the devolved institutions, with the DUP sure to use its increased mandate in the hope of forcing the IRA/SF to

BNP: Fascists still pose a threat

The fascist British National Party (BNP) failed to make a breakthrough in the general election, gaining no MPs and losing 84 deposits. But that is not the whole story.

The BNP stood 119 candidates - three times as many in 2001 - and got four times the popular vote as in 2001 (193,000 v 47,000). They shifted resources to the south of England, especially Barking, East London where they captured 16.9 per cent of the vote and came only 27 votes behind the second-place Tories.

They chalked up respectable votes in several other constituencies, includ-

ing 13.1% in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire. Indeed Yorkshire - especially Bradford, Leeds and the surrounding towns - is clearly a potential base for this thinly disguised fascist outfit. They gained 5 per cent of the total vote, saving most of their deposits. They also saved deposits in nearby Rotherham and the Rother Valley, a first for the BNP.

Nick Griffin, the BNP's leader, had made a high-profile switch from his 2001 target of Oldham in Lancashire, to Keighley in West Yorkshire, hoping to cash in on the issue of Asian men "grooming" school students for sex. He came fourth with a 10 per cent vote, despite parachuting into the constituen-

cy and facing an intense campaign against him spearheaded by the Keighley Trades Council.

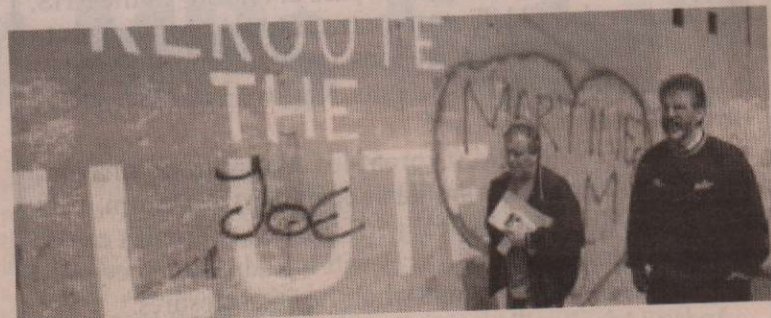
Meanwhile, in the North West, there were encouraging examples of effective opposition to the fascists. At the start of the decade, the BNP had made major inroads in Oldham and in 2001 it recorded the biggest BNP vote. But four years later its share of the poll had slumped by half. This was undoubtedly the result of sustained campaigning by anti-racists.

In Knowsley, near Liverpool, the local authority met with organised resistance when they invited the fascist BNP and other candidates to a hustings. All the other candidates - bar Labour's

- agreed to the anti-fascist pickets' demand that they refuse to share the platform with the Nazi. With just Labour's hapless George Howarth and the BNP candidate remaining, the chair of the meeting reluctantly agreed to start proceedings - at which point every single member of the audience turned their backs and walked out!

During and after the election, we must raise the demand on the trade union leaders and the left Labour MPs to launch a massive campaign in defence of refugee and migrant workers' rights and to push the organised racists and fascists like the BNP back into the gutter, where they belong.

www.workerspower.com



Gerry Adams on the campaign trail

"go the extra mile".

But the republican struggle is based on a real social injustice that nothing in the past decade has resolved. That is the denial of the right to self-determination for the Irish people as a whole.

Ireland remains divided by the British state, whose troops remain stationed in the North. Northern Ireland minister Peter Hain holds a veto over all political decisions; Tony Blair can unilaterally suspend or reinstate the Assembly.

The Good Friday agreement formalised the unionist veto that is the bedrock of the mini-state. The unionists retain their veto over any fundamental dismantling of this sectarian state.

The DUP has used this veto to ensure that, despite some alleviation of Catholic discrimination, the police and security services remain unionist controlled. As the election showed, this sectarianism is increasing, not fading away. Working class disunity, based on privileges for the protestant majority, remains intact.

In these circumstances, socialists should resist all calls for the "normalisation" of Northern Ireland. While the armed struggle of the IRA has failed to eject the British guarantors of sectarianism, its disbanding will not bring a progressive solution one day nearer.

TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND NOW!

Manufacturing in crisis: how to ensure workers don't pay the price

By Dave Ashcroft

Since New Labour's election victory in 1997, over a million manufacturing jobs have disappeared in Britain. Last month the quiet jobs massacre gathered pace in the West Midlands. Dave Ashcroft looks at the mounting crisis in manufacturing and puts the case for nationalisation under workers control as the alternative to mass unemployment.

In April the sole remaining British-owned major car manufacturer, MG Rover, closed, following the collapse of takeover talks with China's Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC). The 6,000 workers sacked at Longbridge, along with 15,000-20,000 whose jobs are on the line at Rover's suppliers, joined the thousand whose jobs are going with the closure of Jaguar's Coventry plant, and 800 others left unemployed with the loss of a shift at Peugeot.

These job losses are not limited to the car industry. The telecommunications giant Marconi has just announced 800 job losses. Soon after, IBM revealed plans to axe 13,000 jobs worldwide, mostly in its European operations, including Greenock, Scotland.

New Labour politicians and union leaders tell us they are doing everything they can, but little can be done. The massive job cuts and closures result from the working of the global market, which is outside their control. While dishonest, they are also close to admitting that the profit system itself is to blame.

Of course, there were peculiar factors at play in the case of Rover. John Towers and the 'Phoenix Four' bought Rover for £10 in the so-called rescue package in 2000. Since then they have milked the corporation. What they have taken out in salaries, bonuses and pension provision amounts to at least £30 million.

They have squandered BMW's £247 million legacy. Worst of all they have left a huge gap in the workers' pension fund.



Now, the administrators, Price Waterhouse, are poring over the complex accounts. Politicians are demanding an enquiry. Why can't we all see where the millions have gone?

The trade unions must demand the opening of Rover's books for inspection by Longbridge workers, with the same for any company claiming the 'market' is forcing job cuts. After all, Rover is also a symptom of much bigger problems.

Globally, a handful of mega-corporations dominate car manufacturing. These are among the world's biggest companies. These corporations are locked into increasingly fierce competition. If they are to stop their rivals getting ahead they have to invest in new plants making cars more efficiently and cheaply, and hence with ever fewer workers. This mad scramble results in the production of 24 million more cars worldwide than are actually being sold.

So, the global car industry is in a crisis. Even the biggest corporations are in trouble. Early in May, both General Motors and Ford had their credit ratings downgraded to junk. But the smaller players feel the crisis more sharply. Italy's Fiat could be next. If it is, Prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has already hinted the government will not intervene.

If the bosses say that plants are 'failing' the government must be forced to nationalise them under workers' control (see box). Needless to say, in these neo-liberal times this won't happen just because the T&G's Tony Wood-

ley has had private discussions with Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Blair very publicly ruled out any serious state intervention. Only through mobilising union members for a real fight will it be possible to force governments to

nationalise threatened factories. To resist closures means:

- Occupying threatened plants to stop asset stripping, and holding the assets to ransom to force the government to act
- Building action committees to mobilise workers in related industries, others whose jobs are threatened, and all sectors in the areas with threatened plants to organise a fight-back, organising solidarity strikes and protests against job cuts.
- Building international rank and file committees across companies and industries. The bosses try to smooth their path in cutting jobs by playing off workers in different countries against one another. The union leaders try to excuse their failure to call for a real fight by pointing to the difficulties of organising international action. Rank and file committees can defeat these divide and rule tactics, building international solidarity action for workers under threat, and holding the union leaders to account.

Nationalisation under workers' control

In the final days of Rover's lurch to bankruptcy, T&G General Secretary, Tony Woodley, remained focused on a takeover by SAIC as the one way to save jobs.

During the previous Rover crisis in 2000, Woodley did call for the nationalisation of the company, but quickly turned into a cheerleader of the Phoenix deal as the alternative to the open asset-strippers in the alternative Alchemy bid.

This time in a Guardian column two days before the election he began to argue that state aid could have saved Rover, if only the government had been willing to apply a private-public partnership 'in reverse'. In Woodley's scheme the government should have bought Rover shares to gain a minority stake in order to persuade SAIC to ignore the huge black hole in Rover's

accounts and go ahead with the takeover.

Woodley's strategy has been to "defend" manufacturing through concession bargaining; selling some jobs and working conditions to save other jobs, instead of mobilising the union members for a real fight. The other union leaders are no better.

Why should the workers at plants like Longbridge pay for the devastation wrought by the global capitalist market, along with their families? Plants threatened with closure must be nationalised without 'compensation'. Not a penny more should be added to the millions these fat cats have already wrung from their employees or fleeced from the public purse.

Even if the government had nationalised Rover, the company would most probably have faced a bleak future try-

ing to sell dated cars in a global market with massive excess capacity. The skills of the thousands of workers at Longbridge and the equipment there could be used in making other socially useful goods such as buses or trains. Nationalisation under workers' control means the workers can then draw up a workers' plan to use their skills on work that meets urgent social needs, not the hunt for profits in a chaotic global market.

Some in the labour movement will object that these proposals are utopian. But there are numerous examples from the 1970s of workers' plans for alternative production. Such plans, however, can only become reality with physical control over the means of production and must eventually form part of national and indeed international plans for the economy as a whole that puts human need over private profit.

Sukula family: here to stay, here to fight!

By Jason Travis

"My name is Daniel and I am 15 years old. I am writing this because me and my family face deportation to the Congo. I don't want to go back to the Congo because there is a war there and, if I go back, my life will be finished."



Daniel Sukula, a high school student from Bolton, near Manchester, is one of 2,000 school students in Britain, threatened with deportation. Every week his elder sister, Flores, studying health care at Bolton's Sixth Form College, has to register at the secure Dallas Court complex in Manchester. She misses a day at her college, knowing that she could be detained at any moment and that immigration officials could raid the family home, detain and deport her family of seven, including a four-month-old baby. The family are targeted as part of a pilot scheme, introduced in the wake of David Blunkett's 2004 asylum legislation to fast track the deportation of families with children.

In early May the family were threatened with eviction from their house

and the withdrawal of benefits unless they 'voluntarily' agreed to repatriation. A strange definition of voluntary - agree to our demands or we'll take your house and modest income off you! Intimidation and coercion might be considered more accurate.

But the family are fighting back. "We are not going back!" says Ms Lusukumu, the family head. "My two youngest children were born here and we have every right to remain." The campaign is, of course highlighting the particular dangers of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where since the overthrow of the Mobutu regime in 1997 more than 3 million have died in a civil war for control over the country's vast mineral wealth. Open war-

fare continues in many parts of the country. But the family do not see their case in isolation. They are also committed to uniting with other anti-deportation campaigns in the region and nationally.

Trade unionists across Bolton have met and agreed to support the campaign. In particular, Bolton NUT is supporting the campaign and is urging the NUT nationally to support the recently launch Schools Against Deportation initiative to campaign against the deportation of all school students threatened with removal from Britain.

The campaign's supporters have drawn inspiration from the partial successes of campaigners in Canterbury to defend unaccompanied Afghan students at the local college and in Portsmouth, where the family of 15-year-old Lorin Suleiman, a Syrian Kurd, won a two-year reprieve from the Home Office. This came after a lively and sustained fight by her classmates and teachers at Mayfield School.

Of course, the details of individual cases like these are often shocking and can lead individuals to reconsider their own prejudices. The labour movement,

however, needs to support not only families like the Sukulas but also to challenge the lies of the media and politicians from all the main parties. There is also the long-standing need to confront the state racism, reflected in the never-ending rounds of legislation targeting asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants generally.

Nearly 100 years ago the British Parliament adopted the first ever set of peacetime immigration controls. The Aliens Act 1905 stemmed from anti-Jewish agitation in East London and cities like Manchester. Every single piece of legislation since then has been racist in intent and implementation. Immigration controls have always served to divide the working class.

The labour movement cannot continue to accept a situation where thousands of our fellow workers are forced to work illegally and face the grossest forms of exploitation. We must act now to resist a system that drives refugee and immigrant families into cramped and unsanitary housing, forces them to report to locked registration centres where you can be forcibly detained, sent to a special prison and deported.

Against the vicious divide and rule appeals of Charles Clark and Michael Howard, we need to heed the words of Daniel Sukula, "Together we are stronger".

Flores Sukula has started a petition at Bolton Sixth Form College and the family's first campaign meeting will take place on Tuesday 24 May in Bolton Socialist Club. "We've got lots of people coming already but we need all the support we can get!" says Flores.

Please send resolutions, messages of support, etc to info@sukula.org or write to: Sukula Family Campaign, c/o CARF, BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3XX

For more information visit www.sukula.org and www.irr.org.uk/sad/ Sukula Family Campaign Meeting 7.30 p.m. Tuesday 24 May, Bolton Socialist Club, Wood St, Bolton.

Teach college chiefs a lesson to remember

Lecturers have been on strike because further education colleges have failed to implement a two-year national pay deal agreed in October 2003. Below we look at the background to the dispute and how lecturers at one college fought and won

In 2003 the Association of Colleges (AOC) agreed a two-year national pay agreement with the unions in further education. National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (Natfhe) members voted four to one to accept the 2003-5 pay offer. The other unions voted to accept as well.

The deal was supposed to be implemented in August 2004. As the Natfhe web site said about it, "It's signed and it's sealed. Now colleges must deliver."

But the truth was that there was no signed or sealed national deal! As each college is effectively separate, it was always going to be up to local managers to decide whether or not they would pay the money. So the unions accepted the deal without any guarantees that the colleges would actually receive money from government to fund

the deal.

By the beginning of this year very few local colleges had paid up and most of them were not even prepared to negotiate with local union branches. The union was forced to act and balloted for strike action, but it balloted only 70 out of 280 colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Even this limited ballot forced the hand of some colleges, which proceeded to negotiate.

But again without any guarantees and with evidence to show that college managers were using delaying tactics, the national officers of the union recommended that the strike be called off where there were negotiations. In the end only 37 colleges went on strike on 24 February.

But many colleges are balloting to strike this month including west and

north Nottinghamshire, north east London, Southwark in south London, Orpington, Basingstoke, Sussex Downs, Southampton, south Birmingham, Sandwell, North Lindsey, and Grimsby.

Even when ballots support strike action, the national union has argued to suspend any strikes wherever managers offer negotiations.

But according to Natfhe, two years after a so-called national pay deal about three-fifths of colleges haven't implemented it and aren't even negotiating over it. Some deal!

Even worse at some colleges managers have used the pay dispute to try to introduce cuts or worsen conditions. In Southampton, lecturers have been told to sign new contracts that would introduce performance-related pay. It states that should they refuse to do

so, their existing contract will be terminated with effect from 30 June.

Natfhe's annual conference is at the end of May. Delegates should condemn the leadership for agreeing the deal and the way the union has refused to lead a national strike over pay. The union should approach all the other FE unions such as TGWU, GMB, Unison and so on to demand the government funds a national deal. And if the government refuses, then the union should organise national strike action.

But while we want the union to co-ordinate national action we cannot rely on the national leadership to do so. Local branches must link up and ensure that we take united action whether or not the leaders call it. Otherwise individual branches will be left to fight alone.

WHAT WE SAY

RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

All the articles on these pages have stated that workers must take control of their union by organising the rank and file and democratising the union structures. Then workers can control negotiations and strikes and stop sell outs by the leaders.

But even a democratic union will still be attacked by the bosses and by the government. Only by being anti capitalist, nationalising industry under workers control, defending picket lines and demonstrations by defence squads and fighting the bosses' parties, including the Labour party, and ultimately their state will workers be able to finally defeat the attacks on them.

NEW WORKERS PARTY

To win the unions to such a perspective it is necessary to build a revolutionary party to fight for these policies. All the unions on these pages are under attack by a Labour government, and many other workers will be as well.

Currently no such party exists, but as the article on the FBU shows, there are unions, workers' leaders and other organisations that are discussing the need for a new organisation.

Workers Power believes that it is possible to win these forces to the fight for a new workers party. The FBU and the RMT should convene a conference open to all activists to discuss such a party.

In such a party Workers Power will fight to win workers to revolutionary socialism to overthrow capitalism.

Strike action wins pay victory at Lambeth College

Management had not negotiated with the local Natfhe branch at Lambeth College after the one-day strike in February. It had also become clear to us that the union was leaving individual colleges to fight their own battles. So we decided, as Lambeth is a well organised branch of over 300 members, to escalate the action until we got what we wanted.

At a well attended branch meeting we voted to hold a two-day strike. An amendment to the resolution saying the branch should threaten indefinite all-out action was rejected but the fact that about a fifth of the meeting voted for it showed the level of anger and determination.

Finally the senior management team (SMT) made an offer only a few days before the strike. The deal would have removed pay banding (which prevents some lecturers going further up the pay scale) and with promises of a deal from August 2004. The SMT claimed it could not make a final deal until May,

By Dave Ellis

when the college receive its funding. The branch committee proposed to the branch to suspend the two-day strike until May and wait to see what management would offer. But the anger and mistrust at the SMT's actions was enough to convince the meeting to carry on with the strike.

The two-day strike was a success. Very few union members scabbed. More than a quarter of the branch members were on the picket line at one time or another. Unison members held lunch-time protests over their own pay and in support of the lecturers strike. Management were so worried about this they sent letters to support staff warning them about breaking the anti-union laws. Some Unison members were asking why their national union wasn't organising strike action with the lec-

turers. The student union, which is invited to attend all our union meetings, leafleted students to explain why the lecturers were on strike and why students shouldn't cross the picket lines. A number of delivery workers including postal workers refused to cross the picket line. The spirit of unity and solidarity was alive and well.

At the branch meeting held on the second day of the strike the majority voted to escalate to a three-day strike and then if necessary organise an indefinite all-out strike. It was agreed to bring more people on to the union leadership and if needed form a strike committee should we escalate the action.

We protested outside the annual dinner for the governors. And management showed just what contempt they have for their staff by hiring hire private security guards with dogs to "protect" their £10,000 dinner. This action was condemned by Natfhe and the SMT have

since had to apologise.

The strike forced the SMT to come to us with a much better offer. Pay banding would end, teaching staff would move on to the new pay spine at the next point and the college would pay up to an additional 3 per cent pay increase on top. There was also a guarantee not to introduce performance-related pay. Management would also negotiate about bringing all staff on to the new pay spine.

A full branch meeting with more than 180 members present decided to suspend action but not to end the dispute until all parts of the deal were implemented and managers had agreed to no redundancies, cuts or victimisation of union members.

The same mass meeting voted unanimously to condemn the failure of the Natfhe leadership to lead national action.

If the managers pay up then it will be a victory. And the number of union activists has grown over the last year with

greater unity between Natfhe, Unison and the students union - another benefit.

As we go to press it looks like we were right to only suspend action and remain in dispute. The SMT are already looking to water down some of their promises and are in the process of restructuring the college departments.

Natfhe needs to approach Unison and the student union to have a united front. Meetings of all the college workers should be held to declare our opposition to any cuts and redundancies. We also need to make sure that the London region of Natfhe starts to organise joint action of those colleges affected by cuts. Already Hackney College workers face around 50 to 60 redundancies. Local college branches faced with cuts, such as Lambeth and Hackney, should call on all union activists to meet up and plan united action including where possible city wide action to spread the action.

Civil servants: five years of a left leader

By a PCS activist

On 24 March 2005, Mark Serwotka was re-elected unopposed for a second five-year term as general secretary for the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS). He was first elected as general secretary in December 2000 and came straight from the shop floor.

In 2000 Serwotka won by promising that he would only take a worker's wage, a principled stance in a union where around one quarter of members earn less than £13,500 a year. Serwotka donates £1,000 per month of his salary to the PCS campaign fund and has donated £50,000 to date.

Under Serwotka's tenure, and aided by the election of a left-wing NEC, the

PCS has campaigned on improving members' pay and working conditions. Out went compliant "partnership" with the employer. In came membership recruitment drives, campaigns around low pay and equality, and greater internal union democracy. This has been reflected by a rise in membership has risen under Serwotka's leadership to more than 311,000.

But the PCS has come under repeated attack from the government and while membership has risen, the lack of victories shows that Serwotka and the PCS leadership have fallen short in these campaigns.

The first major strike in February 2002 was by 40,000 workers in the Department for Work and Pensions over safety. The series of one-day strikes ended

in failure, with the demoralisation of members, many of whom had never been on strike before.

Pay disputes in the civil service have been characterised by sectionalism, workers in each branch or department of government have been left to their own devices. Instead the union should have pursued a unified campaign that would have united low paid workers throughout the civil service irrespective of what department they work in.

Last year, Gordon Brown announced he was cutting 104,000 civil service jobs to save £20 billion, which would be spent on "frontline" public services. The union vowed to fight to save members' jobs but did not prevent the Government from implementing voluntary early retirement and redundancy schemes, which marked

the first stage of job cuts.

The union organised a one-day national strike on 5 November 2004 - the first such strike since 1993 - which was widely supported. But the leadership refused to call for an indefinite industrial action, claiming it was unrealistic, despite the success of the one-day strike.

When the Government announced its assault on public sector pensions, the union's fightback again fell short. The PCS leadership, along with Amicus, T&GWU and UCATT followed Unison's decision to suspend the national strike set for 23 March after the Government agreed to talk.

The concession of negotiations without preconditions showed that the threat of more than one million workers going on strike in the run up to the General

Election proved far more powerful than any number of fruitless meetings with ministers.

But as soon as Labour was re-elected, the Government renewed the attack on public sector pensions via its pensions commissioner, former Confederation of British industry chairman Adair Turner.

Mark Serwotka enjoys widespread support. But this will not be enough to win the struggles ahead. PCS activists should agitate for a democratically controlled rank and file movement, both in PCS and in other unions. This would be a step forward to creating a stronger, unified, more democratic union where elected delegates control industrial action and negotiations. Only then will the union have a realistic chance of winning its demands.

FBU elect on of their own

Firefighters have rejected Andy Gilchrist for Matt Wrack who represents the spirit of the rank and file

By Mark Hoskisson

A little over a year ago Matt Wrack was witch-hunted by the Gilchrist leadership of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The leadership were furious at Matt for two reasons. He led the fight against the sell out of the pay strike by the Gilchrist leadership and he started to build a rank and file organisation, Grass Roots FBU, to carry out that fight.

It only seemed fair to let the members of the union decide Matt's fate. To this end he stood against Gilchrist for the position of general secretary of the union. And the members decided - sell out merchant Gilchrist, 7,259 votes, rank and file firefighter Wrack, 12,883 votes.

Matt Wrack's victory is of all those who say we can defeat cowardly bureaucrats and replace them with class fighters in the union. It is also proof positive that despite the unnecessary defeat the union suffered thanks to Gilchrist's Labour-loyal misleadership of the pay strike, FBU members are far from defeated or demoralised. To elect a well-known socialist activist by such a majority is to vote in favour of a union that fights.

Ever since the defeat of the FBU strike two years ago the management has been engaged in a systematic campaign to sack workers, reduce the level of service and take away the hard won gains of workers in a dangerous and demanding job. The latest phase of this attack is the proposal to cut the number of emergency control rooms in the country from 46 to nine in England and Wales and from eight to three in Scotland.

The closures will mean the loss of 900 jobs. This will diminish the ability of the service to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies. In addition the government wants to cut the level of pensions and raise the retire-



FBU General Secretary - Matt Wrack

ment age.

At his first union conference this month as general secretary Matt Wrack has responded with the threat of potential strike action. He said: "We will be considering a number of options this week and will start by developing a political campaign but we will consider industrial action if necessary."

Talk like this coming out of the conference is good. But the test that Matt Wrack faces in the months ahead is the ability to break completely with the legacy of Gilchrist. He has to put the union on a war footing against Blair's third-term plans to assault the public sector and its pensions system. He must transform the union into a genuinely democratic organisation in which witch-hunts of the sort he was subjected to are a thing of the past.

The political campaign should be used to rebuild the strength of the union inside the stations. There should be regular mass meetings, local committees ready to become strike committees, local and national bulletins putting the case for action, on the model of the ones Matt himself pro-

duced for the London Region during the last strike. And there must be backing for FBU members to take solidarity action with any station or any firefighters that the bosses try to pick off.

The political campaign should also be used to draw in forces beyond the union. During the last strike firefighter support committees around the country drew in students, community campaigns, pensioners and other trade unionists. They had the potential to become broader organising centres of struggle - rather like the social forums were in Italy - until the strike was summarily called off by Gilchrist.

That level of support hasn't gone away. And now, with other public sector workers under attack and with the pensions issue clearly one for the whole class and not just firefighters, using the political campaign to organise the forces once again will be vital. In the run up to the last strike the London FBU, of which Matt was a leader, organised huge street blockades.

It invaded the Greater London Assembly and put the fear of god into the politicians. Actions along these lines

can link up with the mobilisations of the anti-capitalist movement in the run up to the demonstrations at the G8, and build a huge FBU presence at those G8 demos. And this will mean that when the FBU does take strike action - and it is a case of when not if - the strike will be a rallying call for the wider movement, one that can quickly put Labour and the employers to flight.

To build for action in this way Matt must maintain his commitment to transforming the union into one controlled by the rank and file. Only this way will he be able to avoid the fate of the many other left union leaders who, once elected, have become embroiled with the bureaucrats. He needs to fight for the introduction of the regular election and recall of all FBU officials.

Such officials must be paid no more than the average wage of firefighters, plus expenses for union business. Remember it was Gilchrist's expensive meals at top restaurants during the dispute and paid for with union money that angered many FBU members. There must be no room for bureaucracy in the FBU. The branches and the con-

ference must make decisions and the leadership must be the faithful executor of such decisions not a barrier to them being carried out.

This kind of transformation, however, cannot be simply legislated from above. The ruling that shut down Grass Roots FBU must be overturned and a rank and file movement committed to educating the membership and fighting for a socialist solution not just for the fire service, but for society as a whole.

Indeed, the FBU under Matt's leadership could become the focus of a renewed drive to build a workers' party that can stand as an alternative to New Labour. During his time in the Socialist Alliance, Workers Power worked closely with Matt in the campaign to democratise the political funds of the trade unions. We collaborated with him on his excellent pamphlet around that theme, *Whose Money is it Anyway?* In the FBU we enjoyed major success as a result of that campaign, passing resolutions supporting the democratisation of the political fund. Last year the FBU members, sickened by New Labour's vicious attacks on them, went even further and disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

That step needs to be quickly followed up with a step towards forming an alternative. So far all Matt has said publicly on this is that it is "far too early" to discuss rejoining the Labour Party.

This is welcome, in the sense that he is undoubtedly resisting pressure from Gilchrist allies on the NEC to start a move back to Labour. But there is a danger of losing the momentum in the fight to build a new mass working class party. A clear call from the FBU for a labour movement campaign, jointly sponsored with the RMT (expelled from the Labour Party) and other trade union and socialist organisations, and Respect, to build a new workers' party could have an immediate and dramatic effect inside the FBU and beyond.

NUJ: switch off BBC cuts

By Keith Sellick

Workers at the BBC have voted overwhelmingly for action against plans to slash 4,000 jobs or one in five of the workforce. Nearly 2,500 NUJ members (two-thirds of its members at BBC) voted more than four to one in favour of action while half of technicians' union Bectu's 5,000 members voted more than three to one for action.

The two unions have called for strikes on 23 May and over the two days of 31 May and 1 June with a further day to be announced.

BBC director general Mark Thompson claims his plans for job cuts and increased outsourcing for programmes and services are necessary to improve quality!

Commenting on the plans, NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear said: "The cuts package is badly thought out, doesn't add up, will do irreparable damage to quality and standards and has been soundly rejected by staff."

Staff at the BBC have also won backing from the European Federation of Journalists. Chair of the federation Arne



Konig also recognised the cuts are a threat: "The BBC's future is at stake as well as its reputation as the world's leading broadcaster." The federation also promised its full support to the workers at the BBC.

But while the protests can be a first step in a campaign, workers at the BBC should be warned that such a huge vote for action should not be frittered away on a series of one-day strikes. We saw in the case of the firefighters how a huge mandate for action can be used by left-wing union chiefs to squander on

one-day strikes and eventually lead the members to defeat - and Andy Gilchrist getting voted out of a job!

Furthermore the position of both unions is for a cooling off period of 90 days, negotiations, no forced redundancies and safeguards for pay and conditions of workers outsourced to private firms.

But the mandate for action should be used to build all out action to reject the cuts and not as a bargaining tool for negotiations, Workers at the BBC should also form joint strike

committees of union members to democratically control the strikes and mass meetings should vote on any settlement to prevent a sell out.

The action at the BBC has been building up since Thompson announced the cuts at the end of last year and was discussed at the NUJ's annual general meeting in Scarborough in April.

For the sixth year running the union has increased its membership and last year twice as many women joined the union than men. This is testament to the militant campaigns it has run combating low pay in the media. Delegates committed the union to a fight for £25,000 throughout the industry and complement this with raising freelance rates.

There were also debates about stronger ethics in the industry including a conscience clause for journalists and greater safety at work particularly foreign correspondents and improved training.

The conference also discussed international issues. It was heavily involved in the European Social Forum and conference passed a motion criticising the heavy handed stewarding of the event

in London, especially the opening event at Southwark Cathedral.

There was also a major debate on trade unions in Iraq. A clear anti-imperialist motion from the press and pr branch called on the union to unequivocally support the resistance and build independent trade unions and have no truck with puppet unions such as the Iraqi Federation Of Trade Unions. But the NEC amended the motion to support all trade unions including the IFTU and drew back from supporting the resistance.

Conference also decided to support Make Poverty History and will be organising an alternative media centre in Edinburgh during the G8 to counter the lies and distortions of the world's richest countries.

There was also a motion around solidarity work with unions in Venezuela and Colombia.

The campaigns on low pay and at the BBC have the potential to put the NUJ centre stage nationally, increasing its profile and delivering a major blow against the government and its cronies in the media. The NUJ and Bectu have the mandate from its members; now their leaderships must deliver the action.

Shut down the G8

By Joy Macready

The eight biggest criminals in the world - mass murderers, wholesale embezzlers of the natural wealth of the global south, polluters of the planet - will be gathering in Gleneagles, Scotland from the 6th to the 8th of July.

George Bush, Tony Blair, Vladimir Putin, Junichiro Koizumi, Jaques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, Silvio Berlusconi and Paul Martin claim to lead a free democratic world. In reality they represent a tiny group of capitalist exploiters.

They will be accompanied by an entourage of 3,000-4,000 advisers, experts and journalists. Over 10,000 police, from across the UK, will protect them against their own angry subjects, who will be demanding:

- An end to the debt repayments bleeding three whole continents dry.
- An end to the occupation of Iraq and Palestine which has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths.
- An end to the threatened devastation of our planet by climate change caused by corporate polluters.

Forced by years of campaigning by anti-debt activists, environmentalists and anti-capitalists, and by mass revolts in the "Third World" against the neoliberal programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, the summit will discuss two main topics: raising Africa out of poverty and the threat of climate change.

The G8 leaders will also discuss further assaults on civil liberties in the name of counter-terrorism, the "proliferation" of nuclear weapons, and the occupation of Iraq and plans to coerce Syria and Iran.

Bush is on a charm offensive to reforge his "alliance" - domination over with France, Germany and Russia. He has already obtained European Union support for a "democratic" puppet government in Iraq and for exerting pressure to force Syria out of Lebanon. In addition, combined USA-EU pressure achieved "regime change" within the Palestinian authority, enabling Bush to launch a very pro-Israeli "peace process".

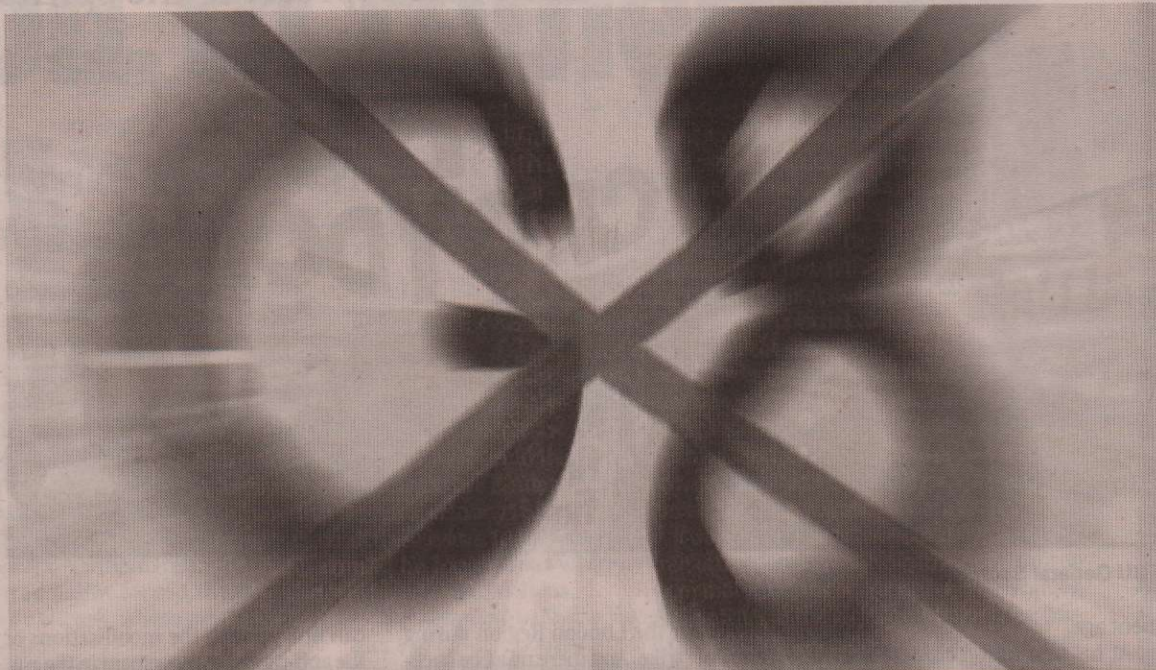
The "critics of the war" - French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder - have proved only too willing to "move on" from the war, as Bush requested them to do, in the hope that he might agree to divide up the wealth of Iraq with them more equally.

In short the major imperialist powers have signed a non-aggression pact for the time being. In the longer term, the process of re-division of the world market - in the Middle East, central Asia, Latin America, and Africa - will bring these rivalries to the surface once again.

SOCIAL LIBERALISM: IMPERIALISM'S NEW CLOTHES

The revolts against corporate globalisation, against the privatisation of health care education and vital utilities like water and electricity in imperialist heartlands and countries like Bolivia and Argentina alike, scared the masters of the world stiff. Their impact was in no small measure responsible for stalling WTO trade rounds, blocking the creation of free trade areas and sowing divisions within the imperialist camp. They were also responsible for emboldening semi-colonial countries like Venezuela to openly defy the USA.

The prestige of the IMF, World Bank and WTO sank to an all time low. After 9/11 the "war on terrorism", with its attacks on civil liberties and the right to protest, was aimed at crushing this movement. But it only produced an anti-war movement that continued the spirit of



Who are the G8?

The G8 is the group of the most industrialised nations in the world - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States. Their heads of states meet together once every year to come to an agreement on how these imperialist countries will divide up the riches of the world and fight those in rebellion against them.

The group was first convened in 1973 by US President Richard Nixon to deal with the worldwide financial instability stemming from the oil crisis and what was seen as a general crisis of

"governability". It began as meetings of the finance ministers, then the presidents or prime ministers, of four countries: Britain, France, West Germany, and the US. It became the G6 in 1975 when Japan and Italy were invited to join; the G7 in 1976 when Canada joined; and then the G8 when post-Soviet Russia was added in 1998.

The G8 is the closest thing to a world government, yet it is completely undemocratic. It is not accountable for the decisions it makes on behalf of the world. The "developing" countries are not even invited to the table - yet

it is their fate that this thieves' kitchen is deciding.

The G8 summits are a key element in the process of global policy-making. Flowing from the G8 come the policies implemented by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, the Bank for International Settlements, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the World Economic Forum. The IMF and World Bank are controlled through a US veto; the WTO is controlled by US economic blackmail.

resistance on an even greater scale. Indeed - but for its reformist and pacifist leadership - this movement could have actually halted the war in Iraq.

Bush and his closest allies escaped defeat in 2003. But resistance in Iraq goes on. Any further adventures against Iran or Syria, or Venezuela, would cause a huge resurgence of opposition. Anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism are back in fashion with young people around the globe.

This has convinced sections of the ruling class that neoliberalism needs a makeover. It needs a social conscience that goes beyond the infamous "trickle down effect". This bright idea said that it does not matter if the richest 20 per cent own 82 percent of the world's wealth. Since they have to spend, it will eventually trickle down to the vast propertyless majority. But inequality and chronic poverty have been increasing. The worst case is Africa - unable to pull itself out of the AIDS crisis and crippling debt.

To give capitalism and imperialism a pro-development, anti-poverty smiling face was a job for social liberalism, as it is called on the continent. Effectively this is a limited revival of Clinton and Blair's "Third Way", which sank from view during the Bush years.

This "social" approach accepts a market economy and an international order based on free trade, but adds a small degree of aid and allows some strictly short-term protectionism in order to get capitalism going again in the global south. It acknowledges that neoliberalism has to be supplemented by limited

"debt forgiveness", larger scale charity and a dash of "fair trade".

This satisfies the churches and the NGOs, which never really joined the militant anticorporate globalisation movement. They were the core of Jubilee 2000 and are now the core of Make Poverty History. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair put themselves forward as champions of this approach. The church and other faith leaders, the heads of the big NGOs are happy to give them credit for this.

The G8 have concentrated on Africa because its terrible crises (famine, AIDS, indebtedness) repeatedly hit the headlines and in Blair's words "shame us all" (i.e. dangerously implicate Britain, France and the USA). And a cosmetic job on Africa would need far fewer resources than carrying out the same task for Latin America or large parts of Asia.

Add a dash of cheap self-criticism for imposing too heavy debt repayment burdens on Africa, and the G8 leaders feel free to add that things would not be so bad if Africans had not gone in for "bad governance." On this Tony Blair can actually claim: "real development can only come through partnership. Not the rich dictating to the poor. Not the poor dictating to the rich. But matching rights and responsibilities."

Blair launched the Commission for Africa in February 2004 to "tackle the twin problems of African poverty and stagnation". It included leaders of African states as well as well-meaning celebrities. The report therefore tries to be even-handed: it is critical of the trade, debt and aid policies of the western countries, but also highlights corruption, incompetence

and conflict in Africa. The report's answer is indeed to cancel the continent's sovereign debt and increase aid to \$16bn.

Blithely shrugging of their responsibility for the impoverishment of a naturally rich continent, the G8 leaders insist, in return for debt forgiveness, that Africa must open up its vast natural resources even more to the imperialist multinationals.

At the same time as Blair's Commission, Gordon Brown took charge of a related project. He chairs the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC)'s Business Action for Africa, which is there to "galvanise development and reduce long-term dependency" but which warns that aid will not work "unless matched by a renaissance in productive business activity". The list of participants reads like a Who's Who of companies that have raped and pillaged the continent of Africa for decades: CEOs of Unilever, GlaxoSmithKline, DeBeers, Rio Tinto, Shell and so on.

Blair and Brown have additional reason to mount a big show about Africa at the G8. When the G8 last visited Britain in 1998, the campaign Jubilee 2000 demanded the abolition of all Third World debt by the turn of the century. They mobilised 70,000 people to protest against the G8 in Birmingham as part of a worldwide movement against the debt of the poor countries. It was also the spark that set off the anticapitalist movement in the UK and worldwide. The results of their promises have been negligible.

Blair and Brown are attempting to avoid another ignition point by co-opting the language and sentiment of the

major charities, NGOs and other organisations still campaigning on this issue. They want to divert and neutralise the outrage thousands of people feel about the inequalities in the world and the injustice of Third World debt, by pretending that they are determined to do something about it.

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

In 1998, Jubilee 2000 was growing massively. After the protests against the G8 in Birmingham, the IMF strengthened its Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC) which had been established in 1996. This was their attempt to provide debt relief for the world's poor, mainly through loan consolidation and restructuring. The result? Debt burdens have increased from \$2.42bn in 2003 to \$2.56bn in 2005.

Now that campaign is being rerun under a different name, but comprising roughly the same forces. Like Jubilee 2000, Make Poverty History (MPH) is stuffed with religious bodies and their associated charities: the Church of England and Christian Aid, the Catholic Church and Cafod, non-conformists like the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, Jewish and Muslim organisations like the Reform Synagogues and Muslim Aid.

In addition, there many NGOs that concentrate on Third World development: Jubilee Debt Campaign, War on Want, Oxfam, People and Planet, etc. Then there are the trade unions: it is backed by the TUC and most of the big unions - Amicus, Unison, TGWU, NUT, PCS, GMB, and the NUJ. In total, over 400 groups have signed up to be a part of the MPH network. The other major category is celebrities, notably Bono, Bob Geldof, Nelson Mandela, Jamelia, Rhys Ifans, Denise Van Outen, Graham Norton, and Brad Pitt.

MPH's strategy is to lobby the G8 in support of the "social liberals", hoping to pressurise or isolate Bush. It wishes to give globalisation a human face (fair trade, opening the EU market to the goods of the global south, allowing Third World states to retain a measure of protection for developing industries). MPH hopes Gordon Brown and Tony Blair can persuade the other G8 leaders (including sceptics like Chirac) to live up to their seven year old promises to cancel the debt of the heavily indebted countries, reduce others, and commit 0.7 per cent of their GDPs to aid.

Five years after the centre of Birmingham was brought to a halt by the first mass protest against Third World debt, only eight of the world's most impoverished countries had seen a "significant" cut in their payments to western creditors, according to a report drafted by Jubilee itself to mark the fifth anniversary of the global movement launched by Jubilee 2000. Only a third of the \$100bn write-off promised by the eight leading industrialised nations had been delivered. Moreover between 1998 and 2002, the 26 heavily indebted countries received a \$29bn debt write-off, but borrowed a further \$24.2bn.

The question to be asked of MPH is why, if this strategy failed before, will it work now? How many years are you going to give them? How many millions will die or suffer misery while you wait?

MPH membership criteria make clear that it is not open to political organisations to join. Even (non-celebrity) individuals must join one of the existing affiliates. Clearly the organisers do not want to create a mass organisation that would survive the G8 meeting. Why is this? Because what the G8 do will be a huge letdown and the NGO and church leaders don't want to have to face, and explain this to, an organised mass base. They fear

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rightly that this would further radicalise the young people they had mobilised for Edinburgh.

Its strategy is limited to a one-off huge mass demonstration, where people will hear moving speeches about poverty and suffering from Nelson Mandela and Bob Geldof, followed by celebrity rock concerts. Even video links to representatives of the G8 are being mooted. And the organisers hope to pack the hundreds of thousands back home as soon as possible so they don't get contaminated by any militantly anticapitalist ideas.

We need to make sure they don't succeed in this cover-up for capitalism. Despite its organisers' limited goals MPH has nevertheless drawn in many new participants, particularly school students. For this reason anticapitalists and socialists should support public activities called by MPH, meetings in schools, mobilising committees with all the anti-G8 campaigns represented.

At the same time we must continue to sharply criticise its social liberal goals as well as its tactics, which totally rely on Blair and Brown delivering for them. This is doubly cynical since these two gentlemen know that Bush will veto any radical proposals on all these issues. Indeed on global warming he has done so already. The MPH leaders will then turn around and say Tony and Gordon did their best - we need another four years chattering till a friendlier figure gets elected to the US presidency.

In particular the national trade unions affiliated to MPH must be won to put their money where their mouths are and lay on trains, buses, even charter flights, to the G8 protest from every corner of Britain. Even more importantly, we must win them to launching militant direct action to cancel the entire Third World debt and to get the huge corporation to pay massive reparations to the countries they have looted for centuries.

G8 ALTERNATIVES

G8 Alternatives started as a Scottish initiative. It includes the Scottish Socialist Party, the more radical NGOs, campaigns against war and racism, the Socialist Workers Party, and trade union bodies such as the Dundee Trades Council and the TGWU Glasgow district. Their aim is to actually protest at the G8 summit itself - at Gleneagles. They plan to organise a convergence centre to facilitate this and hold a counter summit that debates the G8 and the alternatives to capitalist globalisation.

G8 Alternatives is already in touch with Attac France and in co-operation with the European Social Forum. Other than a commitment to peaceful protests, 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 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.

DISSENT

As a network, Dissent (Reshape in Scotland) is much narrower than the other initiatives, organised at its core by anarchists and radical environmental activists united by two ideas: a desire to organise direct action to shut down the G8 (good); and opposition to any involvement of the reformists of the MPH coalition and the Socialist Workers Party or possibly any socialist groups at all (bad). They fail to see the significance and the potential that opens up when hundreds of thousands of people gather to protest; they are not interested in intervening in a mass movement to win people to their ideas.

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 anticapitalist 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.

THE ANSWER TO POVERTY: WORKERS' REVOLUTION AND SOCIALISM

The root of poverty in the global south in general and in Africa in particular is imperialist super-exploitation. Debt is a huge burden on these countries, sucking the wealth created by the people of the global south into western banks and making it unavailable for education and health projects. It needs to be cancelled, all of it, not just reduced to "sustainable" levels.

And it needs to be done throughout the global south, not just in the 25 or 50 countries where absolute poverty is at its worst. Even in big countries like Brazil and Argentina, debt servicing has created huge reserves of poverty and more importantly brought about social and political explosions that have brought onto the streets social forces capable of forcing governments to take radical steps.

But even if debt repayments were reduced, it would still leave billions being sucked out of these countries in repatriated super-profits from the operations of the western MNCs in the global south.

The Bush-Blair wars express competition between imperialist countries and corporations to open up investment destinations for capital, and markets for commodities. Thus poverty cannot ultimately be reformed away. It cannot be a matter of the governments of the imperialist powers acting charitably to the countries of the global south, but of the peoples of the latter rising in revolt, as they have started to do in Bolivia, Argentina and Venezuela.

The subject of the struggle against poverty must be the poor themselves - the workers and peasants of the global south, aided by and in solidarity with the working class of the imperialist heartlands.

Our objective must be to build a mass mobilisation to shut down the G8 in Gleneagles. Even though, given the huge police presence, this will be difficult, the attempt alone will hit the world's media, just as it did in Genoa in July 2001. It will send a message of solidarity and encouragement to the masses fighting back in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

It is also the best way to regroup the thousands brought onto the streets by the mass anticapitalist and antiwar protests of the past five years. The conferences and counter-summits could be a launching pad for a UK Social Forum and local social forums in towns and cities across the country. These bodies should draw in representatives of the trade unions and provide an organising centre not only for solidarity actions with "third world" resistance but for a battle against Blair and Brown's assault on British workers and youth too.

All out against the G8!

The July protests must bring together anticapitalist youth with rank and file trade unionists, as well as local community organisations. We will not be able to do this without building broad anti-G8 mobilising groups now, 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 can say: "OK, you can help organise other aspects of the protest. But don't play into Bush and Blair's hands by denouncing direct action and splitting the movement."

To the anarchist direct action groups we need to say: "Without the cover, and indeed mass reserves, of a maximum sized demonstration which is sympathetic to you, you will be picked off and repressed by the police with ease."

Join the mass march to the gates of the Gleneagles Hotel on Wednesday, 6 July - the opening day of the G8 Summit.

They are G8, but we are six billion!

Five Days of Action Against the G8:

11am Saturday, 2 July - "Make Poverty History" Massive Demonstration in Edinburgh.

Sunday, 3 July - "Ideas to Change the World" G8 Alternatives Summit in Edinburgh. 10am onwards Usher Hall, Queens Hall & Edinburgh University

This event will feature prominent speakers from around the world in eight plenary sessions and more than 36 workshop/seminars. The purpose of the Alternatives Summit is to present a serious ideological challenge to the corrupt policies and ideology of the G8.

For Tickets contact Usher Hall Box Office, Call 44 (0)151 228 1155 or Email: boxoffice.admin@usherhall.co.uk
In Advance: £10 Waged or £5 Unwaged. At the Door: £15

Full details about the summit and confirmed speakers can be found at: <http://www.g8alternatives.org.uk>

Monday, 4 July - Faslane Nuclear Base Blockade 30 miles west of Glasgow, Scotland. "You can't end poverty unless you end war"

Tuesday, 5 July - Dungavel Detention Centre Mass Protest "Close Dungavel, No-one is Illegal!"

12.00pm Wednesday, 6 July - "Another World is Necessary" Demonstration: March to the gates of Gleneagles Hotel opening day of the G8 summit.

For more information visit G8 Alternatives at www.g8alternatives.org.uk

A WORLD TO WIN



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And if a country decides to resist or even just upsets globalisers' carefully arranged world order then the USA - the super power dedicated to guarding world capitalism - steps in with its bombs and tanks, its troops and warships to blast away any opposition. Bush and Blair's "war on terrorism" is actually a war for globalisation, and has been met with a global anti-war movement.

But we also live in a world where resistance is rife. So long as the bosses exploit, the workers fight back. So long as imperialism wages its wars thousands take up arms against it.

So long as poverty and starvation

are inflicted on millions, so millions more take to the streets.

From the Palestinian intifada, to the Iraqi resistance, from the strikes by workers across the world from Italy to India to the huge anti-capitalist mobilisations and the World and European Social Forums, new generations are picking up the baton of struggle.

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A WORLD TO WIN - IDEAS IN ACTION is an event designed to refresh our ideas, learn from the past and understand what is new.

It is a chance to get together with other revolutionaries and discuss these ideas, in order to prepare for new struggles ahead.

It is an event that you cannot afford to miss.

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Four days in dormitory: £45 / £35

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Day Rate: £10

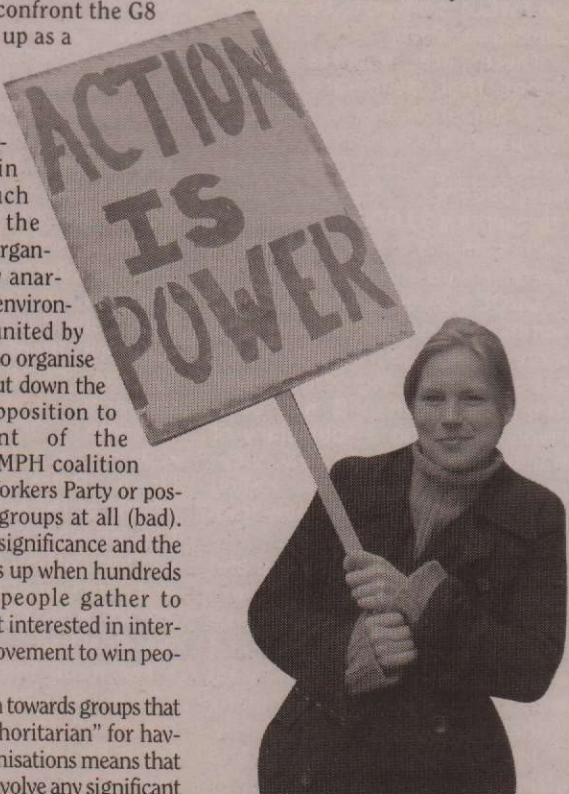
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Iraq: new government, new crisis

The new Iraqi government, formed after months of haggling, will be a government of crisis. Until the occupation is broken, Washington will remain as the real power in the country, *writes Stuart King*

On 3 May Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari's government finally took office more than three months after the national election. It did so in the midst of a ferocious offensive and bombing campaign by the Iraqi resistance. More than 300 people were killed in the first 10 days in May - with suicide bombers targeting police and security forces recruitment offices, foreign contractor's convoys, leading parliamentary deputies and of course the occupation forces.

As *The Economist* said on 7 May: "The past fortnight has been among the bloodiest since the war's official end two years ago." The magazine reported that "the insurgency has lost none of its potency" and points to its "improved professionalism".

The situation gave the lie to Washington's fable that January's election had been a "turning point" in the struggle against the "insurgents". US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the military top brass fell out when in April General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that attacks continued at about "50 or 60 a day". The insurgents' "capacity remained the same as in 2004". This departed from the Pentagon's script that everything was getting better day-by-day.

The spindoctors went into overdrive: attacks on US forces were down; it was a last desperate throw by the terrorists because they were on the run and their organisations were being rounded up. All would be well.

Not so: if attacks on US forces were down it was only because the troops were increasingly holed up in their bases, pushing the already demoralised Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to bear the brunt of the attacks. Whole swathes of the country remain "no go areas", with cities like Mosul and Ramadi, and parts of Baghdad virtually controlled by the resistance.

Haggling for posts

Three months of bitter wrangling over government posts certainly did little to promote the virtues of US-imposed democracy to most Iraqis. The January elections effectively divided the country and parliament along ethnic and religious lines between Kurds and Arabs, Shia and Sunnis. The Kurds refused to do a deal without explicit guarantees over their rights to autonomy, on the status of the oil city of Kirkuk and an agreement on a limited role for sharia law in the new constitution. They also secured a cut of oil revenues.

Worse the Shia coalition - the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) formed by the Shia spiritual leader Ayatollah Sistani - despite winning a bare majority in the 275-seat parliament was deeply unstable. The two largest forces in the coalition, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sciri) and the Dawa party, have differing views on the occupation and conflicting attitudes to the resistance.

The Kurds - through President Talabani - were given the task of bringing in Sunni representatives - the strategy being to split the resistance, winning over the more nationalist wing and isolating the extreme islamists and suicide bombers. Ayad Allawi, head of the previous US puppet administration, demanded too many cabinet seats and was viewed with suspicion. With US connivance he had built up elite security forces staffed by ex-Ba'athists, both military and security agents, who were experts in Saddam Hussein's terrorist regime.

10 • May 2005



No let up in the insurgency despite the elections

For the US these forces were both effective in fighting the insurgents - using torture, kidnapping and assassination - and formed a useful counterweight to the Shia-dominated parliament. Much of the prolonged haggling involved the Shia and Kurds trying to prevent Allawi's allies controlling key security ministries.

Washington issued dire warnings not to purge the useful ex-Ba'athists from the army - however much blood they had on their hands. The defence ministry has for this reason been allocated to the Sunnis but the Shia factions (especially Sciri) have vetoed every person put forward, insisting that no one with past connections to Baathism be allowed to fill the post.

When the cabinet was agreed on 3 May and 29 ministers were sworn in, there was still no permanent agreement on who should run the oil and defence ministries, or five other cabinet posts.

The ceaseless horse-trading and the precarious balance between confessional groups guarantee that there will be no chance of this government drawing up an agreed constitution by the August deadline. The chances of this weak government putting down stable social roots and thereby marginalising or quelling the resistance in 2005 are next to nil.

Fighting occupation

During all this jockeying for position, little was heard of the burning question of how to rid Iraq of the occupying forces. Before the election polls showed that 80 per cent of Iraqis wanted the occupying troops out. The UIA placed an end to the occupation as the second point in its manifesto but the US had made clear that it would decide when (if ever) the troops would leave.

Bush laid down the law in his February State of the Union speech "We will not set an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq, because that would embolden terrorists and make them believe they can wait us out." Blair dutifully repeated this line during the election campaign.

On 9 April - the second anniversary of the occupation of Iraq - Moqtada al-Sadr, the Sciri's leader, organised a massive demonstration against the occupation and to demand punishment for Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist dictators.

As many as 300,000 people demonstrated in Baghdad and not just Shia; Sadr won the support of the Association of Muslim Scholars, a Sunni organisation with links to the resistance, which boycotted the election. This marked a reformatting of the Sunni-Shia

protest movement from the time of the initial US attacks on Fallujah and Najaf in April 2004.

Sadr is putting down a marker. His supporters might be part of the Shia coalition but he intends to remain as a leader of those fighting to remove the occupation forces.

Washington has stated that it will stay in Iraq until there is "stability and democracy" - code for a pliable government with loyal armed forces that act in US interests. The US has invested too much in Iraq to cut and run.

Having committed its forces, the US needs Iraq to become a neo-liberal model for the Middle East.

This puts the new government of Iraq between a rock and a hard place. If they don't implement their promises - of security, an end to occupation, a return to prosperity - they will soon be discredited and the more militant fighters will be strengthened.

If they push to remove the US forces and impede the handover of the country's assets, they will clash with their master - and the US will quickly show them who holds real power in Iraq. The Jaafari government will be one of crisis and division as long as the coalition forces occupy the country and the resistance remains unbeaten.

The US-led occupation has from day one sought to impose a political solution on the country that institutionalises confessionalism. It has played divide and rule doling out political power and patronage between ethnic and religious groupings, forcing Iraqis to identify with "their" group and see others as their competitors in the race for jobs, land and services in a country where unemployment runs at 50 per cent and much of the infrastructure is still in tatters.

This flies in the face of a long tradition of ethnic mixing and religious tolerance that has characterised much of Iraq. It threatens the unity of the Iraqi state and encourages the most extreme Sunni factions (with links to al-Qaida) - who see Shia as heretics - to wage a murderous sectarian war against the latter.

Against this background ending the occupation remains critical and urgent. The US (and British) troops incite the resistance and hence are the main cause of violence; the US politicians have constructed a template for Iraqi politics that threatens a growth in sectarianism and impedes working class unity among the different groups.

Trade unions fight multinationals

The trade unions in Iraq grew and multiplied with the end of the Ba'athist dictatorship. But for all the talk of democratic liberties the unions work under difficult and dangerous conditions. Under Paul Bremer, the first US governor of occupied Iraq, the drive to break up the state industries, privatise them and sell them off to the multi nationals began. A series of 'orders' were passed allowing foreign firms to own 100 per cent of Iraqi companies and to repatriate profits at will. Corporate taxes were slashed from 45 per cent to 15 per cent, while 200 state-owned companies were set for privatisation.

Saddam's laws forbidding all but state-controlled unions have remained in place, leaving the emerging unions under threat. The only union federation recognised by Bremer was the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), controlled by the Stalinist Iraqi Communist Party, which has proved a loyal member of the US-appointed provisional authority. This federation has gained the support of many British trade union leaders who have defended it against criticism.

Many other unions are linked to

political parties - the General Federation (GFOIU) to the Dawa Party, the two Kurdish parties (PUK and KDP) control the Kurdish Workers Syndicate, while the FWCUI is linked to the Worker Communist Party.

There are important new unions that deliberately avoid party affiliation; the Southern Oil Company (GUOE) union based in Basra is one. The GUOE is an independent trade union representing 23,000 workers in 10 union councils in the oil sector in Basra, Amara and Nassiriyah.

GUOE has been involved in a number of struggles not only over wages but against the multinationals' creeping control over Iraqi oil. In Basra it has been involved forcing a subsidiary of Halliburton (tied to US vice-president Dick Cheney) - Kellogg Brown and Root - to employ Iraqi workers - "a security risk".

In March a demonstration and blockade by 3,000 workers against the Danish multi-national Maersk, which ran a port and again refused to employ Iraqi workers, led to the company withdrawing from Iraq completely.

Intimidation, kidnapping and attempted assassinations of

workers' leaders either by Ba'athists or criminals linked to the occupation's security services are becoming more common.

The Iraqi workers and their emerging unions need to link their struggles against privatisation and the multi-nationals with the struggle of the resistance to free the country of foreign occupation. Mass workers' action against the occupation could strike a blow for a secular and socialist movement against the imperialists and lead the rest of the country behind them.

A conference to oppose privatisation, scheduled for late May, will take place in the southern city of Basra, organised by the GUOE. Messages of solidarity and support are welcome.

• Join the protest outside the "Iraqi Petroleum Conference 2005" at the Hilton, Paddington, London where corporate bosses will be plotting the privatisation and carve-up of Iraq's oil industry 29-30 June. Called by Stop the War Coalition.

• For more information on the "Corporate Invasion of Iraq", download the Iraq Occupation Focus Factsheet 2 from www.iraqoccupationfocus.org.uk

All pain, no gain for Iraqi women

"Respect for women... can triumph in the Middle East and beyond!" President George Bush at the UN, September 2002

By Rekha Khurana

Since the US/UK invasion on Iraq something has practically vanished from its streets. That something is the sight of Iraqi women. Not surprisingly, the empty speeches promising liberation for the women of Iraq after the fall of Saddam have amounted to nothing. Instead the situation for women in Iraq today has worsened according to a report published by Amnesty International (*Decades of suffering, Now women deserve better*).

The report documents increases in killings, abductions and rapes since the fall of Saddam's regime. It is no secret that Saddam's regime was not a defender of women's rights but compared to women in other Middle Eastern countries, women in Iraq had many rights that have been destroyed by the occupation.

Women in Saddam's Iraq

The 1970s and early 1980s were years of economic growth in Iraq. State policies were aimed at eradicating illiteracy, educating women and incorporating them into the labour force. They became among the most educated and professional in the entire region. Women could work, study at university, and receive extensive medical coverage. A working Iraqi mother received five years of maternity leave. In 1980 women could vote and run for election. They had equal pay and could legally drive and could choose to uncover their heads.

But after the 1991 Gulf War and the sanctions, living conditions for women in Iraq began to deteriorate. The declin-

ing economy caused many women to lose their jobs and abandon their education. Then in the mid-1990s there was a campaign for the Islamisation of Iraq. Saddam's regime started to appease the tribes and the imams by imposing anti-women legislation that included death for a woman who commits adultery.

In 2000 they organised the mass killing of 200 women in Baghdad and Mosul. The General Union for Women of Iraq - a government organisation controlled by the Ba'ath Party - was asked to present a list of "honourless" women to the government - "honourless" meaning prostitutes. The fate of these women was beheading and then hanging them naked upside down in front of their houses. So life for women under Saddam's rule was far from being free from danger but things have worsened since the war started.

Life for women after the war

Since the beginning of the occupation, rape, abduction, "honour" killings and domestic violence towards women have become daily occurrences. The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) reported that 400 women were raped in Baghdad in the space of just five months last year.

And it's not just the horrors of rape women have to deal with. If they tell their families what has happened to them, they are in danger of being killed to stop them bringing shame on the family. Some of these women commit suicide. Women can no longer leave their homes without fear of being attacked. This means many can no longer work or study.

Political islamism has been rising



since the beginning of the occupation and women have been under attack especially for not wearing the veil. Due to increasing pressure many have started to wear veils, but also because bareheaded women are favourite targets for rapists. More and more mosques are turning away women not wearing the abaya (head to toe covering) and many universities are forcing female students to wear the hijab and forbidding the wearing of jeans! There have been fatwas issued against prostitutes and reports of women being sold to neighbouring countries.

There have also been sexual assaults and violations of women's rights by US forces in Iraq. Many women have been taken hostage tortured, and sexually abused. The sexual abuse, rape and torture against Iraqi women is not

confined only to Abu Ghraib prison, but is reportedly happening all across Iraq.

As well as dealing with fear and repression many women in Iraq have been left as the head of the household after their men have been killed or detained. Seventy-two per cent of working Iraqi women were public employees and many of them have lost their jobs. Most are now too scared to leave the house.

Simple everyday life has been made unbearable since the occupation. Frequent electricity cuts, lack of water and in some cases food, lack of jobs and no basic healthcare in areas have added yet another burden onto the forever increasing list of worries for women in Iraq today.

The stories of horror and despair are many and they are happening to women in Iraq right now. But there are also sto-

ries of brave resistance against the attacks, in some cases in the face of death threats. But the climate of oppression is forcing more and more women out of the political arena and deep into their homes.

Many women's organisations are doing amazing work opening women's shelters and refuges and organising demonstrations but if women are going to be free in Iraq much more needs to be done. There has to be an end to the occupation. Women need to link up with others fighting against the imperialist occupation, such as trade union organisations and organise armed militia to protect women from attacks so more women can join the fight back. Only an end to the occupation can give women the chance to start living a life without fear.

Israeli universities boycott

Last month, the Association of University Teachers voted to boycott three Israeli universities. Workers Power spoke to **Sue Blackwell**, one of the leading movers of the boycott motion

WORKERS POWER: Why did Birmingham AUT branch bring a resolution for an academic boycott of Israeli universities?

Sue Blackwell: We received a call signed by about 60 Palestinian organisations, including all the NGOs in the West Bank and our Palestinian sister trade union, asking for a cultural and academic boycott of Israel.

We responded to that call. (See: <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/article178>)

Why did you choose particular universities? Are you in favour of a total boycott?

Personally I am boycotting all Israeli universities and I support the Palestinian call for a total boycott. However, for tactical reasons the boycott supporters felt it would be more effective to focus on specific universities whose actions were well-documented. We chose the following three which all illustrate the effect of the Occupation in different ways:

1. Hebrew University of Jerusalem - for confiscating Palestinian land to expand their dormitory accommodation;

2. Bar-Ilan University - for supporting a college in an illegal West Bank

www.fifthinternational.org

Settlement;

3. University of Haifa - for victimising an Israeli Jew, Ilan Pappé, who has supported research into the historiography of 1948 when massacres of Palestinians took place.

Some opponents of the boycott argue that this would be cutting links with people who are supporters of the Palestinian cause, how do you answer this?

First, the boycott is aimed at institutions and not individuals. Second, the boycott call clearly exempts "any conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals opposed to their state's colonial and racist policies". Thirdly, there are sadly very few Israeli academics who support the Palestinians to the extent of publicly denouncing the occupation and refusing to enlist as reservists in the Israeli army - though the number is growing and I applaud those who take the courageous step of joining the "refuseniks".

Others have said this is the "wrong time" and a distraction from the opportunities presented by the AUT and Natfhe merger. What do you say to this?

It's never the wrong time to stand up

for human rights. The plight of the Palestinians is as bad as ever - Gaza is like a prison and a wall is going up around the West Bank. The much-trumpeted pullout from Gaza hasn't happened yet - Sharon has just announced he is delaying it for a month because the settlers are giving him some grief over it (if they were Palestinians he would have sent the armoured bulldozers in long ago). And even if it does happen (I'll believe it when I see it), it is just a smokescreen for a continued land grab in the West Bank and Jerusalem, where it's "business as usual" as far as house demolitions are concerned.

A special council has been called to try to overturn the decision. What do you think will happen?

I don't want to speculate about the outcome - we haven't even seen the motions that will be debated yet. But of course we are up against a very well-organised and well-funded Zionist propaganda machine which is prepared to resort to personal attacks on people like myself and threats of legal action against the AUT. So I am not terribly optimistic, but we will fight as hard as we possibly can - our Palestinian colleagues deserve no less.

If the boycott position is lost, will you carry on campaigning? You have come under a lot of pressure, been denounced, received hate mail etc.

Even if the boycott policy is reversed, we have still achieved a lot. As Omar Barghouti of the boycott organisation PACBI said, "The taboo has been shattered at last. From now on, it will be acceptable to compare Israel's apartheid system to its South African predecessor." Before the AUT decision very few people had even heard of the College of Judea and Samaria; now the whole world knows that there is a college in an illegal settlement - which incidentally the Israeli cabinet has just voted to upgrade to a fully-fledged university, amid protests by the Israeli left.

So yes, of course we will carry on campaigning. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa wasn't won overnight: it took years, and so will the struggle against Israeli apartheid.

As for the hate mail, I think that when people resort to such tactics it shows they have lost the moral argument.

What should other trade unionists be doing in relation to a boycott? (Can we

build links with Palestinian universities, schools, towns etc)

First, they should send messages of support to AUT at hq@aut.org.uk as our Head Office has come in for a great deal of flak since Council!

Second, they should support twinning links with organisations in Palestine. Here in Birmingham I am on the committee to twin Birmingham with Ramallah at city level and we are encouraging cultural organisations, students and so on, to twin with their counterparts in Ramallah. A group of Brummie women recently travelled over to show their solidarity with women's groups in Ramallah and hand over the money they had raised for them: unfortunately they didn't get farther than Tel Aviv airport as the Israelis deported them all! We will be protesting against this totally unwarranted harassment of a humanitarian delegation and we will continue the struggle to show solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Palestine.

Sue Blackwell
Department of English,
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http://web.bham.ac.uk/sue_blackwell
Sue's Personal and Political Pages:
<http://www.sue.be>

Rifondazione Comunista moves to the right

April's regional elections brought a crushing defeat for Silvio Berlusconi's "House of Liberty", while anger at his misrule has mounted. But, warns *Paolo Rossi*, Rifondazione Comunista and the left are in danger of squandering the opportunity to press home the advantage

The "House of Liberty", which consists of Forza Italia, plus the National Alliance, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Northern League, control only four out of a total of 20 regions following last month's elections. Waves of mass opposition have grown, on the streets and in the workplaces, to welfare cuts, falling living standards, and at Berlusconi's shameless personal corruption. Despite his promise to get Italian troops out of Iraq by September the war is still an open wound.

In the general election of 2001, large sectors of the middle classes, especially in the south of Italy, voted for the right on the basis of promises of massive tax cuts, including a removal of the IRAP, a regional corporate tax. While, for these sectors, it is okay when workers' pension rights are attacked, it is quite a different story when their own pockets are emptied, as they have been, without the promised tax cuts.

Indeed, the present government has passed laws preventing Berlusconi and his closest associates from being investigated and prosecuted for corruption. Tax cuts have certainly been made, but these have benefited neither workers nor the middle classes, but people with huge incomes where the percentage-based cuts really count.

The only other "achievement" of this government has been to force workers to spend an extra five years being exploited before they can retire.

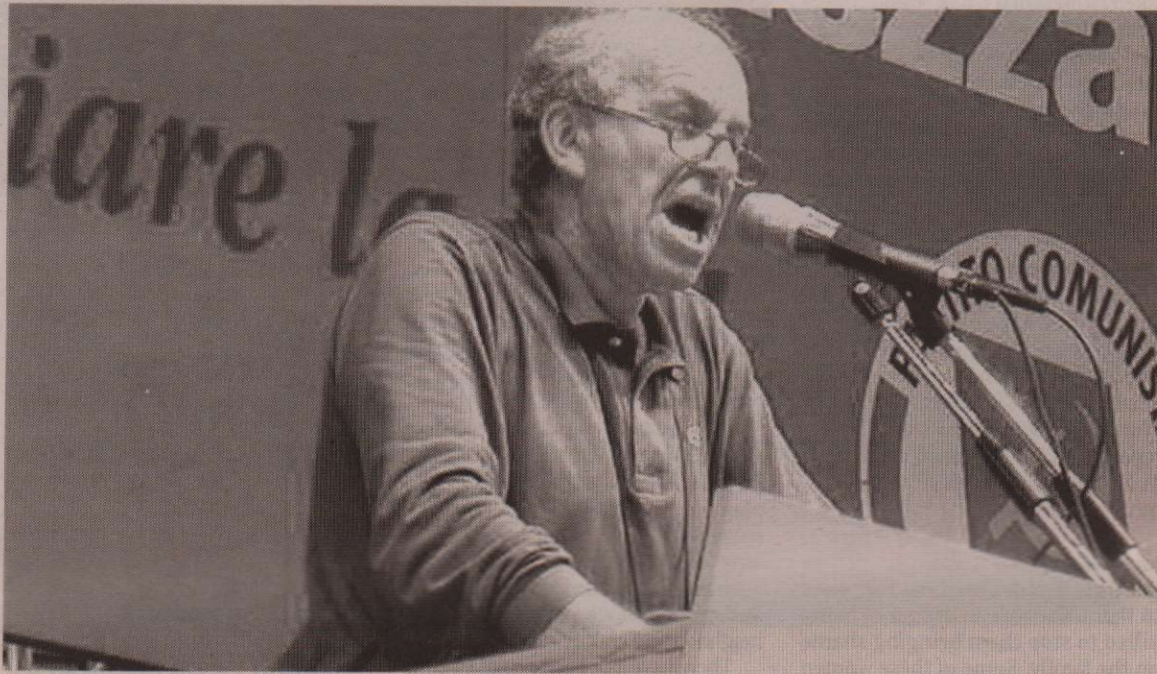
In the meantime, the economy has gone from bad to worse. Italy's industrial decline is there for all to see, most notably in the crisis of Fiat, Alitalia and the collapse of Parmalat.

Nobody believes any longer in Berlusconi's dream-weaving pronouncements or in the anti-communist tirade that he calls upon to mobilise middle class support. Indeed, the biggest loser in the regional elections was Berlusconi's own party, Forza Italia. What these elections demonstrate is that the Berlusconi show is well and truly over.

The big winner was the centre-left coalition, l'Unione, which for the national elections will form the Ulivo coalition, centred on former EU chief Romano Prodi. It increased its voting share from 44.1 per cent to 52.1 per cent compared with the regional elections of 2000.

The left-reformist Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) has recently decided to join the Ulivo coalition for the next parliamentary elections, due in 2006. It gained 5.6 per cent of the poll - 1,366,467 votes - just half a percentage point - 200,000 votes - more than it achieved five years earlier. The PRC actually lost 0.7 per cent of the vote compared with the European elections of last summer. Hardly a ringing endorsement of their leader Fausto Bertinotti's sharp turn to the right in recent years.

Prodi now leads the centre-left and undoubtedly acts as a guarantee of pro-capitalist moderation for those middle class sectors that have decided to abandon the sinking Berlusconi ship and accept a social democratic and



Rifondazione Comunista leader Fausto Bertinotti

"communist" presence in government.

The rise of Prodi is regarded as good news for many workers. It shouldn't be. Prodi governed Italy between May 1996 and October 1998. His government was brought down when the PRC pulled the plug because of Prodi's lethargy in seeing through elements of its programme, especially a reduction in the working week to 35 hours. Prodi was not so lethargic, however, when it came to making workers pay for the budget deficit and for Italy's entry into the euro.

In his period running the European Union Commission Prodi paved the way for the neoliberal Lisbon agenda and the European constitution - both denounced by Rifondazione at the European Social Forums. No one can have any doubt that Prodi will remain loyal to the project of a more competitive European capitalism, at the expense of the working class.

Now Rifondazione finds itself once again in Prodi's coalition. So much for its leader Bertinotti's rousing anticapitalist rhetoric! He is gagging to enter a government led by one of Europe's top social-liberal politicians. And what does social-liberal mean? Socially concerned in words, neoliberal in deeds. What does a social liberal look like? Tony Blair or Gerhard Schröder.

Rifondazione is already paying the price. The election in Apulia of Niki Vendola, an openly gay communist, shows that workers can be rallied to a radical alternative. Yet nationally Rifondazione is barely holding its share of the vote.

Now more than ever workers desperately need political representation which will fight for massive increases in wages and pensions, huge investments in the health and education systems, as well as a dismantling of Berlusconi's pension, education, judicial and constitutional reforms. Last, and most certainly not least, Italian troops must be withdrawn from Iraq.

But Prodi and his Christian Democrat and Democratic Left allies will do

none of this, since such measures would alienate the middle classes, not to mention the employers' confederation, Confindustria, which has clearly abandoned Berlusconi and now looks to Prodi.

Indeed, Prodi has made no pro-worker promises to Rifondazione, whereas the latter has softened its calls for immediate troop withdrawal from Iraq.

The electoral result reflects important social and political changes in the working class and the middle strata too. In the 1990s neoliberalism and its values of self-advancement ("work hard, sell yourself, move from job to job") seemed to be replacing solidarity and collective action. Berlusconi - a buccannering entrepreneur (i.e. a criminal) - represented this ethos.

But the reality of capitalism and its tendency to stagnation was stronger than any ideological offensive. The Italian working class and youth fought back. They turned to the new anticapitalist movement, culminating in the great confrontations around the G8 in 2001.

After the murder of young anticapitalist fighter Carlo Giuliani, workers demonstrated and struck, halting Berlusconi's threatened repression. In the period since then, a number of general strikes, mass demonstrations, and militant, rank and file controlled battles, like the occupation of Fiat Melfi in 2004, took place every year.

Membership of the trade unions is steadily increasing, in marked contrast to many other European countries. Both the left-reformist CGIL and the Christian-social CISL recorded growth in 2004. The CGIL, the biggest union, grew for the seventh consecutive year and now has more than 5.5 million members.

Interestingly unionisation is particularly increasing in sectors where the workers movement was traditionally in a rather weak position: in the south, among immigrants and in the private retail sector. But it is also organising among researchers, scientists and school students.

Rifondazione's Congress

The PRC's sixth party congress, held at the beginning of March in Venice, reflected little or nothing of this new radicalism. At the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002, Bertinotti passionately criticised his own tactics vis-à-vis the Prodi government in the 1990s, and promised the massed ranks of Italian workers in the audience, "never again", calling forth tumultuous applause.

Only two and a half years later, Bertinotti argues that replacing the Berlusconi government by electoral means now takes total priority over other tasks. At the PRC congress he said: "We confront the following problem: after a quarter-century, is it possible to take the path of social reform again and bestride a structure that breaks with this cycle and embarks upon a progressive course, or will we experience a regression of society, democracy and citizens' rights, which for a long period will be irreversible?"

Prodi, himself, who was an honoured guest at the congress, aptly summed up what Bertinotti was saying and preparing to do: "Bertinotti has presented his party as a reformist party that wants to participate in the reformist majority in parliament, and this is the starting point for possibly working together in the near future."

Bertinotti presents this betrayal as an alliance with the "productive" bourgeoisie to relaunch industrial production and guarantee a "greater redistribution of wealth". On 4 March Prodi himself described Bertinotti's speech as "a proposal for a fully reformist socialist party, completely compatible with the responsibilities of government".

Bertinotti, for all his anticapitalist rhetoric, has obviously convinced the bourgeoisie that he is "fit to govern". His motion was passed at the congress with 60 per cent of the vote. Does this mean that there is 40 per cent of the party against Bertinotti's entry into a social-liberal government? Alas, no.

In the past, the line of Bertinotti

and his predecessors passed without too much ado, especially seeing that there was generally only one opposition document stitched together by the self-designated Trotskyist groups - Proposta Comunista (ITO), Bandiera Rossa (USFI) and FalceMartello (CWI). But the alignment of Bandiera Rossa with Bertinotti, and the bureaucratic expulsion of FalceMartello by Proposta Comunista from the organised opposition (now named Progetto Comunista, but effectively Proposta with the name changed) has fragmented the left.

This has been further highlighted by the appearance of two other currents, Ernesto and Erre, break-aways from Bertinotti's own "post-Stalinist" followers. These also presented their own documents at the congress, as did Proposta and FalceMartello.

Ernesto, is actually a neo-Stalinist trend which seeks to negotiate control of the party with the governing faction, whereas Erre presents itself as the left wing of Bertinotti-ism. Ernesto in particular gained support during the congress, taking 25% of the vote.

But neither of these two trends offered an alternative to Bertinotti. Faced instead with Bertinotti's pro-Prodi drive, they have been left speechless and must now form part of the "opposition", something not actually foreseen in their half-baked pressure tactics.

The vote of Progetto Comunista was slashed by half, reaching only 6.4 per cent. Evidently the other half was taken by Erre (7%) and FalceMartello (1.7%). Progetto's vote is short change indeed for what has amounted to an "entrant" tactic which has lasted 15 years and involved a number of unprincipled adaptations to reformism. In the process, Progetto's leaders Marco Ferrando and Franco Grisolia have missed several opportunities to seriously challenge Bertinotti.

Ferrando's latest proposal is to unite the opposition currents, including Ernesto, Erre and FalceMartello, in a battle against Bertinotti. Good but on what basis? Some of these forces are committed to the principle of class collaboration. The issue is not how many pro-worker reforms can be smuggled into the manifesto: these will be unceremoniously dumped as in the 1990s.

The working class cannot govern with the representatives of the bourgeoisie. Class collaboration is the betrayal of the interests of the working class, its immediate necessities as well as the historic goal of superseding capitalism and building "another world".

If the vanguard of trade union militants and anticapitalist youth recognise these facts they will inevitably come to the conclusion that they need a new workers party based on a revolutionary programme.

The European Social Forum, in which Italians play a major role, urgently needs a serious process of political clarification. It cannot go on ignoring and failing to criticise forces within its own ranks that are openly preparing to serve the ruling class in a social liberal government.

Argentina: Underground resistance!

The successful struggles of the Buenos Aires underground train workers over the past few years provides a model of how a militant rank and file organisation can rebuild the shattered confidence of a workforce after privatisation, says *Frederico Valdez*

In 1994 the Buenos Aires underground (Subte) was privatised, along with many other state assets in Argentina under President Carlos Menem. For the employees it came as a hard blow. They were reduced in number from 3,600 to 1,500. But half of these were new, green recruits; of the original workforce only 700 were kept on. Wages were cut and the shift was extended from six to eight hours, six days a week. Safety standards fell rapidly. The new management picked fights over everything. No one could be sure if they'd have a job the next day.

"The trade union was completely unable to react. The old collective agreement was no longer valid after privatisation, the workforce was poorly organised and the leaders were mistrusted bureaucrats. The 800 newly employed workers were helpless and had no experience," says Roberto, today one of the leading union activists.

In June 1994, just three months after privatisation, a new collective agreement was signed. To remain recognised, the trade union (UTA, Union Tramvia Automotor) accepted nearly all the demands of the new owners. But the privatisation process had destroyed the militant culture of the workforce. The shop stewards were loyal followers of the bureaucrats.

Things started to change in 1997. A train driver was sacked for an alleged breach of safety rules *after touching another train*. But no damage had been caused and the driver had simply been helping another driver out. All the other drivers recognised the sacking as a deliberate and unjust act of intimidation. They all went on strike and won re-instatement; never again has the management tried to sack a worker.

The UTA officials quickly sensed that it had to support this unofficial strike in order not to lose control. But with this new sense of confidence the composition of the shop stewards started to change. Back in 1994 only one steward refused to tow the bureaucrats' line; in 1996 there were three, and in 1998 five. By 2001 a clear majority - 17 stewards out of 21 -



Striking Subte workers celebrate victory

were elected on the militant slate.

After the successful strike against the driver's sacking, small groups of workers began to agitate for a reduction in the length of the working day again - but quietly since officially it was a taboo subject after the UTA had signed the eight hours agreement.

Meanwhile the next open conflict occurred over further proposed redundancies. A driver and a guard staffed each train. Management wanted to get rid of the guards and the UTA officials had already agreed that the guards would be redeployed elsewhere in Subte. But the workers had other ideas and went on strike. Again, they were successful.

After this the six-hour day was once again within reach. A motion was put to the Buenos Aires city council in 2002 to cut the shift. At this time the country was in political upheaval after the collapse of the economy. Three

presidents had resigned amid a popular rebellion on the streets, factory occupations, and road blockades by unemployed workers. In this context, almost no politician dared vote against this demand of the Subte workforce. But though the proposal was carried with 95 per cent of the vote, the city's governor vetoed it.

A strike to enforce the change was lost but this was only a momentary setback. Roberto explains: "We didn't get what we wanted, but the management threatening us with repression didn't succeed either. We reinforced our propaganda by collecting signatures from the passengers. We gave three reasons for a reduction of the working hours: better health for the drivers, greater safety for the passengers, and more jobs for the unemployed. We won the sympathy of the people and 100 per cent backing for this struggle in the following election of the union stewards."

However, the next struggle in June 2003 started over a different issue. The company wanted to merge the ticket offices with the newsagents. A strike failed to stop this plan, but it did bring about higher wages and the six-hour day for the drivers. Three hundred people had to be taken on to make up for the shorter working time. In December the drivers of the suburban trains won the six-hour day despite the fact they had been excluded explicitly from the new contract. They simply left their trains after six hours and walked home. Fearing an escalation management gave in.

In April 2004 the UTA officials again tried to stitch up a deal with the management behind the backs of the workers. In return for a six-hour day for all workers except for the ticket sellers, the union would agree to the introduction of tickets machines as long

as staff were redeployed. But the workers opposed the plan and after four days of strike management conceded the six-hour day for all staff and abandoned the plan for the ticket machines. Another 300 unemployed were hired, taking the workforce to more than 2000 again.

The Subte workers were on a roll. Strikes in November last year and February this year resulted in huge pay rises of 44 per cent, higher supplements for night shifts and other gains. The workers introduced a new form of strike: one hour the first day, two the next, and so on. While these pay rises made the Subte workers among the best paid in Argentina in real terms, wages were still lower than before the 2001 financial crash, which devalued the peso by two-thirds against the dollar. Hence their wages could still not buy the goods they bought five years ago.

Effectively the recent battles have only gone some way to restoring the pay and conditions enjoyed 12 years ago, before privatisation. "You tell us we are privileged - but just compare our wages with the salary of the Subte public relations manager!" is the answer given by the strike leaders at the press conference after the strike. "We don't want to be privileged. All workers deserve higher wages!"

Solidarity is no empty word for the Subte workers either. Last year they forced the management to take over the train maintenance mechanics, who had been sacked by Alstom. In March this year they succeeded in extending the UTA agreement to the cleaners, who had been "outsourced" to a different company.

The record of the Subte workers is inspiring. They have cut the length of the working day, forcing the company to hire more staff. They have gained massive wage rises and the re-integration of outsourced sectors. They have done it by defeating the pro-boss agenda of the trade union bureaucrats and generated gains not only for themselves but for other sections of the working class. This is true leadership, a model for the whole working class.

China's anticapitalists can inspire workers' movement

By Peter Main

The name Huankantou deserves to be etched into the memory of the Chinese working class. There, last month, small acts of personal heroism inspired a whole town's population to collective defiance of the authorities.

Police forcibly moved on elderly women, protesting at plans to build a second chemical plant. Two protesters were killed. As local anger mounted, demonstrators filled the streets demanding a public meeting with the authorities, but this was refused.

Instead, at four o'clock on Sunday morning, 3,000 riot police stormed the village. The villagers, however, proved to be more than a match. Using barricades and makeshift weaponry, they repelled the riot police, leaving many injured. Some reports speak of several deaths and 30 police buses burnt out.

The clashes in Huankantou bear remarkable similarity to anticapitalist protests and battles that are a feature of western countries from Bolivia to Italy.

The scramble for industrial expansion has seen growth rates in double figures for much of the past decade. Nothing has been allowed to stand in the

way of China's new rich who have had the backing - and usually active involvement - of the Chinese Communist Party at all levels. In Huankantou, the existing chemical plant was built on land expropriated from the villagers, and brought with it environmental damage, illness and an increase in birth deformities.

The decision to build a second plant, despite local opposition, has been repeated thousands of times throughout China. Huankantou's refusal to accept the authorities' decision is now also being repeated.

Beijing itself recently said that there were 58,000 incidents of popular discontent last year, an increase of 15 per cent on the previous year. Although this includes everything from local petitions to major confrontations, violent clashes are far from exceptional.

Look at the figures. Three thousand riot police is a force approximately one-third the size of the British army in Iraq. Even more significantly, they were defeated. That would be impossible without large numbers willing to fight and an impressive degree of organisation. In the aftermath, a committee was elected to oversee local administration.

And Huankantou is not unique; there is a nationwide wave of militant opposi-

tion to capitalism in China. Crucial to its further development will be the involvement of the working class of the major urban centres.

The national wave of strikes and demonstrations following the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 confirmed the existence of a working class movement. The co-ordinated strikes in the petrochemical industries in 2001 showed that this movement had strengthened itself. These organisations and leaders will know how to make use of the present situation to advance their own demands.

Top of the list of any such demands will be democratic rights. Freedom of the press and other media and the removal of state controls on the internet are essential, as are full political rights and the fall of the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party.

The western media and organisations active in China will attempt to use widespread discontent and demands for democracy for their own interests. Although China's own capitalists have been happy to make their millions behind the protection of the Communist Party and the state security services, as their wealth and economic strength increase they too will want political change in China.



Villagers display trophies from their battle with the police

The workers' movement needs to be absolutely independent of these false friends. Workers' democracy demands not only a free press but also the right to inspect the accounts of all enterprises. The Communist Party should be made to reveal not only the true scale of profits but also the scale of corruption and collusion that allowed it.

Workers also need freedom to organise. The existing underground trade unions must be legalised and the party bureaucrats who control the official trade unions must be kicked out. Moreover,

like the villagers of Huankantou, the workers will need to organise themselves to repel attack.

Most important of all, however, the still developing Chinese workers' movement needs a political leadership, a party committed to the dual task of reversing the privatisation and capitalisation of the economy and overthrowing the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. Above all it means replacing the party's dictatorship with a new form of political power based on the democratic organisations of the workers and poor peasants themselves.

Andrea Dworkin: wrong target

By Clare Heath

Andrea Dworkin died last month. Dworkin was seen by most as an intransigent, man-hating radical feminist. She wrote extensively about male violence, drawing upon her own experiences.

Dworkin had a very traumatic life. She suffered anti-Semitism and sexual abuse from a very young age. Then, after decades as a feminist writer and lecturer she was drugged and raped in 1999. She spent the last few years of her life in a deep depression related to that rape.

Dworkin emerged as a feminist thinker in the 1970s, publishing her first book, *Woman Hating*, in 1974. At the time the women's movement was in debate over theory, strategy and tactics. The early women's movement was involved with the radical civil rights movement, the fight against the war in Vietnam and - in the UK - key struggles of working class women for equal rights.

As it grew, the movement became engrossed in debates that centred on the relationship of feminism to the working class movement, and the linked question of the role of men in the oppression, and consequently the liberation of women.

On the one hand were the socialist feminists, influenced by working class movements and linked to the left parties. They argued that the origin of women's oppression was intimately linked with the emergence of private property and hence class society. Under capitalism they argued women's oppression was closely tied to the exploitation of the working class.

As a result, they argued that the women's movement must link up with workers' struggles, particularly those



of working class women. Their weakness was that they failed to understand the interdependence of class exploitation and women's oppression, and tended to see two parallel spheres of struggle rather than an integrated fight for socialism and women's liberation.

Opposed to the socialist feminists were the radicals, Dworkin included, who regarded women's oppression as the most fundamental social oppression, upon which all other injustice was based. This led to the strategy of seeking women's emancipation through separation from men, often linked to a political lesbianism - an outlook that argued that any contact with men was tantamount to collaborating with the enemy.

Dworkin came to be one of the major figures on this wing of feminism, although she was not one of its key theoreticians. Rather, her books - notably *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979) and *Intercourse* (1987) - are

polemics against men and the system that oppresses women.

Unlike some radical feminists, including the "revolutionary" feminists, she did not try in her books to develop a coherent theory of the underlying class or patriarchal social relations that anchor women's oppression throughout the ages; instead she focused entirely on one form in which the oppression of women is made manifest - sexual violence.

For Dworkin women are oppressed by sexual violence. She is often quoted as saying that all intercourse is rape, a claim she denies. She argued that heterosexual intercourse is "the pure, sterile, formal expression of men's contempt for women". Even more clearly, "intercourse remains a means, or the means, of physiologically making a woman inferior: communicating to her, cell by cell, her own inferior status... pushing and thrusting until she gives in."

She denied that this amounts to saying that all sex is rape; she argues that all sex that involves any force is rape, and that much "romantic" sex is in fact forced penetration of women.

This understanding of the role of sexual intercourse in women's subjugation leads to her next major argument, namely that pornography is propaganda for rape. "Pornography is a celebration of rape and injury to women; it's a kind of union for rapists, a way of legitimising rape and formalising male supremacy in our society." Indeed for Dworkin, pornography is the most fundamental factor in women's oppression.

The other major part of Dworkin's picture is prostitution, which she saw as violence, a systematic way of defiling women in a form of a factory of exploitation. At the same time, marriage contrasts with prostitution in that it involves reproduction, and is seen as a form of "farming", a fertile place for men to grow their seeds.

Her model of women's oppression, links pornography, prostitution and crimes against women - "Each has to be understood as intrinsically part of the condition of women - pornography being what women are, prostitution being what women do, the circle of crimes being what women are for."

Together with academic Catherine MacKinnon, Dworkin drafted and promoted a law to make pornography a form of sexual discrimination, and allow civil action against people who made, sold or distributed it. In this she allied herself with the right wing conservatives. She campaigned against organisations seeking civil rights for sex workers. She was also a defender of the Israeli state, and in one of her later works *Scapegoat: the Jews, Israel and Women's Liberation* (2000) suggested

that women might follow the Israeli model by forming a separate state.

Dworkin was a provocative advocate of an extreme radical feminism that emerged out of the women's movement. While she resisted the liberal feminism that limited itself to the fight to get more women as corporate executives, she also routinely allied herself with some very reactionary forces that, while opposing pornography, opposed equal rights for working class women.

She failed to understand the role of capitalism in dividing society by class, gender and nationality. She was, in essence, an idealist. She failed to grapple with the social and historical roots of women's oppression in class exploitation but looked only at the surface expression of extremes of that oppression. She turned materialism on its head, and placed an ideological issue, pornography, at the base.

Women's oppression is rooted in the family, in their role as child rearers and domestic slaves; their second-class status in the paid labour force reflects and reinforces this. Socialising and responsibilities for child rearing and household work is the lasting route out of this confinement, but this in turn requires unity with working class men to overthrow the capitalist society that depends upon it. Only socialism can truly liberate women.

The bourgeoisie like to portray Dworkin as a revolutionary. "Ms Dworkin writes like a Trotsky of the sex war... full of power and energy," said one commentator. She was not. She may have written with passion, but her polemic targeted the wrong enemy. By turning all her fire on expressions rather than causes of women's oppression, she helped miseducate a generation of radical women.

Papa Rat: ex-inquisitor raises the stakes

By Rachel Hardcastle

German-born Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected head of the Roman Catholic church on Tuesday 19 April. The previous day, he had presented his election manifesto: a homily calling on his fellow cardinals to oppose the "dictatorship of relativism" threatening the moral order worldwide.

The new Pope Benedict XVI, a self-styled "humble worker in the Lord's vineyard", had spent more than 20 years as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - the lineal successor of the Inquisition.

As a young priest Ratzinger was regarded as something of a progressive. But in 1968 his attitudes changed after the student rebellion in Germany. When protesters disrupted one of his theology lectures in the University of Tübingen, he became convinced that the politically left wing and sexually permissive ideas that arose in the 1960s presented a terrible danger to the Church.

One of his first campaigns as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1981 was against "liberation theology" and its many supporters among the priesthood in Latin America. Ratzinger denounced priests who became involved in social action against poverty and repression as making concessions to godless Marxism.

He silenced one of the main exponents of this trend, Leonardo Boff, in 1985. For Ratzinger, the search for social justice in this world was the



equivalent of seeking redemption for human beings on the material plane and by their own actions, rather than in the afterlife and by the mercy of god: in other words, it was heresy.

Ratzinger will continue the work of his predecessor Karol Wojtyla: total opposition to contraception, abortion, homosexuality and opening the priest-

hood to women and married men. An early casualty of the campaign is Father Thomas Reese, the Jesuit editor of the Catholic journal *America*, who had the temerity to publish material reflecting the wide range of opinions held by US Catholics on these issues.

The cardinals' choice has delighted reactionary forces around the globe. To

the fore is George Bush, who ardently shares the pope's views on reproductive issues. The obscenely misnamed Pro-Life agenda in reality condemns millions on all continents, who could be saved by using condoms, to death from AIDS.

Thanks to the ban on abortion in many so-called Catholic countries, countless numbers of women will die, suffer terrible illnesses or be forced to raise children they did not choose to have. Millions more will live out their sex lives wracked by fear and guilt, turning to celibate male priests for forgiveness and paying the church for this illusory service.

Ratzinger has often inveighed against "moral relativism" - the idea that human beings should base their conduct on whether it makes people happy or unhappy, more or less free. He will have none of this. Morality must be absolute and God-given. In the absence of fresh instructions from the deity, His commands must be found in a 2,000-year-old book and any moot points or new rulings transmitted and interpreted by the priesthood.

But the pope and his predecessor Wojtyla have been only too happy to employ their own brand of relativism in interpreting the supposedly unalterable scripture. Thus homosexuality is a "tendency ordered to an intrinsic moral evil", a stance confirmed by the Book of Leviticus, chapter 20, verse 13.

Yet the same Book of Leviticus prohibits contact with menstruating women (15:19-24), permits slavery

(25:44), and forbids the borrowing or lending money at interest (25:36-37). Since the bible does not assign a scale of values to its litany of "do's and don'ts", who exactly gets to decide that god hates homosexuals but it's OK for the Vatican to own a bank?

While not actively condoning anti-gay violence, the pope certainly knows where the blame for violent homophobia lies - with those who struggle for gay rights, and whose desire to live without persecution is mere "egotism":

"When civil legislation is introduced to protect behaviour to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the church nor society at large should be surprised when violent reactions increase."

In electing Ratzinger the cardinals have chosen an open and declared reactionary on all fronts. Religion actively promotes misery and suffering, especially in its influence over personal and sexual matters.

There are, of course, many religious believers who reject the harshness and cruelty of fundamentalism. But even the kindly and compassionate faces of religion are ultimately turned against progress, in convincing millions that the sufferings of this life - exploitation, poverty and disease - are unchanging features of the human condition, for which the remedy can be found only in the afterlife.

For Ratzinger, the fight for freedom from injustice and need in this life is a dangerous heresy. If so, socialists are proud to stand their ground as unrepentant arch-heretics.

Fighting the BNP in Leeds...

...and in the media

Dear Workers Power

I'm writing this to inform you what activists are doing to stop the BNP in Leeds. I am a postal worker for Leeds Central, where the BNP's Mark Collett was standing. The BNP is a growing threat in West Yorkshire, they have councillors in Halifax and Heckmondwike and Bradford, so they are slowly advancing on the city of Leeds. A breakthrough here, the third largest city in England, would hugely boost their image.

If the BNP pays its deposit it has the right to a free mailshot which postworkers are supposed to deliver. But the BNP isn't just any political party, they use their organisation to harass and attack ethnic minorities and anyone else who stands up to them. The BNP don't have the "right" to a voice, they live by the law of the boot, so that's how we'll have to treat them.

I was inspired by last year's example where posties around the country refused to deliver the BNP's filth in the 2004 European elections. This was because a 'conscience clause' negotiated by the CWU with Royal Mail

permitted any employee to refuse to handle material that they found offensive. In fact in many places it became an informal boycott, especially for the South west where the branch rightly went one step further and mailed out all its members advocating that they do not deliver the BNP stuff, and posted out forms that the workers could sign off informing management to that effect! Great idea!

But when I approached my CWU rep this year I was told that we'd have to deliver them and that the clause had been changed. At a meeting, management told us in no uncertain terms that everyone had to deliver them, no matter what their conscience or beliefs, no ifs, ands or buts - even Black and Asian workers!

Many people were angry that we had to deliver them so some of us got together after work and leafleted against Mark Collett in the poorest areas where he was standing, to at least make sure people had an alternate view, using leaflets from both Unite Against Fascism and Asylum Lies. We met some

people with hardened attitudes on race who said they'd vote for the BNP, though a few took the asylum lies leaflet and at least listened to us.

Now after consulting with other anti-fascist activists in the post office, it turns out that in other places like Kirklees workers did successfully, and without trouble, refuse to deliver BNP filth. So what's the story, CWU? The CWU backs Unite Against Fascism - CWU leader Billy Hayes speaks at its events - and yet when workers show they want to take direct action to stop the BNP, the CWU rather than building on the workers' successful action, backs away from it.

This issue needs to get raised at conference and offices need to start getting ready for the council elections coming up in 2006, where the BNP hope to make a big splash. Our response to their leaflets should be a boycott of every last one - let them sit in their boxes till they rot - and strike action to defend anyone victimised for doing it!

A postal worker
Leeds

Dear All

On Friday 22 April I was preparing to work on BBC Radio's lunchtime *Newshour* when I discovered that they were to broadcast a clip of the BNP's party political broadcast, which had gone out on national TV the day before. Needless to say I was outraged. This was a piece that was inciting racial hatred. It specifically attacked Iraqis and Afghans.

I promptly contacted Bectu head office and they advised me that I should inform my manager that I didn't wish to work on this segment of the programme. This is exactly what I did and asked them to send a replacement. Then just after the 13:30 news summary my managers came into the studio and took me off the rest of the programme.

I was then told by the head of our department that I was an embarrassment to the department and a liability. He said I could not be trusted to work and pulled me off all programmes pending a formal meeting. I have since been told that HR are minded to take me to disciplinary unless I apologise.

Bectu have been very supportive and Gerry Morrissey Bectu's assistant general secretary is speaking to senior management and has advised them against taking any action against me. However I am still not working on programmes and have the threat of a disciplinary hang-

ing over my head.

I believe that the BNP should not be allowed a platform and I am pleased that Bectu has taken a strong position on the issue and are supporting me.

They are a racist party whose leader was convicted of incitement to racial hatred. In areas where they have an elected representative racial violence has mushroomed. In London, racist attacks have increased by 61.5 per cent in the last year in Dagenham where they have a councillor. Allowing them a platform only increases their chance of electoral success which in turn fuels racist attacks.

As a trade unionist and a second generation immigrant (whose parents came here as asylum seekers) I should not have to participate in broadcasting such racist filth. Would BBC management make a Jew broadcast anti-Semitic material? Postal workers who choose not to deliver BNP election material are not forced to do so, why should we?

It is for these reasons that I will not be apologising and I am writing to ask for your support, as friends, activists and trade unionists. Send messages of support for the stand I have taken to Huw Jones of BBC Human Resources at huw.jones.02@bbc.co.uk

Thank you
Somaye Zadeh
BBC News studio manager
(World Service)

No evidence of upturn in struggle?

Bolton campaign on pensions

Dear Comrades

Upon reading the article in WP294 entitled "Unions - prepare for new attacks after the election", I was somewhat confused by the assertion that there has been an "important upturn" and a "revival in the unions" since 1997. The evidence or "factors at play" provided in the article are the following:

- The election of the "awkward squad".
- The massive anti-war demonstration in 2003.
- The popularity of the anti-capitalist movement.
- An increase in "days lost" in 2002 due to strike action. These points taken alone, or even together, do not prove that there has been an "important upturn" or "revival in the unions".

First, after Labour's resounding defeat of the Conservatives in 1997, the election of the "awkward squad" by the members of several trade unions can be seen an indication of a desire among a layer of trade unionists to break with New Labour, but does this indicate that trade union members as a whole have become more militant and that there has been a "revival in the unions"? If this was the case, it seems reasonable to presume that there would be an upturn in strike activity and membership following the election of these "left-wing" leaders. While strike activity (and threats of strike activity) among a few of the "awkward squad" unions did increase, this also held true for unions with much more pro-Labour leaderships such as Unison. Regardless of this, total strike activity and trade union density in this very same period have stagnated or declined.

Secondly, the anti-war demonstration of February 2003 was indeed a significant social action which drew one million people into the streets however this does not directly translate into a "revival" of the trade unions or prove that "union militancy is reviving".

The same holds true for the anti-capitalist movement. The evidence used in the article is the raising of consciousness among a small section of workers in one section of Britain (Liverpool) and then

a further statement that 775,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost. Again, how does any of this indicate there is a "revival in the unions"? On the contrary, the majority of the statistical data available seems to prove the opposite.

There has been no significant increase in trade union membership as a percentage of the workforce since 1992 despite a prolonged period of jobs growth. While actual numbers of trade union members have gone up and down slightly over the same period, the percentage of the workforce that is unionised has either stagnated or declined from about 27 per cent to 26 per cent over the past few years. The last time trade union density was this low was in 1915 when it was 24.1 per cent.

The number of actual work stoppages from 1992 until today, while fluctuating slightly, has not gone above 250. Indeed from 2001, it has continued to decline. In fact, the year you cite as evidence of an "important upturn", 2002, saw a mere 146 total strikes. Granted, a larger number of workers were involved in those 2002 strikes than any year since 1989 due to a few big unions having one-day actions, but the remaining statistical data is completely ignored.

For the same reason 1996 saw very similar numbers to 2002 of "days lost" and there is no present day indication, with benefit of hindsight, that this increase in 1996 produced an "upturn" in worker militancy. The majority of the data that is overlooked clearly shows that there has been an overall decline in strikes from 1992 until today with the year 2003 seeing 133 strikes and 2004 seeing only 130 strikes - the lowest number of annual strikes in the history of the British labour movement dating back to 1897.

Finally, the claim of a "revival" seems to contradict other claims made in the previous edition of your paper. One of the main articles is titled, perhaps erroneously, "Union Mergers Won't Stop the Decline". The main argument seems to be that union mergers will not stop the decline in the trade unions - but I thought there was an "upturn", "revival" and even an increase in "militancy". Which is it?

Sincerely,
Tami Peterson



Action at London Metropolitan University

Dear comrades

Natfhe members at London Metropolitan will be on strike for the whole week 16th - 20th May, the week that the Quality Assurance Agency will be visiting the institution.

We will be holding a mass meeting outside the university building in the Holloway Road at 1pm on the Tuesday of that week and invite all our supporters to come along, trade union banners welcome.

We will be following up this with, amongst other things, a boycott of all quality assurance procedures and processes, as well as a withdrawal from exam invigilation and a marking ban.

Paul Mackney, Natfhe general secretary said: "the dispute has gone on long enough ... we are determined to oblige the Vice Chancellor to accept that the time to reach agreement really has come." Please help us by spreading the word of the academic boycott as widely as possible.

More details on our website <http://www.natfhe-london.org.uk/>
Steve Cushion
Natfhe London Region HE Secretary

Dear Comrades

The Bolton Public Sector Action Group, Action for Pensions, met recently. There were delegates from Unison (council and health workers' sections) PCS, GMB and the NUT.

Delegates reported that members were angry that the action had been called off and sounded a warning that the issue has not gone away and that we will organise in the workplaces, with cross union meetings, with indicative questionnaires and ballots, and amongst the public for united public sector strikes to defend our pensions.

We agreed to produce information to confront the government lies about the pensions crisis when profits are at record highs, billions are spent on wars and when company directors (and MPs!) award themselves huge pension rises.

We called for taxing the super-profits of the corporations to pay for our pensions and pay a decent state pension for all workers that's linked to average earnings and payed at age 60.

We see the pensions issue as a class wide attack and the public sector campaign as being fought in the interests of all workers. We agreed to approach private sector unions and activists as well as draw in the other public sector unions.

In addition, we talked about the need to watch our own leaders, to pressurise them to fulfil the demands of members for united strike action. One delegate reported that her workplace had taken an indicative ballot in favour of unofficial action which drew applause.

The meeting also agreed to support the Bolton based Sukula Family fighting deportation, other anti-deportation and anti-racist campaigns.

We also agreed to mobilise to send contingents to the anti-G8 demonstrations and blockade in July.

Yours,
Jason Travis
Bolton NUT

Now fight for a new working class party!

During the election campaign Bob Crow, leader of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union, convincingly made the case for a new working class party. Quoted in the Morning Star, he said: "Despite the excellent work done by [left wing MP] Mr Simpson and others like him in the Labour Party, the party can't be changed. We need a new party to represent working men and women... The sooner we all realise this, the sooner we can pick up the pieces and move on."

Now the MP Bob Crow is talking about, Alan Simpson, is indeed left wing by Labour's standards. As chair of Labour Against the War, he campaigned openly against the invasion of Iraq, opposes the occupation and works in solidarity with the Iraqi oil workers union. Simpson also voted against tuition fees, foundation hospitals and anti-asylum legislation.

But Bob Crow is right. What use is this when Simpson sits on Tony Blair's backbenches, when he votes for Gordon Brown's budget, when he calls on voters in every constituency to vote Labour?

The Labour Party cannot be captured by the left and transformed into a socialist party for the working class. It never could and currently right wing domination is secure after a series of rule changes stripping away the power of the conference and the party's elected institutions.

Rebel MP John Austin came out fight-

ing on 6 May, offering to stand against Blair in a leadership contest. Then came the obstacles. He needs 72 MPs to nominate him and even then a majority of the stage-managed Party conference would have to give its approval for an election even to take place.

Of course this paper believes the Labour left should challenge Blair. We call on them - and those trade unions still affiliated to the party - to challenge Blair, campaigning for an end to the war, troops out of Iraq now, an end to privatisation and a defence of civil liberties and the rights of refugees. This is what should be discussed at the forthcoming conference called by the Campaign Group of Labour MPs and the Labour Representation Committee on 16 July.

But rallying the left within the Labour Party is only part of the story. It will be useful if it weakens Blair and breaks the unity of his party around right-wing policies. But it cannot succeed in capturing Labour as a whole.

To establish working class political independence, we will need to found a new party. And here the most important point of departure is the existence of a number of unions, with militant leaders, now standing outside the Labour Party and obliged to confront the need for political representation. These include Bob Crow of the RMT transport union, which was thrown out of Labour and others, like



Bob Crow: "We need a new party to represent working men and women"

Matt Wrack, newly elected general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, and Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS civil servants union, who were voted into office partly because they stand to the left of Labour.

These unions - the firefighters, the civil servants and the railworkers - should issue a clear call for a conference to discuss the need for a working class alternative to Labour. The conference should be open

to unions, socialist organisations, progressive campaigns, Respect, left wing anti-war Labour MPs and constituencies.

Such a conference should also debate and agree on a united campaign against all the reactionary measures flagged up by Blair for the year ahead.

In such a debate, Workers Power would propose the formation of a new, explicitly working class party on a programme

for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Of course, Dave Prentis, Paul Kenny, Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley - the Labour loyal leaders of the big four unions - would oppose such a conference. But they are skating on thin ice. They called off the pensions strikes in the spring in order to save Labour from embarrassment during the election campaign. Now they have been kicked in the teeth as identical attacks have re-emerged.

Blair's promise of an "unremittingly New Labour" third term exposes these misleaders' lack of political judgement. As attacks on the NHS, schools and immigrants gain pace, so will opposition to the pro-Labour union leaders.

Resistance to Blair is not confined to the unions. They are mass organisations, but they do not organise the whole of the working class, nor do they represent the whole of the progressive movement in Britain. They sorely under-represent the most radical strata within the working class - the youth.

At the G8 protests in Scotland this July, the anti-war and anticapitalist movements, in all their diverse strands, will converge. What an excellent opportunity to discuss how we are going to fight for another world, and how we can forge a new kind of political movement - an internationalist and revolutionary party - to make such a world a reality.

Labour snobs target working class youth

New Labour has declared war on young people. Backed up by a nasty press campaign, government ministers are obsessed with the lack of "respect" shown by young people to their "elders and betters".

Following the outrageous decision of Bluewater Shopping Centre to exclude young people wearing hooded tops, the government has decided to scapegoat them for just hanging out. With no evidence whatsoever, Blair has linked this to truancy and "youth crime".

Crimes by young people actually fell by 26 per cent between 1992 and 2002. The number of youth offenders has

decreased over the past three years.

But never mind facts. The press whips up fears, so that every young person wearing a hood or a baseball cap starts to look threatening. Then the scared readers tell politicians they want this menace dealt with.

Home Office minister Hazel Blears has suggested that young people carrying out community service orders should be forced to wear special uniforms. She pointed to the orange uniforms worn by chain gangs in the USA.

Since Blair came to power he has been criminalising young people with

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (Asbos). No one has to be convicted for them to be imposed; normal rules of justice do not apply. Yet if you break an Asbo you can be jailed, as over 500 youth have been since 1999.

Trials, legal representation of the accused, appeals and so on exist. Asbos are arbitrarily issued by police and snobby magistrates against working class youth.

We need a massive rebellion of young people - backed by the working class movement - to sweep away the persecution of youth and scrap ASBOs and all petty rules.

Support this resolution

We urge all trade unionists to put the following motion to their branch meetings and national conferences. The resolution is adapted from one passed at last year's RMT annual general meeting.

"That this union regards the Labour Party under its current leadership as the party of privatisation and neoliberalism, support for the imperialist wars of the extreme right Bush administration, attacks on civil liberties and trade union rights and freedoms. It is more important than

ever that our union takes up the important task of developing political representation of the working class.

With this aim in mind we instruct the Council of Executives and the General Secretary to pursue every avenue with all other representative organisations of workers, including building a national conference of trade unions and organisations of working class communities and political organisations to discuss political representation for workers."

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

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