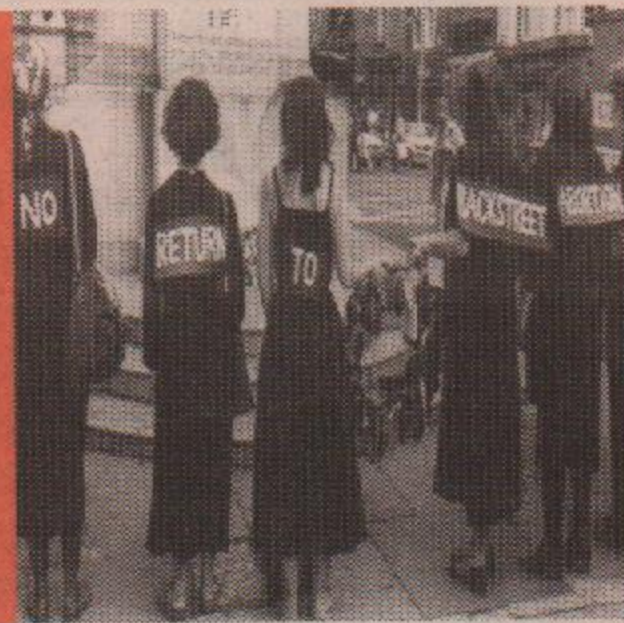


Blair's 'choice' means the privatisation of public services page 5



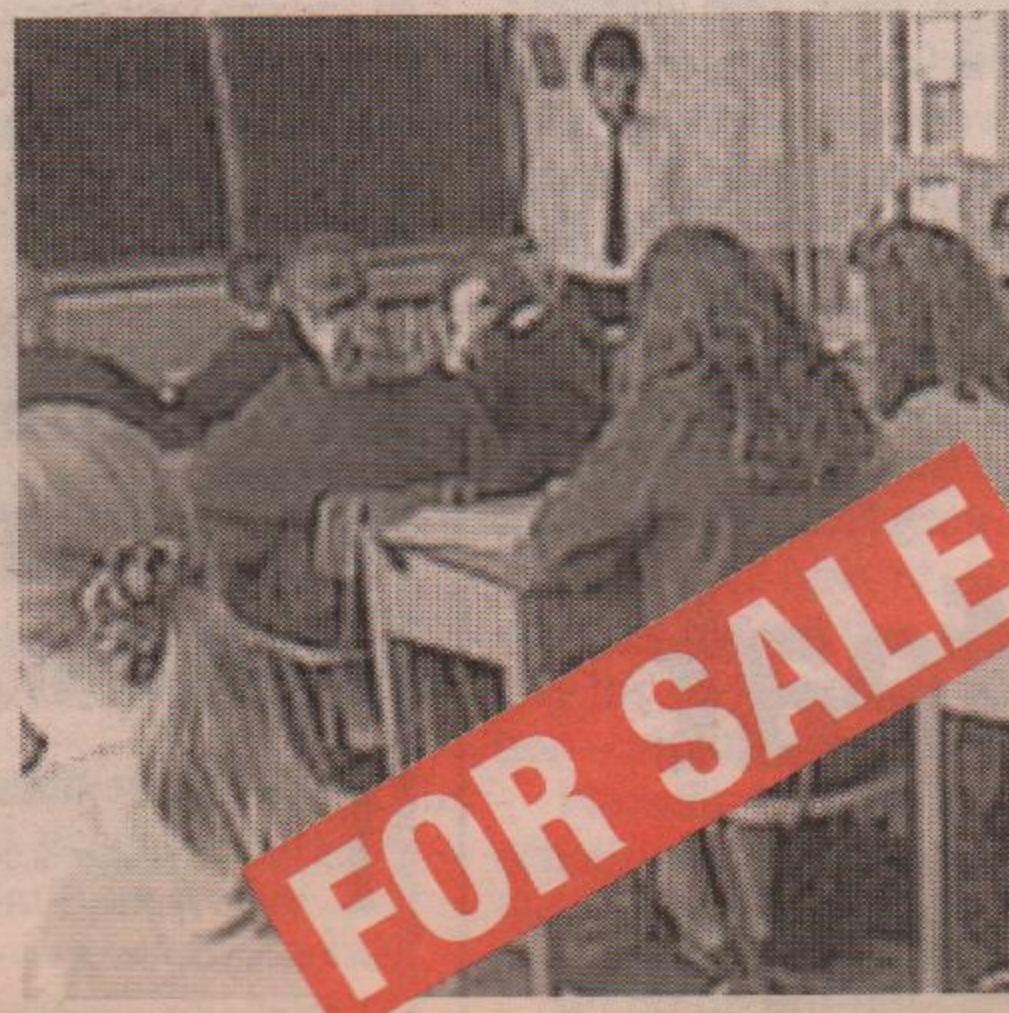
Defending a woman's right to choose pages 8 & 9



100 Years since the founding of the Wobblies page 13



Blair's vision for Britain



STOP THE PRIVATISATION of the NHS, schools, Post Office and council housing

I shouted 'nonsense'. That's all I said. Then these two toughies man-handled me out," explained Walter Wolfgang, the 82 year old Labour activist, after he was ejected from the party conference for heckling Jack Straw's defence of the occupation of Iraq.

Walter, a refugee from Nazi Germany, was later detained under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act, as he tried to re-enter the hall.

This bizarre episode revealed a lot about New Labour: its intolerance of dissent, its trigger-happy lurch for repressive measures, its increasing detachment from working class activists, who once formed its core.

Even by the right wing standards that he has set over the years, Tony Blair's conference speech it was his most reactionary for years.

Unremitting New Labour promises more privatisation, and more attacks on democratic rights. Britain's alliance with American imperialism is projected to stretch into the next generation. Anyone, who isn't "at ease with globalisation", doesn't understand that "the world has changed", needs to "get

real", warned the leader.

Blair tried to wrap privatisation policies up as "reforms" designed to give poor people the "choice" that the rich have enjoyed for centuries. As Walter Wolfgang put it - nonsense!

The expansion of the private health-care sector will mean between 10 and 15 per cent of all NHS operations being performed in independent treatment centres. Medical care multi-nationals will be guaranteed at least £500 million worth of operations - regardless of demand or existing NHS capacity.

So, last month, the Department of Health ordered Brighton and Sussex Hospital to send 85 per cent of its orthopaedic patients to the private sector. No choice. Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare trust has lost 14 doctors' posts as it struggles to make £5.9 million cuts to balance its books. No choice here.

Academy schools offer millionaires, churches and big business £24 million of public funds to open new schools. They gain control for a down payment of just £2 million or less. The only choice pupils, parents and teachers get is to accept the new cur-

riculum and conditions of service imposed by the new bosses.

Meanwhile Royal Mail will have to open its network to private competitors from January next year.

Far from being policies for the 21st Century, these are tired old Tory policies. But popular capitalism - as Margaret Thatcher labelled privatisation in the 1980s - isn't popular anymore. That's why Labour is so frightened by dissent - as Walter found to his cost.

And it's not just the labour conference where dissent is crushed. Blair's plans for the big brother state include:

- banning anyone deemed extremist from universities, even if they are non-violent
- police powers to issue instant banning orders and fines for anti-social behaviour, without any recourse to the courts, any evidence, any witnesses
- a national database and ID card system to track all citizens' movements, phone calls and emails
- detention of suspects for up to three months without being charged

- police authority to close pubs and clubs, to evict suspected drug dealers with no warrant or evidence

Despite being defeated four times at the conference - on council housing, public sector workers pensions, solidarity strike action, and NHS privatisation - on each occasion the minister rushed to blame it on a few trade union leaders wielding block votes - and to make clear it would have no impact on Government policy.

What does this show? That the labour party conference has no influence at all on what a Labour government does. Nor does the party membership or the affiliated unions.

Blair told the BBC that these leaders should, "get into the modern world - get real." It's Blair who should get real. Less than one in four voters elected Labour to office. The party now has only 200,000 members, less than half its tally in 1997. Two thirds of Labour MPs and one third of constituency delegates didn't even turn up to conference. A debate on the one burning issue that most voters associate with New Labour's regime - the occupation of Iraq - was not even allowed.

Get real? We should do more than get real, we should get angry, get mean, get even.

The union leaders were finally forced to reflect some of the anger of their members at the LP conference. Now we should say "turn the resolutions into action" - support solidarity strike action and defy the union laws, organise industrial action against privatising the NHS, mobilise the public sector to fight attacks on pensions.

We should organise the rank and file of the unions, along with youth and community activists, to act without these leaders when they hesitate or hold back the action. In every town and city, workers and youth need to unite to oppose creeping privatisation of public services, attacks on democratic rights, and to get the troops out of Iraq.

Blair and Brown have made clear that their New Labour Party will continue its neo liberal and privatising agenda. We need a new workers party, one that fights for the interest of the poor and oppressed not against them, one that is committed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

OUR WORLD IS NOT FOR SALE!

Build on London benefits strike

By Jin Chan

Members of the Public and Commercial Services Union in the Department of Work and Pensions London region have voted to strike against Government plans to slash 30,000 jobs. In a long overdue ballot, 71 per cent voted to strike on a turnout of just over 25 per cent.

Some 15,000 jobs have already been cut in DWP. These "back room" cuts are already causing delays in processing claims and payments. This is causing hardship amongst vulnerable claimants and incidents of aggression and violence against the low paid benefit office staff.

Yet the Socialist Party dominated leadership of the union have no winnable strategy to fight the job cuts. Indeed, this set of circumstances may account for the low turnout in the ballot.

At this year's conference, general secretary Mark Serwotka claimed the lead-

ership were fully committed to supporting calls by branches and regions for strike action against job cuts.

But scandalously the National Executive Committee has left the campaign to individual civil service groups to organise. The NEC has made little effort to co-ordinate any national campaign. Since 5 November 2004, there has been no organised regional or national industrial action.

While the strike vote by London DWP members is welcome and shows some members are willing to fight, it will, at best, only stop compulsory redundancies in London, if it remains isolated. PCS members in London cannot fight the job cuts for the whole of DWP or the wider civil service on their own.

Job cuts, pensions and low pay are not just confined to civil service workers in London. It is a national problem that requires a nationally co-ordinated militant response. The left dominated leadership has demonstrated that it can-

Attacks on incapacity benefit

The government is not just attacking the workers in the DWP. It is also waging war on those who claim incapacity benefit. Twenty-one medical examination sites throughout England & Scotland have been identified for closure before the end of 2005.

Under the guise of "cost savings" to the taxpayer, the government has privatised the medical services and awarded a contract to Atos Origin worth over £500 million over the next seven years to run the service. Atos Origin are closing even more offices and forcing through compulsorily redundancies.

The closure of these medical examination sites makes it even harder for those claiming incapacity benefit. To do so they must attend a mandatory medical assessment, which for many now means travelling long distances. For example people in Derbyshire will have to travel to Sheffield, Manchester, Mansfield or Nottingham. Unless they have a good reason to justify non-attendance, their benefit will be suspended.

not be relied upon to organise such a response.

Nor can they be trusted with leading the strike in London. Union activists need to call workplace meetings, elect strike committees made up of trusted members, build city and area wide

action committees, produce bulletins to keep members and other unions posted and win over the public. They should fight to turn any strike into an indefinite strike that is immediately spread to the other regions. They should demand the NEC backs such action.

Getting indefinite strike action will be a difficult task. Getting it to spread and avoiding a sell out by the union bureaucracy will be just as hard. But without short term pain and a co-ordinated response, Gordon Brown will get his way and decimate the civil service workforce section by section.

All decisions about the strike must be placed in to the hands of elected strike committees otherwise the union leadership will call it off at the first offer of negotiations. The pre-election pensions dispute showed that calling off strikes from a position of strength, without securing victory for promised negotiations, only weakens and demoralises the workforce and strengthens the hand of the government.

Any strike action must also be used to build a rank and file movement across the civil service that can fight alongside the union leadership when it can, but without and against the leadership when necessary.

Jerry Hicks: wrong strategy leads to defeat

By Pat Spackman

On 12 September, Jerry Hicks, the Bristol Rolls Royce Test Area Convenor, recommended his fellow workers return to work - without him. It was a bitterly sad day for our movement. Jerry's fight against his sacking ended in failure because support throughout the plant just was not there, even though in Jerry's Test Area all 96 workers walked out on 22 August.

Jerry toured the country's Rolls plants, from Derby to East Kilbride. Everywhere, he was greeted by mass meetings, pledging support. So why, after three mass meetings at the Bristol plant that voted in favour of holding a ballot to spread the action, did 326 Amicus workers vote against taking further action, outnumbering the 212 who backed it?

Here was a workplace that had not taken strike action for 20 years. In those two decades the union had come to mean, at best, the organisation that negotiated your pay and, at worse, the organisation that peddled insurance. In short, it lost its sense of what a union is really for. This is a malaise that, to lesser or greater degree, affects all our unions and is spread by the treachery of the bureaucracy. If they had been doing their jobs for the last 20 years, we would have had 538 votes in favour of action!

The leadership of Amicus, under supposed "left" leaning Derek Simpson, refused to give its full support to Jerry. Indeed, when Simpson addressed a fringe meeting at the TUC Congress, he waffled on and on about a proposed merger with the TGWU and GMB. It was left to another union leader, Mark Serwotka of the PCS, to raised Jerry's case. Simpson did not even set foot in Bristol for the entire dispute.

Having already held three meetings at the plant, at which workers had voted by show of hands in support of a ballot,

Amicus officials insisted on a fourth, so that the national officer for aerospace, Ian Waddell could spell out the company's threats - without answering them! His closing remarks that other Rolls plants might not support the struggle sealed his betrayal.

But it didn't have to end like this. As soon as Amicus officials started to impose a strategy of a rolling strike with long pauses between each escalation, and to delay ballots, Jerry should have used his position as a victimised worker and elected NEC member to agitate for immediate walkouts, starting with the rest of the Bristol plant. As he spoke to Rolls plants across the country, he should have called on them to join him on the picket line, there and then.

Momentum counts for a hell of a lot in a dispute. Nothing panics the bosses more than swift solidarity and a whirlwind of walkouts. But as soon as the workers' leaders show hesitancy, the employers feel emboldened, start plotting, playing divide and rule, threatening to sack everyone. This is the lesson of both this and the Gate Gourmet dispute.

What makes this unnecessary defeat even worse, is that Jerry is a long-standing member of the Socialist Workers Party, which is formally in favour of rank and file control of the unions and warns - in abstract and general terms - of the treacherous bureaucracy's preference to avoid a fight at all costs.

But where were the SWP's warnings of the leaders' likely betrayal? Where was their agitation for unofficial action? Where was their call for an elected strike committee to countermand the bureaucracy? Nowhere.

We can change things and get our unions back. What we need is a union that becomes the heart and soul of the whole plant. Jerry's campaign shows that there are workers there that can organise it. A rank and file movement across all of Rolls

Royce and across Amicus as a whole can reclaim the union for the members. Revolutionaries can play an important role in this task - but only if they match their words with action.

Meanwhile Jerry - with £100,000 cheque from Rolls Royce - is seeking employment with the union that let him down so badly.

Perhaps he believes he can support the rank and file from within the court of officials. However, the recent treatment of Simpson's one-time allies in the Amicus Unity Gazette, Des Heemserk, Jimmy Warne and Cathie Willis, who were suspended without warning or explanation, should alert him to the fate that awaits him should he fail to sing from the same hymn sheet as Simpson and his fellow timer-servers.

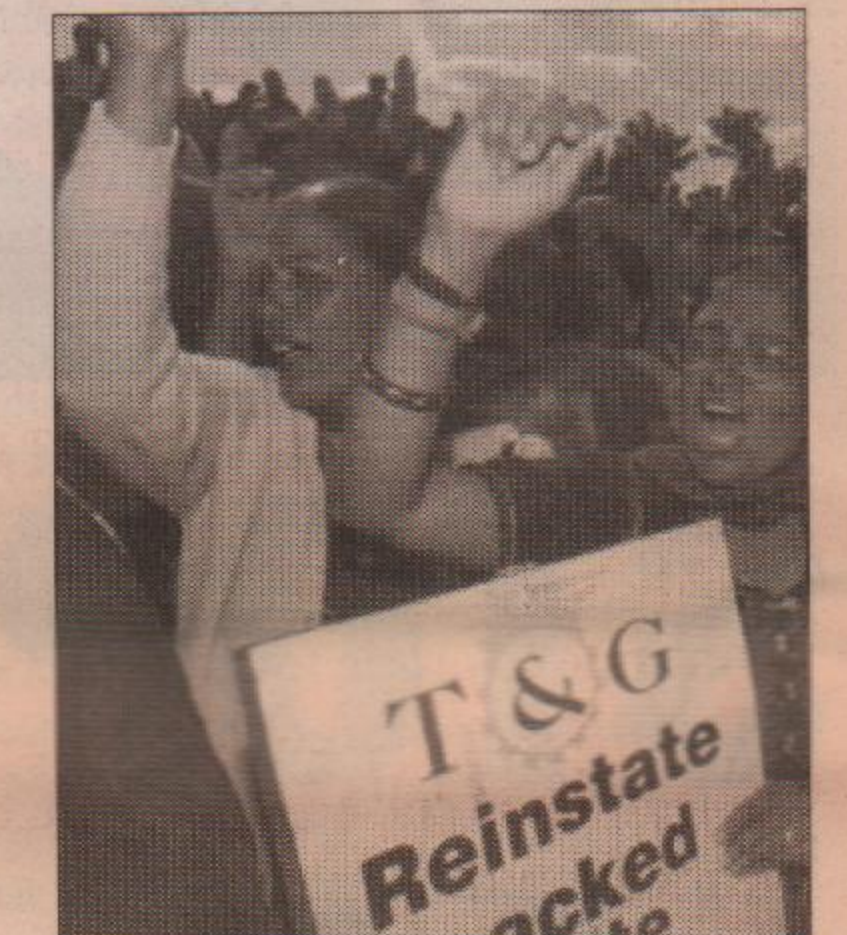
Gate Gourmet lock out ends... but airline plans to break union

By Sean Murray

The dispute at the Heathrow catering company, Gate Gourmet, is over. A mass meeting of the 667 workers, who were locked out by Gate Gourmet management, voted, to accept the settlement agreed by the TGWU and the company. Only four workers voted against the settlement. Almost 400 out of the 700 workers have been given their jobs back. 172 have indicated that they want to take voluntary redundancy, and 144 were given no option.

The union said those being made redundant had been selected on "objective" criteria such as attendance, performance and skills and they would all be allowed to appeal. But Gate Gourmet has insisted that the union militants, who stood up to the management would not be reinstated. If it in fact manages to achieve this objective, then the workers will have been let down badly by the union and suffered a defeat.

When the company sacked around a third of its workforce, nearly all Asian women, ground staff at British Airways, for which Gate Gourmet supplies 80,000



meals a day, walked out in sympathy. Their action grounded more than 700 flights, affecting 100,000 passengers and cost British Airways £40 million.

But instead of using this position of strength to force Gate Gourmet to reinstate the workforce, TGWU leader Tony Woodley told the ground staff to go back to work.

While the workforce appears to have fought off the employers' attempt to engineer mass sackings under the anti-union laws with no redundancy pay, it could have been a complete victory if it were not for the treachery of the TGWU leadership.

In the last issue of *Worker Power* we said that "if the TGWU, with more than 20,000 members at Heathrow, manages to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, then the bosses will consider it open season."

How right we were. Having seen the spineless Woodley in action, British Airways are now trying to victimise three union reps at Heathrow for taking part in the "unofficial" action, and are planning a union busting campaign at Heathrow airport.

Tony Woodley has said he will call a strike ballot if any workers are victimised but, as the Jerry Hicks dispute shows, waiting for official ballots in such instances plays right into the hands of the bosses.

All union militants at Heathrow must start planning now to repel this attack from the British Airways management. If the three union reps are victimised in any way for their part in supporting the Gate Gourmet workers, every trade union member in Heathrow should down tools and walk off the job. They should immediately set up a strike committee to control the dispute. And they should refuse to go back to work until the all victimised workers are reinstated.

Socialism in the 21st century

A day of debate and discussion

Iraq: from occupation to liberation

The US and British policy of occupation lies in tatters. But can the Iraqi working class and civil society prevent a civil war and stop the multinationals stealing the oil wealth of Iraq? Elena Jastaniec, British representative of the General Union of Oil Employees of Iraq, joins a panel with speakers from *Workers Power* and *Revolution* to discuss the way forward in Iraq.



Britain: can the trade unions be made to fight?

The recent struggles at Gate Gourmet Heathrow and the sacking of Jerry Hicks, Convenor at Rolls Royce Aerospace, revealed the weakness of trade union leaders in the face of the anti-union laws and bosses on the offensive. How should the rank and file respond? How do we link these struggles to the fight for a new workers party? Invited speakers from the unionists in struggle: Pat Spackman *RMT Bristol* (personal capacity) and speakers invited from the *CHU, PCS, NUT* and *TGWU* (Gate Gourmet)

Bolivia and Venezuela: eyewitness report

Bolivia is the centre of a struggle against neoliberal privatisations. General strikes and uprisings have defeated water privatisation. Workers and peasants are now fighting the sell off of the natural gas resources to the multinationals. In Venezuela Hugo Chavez has said he rejects neoliberalism and is fighting for a new version of socialism in the 21st century. Dave Ellis gives an eyewitness report of the explosive struggles in Latin America.



Respect: left alternative or populist dead end?

George Galloway, the leader of the Respect Coalition, won a stunning victory in the General Election. But is Respect the basis for the left alternative to Labour that the working class desperately needs? Or is it a populist dead end? A debate between *Luke Cooper* from *Workers Power* and the *Alan Thornett* from *International Socialist Group*.

The New Orleans flood disaster

The flooding of New Orleans revealed in all its horror the American class system and its deep seated racism. Will the public outcry lead to a fundamental change in US politics and a rejection of unbridled capitalism?



Saturday 15 October, 10.30-5.00

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Nearest tube: Holborn)
Registration and coffee 10.00-10.30. Employed: £5.00. Unwaged: £2.50. Per session: £1.50.

www.workerspower.com
Email: workerspower@btopenworld.com Tel: 020 7820 1363

Working class representation

Labour Party conference came and went as usual. The party machine refused a debate on the war. The government was defeated four times, but vowed to carry on regardless. The unions and the left were told to grow up.

Those who believe that Gordon Brown will roll back Tony Blair's worst excesses on policy or internal democracy are now even thinner on the ground. Brown used his keynote speech to underline his commitment to privatisation and anti-union legislation. He stands for "New Labour renewed" – whatever that means.

Two-thirds of Labour MPs and one-third of constituency delegates didn't bother to turn up.

This makes Bob Crow and the Rail Maritime and Transport union's call for a meeting of unions and political parties to discuss the crisis in working class representation all the more urgent. Crow rightly told *Socialist Worker* that the Blairites have "adopted a scorched earth policy behind them so there is no democracy left in the Labour Party".

Rank and file union militants, antiwar and anticapitalist activists should start preparing for this January meeting by beginning the debate about forming an alternative to Labour, a new, mass working class party.

Regional meetings and union caucuses should rally fighters against privatisation, racism and war to participate and contribute to this crucial debate.

We, in Workers Power, are proud to have initiated this campaign, which now has full RMT backing. But we are also aware that Bob Crow and other allies will have different ideas about what such a new party should look like. Which is why we will continue to argue for a revolutionary socialist party, in which electoral tactics are subordinated to the fight to overthrow capitalism and replace it with the rule of workers councils and a workers militia.

Now let's stop the war

Last month saw two important antiwar demonstrations: in Washington and London. What did they demonstrate about the condition of our movement in the two countries?

The US protest drew 150,000 people and more, the biggest antiwar demo since the war began. Cindy Sheehan's summer peace camp outside George Bush's ranch has revived the movement and forced the various wings of the movement – United for Peace and Justice, Answer, and US Labour Against the War – to co-operate.

Now for the first time a majority – 59 per cent – of Americans want the troops withdrawn.

By contrast, London's demo, despite claims from the organisers, mobilised about 30,000. Neither the Muslim Association of Britain nor the unions brought their members out in numbers. Tariq Ali summed up the spirit of lacklustre platform speakers, by encouraging us to...keep on marching.

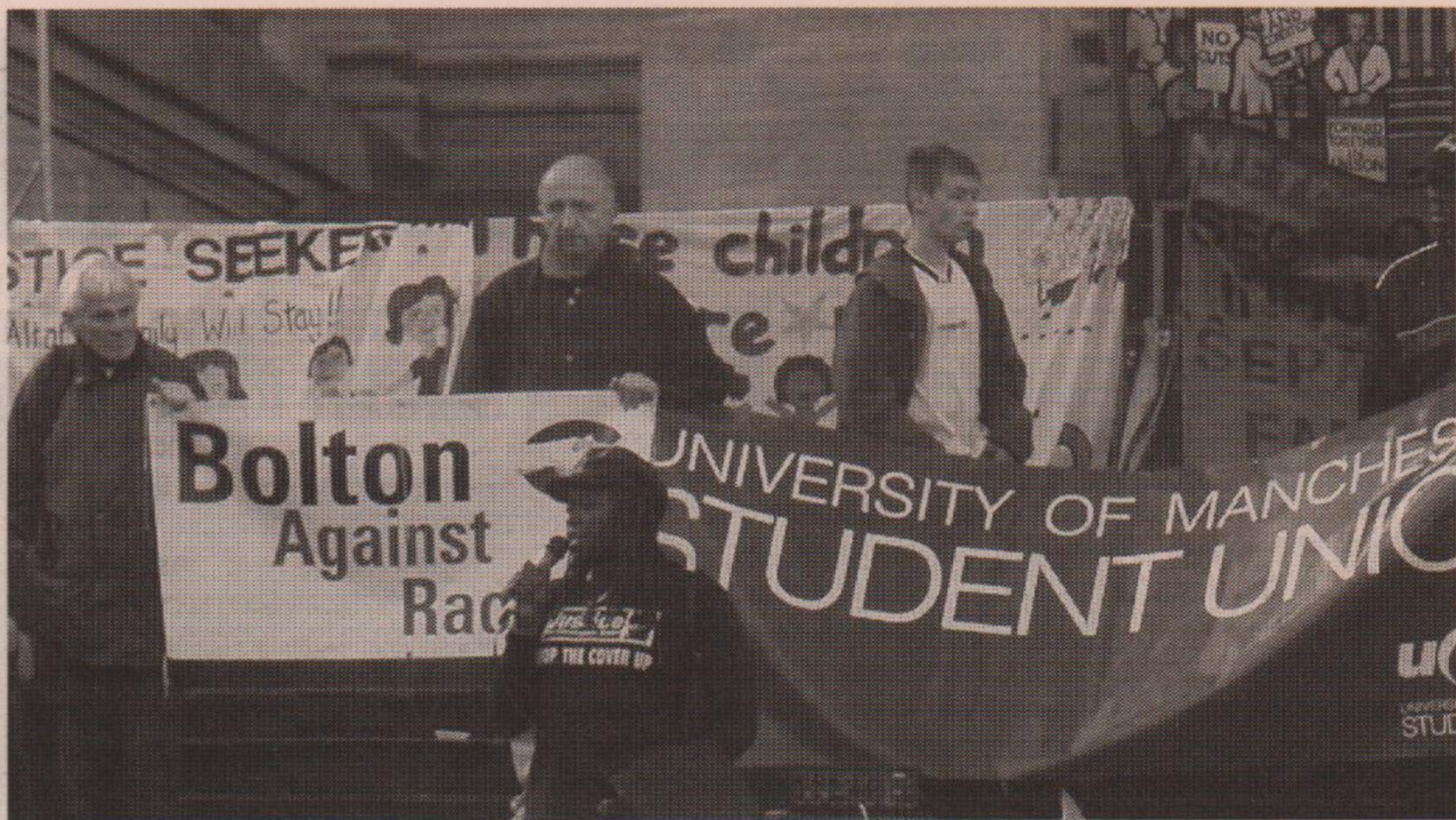
The Stop the War Coalition has now launched a campaign for peace and justice, calling for an international activists' conference, resistance to the attacks on civil liberties, lobbies of MPs, local meetings and support for antiwar soldiers.

Unfortunately, none of this, on its own, will stop the decline of the movement. We need to win youth and trade unionists to taking direct action – walkouts, occupations – against atrocities, like the recent British army rampage in Basra.

We need to deliver solidarity, by twinning union branches, schools, colleges and hospitals with counterparts in Iraq, and offering them material and political assistance.

We need direct action to highlight the crimes of British corporate vultures like Shell, which are making a killing out of the occupations.

Most of all, we need to stand up to the anti-terrorist hysteria, and win people to the fight to get British troops out of Iraq now, and to support for the Iraqi national liberation struggle.



Jane Adler, sister of Christopher Alder who died in police custody in 1998, addresses 1 October Bolton demo against deportations and Section 9 (see page 15 for report)

Stop deportations

Manuel Bravo, a 35-year-old Angolan living in Leeds, was seized in a dawn raid in September, writes Keith Harvey. He was taken to Yarls Wood detention centre to await deportation. That night, Manuel killed himself, explaining in a note that this was the only way he could save his 13-year-old son from deportation – at least until his 18th birthday.

Manuel's death can be laid at the door of the increasing reactionary and restrictive asylum policies that New Labour has brought in. Since 1999 there have been five major pieces of legislation.

The latest disgusting measure is Section 9 nine of the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004, which deprives failed asylum seekers of all benefits, forcing them into homelessness and destitution, with their children taken into care. Until now, parents with children under 18 were still entitled to state support until their cases were rejected and they were deported. Section nine being piloted in several areas and will then be rolled out nationally.

Section 10 of the same act, soon to be piloted, is a slavery charter. Asylum seekers who have agreed to repatriation, but are unable to do so immediately, perhaps because the home country is too dangerous, now have to work in order to receive any state support at all.

Further attacks are under way under the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill 2005, which got its first reading in June. Clause 40 of the new Bill proposes to terminate benefits when the person is notified of a decision to remove them. Since asylum seekers, whose claims have been rejected, usually wait a long time before they are actually removed from the UK, this will guarantee further destitution.

Resistance is growing to these racist measures and including several councils that are supporting campaigns against Section 9.

In Bolton the Sukula family have had their benefits withdrawn and are marked for deportation. They had fled the Democratic Republic of Congo where soldiers had attacked their mother. Due to a massive local campaign by trade unions and the community Bolton Council has agreed not to evict them under Section 9.

But the state vendetta against this family continues. Flores Sukula, the eldest daughter, was called in by the management of Bolton Sixth Form college last month to be told she was no longer eligible to study as she was over 18, a failed asylum seeker and due to be deported. Only the intervention of Bolton NUT officials and threatened protests by staff and students forced the college to back down.

In nearby Bury the Khanali family who were due to be evicted from their home last month were given a last minute reprieve when Bury Council refused to

Flores Sukula's speech to fringe meeting at Labour Party conference

I'm Flores Sukula. I'm a student at Bolton Sixth Form College. I want to be a midwife. I want to serve the women of Britain to help bring new life into the world. But the government says I can't.

Today's my birthday, I'm 19-years-old.

I'm very glad to be invited to address this meeting. But I shouldn't have to be here, on my birthday, having to plead for our lives, the lives of my family – my brothers and sisters. I shouldn't have to but I do. This campaign has become our lives. This is a campaign to save our lives. My brothers and sisters' childhoods are being stolen from them.

Our lives are very difficult. We're all very stressed. My Mum's depressed, always crying. My six-year-old brother keeps having nightmares. We've young children who aren't even getting a proper diet.

When we first came to Britain over three and a half years ago we thought we were starting a new life away from the fear we'd lived under. We believed that Britain would give us protection. How were we to know that asylum has become a game where countries pretend to meet their international rules to protect people but actually presume that people are lying?

We didn't know that it has become a game for the government to meet targets – to meet targets! – to prove how many people are lying and to deport them. We didn't know any of these things. How could we? All we knew was that before our lives were in danger and that then we were safe. Now we are no longer safe.

We knew our mother was telling the truth. We saw the soldiers attack her. That's a very hard thing to see that. But the Home Office here said that as our Mum was only attacked once this wasn't "persecution". All I know is that if soldiers come to your house and beat you it's a warning. Does anyone here really believe that we should have waited to see if it happens again? Does anyone here believe that we should be sent back now to see if it happens again?

evict them. Ten other councils are asking for a review of Section 9 since it conflicts with one of the fundamental principles of the Children Act 1989, under which councils where possible must keep children with their parents.

But without constant protests and the vigilance of organised campaigns, many of these councils will carry out the government's bidding. A woman and her three-year-old son, who fled a war zone in Angola, have become the second confirmed eviction under Section 9. Blackburn and Darwen Council evicted her despite signing the protest letter from Greater Manchester Councils and another family have been evicted from Rochdale.

The revolt against these unjust laws is spreading. Many unions and trades councils gave their support to the national demonstration in Bolton on 1 October, called by the Sukula Campaign (see letters, page 15). Unison members at Manchester social services have voted to collectively refuse to implement these measures. We call on other Unison branches, teaching unions and PCS members in the Home Office to follow suit.

We can defeat Section 9 before it becomes national policy by making it unworkable. Threats by managers, councils, college and education authorities should be met with resolute action including strike action if they go ahead and carry out these attacks. We should also campaign for the right to work

for all asylum seekers or full benefits.

We need to get rid of all immigration controls. They deny free movement for the workers while happily allowing the "free movement of capital" that allows UK banks and big business the freedom to exploit the world. They stir up racism and lay the blame on migrants for crumbling services and unemployment blackspots. And they create a pool of semi-legal and super-exploitable workers to undermine pay and conditions of all workers.

That's why we should scrap all immigration controls and organise every migrant worker and asylum seeker to fight for their rights.

The Sukula campaign is backing a national conference in the new year to bring together anti-deportation campaigns and trade unions to learn from and build on the struggles so far.

- **Smash Section 9 and repeal all anti asylum seeker legislation!**
- **No more deportations! Scrap all immigration controls!**

TRADES UNIONS FOR REFUGEES

Mechanics Institute, Manchester
Saturday 26 November 2005,
12-4.30pm
Supported by NUJ, FBUI,
and other trade unions
Recruit undocumented workers!

The anti-union laws

How the Tories shackled the workers

The recent Gate Gourmet and Rolls Royce disputes have highlighted how Britain's anti-union laws prevent workers defending themselves. *GR McColl* looks at how they were imposed

The post war idea of "curbing union power" did not originate with the Tories. By the late 1960s the union movement was on a forward march in both the private and public sectors, with a strong shop stewards' movement that had begun to assert independence from national union bureaucracies. Mounting anxieties among key employers' bodies soon shaped the actions of Harold Wilson's Labour Government.

Initially, the Donovan Commission conducted an inquiry focused on the growing influence of stewards and the alleged "anarchy" of British industrial relations. Its conclusions were tentative, but they laid the basis for an attempted major legislative attack by Labour. This was embodied in a White Paper entitled "In Place of Strife" and Barbara Castle was given the job of pushing it through. Opposition from the trade unions, then a powerful force in the party forced it to be shelved. But its substance foreshadowed key elements of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, introduced by the Tories under Ted Heath.

The Heath government underestimated the strength of the unions when it sought in one fell swoop to curtail their "power" with extensive restrictions on secondary picketing and solidarity action, and threatened bans on strikes in essential services accompanied by US-style mandatory cooling off periods. The 1971 legislation was seen as such a provocation that even the TUC had to mount a campaign of resistance. Most unions withdrew from the Act's registration procedures, but more significantly the dramatic success of the miners' 1972 strike against Heath's policies of wage restraint bolstered the confidence of rank and file activists throughout the movement.

The jailing of "Pentonville Five" dockers, members of the TGWU, for contempt of court brought about a confrontation that sounded the death knell for the legislation. A mass demonstration through London's streets with tens of thousands joining unofficial strikes forced the TUC to call for Britain's first general strike in more than 45 years. The government retreated and the Law Lords to swiftly overturned the original court ruling and secured the TGWU members' release.

By the end of Heath's administration in early 1974 even the CBI favoured repeal of the Act as inoperable. Few bosses were prepared to make use of its provisions and the Tories under Heath were



Thatcher used the anti-unions laws to seize union funds during the miners strike of 1984 - 85

unwilling to take on a militant union movement. In five years a new Tory leadership under Margaret Thatcher would have no such qualms. Influenced by the key ideologues of neo-liberalism such as F A von Hayek and Milton Friedman, Thatcher entered 10 Downing Street in 1979 with a ruthless determination to tame and ultimately crush effective trade unionism. But she and her key advisors were also pragmatic class warriors, prepared to move slowly rather than attempting the "big bang" approach adopted by Heath.

In his memoirs Thatcher's first Employment Secretary, James Prior, outlined the initial aims and approach: "to bring about a lasting change in [union] attitude by changing the law gradually, with as little resistance and therefore as much stealth as possible. There were also dangers in having tougher legislation, which the employers might, in practice, be afraid to use. It would be wrong to pass legislation which the courts could not enforce as happened with the 1971 Act." (Prior, Balance of Power, 1986).

The legislative assault began in 1980 with the introduction of the first of seven major Acts. The various rounds of legislation had several overarching strategic objectives:

- To increase "labour market" flexibility - in short to make it easier to sack workers
- To restrict the scope of collective bargaining
- To increase state interference in unions' internal operations,
- To strip unions of immunities for industrial action that left them open to massive fines or even complete seques-

tration - crucially by making solidarity strike action, so called "secondary action", unlawful. (See box for an outline of the most significant measures).

The TUC dithered for nearly two years before formulating something akin to a strategy contenting itself with a "day of action", along with an educational programme for full-time officials and sometimes shop stewards. Finally, in spring 1982 the TUC convened a special conference at Wembley to agree a campaign of opposition. The conference agreed that TUC affiliates would boycott ballots on closed shop arrangements and refuse state funding for internal ballots. There was also an agreement to consider the possibility of co-ordinated industrial action to back any individual union faced with legal action under the Employment Act 1982.

Initially, bosses proved reluctant to make use of the law and only a handful of cases reached the courts before Thatcher's June 1983 electoral triumph. The victory strengthened the bosses resolve and the gloves came off - the unions began to receive a pummeling in the courts.

The central flashpoint came in November/December 1983 when the National Graphical Association (NGA) mounted a defence of the closed shop, which meant all workers had to join the union, at a small provincial newspaper, the Stockport Messenger.

Its publisher, Eddie Shah, was determined to make use of the law against the NGA and dragged the union through the courts in an effort to stop secondary picketing, which had, in turn, met with brutal policing. Eventually, after the

courts imposed a series of fines, which the NGA refused to pay, a High Court order allowed accountants to seize the union's overall assets. Eventually, the TUC General Council voted against solidarity action in response to the attack on the NGA and abandoned the union to its fate.

The capitulation of the top layer of the trade union bureaucracy at one of the first tests of will with the government set the stage for the epic confrontation between the miners and Thatcher's government in which anti-union laws were used to try and drain the union of financial resources during the strike.

The ultimate defeat of the year long Great Strike in March 1985 secured for Thatcher the strategic objective of smashing the workers vanguard and paved the way for further legislative attacks. The defeat also strengthened the most right-wing sections of the union bureaucracy, which began to coalesce around a "new realism" that argued that industrial

resistance was effectively futile and that the future of trade unionism lay in the provision of cheaper holidays and financial services to members.

The serious defeats of the 1980s and the legislative arsenal that developed around them have continued to shape the terrain of struggle today. The dead hand of bureaucracy has gained strength in many unions, with the union tops often invoking the possibility of legal action as a reason not to pursue effective action as in the case of the "secondary action" by baggage handlers in the Gate Gourmet dispute.

After more than eight years of New Labour in office nothing has been done to remove the key restrictions on unions imposed by Thatcher. While there has been some tinkering around the margins of the anti-union laws, especially in respect of union recognition, Tony Blair has honoured his pledge to the bosses to "leave British law the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world".

Key elements of the Tory anti-union legislation (1980-1993)

Employment Act 1980:

- Restrictions on picketing and "secondary" action
- Ballots for new closed shops
- Abolition of previous basis for recognition rights

Employment Act 1982:

- All closed shops subject to ballots
- Tighter definition of a trade dispute
- Union faced new liabilities for "unlawful" acts

Trade Union Act 1984:

- Mandatory elections by secret ballot for senior official posts in national unions every five years
- Ballots required for industrial action to retain immunity
- Political fund ballots once a decade

Employment Act 1988

- Enforcement of post-entry closed shop made "unlawful"
- Removed right of unions to discipline/expel members for scabbing on strikes
- Creation of the office of Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members

Employment Act 1989

- New, tighter limits on facility time for union representatives
- Tighter procedures for use of Employment Tribunals and introduction of deposits for those lodging claims

Employment Act 1990

- Unions liable for unofficial industrial action in the absence of a written repudiation
- Selective sacking allowed of those on unofficial strike
- Absolute bar on "secondary" action
- Further restrictions on the closed shop

Employment Act 1993

- Strike ballots become strictly postal
- New rights for members of the public to sue for damages caused by industrial action
- Finance from the state to pursue such cases
- Minimum of seven days notice required prior to strike action
- Abolition of the industrial Wages Councils

Smashing the anti-union laws through rank and file organisation

By Stuart King

The Gate Gourmet dispute shows how the anti union laws can undermine effective action. Immediate solidarity action by Heathrow workers had British Airways demanding that the Gate Gourmet bosses settle the dispute. Had the workers stayed out they could have delivered a complete victory. But the unions leaders are terrified of such solidarity action because it is "unlawful" and opens them, and the workers leaders themselves, to court action.

In many of these disputes, it is the fear of the anti-union laws, rather than the laws themselves, which prevents workers from turning anger into effective action. As soon as the argument that the union must abide by the

laws is won, the dispute is often lost. Therefore, the starting point for a victorious strategy has to be winning the argument to ignore these laws.

The first battle is among activists, and through them to the wider membership, drawing lessons from other disputes and provoking discussion while organising solidarity with workers in struggle. We need to win workers to a pledge of solidarity action, especially walkouts, should any other section of workers be attacked. By making the agreements reciprocal, every section of workers - say, providing services in a local authority, within a complex like Heathrow, across Rolls Royce and its suppliers, or even across the whole car industry - will feel emboldened and have a direct interest in implementing them,

even if they are not first to call on them.

This campaign should be organised across the unions, through trades councils and other cross-union bodies where possible. But, in reality, it will have to be co-ordinated by unofficial means. This is because full time officials will isolate and witch-hunt any militant challenge to their "right" to dictate how, when and where industrial action takes place.

British Airways decision to move against "ringleaders" who it claims were behind the solidarity walkouts in August should alert all militants to two facts. First, the bosses will always try to discover who is arguing for militant action and punish them. They will use all sorts of nefarious means: spies, bribery, threats, you name it. Second, the union officials are

unlikely to defend you.

Post workers and fire fighters have, over the years, built up impressive networks of militants, who can spread unofficial action and take the employers completely by surprise. This requires a trusted leadership to be elected and empowered with furthering the strike. What is key is that the workers they represent have complete control over them and are regularly - preferably daily - involved in making the main decisions concerning the dispute. Right from the beginning, strikers need to be aware that, on the return to work, any victimisation of strike leaders or anyone else involved in the strike will lead to an immediate resumption of the action.

In some disputes, strike leaders have even had to hide their identity. The tube strikes in

1989 were co-ordinated by the "shepherd's pie gang", messages about the next strike days were relayed by "D Duck" and M Mouse". But this necessary clandestine activity did not prevent mass meetings from being held, the election and accountability of the strike committee.

Union leaders might pass resolutions at Labour Party Conference calling for the right to take solidarity action but on the ground they will do everything to put the union funds and property before the workers interests. Rank and file action and organisation against the anti union laws should be the springboard to kick out these bureaucrats and transforming the unions into fighting organisations that really defend workers in struggle.

Blair's 'choice' means the privatisation of public services

By Jeremy Dewar

“Every time I've introduced reform in government, I wish, in retrospect, I had gone further,” declared Blair at the Labour Party conference. But reform for this government only means one thing: handing over more public services to private profiteers. “Choice” is the buzzword: but the only choice on offer to hand over control to corporations and millionaires.

He even tried to bamboozle people into believing that these reforms were somehow progressive, enhancing social justice: “There's a great myth here: which is that we don't have a market in services now. We do. It's called private schools and private healthcare. But it's only open to the well-off.”

“There is another myth: choice is a New Labour invention. Wrong. Choice is what wealthy people have exercised for centuries. The Tories have always been comfortable with that. But for



“The profit margins are gonna be this big”

Labour choice is too important to be the monopoly of the wealthy.”

At one level, this is laughable. Everyone knows that Labour is not offering workers kids a place in Eton or a doctor in Harley Street. However, when your local school is dangerously dilapidated, or you are anxiously waiting for a hospital appointment, or waiting years

on a housing list the idea of “choice” can sound like an offer of something better.

Health minister Patricia Hewitt continued the theme, “People in pain and anxiety are still being told by our NHS to wait months, sometimes years, for an MRI scan. But if they able to go private they can have it in a day. That

is not acceptable.”

By making out that the public sector is callously shrugging off the complaints of those in pain, privatisation sounds like the humane alternative - and by sleight of hand, Labour claim it is the only alternative. But in fact it is a much more costly alternative that takes money that could be invested in new schools and hospitals and puts it in the pockets of the profit hungry corporations.

For example, a run down school - or hospital - can only be rebuilt through the Public Finance Initiative by a private consortium, who then lease it back to the taxpayer over the next 25 to 30 years at an enormous rate of profit.

One scheme for a £40m hospital wing in London involved payments for lease and services adding up to almost £17m a year - giving a profit over 30 years of over £450 million! This means mortgaging our public services, saddling ourselves with a lifetime of debt, which will be added onto tax bills. And, according to Hewitt, this scandal is being multiplied 100 times across the country!

PFI schemes are also unaccountable. “Commercial in confidence” is stamped all over the documents which show how great the real profit is. Consortia typically raise their price once the local authority or NHS trust has bought into the contract. Swindon and Marlborough trust, for instance, ended up paying three times the original contracted price on a new hospital.

And, to cap it all, there is no evidence that these schools, hospitals and council home repairs are any better quality than those provided by the public sector. In fact, they're often worse. PFI hospitals typically have up to 20% fewer beds while A&E units are often relocated to edge of town sites.

Defenders of privatisation claim that, by transferring the risks involved in building, designing and managing these projects to the private sector, public sector workers can focus on the really important stuff of delivering the service. This also is untrue. If anything goes wrong, the costs return to the public sector.

When Merton Borough Council in South London wanted to improve school meals, the private catering supplier refused, saying quality was not specified or accounted for in its contract. When Merton tried to terminate the contract, its lawyers said that it would have to pay the contractors compensation for estimated profits over the next 20 years!

The City Academy schools are precisely aimed at introducing a two or three tier service provision. Some academies, privately controlled, though bankrolled by the public sector, are allowed to select pupils and will provide

a form of grammar school education.

Other academies will “specialise” in certain skills according to what the local employers need. So the new academy in Fenton, Newcastle will specialise in information technology, regardless of the many and varied needs and inclinations of pupils over the next 25 to 30 years.

Of course, both services will be free at the point of delivery - for the time being - but the first kind of academy will rely on regular fundraising and parental contributions from the selected intake to provide extra resources and options, while the latter's course will be decided by the controlling consortium and whatever big business needs from its future workforce at any particular time.

The government similarly tries to gloss over the question of ownership in the NHS reforms. According to Patricia Hewitt, Health Minister, it really doesn't matter whether an operation is provided by a private multinational company or the NHS, so long as it is available at the point of need and free to the patient. So the government can bulk buy certain types of operation stretching years into the future from private medical treatment centres. By buying in bulk, the private sector can be induced to bid, and the operations come cheaper.

This is a recipe for the same kind of scandal that plagues PFI schemes and the train operating companies. First, the market is fixed to guarantee the private sector a million operations over the next five years. Operations will be switched to the private provider, even if it is more expensive, in order to fill this quota. Second, the private sector can “cherry-pick” those types of operation that are cheapest to perform and provide the fattest profit margin. Third, the market will inevitably produce winners and losers, forcing over time wards and eventually perfectly good NHS hospitals to close.

The answer to the problem of failing public services is there for all to see: a fully funded, integrated system of free, universal provision. First, it can and should take over the existing private sector, including drug companies, private schools and PFI merchants, with no compensation.

People don't want a “choice” over their MRI scan. They just want the scan, preferably today and in a local hospital. If there is a waiting list this is quite simply because there is not enough equipment and staff available in the NHS hospitals. This indicates the government's real priorities. We could spend the money wasted occupying Iraq on the NHS, cut out the money paid to the royal parasites and tax the rich. The sources are endless.

A recent YouGov poll showed that 89 per cent want continued public ownership of public services. However, public ownership today is the bureaucratic preserve of professionals, governors and trustees, who are unaccountable and unresponsive to the needs of service users and ignorant of the day to day problems in running a service.

Only working class control over the services can bring real choice, as needs are openly debated, quantified and prioritised in a democratic forum. By increasing funding, removing the overpaid managers and ending the tyranny of bureaucratic targets the workers and the users of public services working together could dramatically improve their efficiency.

Labour's market in the NHS: an insiders view

By John Bowden

Patients who have been waiting a long time must be offered an operation at a different hospital if it can do it more quickly. The costs are paid for by the original hospital. Often alternative NHS hospitals do not have the capacity to carry out an operation more quickly so the patient has to be offered private treatment hospital, at huge cost. The surgeon, however, is also often the same one that would have carried the operation out under the NHS!

More recently, hospitals have been allocated money for private treatment. This costs the taxpayer money which could be better spent in increasing a hospital's capacity and staff numbers which would provide far better value

for money and a greater number of treated patients. So great are people's suspicions regarding privatisation that I have seen some patients refuse treatment at a private hospital on principle.

Management or doctors. Who is in control?

Consultants benefit from longer waiting lists, which push wealthier patients into paying for private operations. NHS managers are judged by their ability to reduce waiting lists. In fact Bernie Ribeiro, head of the Royal College of Surgeons, has suggested that more means testing and fewer free operations would make the NHS function better. People should remember that the BMA opposed the foundation of the NHS unless doctors could continue to provide treatment privately.

Managers rely on the co-operation of consultants when meeting targets is difficult and consultants still have the ability to ruin a managerial career if they choose. As the Department of Health orders management to introduce unpopular new processes, managers frequently pass the buck to lower administrative workers to avoid conflict between themselves and the consultants. This leads to massive stress for clerical workers, who feel the brunt of consultant anger against management decisions.

The famous bureaucracy of the NHS is often the result of too much market interference, producing conflicts of interest, red tape and change by dictat. Patients, meanwhile, are reduced to the level of statistics.

Stop Labour's Academies

By Bernie Mc Adam President Sandwell NUT (personal capacity)

The academy programme is at the heart of new Labour's privatisation agenda for education. Private sponsors are required to pay around 20 per cent of the capital costs, around £2 million, and are given ownership and control of the land and buildings of the existing state school by the local council.

The new private sponsors, mainly business and religious interests, are not subject to any accountability by locally elected councils and have complete freedom to devise their own curriculum. Operating under private school legislation, academies will undermine pay and conditions of service for education workers, indeed they are not even required to recognise trade unions.

Despite the obvious advantages, sponsors are still trying to squeeze more

cash out of their “investments”. Many of those already sponsoring academies have yet to pay their £2 million, whilst others are using the schools' budgets to siphon off funds to their own companies.

And now Labour is cutting the cost yet again. The Times Educational Supplement has obtained documents, which show that The United Learning Trust is only paying £1.5 million for each academy it sponsors, while the Archdiocese of Southwark is getting control of one for only £200,000.

Labour has continued to bribe local authorities into supporting the programme. In Sandwell where four academies are in the pipeline, the borough has had little difficulty in securing “Building Schools for the Future” money. In nearby Wolverhampton no such plans exist, so no new money for schools.

As a last resort if knock down prices and sheer bribery doesn't work the government has announced it has another

card up its sleeve - Ofsted. Ruth Kelly Education Secretary intends to rush through the closure of failing schools, claiming that they were being given far too long to improve. And surprise, surprise what will replace these so-called failing schools? Academies of course!

Fighting back

Local campaigns have already seen off the academy threat in Doncaster, Hackney and elsewhere. Unison and all the teacher trade unions in Sandwell are committed to stopping academies and joint union meetings are being organised with a view to building a campaign with pupils, parents and within the wider community.

Local campaigns are absolutely necessary, but not all academies are being stopped and a national campaign is long overdue. This month sees the first national meeting to discuss academies organised by rank and file NUT activists. A trade union led campaign must involve industrial action against academies, PFI and outsourcing.

German Left Party success: the struggle now begins

Many German workers and youth voted for a new left party that scored well at the polls. But it must do more than rehash old policies, argues *Martin Suchanek*

The German ruling class is angry with its electorate. It would, in the well known words of Bertolt Brecht, dearly like to "dissolve the people and elect another one."

As soon as the electoral stalemate became clear, the employers associations and their press let out cries of rage about the immaturity of the voters, the lost opportunity for necessary, indeed inevitable reform. What they wanted was a clear mandate for the leader of the right-wing CDU Angela Merkel and her promised all out neoliberal assault on the German working class.

German voters found a way to frustrate this plan. Ever the sharp operator, Schroeder realised that he could not go to the electorate as the hardest neoliberal on the block. He hastily rebranded himself – for the duration of the campaign only – as the means to stop the German Thatcher. The Social Democrats (SPD), having thus saved themselves from electoral disaster, are galloping back to do the bosses bidding in a Grand Coalition which will carry out the Thatcher revolution.

Despite voting by a large majority against this policy of social attacks that

is just what Germany's workers will get from "their" party – one which their trade unions continue to support.

The large vote for the Linkspartei (Left Party) – 8.7 per cent – expressed a clear and conscious wish to break from the SPD's policy of doing the bosses dirty work by a substantial section of workers. The Left Party brought together the PDS (the reformed Communist Party from East Germany) and the WASG, a grouping largely made up of former SPD and trade union bureaucrats in an electoral alliance – a founding conference of the party will take place in the future.

The party's strong showing came from the votes of the unemployed, workers, pensioners and sections of the youth. According to polls around 23 per cent of the unemployed voted Linkspartei and 11 per cent of the blue-collar workers. It received more than four million votes, almost twice as much as the PDS received in 2002. About one million of the new Linkspartei voters voted SPD in 2002 – 430,000 had abstained in the previous elections.

There is no doubt that the new party has drawn in and energised thousands disillusioned with the SPD's attacks on workers welfare and living



standards

For the WASG, the Linkspartei project is aimed at creating an old-style social democratic party, a parliamentary vehicle for a section of the labour bureaucracy and a means to pressurise the SPD itself back in their direction. The PDS has no substantial difference with this. Both are reformist in their horizons.

If the leaderships of these two groupings have their way they will use their

Stalinist and bureaucratic experience to create a completely undemocratic structure for the new party with power in the hands of the tops and the 54 parliamentary deputies.

They plan to push through the fusion with little or no discussion. The programme of a combined party will be worked out in a small commission and be rushed through by "referendum" inside both organisations without any possible alternative being presented.

WHAT TO DO?

The fate of the Linkspartei however will not only be decided in back rooms in parliament or the PDS headquarters. The Linkspartei is seen by those who voted for it as an instrument to oppose neoliberal attacks by the government and the employers. Given the sharp attacks coming, it will quickly come under pressure from the working class.

The unemployed, the trade union left, social movements and importantly the youth must be drawn into the formation of the new party. Their influence alone can begin to counteract the weight of the PDS and WASG bureaucracy. The national convention of the trade union left being held on 1 October, the action conference called by the German Social Forum for 19 and 20 November, and a national youth conference "Time for new youth movement" should all discuss and adopt a mobilisation plan against the attacks of the new government and the capitalists.

The rank and file of the component parts of the Left Party must call on the PDS to stop implementing neoliberal policies in the regional governments in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern at once where they are in coalition with the SPD. The PDS and WASG must make it clear that they will not join or support any such anti-working class coalitions in other regions.

Last but not least we need to fight for an open, frank and democratic discussion on the programme and policies of the future party. Till now such "discussions" in the PDS and in the WASG were simply a farce. A revolutionary communist programme has to be presented as an alternative to the varieties of warmed up Keynesian reformism hitherto on offer. Only in this way can working class militants ensure a new party is not just another version of the social democracy that has betrayed us so many times before.

What alternative to the European Union's neoliberal agenda?

Luke Cooper reports on the Preparatory Assembly of the European Social Forum in Istanbul

About 250 socialists and trade unionists gathered in Istanbul in September for the Preparatory Assembly of the fourth European Social Forum (the next ESF is due to be held in Athens at Easter 2006).

There were sizeable delegations from Italy and France, a large number from Turkey plus the Greek organisers of the upcoming ESF. There was an increased participation from Eastern Europe, including delegations from Russia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. The Assembly met at a challenging time for the European working class and the social movements. In France, the left recently won a major victory against European neo-liberalism with the "No" in the EU Constitution referendum, spectacularly derailing the entire project. In Germany too, similar forces, united in the new Linkspartei, had just won 8.7 per cent of the vote, creating a hung parliament.

However, these two developments have not halted the bosses offensive. The central challenge facing the ESF is to co-ordinate an effective Europe-wide resistance to the neo-liberal drive and to develop a political alternative to the Europe of capital. Such a challenge poses the importance of developing a political strategy – a programme of action that can lead Europe's workers to victory.

In Paris, in June, another conference

called by the organisers of the French "No" discussed what strategy the social movements should adopt with regard to the European Union. Various ideas were proposed varying from a petition aimed at getting "a million signatures for a social Europe", to days of action against the Bolkestein directive (for privatisation of social and public services), and Attac's proposal for an "a,b,c strategy" of immediate, medium and longer term reform of the EU.

Since the Paris assembly, the French delegation – dominated by the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) and the Ligue Socialiste Révolutionnaire (LSR) – have produced a draft for the "million signatures" petition and proposed holding a series of mass public meetings across Europe based upon its contents.

A pan-European campaign of mass rallies might indeed be useful if the purpose was to call the working class and youth to action to defeat privatisation, the attacks on pensions and to demand jobs for the millions of Europe's unemployed. The rallies and meetings could also be used to debate a bold strategy for another Europe – a Socialist United States of Europe.

But, the contents of the draft petition are simply a series of reformist platitudes with nothing even approaching action to achieve them. What the organisers envisage is the reconstitution of a European left reformism. We need this like a hole in the head.

The Italian delegation implicitly counter posed to this a process for developing a "Charter for another Europe". This is to be organised under seven headings:

- Peace and security.
- Europe in the world.
- Citizenship, equality and difference.
- Workers and social rights.
- Democracy and participation.
- For alternative economy: environment.
- For alternative economy: public services

A series of drafts under these headings will be presented for an assembly to be held in Florence on November 12 and 13. Its supporters, most notably Franco Russo of Rifondazione Comunista and Alessandra Mecozzi of the metalworkers union Fiom, argued that it should provide a framework for action against neo-liberalism as well as a vision of an alternative social Europe.

Certainly, an emphasis on specific policies and related action to achieve them would be a better starting point than the French petition. The idea is that the charter will be discussed in sections and then collectively in Florence, aiming to come up with a draft that will be translated into as many languages as possible and then submitted to a similar process in Athens. Assemblies or seminars will then discuss each section and finally a general assembly will debate it. The organisers see it as result-

ing in an "agenda of Athens" to be counterposed to the Lisbon agenda of the EU.

While we can safely predict that the initial drafts will restrict themselves to the level of reforms, any open and democratic debate on programme and action is to be welcomed. Revolutionaries can and will put forward their own proposals, both on specific points and on the overall strategy. We will make it clear that there should be no attempt to reform the imperialist EU, no attempt to search for the utopia of a social Europe.

But one of the key things which the ESF has been lacking so far is precisely a serious debate over programme and action.

Piero Bernocchi, from the Italian radical trade union Cobas, argued that the social movements were already stagnating, that this stagnation could only overcome by mass action on the streets against neo-liberalism. He said: "You can produce as many charters and petitions as you like, we are not against it but we won't sign it, but we must have action". He pointed to the fact that the international day of action against Bolkestein directive planned by the ESF for 15 October had only been taken up by the Italian and Belgian movements.

But even the issue of action is not enough – particularly "days of action" which are in essence only demonstrations. Italy and France provide us with plenty of examples of these but

unless the neoliberals can be driven from power then such endless demonstrating will get us nowhere. It is good to mobilise the masses in huge numbers but then we need to call them to further and more decisive action. For this the syndicalism of Cobas is no use. We need political organisation. New parties and electoral alliances are springing up to challenge neoliberals but they need to be much more than electoral machines. We need to discuss their politics in Florence and Athens.

Europe's workers are entering a critical phase of struggle against neoliberalism. The Athens ESF can and must become a focus point for this struggle. The presence of the mass forces that have united with the anticapitalist movement over the last period – former communist parties, the trade unions of Greece, Turkey, Italy, France and Germany, and so on – are seeking to take the movement on a reformist road.

Revolutionary socialists must fight this reformism by putting forward a clear strategy for the movement that addresses both these immediate struggles and the urgent tasks facing the working class. An action programme that seeks to develop them into a struggle for power, into a socialist revolution. At the Florence conference in November and in Athens the League for the Fifth International will be doing just this.

IRA decommissioning - a quiet surrender

By Maureen Gallagher

“We believe that the arms decommissioned represent the totality of the IRA's arms.” So concluded General John de Chastelain in his report on IRA decommissioning in the Culloiden Hotel in Belfast on 26 September.

Blair and Ahern welcomed the report of Independent International Commission (IICD) on IRA decommissioning last month. The Ulster Unionist Party adopted a guardedly positive response, all attention was focused on the largest unionist party, the DUP, whose response was predictably condemnatory. “The promise made by the prime minister that decommissioning must be transparent and verifiable and must satisfy everyone was broken. There were no photographs, no detailed inventory and no detail of the destruction of these arms. To describe today's act as being transparent would be the falsehood of the century.”

Asked what Sinn Fein could do to convince unionists on decommissioning, Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, replied: “...even if republicans stripped naked on the lawns of Stormont, decommissioned their weapons and one by one committed hara-kiri, some people within unionism would not be convinced.”

The truth is that without a degree of discretion, decommissioning would not have taken place. The explanation for this is firstly the way the IRA decommissioning was conceived, the fact that it would be voluntary, carried out by the IRA itself, although verified independently and covered in a blanket of silence, was done specifically to avoid



The Provisional IRA was formed in 1969 to protect the Nationalist community from Loyalist pogroms

any impression that the IRA had been defeated or humiliated.

The rest of the explanation lies in the fact that the secrecy allowed the IRA leadership to claim to its rank and file that decommissioning was less significant than was being claimed. It was the perfect example of constrictive ambiguity in practice.

When the IRA first decommissioned some weapons in October 2001 for

instance, supporters were told that the IICD had been given access to a compromised arms dump already under surveillance. The IRA had therefore given away nothing of value. On the second occasion the rank and file were told that de Chastelain had been fooled, that the IRA's engineering department had made up phony weapons and passed them on to the IICD.

These were far-fetched and ludicrous

claims. But to an audience unwilling to believe that the appalling vista they had been told didn't exist was now visibly stretching out in front of them, these tales were straws, which they eagerly grasped. The IRA leadership slowly got its membership used to the idea that weapons could be decommissioned without the sky falling in.

No one can seriously doubt that massive IRA decommissioning has

taken place. But while the secrecy surrounding decommissioning may have been meant to make the ordeal of disarming easier for Sinn Fein and the IRA to bear but it had, as an unintended consequence, the rise of the sectarian DUP to become the largest unionist party in the North.

Paisley is already dismissive of suggestions that the next two IMC reports - in October and January 2006 - could provide a “clean bill of health” for the IRA and allow for the Assembly to get and running again.

The British and Irish governments want talks between the DUP and SF soon so as to get the Assembly up and running in 2007. Paisley's intransigence is a serious obstacle but once all the IICD's reports show positively that “the IRA has gone away”, Britain and the US will be down like a ton of bricks on the “slow learners of the DUP” if they continue to resist “power-sharing”.

Sinn Fein too will come under new pressures. It will be bludgeoned into recommending nationalists join the Police Service of Northern Ireland once the formality of the Patten Report is implemented in full. Blair and Ahern will step-up spying, infiltration, repression and imprisonment against dissident republicans - with Sinn Fein's tacit support.

But the British state will also have to confront the Loyalist paramilitaries who remain armed to the teeth and capable of pogroming nationalists in Northern Ireland, as events in Belfast and elsewhere last month proved. Blinded by their hatred of Catholics, fearful of losing their privileges in any power-sharing set up, confused and angered by the prosperity of the south compared to their enclaves, these thugs will hit out until crushed.

IRA renounces the armed struggle

Extracts from a joint statement by Workers Power Ireland and Workers Power Britain, 15 August 2005

“The leadership of Oglai na hEireann has formally ordered an end to the armed campaign.

This will take effect from 4pm this afternoon.” So began spokesman Seanna Walsh, delivering an IRA statement via DVD on 28th July. “All IRA units have been ordered to dump arms. All Volunteers have been instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means. Volunteers must not engage in any other activities whatsoever.”

This is truly a historic statement, despite the fact that since the 1997 IRA cease-fire, and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the Republicans' war to drive British imperialism out of Northern Ireland has been over. But the IRA's retention of large arms stocks made the unlikely return to the armed struggle just enough of a possibility for the Northern Unionists and the British to effectively keep them out of the power-sharing they were promised in 1998 in return for their cease-fire.

Naturally enough every capitalist state will do all it can to enforce its total monopoly of violence. In Northern Ireland this leaves the large nationalist minority - which has never accepted the democratic validity of British rule - under the power of the British army, however reduced in numbers. More importantly, on a day to day basis, it means leaving them to the tender mercies of a Loyalist-dominated police force. In short, despite nearly thirty years of a guerrilla war, the Six Counties still remains “a Protestant state for a Protestant people”.

The most glaring absence in the IRA's the statement was any mention of policing. Sinn Fein has always insisted that the British government has not given enough on policing to persuade it to join the policing board. Republican demands with regard to legislative police reform include total disbandment of the special branch, reform of the use of rubber bullets and better representation of nationalists on the policing board, especially at district level. It also wants a pledge to devolve policing and justice powers to Stormont before it holds a special Ardfeis (conference) to secure approval for Catholics joining the police force.

David Ervine of the “Progressive” Unionist Party hit the nail on the head when he said: “Policing is a nightmare for them, Martin Mc Guinness and Bairbre de Brun sitting as British ministers at Stormont is one thing, but the peeler in the street is much more in yer face for Republicans. Accepting him means totally accepting the ‘alien’ state.”

Peace without justice

The Republican struggle, however, was based on real social injustice, which nothing in the past decade has fundamentally resolved. That is the denial of the right to self-determination for the Irish people as a whole and that section of it, imprisoned against its will, in “Northern Ireland”. Loyalist paramilitary and state terrorism, and British occupation were far more indiscriminate in their targets: their goal was to break the spirit of resistance of the nationalist population as a whole; whereas the IRA's was

the right to self-determination and a united Ireland.

For all the bleating by the British state and its journalists about the murderous actions of the IRA, it is the British army, its secret services and their Loyalist collaborators who hold the shameful and bloody record. Northern Ireland was for 25 years and more a test bed for assassinations, torture (such as the use of “white noise” and “helicopter” techniques) and widespread informants. These same techniques were exported around the globe, as were the army “experts” who trained foreign forces how to use them. Finally, they were used again by British troops in torture camps like Camp Breadbasket.

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 this statelet. 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.

If and when the power-sharing is resumed it will still be based on a sectarian head count underpinned by confessional politics; this will impede the development of cross-community working class politics. Sinn Fein now aims for a united Ireland by peaceful

means. They hope for further electoral advances in the South which will enable them to become a power broker in a 26 Counties government eventually. This comes on top of their success in displacing the SDLP as the main nationalist party in the Six Counties. Demographic changes in the north (negating the unionist majority or leaving the minority on their own state) by 2015 and further advance in the south would lead them to believe they can engineer an all-Ireland referendum on a united Ireland.

But, justified as the goal of a united Ireland was and is, the road to it is not that of unifying the Irish nationalists of all classes into a gradual step-by-step establishment of a capitalist country within the imperialist EU. Unless a united working class politics comes into being, transcending and obliterating the religious-communalist divide, then the above scenario, as it looms nearer, will in all probability lead to a reactionary Loyalist revolt against it, either trying to impose some sort of veto or even a bloody repartition of the Six Counties. In any case, if and when the power-sharing executive is restored, it will still be based on a sectarian head count.

Now, as Sinn Fein adapt themselves to normal bourgeois politics in Northern Ireland and the Republic, as the last rags of petit bourgeois revolutionary nationalism (and even a whiff of Stalinist “socialism”) fall from them, a new opportunity exists - a turn to working class and genuine revolutionary socialist politics in both the North and the South, a politics which does not renounce Irish unity, nor the right of

the people to bear arms but which puts its whole stress on mass working class action. A politics, which, as we have always said, is based on Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution. Only the Irish working class, organised politically as a class, in a Leninist party, can lead the struggle for national liberation to a conclusion by overthrowing both the southern bourgeoisie and ending British imperialist rule in Ireland.

In the coming months and years revolutionary socialists will oppose the setting up of a new Stormont state, based on a division of spoils amongst “Catholic/nationalist and “Protestant /Loyalist” communalism. Instead we must do all we can to unite Protestant and Catholic workers in the militant defence of their own class interests, to fight for a united workers' republic as envisaged by James Connolly and Jim Larkin. On the road to this goal, important democratic changes to the existing system of national oppression and exploitation will also have to be fought for - the complete secularisation of education, the immediate withdrawal of all British troops, the dissolution of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, its replacement by a workers' and popular militia and the election of an all-Ireland Constituent Assembly.

Long live the Irish national liberation struggle

Long live the Irish proletarian revolution as part of the world revolution

For the full text go to:

<http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,761,0,0,1,0>

A woman's right to choose

In the first of a series of articles looking at issues effecting women, *Clare Heath* looks at the question of reproductive rights and the fight to control access to abortion



Last year over 180,000 women in England and Wales had an abortion, and one in three women has an abortion at some time in her life, mostly in their 20s. Abortion is a fact of life. But it is fact that drives right wing politicians, religious leaders and bigots mad, and they expend a great deal of energy trying to restrict women's legal rights.

In October parliament will be

presented with yet another private members' bill to change the abortion law. This time the anti-abortion baton has been passed to Tory MP Laurence Robertson who has no chance of making it through the second reading. Robertson came last in the ballot for private members' bills, and has put forward a plan to prohibit abortion in England and Wales in all circumstances unless the mother's life is at risk

or where conception is a result of rape. A doctor carrying out an abortion in any other circumstances would be committing an imprisonable offence. This would reduce the number of legal abortions to a couple of hundred a year.

Supporters of the bill, including Nicholas Winterton and a few other rabid Tories, think this would be a great thing, "saving" hundreds of thousands of babies every year

from the murderous intent of their mothers. Of course it would not actually reduce the number of abortions this dramatically – women would continue to seek and have abortions just as they have always done. Only now those with money would travel to a more liberal country, and those without would turn to a modern day Vera Drake and risk infection, bleeding, future infertility and even death.

Robertson is not the first and will certainly not be the last MP to try and restrict abortion rights. While he is on the extreme wing of the anti-abortion movement, there are many other politicians with more limited plans. The contenders for the Tory Party leadership are falling over themselves to save unborn children. Liam Fox wants to reduce the upper time limit to 12 weeks. David Davis and David Cameron are aiming for the middle ground with a limit of 18 to 20 weeks. Since abortion was legalised in

1967 there have been over 20 separate parliamentary challenges to try and make the law more restrictive. Anyone would think, like Michael Howard, that women in the UK enjoyed abortion on demand, but in fact the law on abortion in the UK is one of the most restrictive in Europe. (see box on a doctor's view).

Why are the right so obsessed with restricting abortion rights?

While many of the attempts to further restrict abortion rights are justified on the grounds of advances in foetal medicine, in reality they are motivated by an opposition to women's rights to exercise control over reproduction. Reproduction is a central function of the family, a key structure that underpins society. If women can exercise full choice over when, if and with whom they have children, this rock could be shattered. It is the same with divorce – since the

laws were liberalised the divorce rate has soared and it is most women that are initiating it. Given choice, many women will opt out of the prison that many marriages become. But the right wing need to keep women responsible for the home, and by limiting control over reproduction women have fewer choices. This is particularly the case for working class women who cannot afford the kind of childcare that means you can really combine having children with playing a full role in social and work life.

Why do we call for abortion on demand?

In much the same way as the right wing see abortion rights as a sign of women getting out of hand and threatening to destabilise society, so we see abortion rights as a fundamental step towards women's liberation. So in essence, we agree with the

A doctor's view...

Any woman who wants an abortion has to get the permission of two doctors who state that she fulfils the legal, not medical, criteria. I work as a doctor in a sexual health clinic, and therefore have to make these decisions. When a woman approaches me to seek an abortion I complete a form stating that continuing with the pregnancy involves a greater risk to her physical or mental health (or to that of her existing children) than having a termination. I am permitted, by the law to take into consideration a woman's "actual or reasonably foreseeable environment", which includes her personal and social situation. This is the clause that permits abortion on so-called social grounds.

Like many doctors, I listen to the woman and, if she thinks abortion is the right thing for her, I will refer her and sign the form. If she is uncertain then I can offer counselling or a further discussion after she has talked to her partner, friends or family. To be honest, I am not in a position to really know what her "actual or reasonably

foreseeable environment" is, since generally I have never met her before.

While I interpret the law in this way, many of my colleagues do not. Ten per cent of GPs consider themselves conscientious objectors and frequently refuse to grant women an abortion or even refer them to a doctor who will help. This goes against General Medical Council guidelines, but I don't remember any doctors being stuck off for this. Other doctors will interpret the law as giving them the right to decide on the woman's future. The doctor will decide that, in his or her view, there is nothing wrong with the social situation: having a third baby really won't make that much difference will it? or, yes this may mean you can't keep your job, go travelling, complete your degree, but never mind, you'll enjoy being a mother.

It is completely wrong for doctors, or any third party for that matter, to make such decisions on behalf of a woman, and put in this way it seems rather bizarre. In most European countries women do have abortion "on request" in the first three months of a

pregnancy, and only after that does the law restrict rights. But in the UK the law retains the premise that reproduction cannot be left up to women. Women are not able to take decisions about their own future and that the state, in the form of two doctors, has to retain the right to interfere. If women had control over their own bodies they might chose not to have children, not to get married and then where would we be? Better not give them the choice.

I work in an open access clinic where anyone can attend without a GP referral. But many women do not know that they can approach us for help, and if their GP refuses to offer them an abortion they either go straight to the private abortion providers and have to pay £400 to £500, or simply wait and worry, only coming forward later on in pregnancy when it is more difficult and dangerous to terminate. There are not very many late abortions, and could be even fewer if women had easier access to abortion without having to get through the gate-keepers in the medical profession.

Religion and abortion do not mix

It is well known that the Catholic Church is a passionate opponent of abortion rights, but did you know that all the major religions oppose abortion? As some socialists seem to be willing to embrace "faith communities", or at least stay quiet on the reactionary role of religion, we should remember that all this mumbo-jumbo, from Hinduism to Judaism, is propaganda for social control.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND: abortion is "gravely contrary to the moral law" since "...the foetus has the right to live and develop as a member of the human family, we see abortion, the termination of that life by the act of man, as a great moral evil." They permit "very few" exceptions, namely when the life of the mother is at risk.

JUDAISM: Strict Judaism permits abortion only in cases

where continuing the pregnancy would put the mother's life in serious danger. In this situation the foetus must be aborted, since the mother's life is more important than that of the foetus. Jewish law is more lenient concerning abortions in the first 40 days of pregnancy as it considers the embryo to be of relatively low value during this time.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: deliberately causing an abortion is a grave moral wrong.

HINDUISM: generally opposed to abortion except where it is necessary to save the mother's life. Classical Hindu texts are strongly opposed to abortion, comparing abortion to the killing of a priest, arguing that abortion is a worse sin than killing one's parents, and a woman who aborts her child will lose her caste.

Traditional Hinduism and many modern Hindus also see abortion

as a breach of the duty to produce children in order to continue the family and produce new members of society.

ISLAM: Muslims regard abortion as wrong and haram (forbidden). Abortion is permitted if continuing the pregnancy would put the mother's life in real danger. Different schools of Muslim law hold different views on whether any other reasons for abortion are permitted, often only in the first few weeks.

SIKHISM: Abortion is generally forbidden in Sikhism, as it interferes in the creative work of God – who created everything and is present in every being. However, the Sikh code of conduct does not deal with abortion or any bioethical issues, and abortion is common among the Sikh community in India, particularly aborting female embryos.

Did you know?

- One in three women has an abortion in her lifetime
- 76 per cent of the British population support a woman's right to choose
- Abortion laws in the UK are more restrictive than in almost every other European country, where abortion on request is legal in the first three months of pregnancy
- 90 per cent of abortions in England and Wales are done before the 12th week of the pregnancy.
- Abortion has been legal in Britain since 1967, but only by permission of two doctors and in restricted circumstances
- A quarter of women having abortions in England and Wales have to pay for them - there are no public funds available specifically to help poorer women in these circumstances
- Each year, 20 million abortions take place in unsafe conditions and as a consequence, an estimated 80,000 women die

See: www.abortionrights.org.uk

right on the centrality of the issue. Women's continued subordination is rooted in the social relations of capitalism in which there is one sphere for reproduction, the family, and another for social production, the market. Capitalism relies on the family to produce and look after children, and women's unequal position is all rooted in this, even for women who don't have children.

For example, the lack of equality in pay has persisted despite equal pay legislation because it is rooted in the structure of employment in which women are concentrated in sectors and roles that can be combined with family responsibilities - mostly part time flexible work. Sexism is pervasive, including the ever expanding use of images that portray women as sexually available, or the way that young girls and women are constantly required to be thin, beautiful, fashionable. Like it or not, women are still judged by their looks as much as any other attributes. What has this to do with the family? It constantly reinforces an essential sexual role for women, where looking for love and a mate is the norm for young women.

For women to be freed from these and many other aspects of oppression means tackling each one head on, for example fighting for equal pay and equal opportunities, full free childcare, flexible working and arguing against sexism wherever it is displayed. But we also need to tackle the underlying cause - capitalism and the family. Women's control over reproduction is key to this - and this includes abortion and contraception rights.

The Bush War on abortion

When George Bush came into the White House virtually his first act was to re-introduce the 'Global Gag' rule which withholds US federal funding for health centres that provide abortion services or even information. This has affected women in over 60 countries where reproductive health services are provided by non-governmental organisations reliant on international funding. Within the US itself many individual states have introduced wave of harsh restrictions on women's legal rights to access abortion and many abortion clinics have closed down. Some women now have to travel hundreds of miles to access services.

The fundamental right to choose in the USA, established with the groundbreaking 1973 Roe v Wade Supreme Court decision, is also in jeopardy now. The Supreme Court has been very

finely balanced up to now, but two new judges are being appointed that could swing the balance. The first appointment, John Roberts, was announced at the end of September. He has previously argued that "Roe was wrongly decided and should be overruled", and as a staunch Republican described as a "strict but pragmatic conservative" this does not bode well. The other nomination is to be announced by Bush shortly, and if he chooses another reactionary it is not only possible but likely that Roe v Wade will be overturned. If this happens, many states would quickly ban abortion altogether, with devastating consequences for tens of millions of women across the US.

Campaigning to defend and extend abortion rights

The Robertson Bill will not get very far in parliament, but this does not mean we should leave the issue alone. Firstly we need to defend what we already have, including the fact that in the UK there is no upper time limit in the case of medical indications. Not very many women need later abortions but if they do it is often because of very difficult circumstances including failure to diagnose pregnancy, obstruction to earlier abortion, medical problems or foetal abnormalities.

We need to challenge the current law that gives doctors rather than women the right to choose. Women should have the right to an abortion - as early as possible and as late as necessary - but based on her own decision. Doctors, fathers or parents should have no right to decide on her behalf. We also need to expand provision - the government has said it is committed to making abortions available on the NHS but in many parts of the country, and for many groups of women this is not happening. In some areas only young women are eligible for free abortions. Older women have to pay.

In the past the labour movement has taken up the defence of abortion rights, but has never launched an offensive campaign. The pressure group Abortion Rights, formed from a merger of the National Abortion Campaign and the Abortion Law Reform Association, campaigns for abortion on request for all women and an expansion of services. We need to take this into the labour movement and use the methods of class struggle rather than restricting it political lobbying. There is also an urgent need for an international campaign on reproductive rights.

Abortion on demand - a right for all women!

World March of Women

By Joy MacReady

The World March of Women (WMW) relay promoting the Women's Global Charter for Humanity will end in Quagadongou, Burkina Faso on 17 October. Along with the Solidarity Quilt, it will have passed through 53 countries across the globe, from Azerbaijan to Argentina, with thousands of women coming together to discuss the principles of the Charter and how to take the struggle forward. The WMW is calling for women in all the time zones to take to the streets at noon on 17 October and stage actions for one hour to show their support for the blueprint for society depicted in the charter.

The Women's Global Charter is a platform of 'affirmations' or policy statements that advocates what oppressed women across the globe should be fighting for today. In the context of a global system of exploitation and oppression a charter an excellent idea for developing and coordinating the international struggle for women's liberation. Unfortunately this charter fails women in many ways..

The Charter has five main issues that it deals with: equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace. It declares that everyone should be equal and there should be no discrimination; everyone should be free and in control of their body, fertility and sexuality; resources should be shared and everyone should promote international solidarity; everyone should have citizenship rights, social benefits and access to free public services; and everyone should live in a peaceful world. Although all these things are commendable in themselves, women cannot just wish them into being.

Fundamentally that is what the Charter is - a wish list of affirmations of how a society should be without any serious thought of what action or organisation it would take to get there. The main proposal for action is to lobby the leaders of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations, as well as the leaders of their countries. Instead of developing a strategy of challenging the rule and legitimacy of these institutions, which not only maintain the status quo but also are instrumental in pushing forward privatisation, 'free trade' and exploitation, the WMW suggests we go to these institutions cap in hand asking for a more equitable slice of the pie.

This approach is a result of the make up and political character of the movement. It is a continuation of the Beijing World Conference on Women organised by the United Nations in 1995 and addressed by the likes of Hilary Clinton and Benazir Bhutto. The WMW movement is made up of the same constituents as the attendees at Beijing: governmental and non-governmental organisations, charities, women groups, federations, academics and women activists that align themselves with feminist politics.

In the Charter, it states that they view "...patriarchy as the system oppressing women and capitalism as the system that enables



a minority to exploit the vast majority of women and men. These systems reinforce one another." The relationship between patriarchy and capitalism appears to be of equal and competing systems of oppression. In reality, sexism, like racism, homophobia and other forms of oppression, are tools used to maintain the capitalist system. They maintain the level of exploitation by playing one section of society off against the other.

For example, in the family the sexist division of labour means women are expected to carry out a host of domestic duties and childcare. Men clearly benefit from this which is why some men continue to defend their privileged role in the family. However the real beneficiaries are the capitalists who effectively get women to carry out the reproduction of labour by raising the next generation of workers for nothing. That is why bourgeois society does everything to maintain the patriarchal family. While men may also dominate many spheres of power and influence in society such as the workplace and political and judicial structures, it is class relations in society that explains how exploitation works not gender. It is the capitalist class that exploits working class men and women and this class is made up of women as well as men.

It is this idea that all women suffer the same level of oppression under capitalism which blurs the class divide and the socio-economic structures underpinning capitalism. Although even bourgeois women suffer sexism, they are representatives of the ruling class and will act in the interests of that class - a young women worker in a sweatshop factory in a Mexican maquiladora has more in common with a fellow male worker than she does with Hilary Clinton or with the 'first lady' of any country.

This has consequences for how you build a women's movement. Feminist movements who have subordinated the demands of working class women in order to maintain unity with bourgeois and petty bourgeois women have failed to fight consistently against oppression. The founders of the Suffragette movement in Britain suspended their demand for the vote after the outbreak of the First World War because they put their allegiance to their class above their solidarity with their sisters. Only a working class women's

movement in solidarity with an international communist movement has the interests in fighting against the system that has created global inequality and oppression.

Another section of the charter talks about fair distribution of resources, production and exchange within a society's economy as being: "the priority [is] of satisfying the collective needs, eliminating poverty and ensuring the balance of collective and individual interests." The Charter opposes the private accumulation of the means of production, wealth, capital, land, and decision-making power by a few groups and individuals, and yet does not say how we would wrest the property from its owners, the power from the few or how we would organise ourselves to bring into being such a society.

The charter renounces any use of violence - "...no custom, tradition, ideology, religion, political or economic system justifies the use of violence" - and yet what about self-defence? Do women have the right to organise and defend themselves against rape, abuse or murder? We must have the right to defend ourselves and our communities against the brutalities meted out by the ruling class.

The Charter advocates that armed conflicts should be resolved through peaceful negotiations. What does that mean? Does it mean in Iraq for example that the Iraqi people should cease their resistance against US and British occupation and negotiate with their oppressors? Does it mean that Palestinian women should give up their fight against Israeli tyranny? Those fighting back have often been asked to negotiate: in other words cease their struggle and agree to the terms imposed by those in power. Today in Iraq only a determined political and military struggle against the armies of occupation and the corrupt government that supports them will offer the possibility of lasting peace in the region.

The WMW calls for a society free of oppression, exclusion, discrimination, intolerance and violence - but we, as revolutionaries, are willing to fight for such a world and have a strategy to do so. We don't believe that the world's wealthy are going to just hand over their profits and renounce their old ways to make a better world. We are not dreaming of a utopia, but are waging a political struggle against the

problems today and building a strategy of how we will win the struggles of tomorrow.

It is not surprising that the WMW is strongest in the developing countries where women are in the direct firing line of capitalist globalisation. The relay was launched on International Women's Day, 8 March 2005, by a 40,000 strong demonstration in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Many of women in the countries involved took the opportunity presented by the relay to raise political issues that were crucial to their situation. In Colombia, women blocked the highway in a protest against neo-liberal globalisation to demand that the Free Trade Area of the Americas be rejected; in Cuba, they demanded reform of monetary policies which create poverty and inequality and the reform of the UN; in Ghana, they are fighting for the right to property and secure family life; in Palestine, they are fighting against the brutal force of the occupation; and in Romania they want to increase women's political presence.

All of these are important issues affecting women and ones that women are willing to take to the streets and fight over. The international women's movement needs concrete plans for advancing their struggle. The pre-amble of the charter says "We women have been marching a long time", but they are going to be marching for a lot longer if they don't realise that lobbying the people that maintain the capitalist system is not going to change the status quo - it is going to take revolutionary ideas and actions.

The international women's movement needs to develop a political programme that can serve as a blueprint to take the struggle forward. It needs to be open and democratic - to see beyond national borders by linking up with struggles in other countries. It needs to involve local activists, women's groups and federations, but also pull in the trade unions that together can strike a blow against the capitalists and bring the system to a grinding halt through strikes and occupations.

In Workers Power, we support the struggles of working class women across the globe, at the grassroots level, at the factory level, national and international levels. We aim to build an international women's movement as a part of the international working class party - the Fifth International - that will overthrow the global capitalist system.

'No' vote boosts French fightback

Weakened by the 'No' vote to the constitution, Chirac and his government are being met by growing resistance to his policies, writes *Marc Lasalle*

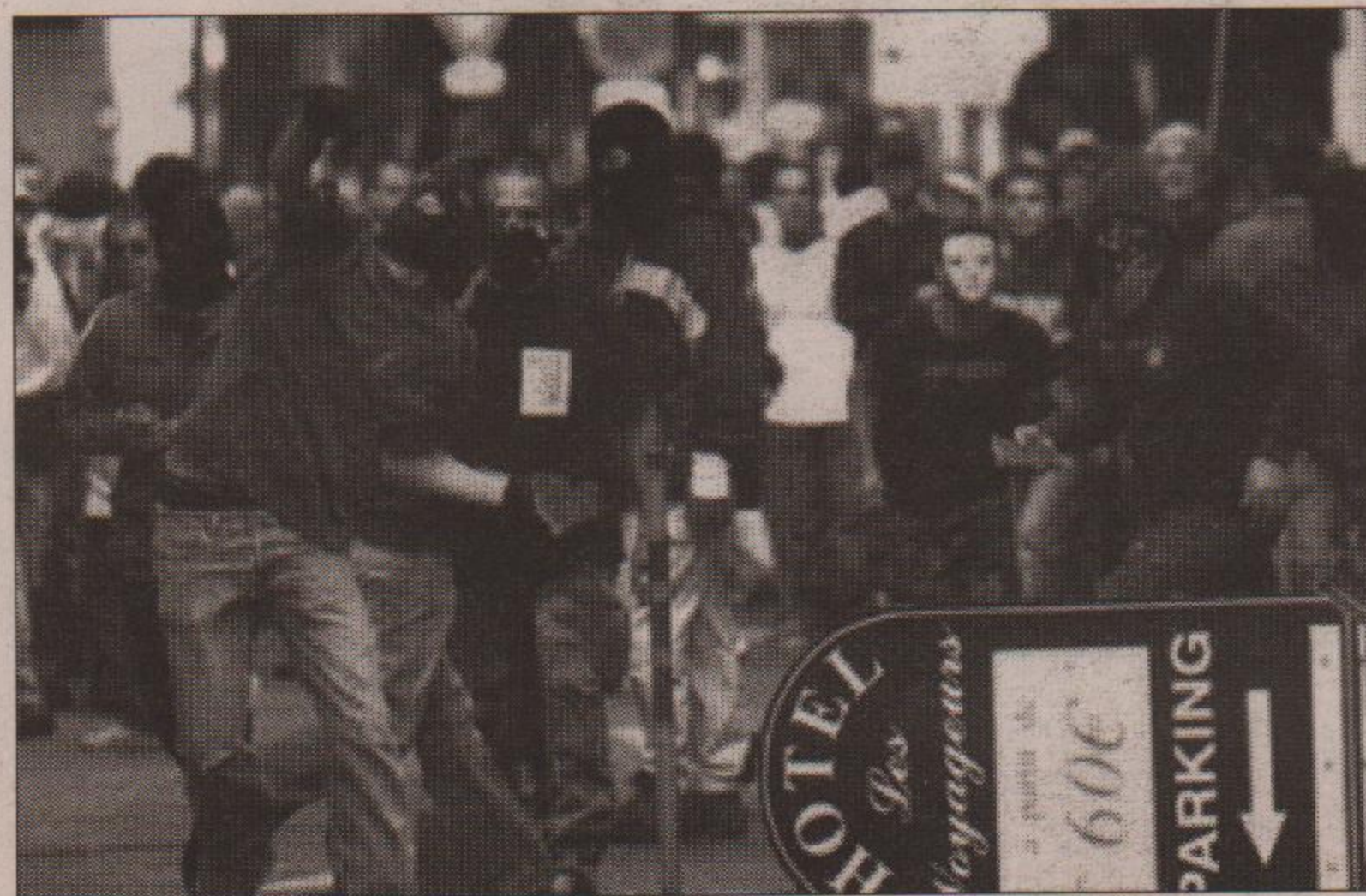
The recent victory of the left over the "No" vote to the EU Constitution was the latest in a line of reverses for Jacques Chirac. He was elected president 10 years ago with a mandate from the French bosses to defeat the working class in the same manner that Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher had. But Chirac has repeatedly proved powerless to win such a strategic victory.

He now faces serious opposition within his own party, the Union pour la Majorité Populaire (UMP), from Nicolas Sarkozy. An immensely ambitious and cynical opportunist, Sarkozy, as interior minister of the previous government, decided to win over the racist voters of Jean Marie Le Pen by launching a series of vicious anti-immigrant and anti-youth measures. He is poised to be the right wing's candidate of choice in the 2007 presidential election.

The present prime minister Dominique Villepin is Chirac's chosen successor. In order to promote himself against Sarkozy, Villepin knows that he must act quickly and achieve results for the bosses. He must also avoid the mishaps that happened to previous Chirac premiers when they provoked mass strikes and movements. This November will be the 10th anniversary of the huge upsurge, led by the rail workers, which led to the downfall of Alain Juppé.

Therefore, attacks against the workers are likely in the coming months. But the government walks on thin ice and the all-out offensive the bosses are calling for will probably only come after 2007 election.

While the past decade has seen many struggles, most of them were in the pub-



Demonstrators fight police in Corsica over plans to privatise the ferry service. Police were sent in to break the strike that started at the end of September

lic sector. Pressure of the high unemployment rate, weakness of the trade unions, and the move to the right of the Socialist and Communist parties explain the lower combativity in the private sector. For many years the strikes here were limited to defensive ones, desperately trying to oppose factory closures. But this started to change recently.

A series of long struggles in the most exploited workplaces (McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Virgin) shows that a new generation of young workers is coming to the fore and they are not ready to accept the bosses dictates. Two-thirds of the new jobs are temporary, part-time or in other ways precarious.

Spring 2005 has seen the first radical youth movement for years. A massive mobilisation in the lycées opposed the government project to reform the sec-

ondary school system. Led by anarchists and young of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) members, the movement was confronted by the student union betrayals and police repression. At the same time new layers of young workers are coming to the class struggle as shown by recent demos. Reforms of the school sector have in the past been a spark for a serious workers movement.

Last winter the pressure of private sector workers against low wages obliged the unions to organise a few days of action and some strikes over the wage issue erupted in private companies such as Total and Carrefour. The CGT, while remaining more radical in words than the other major union federations, has repeatedly slammed on the brakes on such movements and isolated the sectors in struggle. The CGT

bureaucrats do not want an all out general strike, or indeed any situation developing out of their strict control.

The present CGT leadership was however discredited with their own rank and file activists over their attitude to the European Constitution referendum. General secretary Bernard Thibaut tried to impose the European TUC line of abstaining from the "No" campaign. He was defeated in an unprecedented vote at the CGT national council and the federation's rank and file activist played a major role in that campaign. With the CGT congress next spring, Thibaut will have to put on a more radical act to get re-elected.

SUD – a smaller and even more radical federation within which the LCR has considerable influence – is strong only in a few sectors (post, telecom, railways) but these are militant ones. But it too has failed to grow in recent years. More importantly, it lacks any clear strategy to build a new confederation by organising the huge unorganised majority of workers.

Nor has it broken with the old syndicalist prejudice (enshrined in the Charter of Amiens) for "non-political" unions, which leaves the road open to reformist electoralism. Despite the higher level of political consciousness of many of SUD's members, it remains tied to a marginal role as a radical tiny union (like the Cobas in Italy).

The referendum campaign and the success of the No vote have opened a new phase for the Socialist Party (PS). While the majority campaigned for a Yes vote in the referendum, the opposition, led by Laurent Fabius, joined the No campaign with the Communist Party

(PCF), the LCR and Attac activists.

The next PS congress in November will be a show-down between the two blocks. Personal rivalries and petty fights by bureaucratic cliques riddle both. It seems unlikely that a decisive split or exclusion will take place.

Over the past few months, PCF secretary Marie-Georges Buffet has been trying to build a new Union of the Left, re-named the "union populaire". This project may be successful for several reasons – tired by long struggles, uncertain over the future, eager to stop a victory by the right, many working class militants are demanding unity from their representatives. The PS cannot win without allying with and being covered on its left by the PCF. The LCR is openly flirting with PCF and may even join this proto governmental alliance.

The LCR is openly proposing that the No campaign transforms itself into an electoral alliance consisting of the left-wing of the PS, the PCF, and itself – what it calls the "real left". Given that the other partners have no intention of cutting all the links to the "right-wing" of the SP, without which an electoral victory is out of the question, there is the possibility that LCR will become the left appendix to such a reformist alliance.

Debates in LCR are already preparing the way for this with themes like "on what conditions is it possible to participate in a Left government?" The possibility of this depends of course on the on the willingness of PS and PCF to allow LCR to be a member of this alliance. This in turn depends on the level of class struggle in 2006 and 2007 and the behaviour of the LCR within it.

The UK's *Guardian* newspaper recently carried an article, which quoted a French academic as saying that a pre-revolutionary situation was in the offing in France. This was based on the plans for another day of action on 4 October against De Villepin's reforms. The possibility of sectional or youth struggles is far from excluded. There is certainly massive discontent at a rank and file level. But for the workers vanguard to launch an indefinite strike wave would mean a hard struggle against the union bureaucrats. It would require organizing the fight independently from them in co-ordinations.

Is the far left, the LCR or Lutte Ouvriere, prepared to do this? This seems unlikely at the moment. The LCR certainly has its sights fixed on the electoral terrain once again. But the French working class and youth have a habit of taking their leaders – even their "revolutionary" ones – by surprise.

Fuel protests sweep Indonesia

By Carlene Wilson

For the second time in a year, major fuel increases have hit Indonesia. The latest rises, of more than 126 per cent have been met by widespread protests.

Demonstrations have occurred in all the major cities across Indonesia. Although student organisations have taken a leading role in initiating them, workers and leftist organisations, plus NGOs, and in some cities representatives of the local government are all involved.

Fuel increases are a serious issue in Indonesia where most of the population relies on kerosene to fuel cooking stoves and where cheap fuel allows people to run relatively inexpensive motorbikes.

The rises are biggest for kerosene, something that will disproportionately affect the millions of Indonesians already living on or below the poverty line.

The government's response has been to offer special quarterly payments to 15.6 million families calculated as being the poorest, but the payments of 300,000 Rupiah (about £16) to each family will make little difference to these people and does nothing to alleviate the situation for most.

The fuel rises are caused by the removal



of a massive fuel subsidy that has previously kept Indonesian petrol and kerosene the cheapest in the world. But with rising oil prices the government has claimed that the current subsidy will drive them into further debt. It appears that already a fifth to a third of the national budget has been used on fuel subsidies.

Earlier this year when prices rose for the first time, they were met with a wave

of protests. The government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono promised then that there would be no further price increases this year.

The large demonstrations on Thursday 29 September in Jakarta, ahead of the Saturday 1 October price rise, are typical of what's been happening across Indonesia. Around 5,000 people took to the street and marched to the presidential palace. These demonstrations were repeated over the following days.

While most of the demonstration was formed of broadly progressive forces, the demonstrators were joined by ex-Presidents Gus Dur and Megawati Sukarnoputri as well as by right-wing nationalist and islamist forces, all seeing an opportunity to feather their own political nests.

Demonstrators have called for an end to the fuel increases, including a group of students in Makassar who blocked the streets outside their University on Saturday, waiting for the fuel increase. There have also been calls for the President to resign and for an end to the signing of free trade agreements that have already seen price rises in other household staples like rice and cooking oil.

Workers' trade unions and parties, the poor peasants and the anticapitalist youth should keep up the protests, demanding the total cancellation of the price increases adding to this demands for substantial rises in wages and organise to back up these demands with mass strike action.

Bali bombing

As we go to press, it is reported that suicide bombs in Bali have killed 26 people.

The bombings were, allegedly, carried out by Jemaah Islamia, the group responsible for the Bali bombings of 2002 in which more than 200 people were killed.

The bombers have shown that they are divorced from the real concerns of the millions of people who are involved with the fight against the government.

The bombings also hand the Indonesian government an ideal opportunity to unite the country behind it in the face of the threat from terrorism precisely at a time when it is under attack over the fuel price hike.

All this is in addition to the targeting of innocent people eating in restaurants.

For these reasons we condemn the bombings.

Japan: Koizumi victory marks new neoliberal drive

Japan's prime minister recently fought – and won – an election where his main opposition was a section of his own party. *Keith Harvey* explains why the privatisation of the Post Office was a central issue

During the election campaign Toshio Hinode, a local postmaster, summed up the problem of the Japanese Post Office for the ruling class succinctly. "If I have to run this office based on market principles, I'd have to close it down. It wouldn't be viable."

Japan's is no ordinary Post Office. It is the world's largest bank, in control of £1.75 trillion of savings, drawn from 85 per cent of Japanese households. Its assets are two and a half times bigger than Citicorp of the USA, the next largest bank in the world.

The incumbent prime minister Junichiro Koizumi of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) called a snap election on 10 August when his proposals to privatise the post office were blocked in the lower house of parliament mainly as a result of the votes of dissident members of his own party.

Koizumi opened up his campaign not with an attack on the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) but on his own party. "I will smash the old LDP and forge ahead with a new LDP," he threatened. He immediately expelled the 37 LDP MPs opposed to privatisation and sent in hand-picked celebrity candidates to unseat them in the election.

BREAKING UP THE POST

Privatising Japan Post and giving the LDP a major make-over suggested a historic moment in the history of post-war Japan; and Koizumi's gamble, although it appeared reckless to many, paid off on 12 September when the votes were counted. He had won a landslide victory and the LDP was returned with a two-thirds majority in the lower house, rendering meaningless any obstruction to his programme in the upper house of parliament.

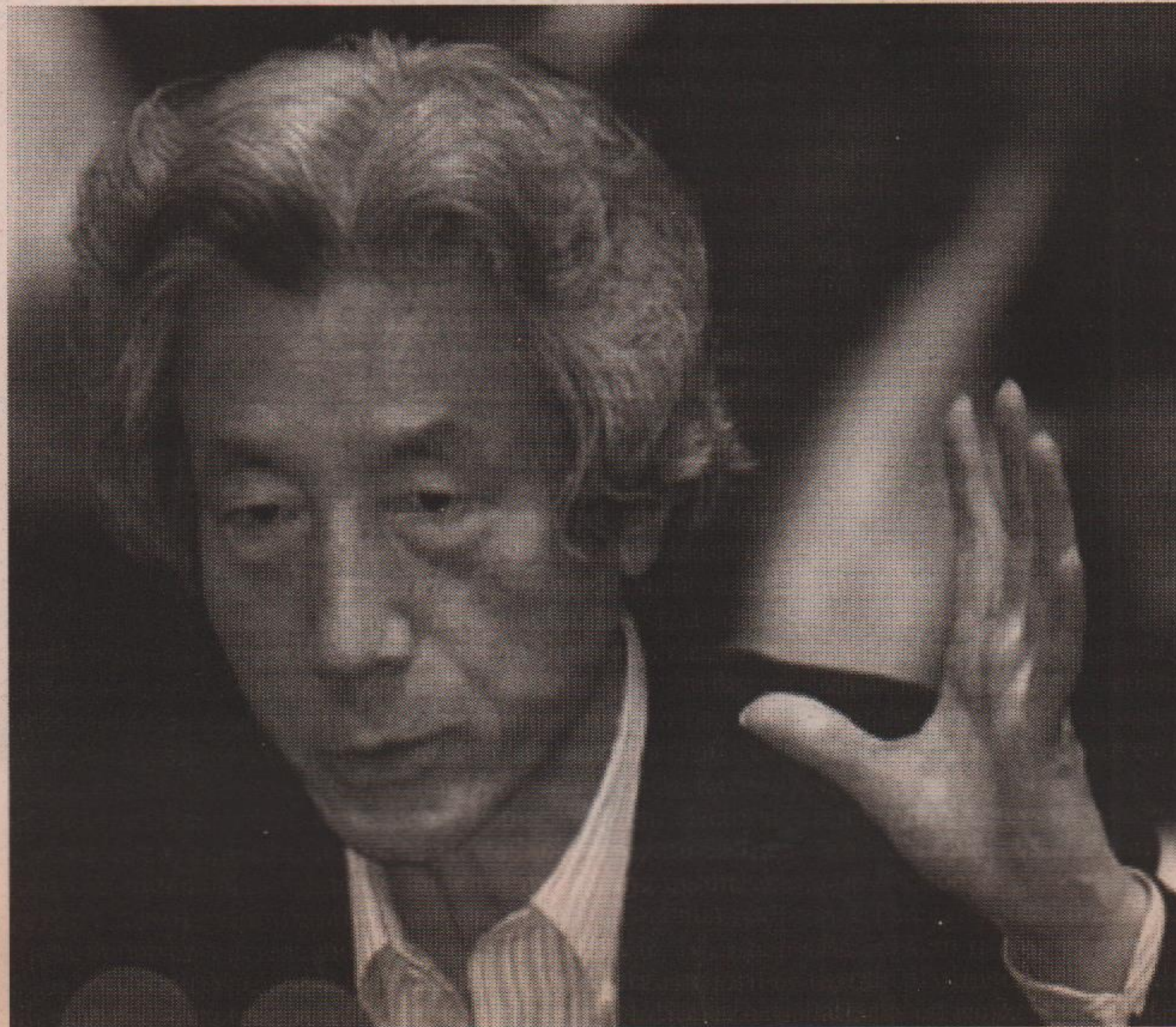
Koizumi is thus set to push through major neoliberal changes to the way Japanese capitalism operates and radically transform the ideology of his party in the process. Toshio Hinode and his customers are not the only ones likely to suffer if he succeeds.

Koizumi plans to break up Japan Post into four companies between 2007 and 2017 and put its savings at the disposal of Japanese industry and other commercial banks – a huge reservoir of investment funds.

Historically, those savings have been a giant slush fund for the ruling LDP – in power for all but a few months since the second world war. The government regularly used the money to fund domestic infrastructural projects and – in a highly politicised fashion – to provide low interest loans to favoured businesses. Small businesses that pledged to back the Liberal Democrats were given loans with no collateral and low interest rates from postal services – as long as they had the endorsement of their member of parliament.

Japanese could also take out loans to the value of 90 per cent of their deposits at low rates. Special postmasters played a crucial role by acting as vote-gatherers for the Liberal Democrats.

On the other hand, the post office also acted as a quasi-welfare state in the countryside. With 280,000 employees (more than the Japanese armed forces)



Koizumi "I will smash the old LDP"

in 26,000 branches Japan Post provides a form of welfare, especially in rural areas with ageing populations. Post workers will check up on people who are infirm or ill and go and visit them if need be.

It is this social non-market function that will disappear with privatisation and, given the absence of a general welfare state paid for out of general taxation, that will hit the poorest hard.

ECONOMIC WOES

Japan is the world's second largest economy. So whether it is booming or stagnating makes a big difference to the global economy. For the whole of the 1990s Japan was mired in the economic doldrums; GDP grew at an average of 0.5 per cent a year. The cause of this stagnation was the bursting of a property speculation bubble in 1989. In the ensuing years land prices collapsed, the stock market went into freefall and Japan's banks were saddled with £80bn of bad loans on their books. They stopped lending, companies stopped borrowing and so investment dwindled.

The government cut interest rates to ease the burden of debt and for most of the 1990s they were zero or negative. These helped companies survive but it also set in motion a deflationary spiral of falling prices. In turn consumers – already cautious of spending when their jobs were under threat – constantly postponed their big purchases; after all in a deflationary period, "prices are always lower tomorrow".

So what growth there was in the 1990s came from two sources. There was the pull of the growing Asian economies, China above all, which sucked in Japan's exports. Second, the government wracked up more and more public debt (to 160 per cent of GDP) to finance big building and infrastructural projects. These "fixes" periodically kick-started some growth but it soon fell away. Business investment and domestic consumer demand remained nailed to the floor.

The "Thatcherite" solution to Japan-

ese capitalism's woes would have been to keep interest rates fairly high, forcing banks and bankrupt firms alike to the wall. This would have speeded up closures and mergers and given rise to mass unemployment. This destruction of capital would have allowed productivity and profits to revive and stimulated new investment.

But the LDP did not do that. Weighed down (from neoliberalism's point of view) by paternalism and clientalism, and fearful of a working class revolt, the government and banks accepted slow to zero growth, allowing a long-term gradual working through of the bad debt problem. This kept

unemployment low (always less than 6 per cent) and preserved "social peace", avoiding massive bouts of class struggle. But the cost was a lost decade of economic growth.

Economic reform proceeded slowly, but in 1999 the banks were forced to reform more quickly. Koizumi speeded up the process after he came to power in 2001 with the appointment of Heizo Takenaka as head of financial services. He also privatised the state housing corporation that opened up mortgage business to private companies.

Taken together with constantly rising export volumes to China, Japan's economy turned the corner after 2002.

REMAKING THE LDP

When Koizumi became leader of the LDP this was a break with the past. He comes from the Tokyo suburbs unlike most senior leaders of the LDP who hail from the countryside. The LDP has traditionally been based on rural farmers and the construction industry. It has used government money to finance Japanese rice production and protect the farmers from cheaper imports. It has channelled huge amounts of money to the building industry often for massive infrastructural projects like airports, highways and railways. The projects kept parts of the economy ticking over in recession while the LDP received kickbacks for its services.

The LDP is a coalition of all capitalist ideologies held together by its main purpose – to grease the wheel and ensure the LDP got the rural vote out; and under the Japanese electoral system rural votes count for more than urban ones.

The LDP split in the 1990s and the main opposition party, the DPJ emerged – it is more urban based and polls well in Tokyo and other big cities. At the election it stood on a platform of reform of the state bureaucracy, ending the large-scale public works programmes and cutting back government expenditure – it promised \$90 billion in spending cuts over 3 years. Against the LDP it favoured retaining a single state postal corporation but restricting its saving/banking operations. It also called for the withdrawal of all troops from Iraq by December this year.

The DPJ was swamped in the election as Koizumi stole their reformist clothes. He is determined to push the LDP away from reliance upon the declining and ageing rural population and towards the urban middle classes. At the same time he is stoutly pro-imperialist and pro-USA, supporting the war against Iraq and US bases in Japan. He is much more ideological than past LDP leaders and wants to break up the traditional structures between Japanese finance, big business and government, to move away from clientalism, the giving of contracts to favoured businesses, and the corruption that marked LDP rule, towards free market, neoliberal competition.

The Financial Times recently summed the situation up: "In banking the non-performing loans problem that crippled the big banks over the past decade is over. At the same time industrial companies have dealt with their overcapacity, excess labour and debt problems. Corporate earnings are expected to grow for the fourth consecutive year this year."

In August, bank lending increased for the first time in seven years. Business investment and domestic demand are beginning to take over from exports as the main motor of growth. Wages have stopped falling, jobs are increasing and prices stabilised; inflation is even expected sometime next year.

NEOLIBERAL REFORM

All this makes a big difference to Koizumi's options now he has a huge mandate. He came to power pledging to cut the massive public debt by raising taxes and cutting expenditure, but in the end he did neither, as the gradual return of economic growth stabilised the budget deficit. Japan should grow in the 2-3 per cent range for a while, postponing the urgent need to increase taxes and cut spending, which threatens to stall the economic recovery.

One thing Koizumi will not relent on, however, is his privatisation agenda. Even if the pace of change he proposes is fairly slow, in the medium term it threatens to shake Japan's political and social system to the core. The bourgeois parties will redefine themselves more sharply along ideological lines; at present there are as many differences within the LDP and DPJ as separated them from each other; more splits and realignments are inevitable.

Also bound to change is the strong paternalistic grip the main bourgeois parties and big companies have over their workers. Jobs for life, rewards based on seniority, fierce company loyalty – all these things have been eroding for sometime, but Koizumi's neoliberal counter revolution threatens to tear them apart.

This will provide the objective basis for a re-awakened working class movement that has truly independent (rather than company) unions. Politically, those class conscious parts of the working class have lined up behind the Japanese Communist Party. The JCP is the second largest non-ruling communist party in the world, with about 400,000 members belonging to 25,000 branches. Its electoral strength, however, is declining. It polled 11.3 per cent of the vote in 2000, 8.2 per cent in 2003 and 7.3 per cent, or 5 million votes, in last month's election, which allowed it to hang onto the nine seats it had previously held.

The JCP's vote is dying away as, like most social democratising, reformist Stalinist parties since 1989, its membership is rapidly ageing – its traditional Stalinist and reformist politics having little appeal for radicalising youth. It is not the party of the Japanese working class' future which must be internationalist and revolutionary if it is to steer the working class through the next decades. If the end of the 20th century saw Japan in the economic and political doldrums, the opening decades of the 21st promises storms ahead.

1905 Russian revolution: mass strikes and soviets

In the second of our series on the Russian revolution of 1905, *Richard Brenner* looks at the development of mass strikes and the workers' councils – soviets

The carnage in the streets of St Petersburg on 9 January 1905 unleashed a storm of strikes across the Russian Empire. In January, 414,000 and in February 291,000 workers struck in 122 towns and localities. Militant rail workers spread the strikes to all the industrial centres of Russia and Poland, from the huge metalworking plants in the capital to the mines of the Donets Basin. They broke out too in the non-Russian areas: Poland, Finland and the Baltic provinces. In March all the universities were forcibly closed, as students joined the striking workers.

This mass strike wave was remarkable; nothing like it had been seen before. Not in Britain, Germany or the United States had such a huge, prolonged and spontaneous wave of strikes taken place. The Russian workers' mass strikes – which linked immediate economic demands and calls for democratic rights to the overthrow of the autocracy – opened the perspective of a nationwide revolution to bring down the Tsarist regime.

In January and February over 13,000 enterprises were affected by strikes. Workers' demands included increases in pay, a maximum eight-hour working day, provision of medical care, an end to verbal and physical abuse by managers and foremen, and the election of recognised workplace representatives. Then strike figures fell in March and April. Was the revolution over? As if to give a resounding 'no', the strike wave quickly resumed with 220,000 workers striking in May. Strike figures remained high in June and July (142,000 and 150,000 respectively) and then fell back again in August and September.

Lenin, in a lecture he gave on the 1905 revolution 12 years later, said that in these months: "Russia was transformed into a Russia of a revolutionary proletariat and a revolutionary people. (...) The principal factor in this transformation was the mass strike."

The mass strikes had given birth to another new phenomenon, one that was to prove of historic importance for the world working class – the soviet. On 12 May, a strike of textile workers broke out in Ivanovo-Voznesensk which lasted for a staggering 72 days. Textile workers were some of the poorest, worst paid, most downtrodden workers in Russia. A large majority of them were women. On 15 May, 110 delegates from the various factories met in a sort of council (in Russian, soviet).

Initially this was a meeting of elected workers' representatives to put their case to the government factory inspector. But it decided to continue in existence as a strike committee. It took on more and more tasks in the city. It arranged food and supplies, created a militia to keep order, issued its own press, held daily mass meetings of the strikers. On 3 June fights occurred with the police and the Cossacks. Eventually the strike was defeated and the soviet dissolved but the example was to be copied in the next great upsurge of mass strikes in the autumn.

In the soviet the textile workers of Ivanovo had created an instrument excellently adapted to the new means of struggle workers were already using,



The massacre of the people of Odessa by Tsarist troops re-created in the film *Battleship Potemkin*, by Sergei M. Eisenstein,

the mass strike. It was a body that challenged to the employers and the Tsarist police as to who ruled in the factories and streets of the city. This instrument of struggle would soon be taken up by workers in the main cities, particularly in St Petersburg and Moscow and become an instrument of the struggle for power. The soviet was the embodiment of working class democracy – democracy for the class struggle.

Defeats and mutinies

The main thing undermining the prestige and self-confidence of the regime was the war with Japan which was going from bad to worse. In January, Port Arthur – the Russian base in the Far East, which had been besieged for months – surrendered. In February 1905, the Russian army was defeated at Mukden, losing 90,000 men. The Tsar ordered the Baltic fleet to sail halfway round the world to recover the desperate situation but it was ignominiously beaten and sunk by the Japanese navy at the battle of Tsushima on 14 May.

There were major naval mutinies at Sevastopol, Vladivostok and Kronstadt, peaking in June, with the famous mutiny aboard the *Battleship Potemkin* and the associated revolutionary upheavals in the Black Sea port of Odessa. The Tsar scrambled to accept American mediation and a peace treaty was signed with Japan in Portsmouth, Connecticut in August.

Simultaneously the Tsar finally decided to offer some fake concessions to help confuse and demobilise the mass movement. On 6 August he issued a ukase (decree) which announced that a parliament or Duma would be elected in the coming months. Nevertheless he also made it clear that the great mass

of the population, the workers and all but the richest peasants, would be excluded from the electorate. This proposal, which came to be called after the minister in charge of it, the Bulygin Duma, greatly excited the Liberals but was rejected out of hand by the workers' party – the Social Democrats – and the Socialist Revolutionaries (peasant based populists). They determined to boycott any elections and press on with the demand for a constituent assembly. The Bolsheviks stressed that only an armed insurrection and a provisional revolutionary government could convene a constituent assembly.

In August Lenin published a pamphlet – *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. He accepted that the Russian revolution was a bourgeois revolution (one which would open the road to democracy and capitalism), and not a socialist revolution that would enable the working class to commence the construction of a planned economy in place of capitalism. Nevertheless, Lenin added that the bourgeoisie in Russia was anti-revolutionary and would always seek to compromise with Tsarism, using the mass action of the workers and peasants to win reforms but betraying their interests once they had secured themselves a place at the ruling table. The social classes that would carry out the revolution were the working class leading the peasantry, so a provisional revolutionary government would have to be what he called a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". This envisaged a provisional government of social democrats and SR populists.

By contrast the Menshevik leaders – Pavel Axelrod, Yulii Martov and Georgi Plekhanov – argued that because

of the bourgeois character of the revolution, the liberal bourgeoisie had to be pressured into replacing Tsarism. Instead of an alliance with the peasantry, they sought an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. The social democracy, representing the working class, would remain a party of opposition and would not participate in the government.

A third alternative perspective was advanced by Trotsky and Alexander Helphand, known as Parvus. This was known as the permanent revolution, meaning that starting as a bourgeois and democratic revolution, it must pass over to working class and socialist measures and spread on an international level. Trotsky and Parvus argued that the working class must seize power and form a workers' government, relying on the support of the peasantry. Once in power this government would be obliged to make inroads into the economic domination of the capitalists, if only to prevent them sabotaging the revolution. The economic backwardness of Russia meant that there was no question of completing the socialist revolution in Russia. It must be actively spread to the advanced capitalist countries of central and western Europe. Clearly Trotsky and Parvus' perspective and that of Lenin and the Bolsheviks were the closest since both emphasised placing no reliance on the bourgeoisie to overthrow the Tsar and take power, the necessity of an armed uprising by the workers, and the formation of a provisional government which would break up the Tsarist state.

Nevertheless the summer saw a distinct ebbing of the revolutionary tide. Repression increased, and the Tsar moved ahead to impose the "Bulygin Duma". Nicholas even felt secure enough

to go on holiday. But he was relaxing too soon. The most intensive phase of the revolution was about to break out.

The October general strike

Towards the end of September mass strike action broke out again. The combination of the autocracy's police violence and social-democratic agitation increasingly spurred this to a higher, more directly political, level. On 19 September the Moscow printers began a strike for higher wages. On 2 October printers in St Petersburg struck in solidarity. On 22 September clashes occurred with the police – firearms were reportedly used. Spurred by a police attack on a meeting of the bakers' union, delegates of strikers convened a soviet. On the railways, the workers were already set on staging an all-Russian strike to coincide with the opening of the new State Duma which was scheduled to take place in January 1906.

The struggle was subject to numerous ebbs and flows. On 4 and 5 October the Moscow printers returned to work – the St. Petersburg printers followed. Trotsky observed that "everyday life seemed about to return, but that was only how it looked."

Yet over the coming days the strike movement unexpectedly gathered momentum. A railway strike began on 7 October; an all-Russian railway union was finally founded on 8 October. The next day the other lines struck. Moscow-Kiev-Voronezh, Moscow-Brest. The slogans of the railway workers linked economic and political demands: eight-hour day, civil liberties, amnesty, constituent assembly. Along the lines the telegraph spread news of the mounting action.

As the strikes in various sectors gathered force the strikers themselves began to elect delegates. The Mensheviks saw a conference of such representatives as an embodiment of their call for "organs of revolutionary self-government". Trotsky who arrived from Finland about this time had developed the idea of a council of elected delegates to organise the strike actions. Thus at a meeting of about 40 delegates, held in the St Petersburg Technological Institute a soviet was formed on 13 October. The first chair was a lawyer and Menshevik sympathiser, Krustalev-Nosar. But the real political influences on the soviet soon became Trotsky and Parvus. It set out to draw delegates from as many factories and trade unions as possible on the basis of one delegate per 500 workers. By November 562 delegates from 147 factories and 16 trade unions to their places in the soviet. The example was followed in Moscow and 50 other cities and towns, plus a few peasants' and soldiers' soviets.

The Bolshevik faction in St Petersburg was initially cautious about the call for an all out general strike and downright suspicious about the formation of the soviet. It was not until 13 October that the Petersburg Committee of the RSDLP issued a call for a general strike. By then the entire rail network – some 750,000 workers – were on strike. Hundreds of thousands of workers from enterprises of every type ...continued on page 14

Industrial Workers of the World: one big union

Mark Hoskisson looks at the history of the Industrial Workers of the World one hundred years on from its foundation, while Patrick Spackman reviews *Wobblies!* an illustrated history

This summer, 350 British TGWU members in the car industry in Liverpool and Avonmouth went into dispute over a wage cut. They "lost" the keys of thousands of Ford cars they were transporting to the showrooms to meet the mad August rush for new number plates.

Without the keys the cars would not start. Without decent wages the workers couldn't live. They did what they had to. And they won.

They embodied the living spirit of Bill Jones, a figure bequeathed to us by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), better known as the Wobblies.

Who was Bill? According to Wobbly legend Bill was:

"On the firing line, with stink in his clothes, rebellion in his brain, hope in his heart, determination in his eye and direct action in his gnarled fist."

Bill was the nameless worker who made our movement possible. He was theory made flesh. He was a slogan made real. He was the working class.

We can learn a lot about class struggle from the Wobblies that isn't in any books. The Wobblies succeeded in passing on a legacy of class struggle tactics second to none.

But in the end they failed because they didn't understand the relationship between these tactics and the great political tasks that confront the working class, above all the task of organising both militant unions and revolutionary parties as distinct but inter-related organisations. That failure doomed the Wobblies.

Founded 100 years ago in June 1905 at Brands Hall Chicago, the IWW went from being the most promising working class organisation to emerge in the USA into a tiny communist-baiting irrelevance within 20 years.

The initial driving force behind the formation of the IWW was the Western Federation of Miners. This was the union of hard rock miners, the miners who blasted and then clawed copper, silver and iron out of the western mountains.

Men like Big Bill Haywood and Vincent St John led it – men who had fought brutal strikes against the mining barons out in the Wild West. Pay rises might follow a strike, but only if the strikers had enough six-shooters to see off the private gun thugs the bosses hired to kill them.

Such a union was anathema to the American Federation of Labour (AFL) or the American Separation of Labour as the IWW christened it. The AFL, led by Samuel Gompers, was the prototype business union. It excluded blacks and most other non-white races. It largely excluded women and it spurned the unskilled. It was based entirely on skilled workers who took more pride in their craft than they did in their class.

The AFL promoted itself on its ability to avoid strikes. It existed as a base for Gompers' forelock-tugging bureaucracy and as a glorified mutual insurance scheme for the mere 1.5 million workers it organised in 1900 (a time when the immigrant workforce alone – itself a minority of the working class – numbered 11.5 million).

A UNION FOR ALL WORKERS



The AFL's pre-occupation with the "labour aristocracy" and their good relations with their employers led the miners to look for an alternative federation more in tune with its experience of fighting ruthless bosses. It found allies in the German-dominated Brewery Workers Union and the English-dominated Amalgamated Society of Engineers. The miners federation split from the AFL and with the brewery workers and engineers formed the American Labour Union.

Led by the miners federation, which had between 50,000 to 100,000 members, the American Labour Union united with socialist and anarchist activists to convene the June 1905 "Continental Congress of the Working Class" – the founding congress of the IWW.

The congress was a carnival of working class resistance. It rejected craftism in favour of industrial unionism, racism in favour of organising every race and creed, sexism by placing women at the forefront of its organisation. Indeed Lucy Parsons, a black woman, made a keynote speech spelling out that the occupation and sit-down strike should become the weapons of the class struggle in the future.

The IWW's message was simple and direct. As the preamble to the constitution put it: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in

common... Instead of the conservative motto 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work' we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system'. It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism."

But behind these rousing words tensions existed at the conference, tensions between different political ideologies and strategies. The failure to resolve these tensions dogged the entire history of the Wobblies.

Indeed the tensions flared quicker than anyone expected when, not long after the conference, Big Bill Haywood was framed for the murder of Frank Steuener, Idaho's state governor. He was found not guilty in 1906 in a celebrated court case but during the time he spent in jail waiting for the case to come to trial the IWW stagnated.

In the first place this was down to a conflict between the industrial unionists like Vincent St John and the sectarian socialists like Daniel De Leon.

The industrial unionists saw the union itself as the vehicle for society wide change – via the peaceful general strike – and regarded political work, electoral or not, as a diversion.

De Leon favoured a union that was little more than a propaganda society, an industrial arm of his Socialist Labor Party, geared towards increasing its electoral support.

The anarchists, like Lucy Parsons and father Hagerty – who were even more hostile to political action – sided with St John in the dispute.

St John, won a decisive victory over De Leon and began to turn the union around. From 1909 to 1912 its agitators deployed many of the tactics that made the Wobblies famous.

In the Goldfield Nevada strikes they built on the idea of workers' control that was used as such a potent weapon in the Russian Revolution of 1905. St John said of the strike in Nevada: "No committee was ever sent to the employers. The unions adopted the wage scales and regulated the hours. The secretary posted the same on a bulletin board outside the union hall, and it was the law. The employers were forced to come and see the committee."

At the General Electric plant in Shenectady, New York state, the IWW led the first recorded occupation, lasting 65 hours.

In the face of violence by the bosses' thugs or state troopers the IWW issued a simple statement during a strike at the Pressed Steel plant at McKees Rock in Pennsylvania: "For every striker's life you take a trooper's life will be taken." During the same strike 60 workers agreed to scab. The minute they were inside they revealed themselves as Wobblies and persuaded every real scab to strike. Victory soon fol-

lowed, boosting the prestige of the Wobblies in the eyes of militant workers throughout the land.

But despite the ingenuity of their tactics and the colourful characters in their ranks, who put their message to song, like Joe Hill, the IWW did not become a mass organisation. In essence it was a cadre organisation, moving from town to town spreading the revolutionary unionist gospel through propaganda.

But the Wobblies never grew as a result of it. They did not follow up their strikes with solid organising among the masses. Indeed the anarchists did not want to do this. For them the IWW was a vehicle for anarchist propaganda and they were hostile to the idea of a centralised union capable of drawing in non-anarchist workers. In 1910 their drive to decentralise the organisation completely, leaving them free to do as they pleased where they pleased, led to a second major feud in the Wobblies. On returning from a tour of Europe, Big Bill Haywood and St John led a fight to build a proper mass membership centralised union.

Haywood had developed his understanding of industrial unionism through discussions and debate with European syndicalists the reformists of the Socialist Party, who counterposed electoral work to industrial struggle, and the anarchist influenced decentralisers.

Industrial unionism – syndicalism – is a belief that industrial action by the workers united in a single union, could abolish capitalism. You don't need a party and you don't need a programme; you just need a union and you just need a general strike.

The idea was best expressed in verse:

**"If the workers took a notion
They could stop all speeding
trains;**

**Every ship upon the ocean
They can tie with mighty chains
Every wheel in the creation
Every mine and every mill
Fleets and armies of the nation
Will at their command stand
still."**

Against the decentralisers this creed looked good. And Haywood and St John were able to win the dispute inside the IWW. It appeared to emphasise organising workers' action over abstract propaganda. And in 1912, at the Lawrence textile strike in Massachusetts, it came to life. Thousands of workers, speaking around 60 different languages, were organised by the IWW into a mass strike against wage cuts.

The strike was won and Haywood and the industrial unionists won outright control of the union.

But industrial unionism alone was not sufficient. It actually substituted a small cadre group at the top of the IWW for both a mass trade union embracing workers of many different political persuasions and a revolutionary party openly trying to win those workers over to its programme. Instead, the revolutionary minority was content to pass itself off as a union by day in front of the workers, and a party by night in the salons of the intellectuals.

The political ideas of the leaders were kept largely private and each indi-...continued on page 14

Workers history

... 1905 continued from page 12 walked out alongside them. The principle Bolshevik leader then present in St Petersburg, Alexander Bogdanov, was hostile to the idea of a soviet. The Bolsheviks correctly opposed the Mensheviks' idea of creating what they called "organs of self-government" whilst there was still a fully blown Tsarist dictatorship in operation and as an alternative to an armed insurrection. For the Bolsheviks this was central to winning democratic liberties and then it would not be a matter just of self-government but of power over the whole of the country.

Bogdanov and the Petersburg Bolshevik leadership however made a serious mistake. Bogdanov came up with the idea of issuing an ultimatum to the nascent soviet: adopt the party programme of the Social Democrats or convert itself into a purely trade union body. However this wooden schematic approach fell apart the moment the Bolsheviks tried to apply it. It soon became clear to them that if their ultimatum were to be passed an important minority of Socialist Revolutionaries and the majority of non-party delegates might well be driven away from the soviet. The soviet itself did not even vote on the proposal. And the Bolsheviks quickly abandoned it.

Soon Lenin's arrival from abroad in early November buried this ultimatum approach. Lenin attended the soviet and was immediately impressed with both its actual role in leading the general strike and its potential. This quickly led the Bolsheviks to a more proactive and positive attitude to the soviets. Lenin saw that far from being obstacles to it, they could become organs of the insurrection. And if it were success-

ful, they could become the foundation of a provisional government.

In fact the Bolsheviks – and most of the Mensheviks, plus the small group of militants around Trotsky and Parvus – had taken a clear stance in support of the mass strike as a key weapon of working class struggle. At the same time they all opposed the arguments of the anarcho-syndicalists that a general strike would be sufficient to bring down Tsarism and capitalism and install decentralised working class control over the economy. Their view was that a general strike could unite the working class and rouse even its more backward sections to struggle, but that alone it would be insufficient to overthrow the autocracy.

Thus Trotsky wrote: "... a strike brings the army of the revolution to its feet. But neither the one nor the other, in itself, creates a state revolution. The power still has to be snatched from the hands of the old rulers and handed over to the revolution. That is the fundamental task. A general strike only creates the necessary pre-conditions; it is quite inadequate for achieving the task itself."

What months of liberal petitioning and pleading had failed to achieve, the general strike wrung from the Tsar within a matter of days. On 17 October, he issued what became known as the Constitutional Manifesto. In it the frightened Nicholas promised freedom of conscience, speech, assembly, and union; that the lower classes would be able to vote in elections to the Duma; and that no law would take effect without the approval of the Duma. The Tsar followed this initiative with the appointment of the liberal stockbroker Witte as prime minister.

In countless revolutions since, movements have responded to such concessions by entering into negotiations with the regime. Under reformist leadership the working class movement has invariably sacrificed its independence, ceding hegemony of this "democratic revolution" to the bourgeois compromisers, often with the approval of people who call themselves revolu-

Trotsky described the Tsar's Manifesto not as a step towards democracy but as a gambit of a desperate regime and "a prelude to martial law"

tionaries or the "far left". Yet in 1905, the Liberals' joyous reaction to the Tsar's manifesto was not matched by the revolutionary social democrats. They warned the masses of the Tsar's deceit and his real aims – the demobilisation of the movement.

On 17 October, the very day of the Tsar's manifesto, Lenin's article An Equilibrium of Forces stated unambiguously: "If we do not rise to a higher level, if we do not manage to launch an independent offensive, if we do not smash the forces of Tsarism, do not

destroy its actual power, then the revolution will stop half-way, then the bourgeoisie will fool the workers. Rumour has it that a constitution has been decided upon. If that is so, then it follows that the tsar is heeding the lessons of 1848 and other revolutions: he wants to grant a constitution without a constituent assembly, before a constituent assembly, apart from a constituent assembly...this implies ... skipping the revolution deceiving the people..."

Meanwhile in Petersburg Trotsky and the leaders of the new workers' soviet took a similar stance. In a famous speech, he contrasted the Manifesto's words with the repressive actions of the autocracy and described the Manifesto not as a step towards democracy but as a gambit of a desperate regime and "a prelude to martial law".

The Tsar appointed Witte prime minister with responsibility for fuelling illusions in the coming "constitutional" monarchy, but still relied on his police chief in Petersburg, General Trepo, who had posted the infamous order to the troops on the eve of the October general strike "no blank shots: spare no bullets", and his Minister of the Interior P. N. Durnovo. The latter, with his imperial master's approval, unleashed the most reactionary forces across Russia to try to poison the consciousness of the workers with anti-Jewish racism and also savagely attack the revolutionaries and the militant vanguard of the working class.

Who were these forces, who in many ways pre-figured 20th century fascism? The Union of the Russian People united a number of reactionary forces which had been springing up after 1900 as the revolutionary ferment increased. The secret police – the Okhrana – played a

large part in organising and arming bands of thugs, the Black Hundreds. It was the Okhrana who had manufactured the bible of anti-Semitism the Protocols of the Elders of Zion in 1903. The Tsar and the court clique also played a key role in encouraging atrocities against the Jews by launching a furious campaign of pogroms. Lumpenproletarian gangs attacked Jews, students, workers and, in one recorded instance, school students. Hundreds were killed in Kiev, thousands in Odessa.

In Zhitomir, a city with a two-thirds Jewish population, seminary students mounted armed resistance to the pogromists. By the end of October, there had been more than 57 pogroms in cities and towns across Russia. In St Petersburg however the soviet enormously expanded its workers militia. It persuaded gunsmiths to sell large quantities of revolvers, despite police attempts to stop them. Engineering factories produced sabres. Printers stopped the production of pogromist literature. Attempts by the Black Hundreds to march on the Soviet were broken up. No pogrom occurred in St Petersburg.

But the turn of the regime and its arch-reactionary social base to these actions made it clear that no hope or reliance could be based on Witte and the Tsar's constitutional guarantees. The only safety and hope for the working class, the peasants, the oppressed nationalities, the persecuted Jewish population was to go forward to the overthrow of Tsarism. The working class movement, the revolutionary social democrats had now to put the question of the struggle for power at the top of its agenda.

To be continued...

...IWW continued from page 13 vidual strike was a thing in itself. Once it was over the leaders would move on to a new strike, often leaving little behind – the IWW membership in Lawrence simply collapsed after the strike had been won.

The problem with this approach by the industrial unionists was starkly revealed a year later when the Paterson Silk workers' strike in New Jersey was defeated after a heroic struggle.

This defeat prompted a major debate in the IWW with some members expressing the view that the IWW was in danger of becoming a sort of travelling stage show, a touring strike movement, which did not take the general movement forward.

This view was argued by Ben Williams, the editor of the IWW's paper *Solidarity*: "At present we are to the labour movement what the highdiver is to the circus. A sensation, marvellous and ever-thrilling. We give them thrills. We do hair-raising stunts and send the crowd home to wait impatiently for the next sensationalist to come along. As far as making industrial unionism fit the everyday life of the workers, we have failed miserably."

An IWW field organiser was even more forthright: "A spontaneous strike is a spontaneous tragedy unless there is strong local organisation on the spot."

The debate prompted the IWW to change its orientation – but not its industrial unionist creed. In 1914 St John retired to go gold prospecting. Bill Haywood became the general secretary and moved from New York to Chicago. But Haywood decided that industrial centres – with a stable working class – were immune to the industrial unionist doctrine. The answer was to turn west, to the migrant workers who travelled the west and mid-west following the harvests for working, riding the freight trains with their IWW red card as protection.

The results of this turn were very good. Two significant mass unions, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (which was about half black) and the Agricultural Workers Organisation both joined the IWW and were engaged in remarkable organising drives across the

west. But the turn was based on the idea that these workers – the footloose "bindlestiffs" and the rootless hobos – were a vanguard, superior to the industrial working class in the great cities of the USA.

According to *Solidarity* the hobo "embodies the very spirit of the IWW. His cheerful cynicism, his frank and outspoken contempt for most of the conventions of bourgeois society... make him an admirable exemplar of the iconoclastic doctrines of revolutionary unionism. His anomalous position, half industrial slave, half vagabond adventurer, leaves him infinitely less servile than his counterpart in the East."

Haywood had decided the only way to beat Gompers was by ignoring the factory workers and "reaching down into the gutters" to the itinerant workers. It was a return to his early ideals shaped in the west. It was a return to "Hobohemia".

At the point where it could have mounted a serious challenge to the AFL the IWW collapsed because it could not give a clear political answer to the big political question everyone was talking about between 1914 and 1916 – the war and the USA's entry into it.

Of course the IWW were opposed to the war. But they had no answer to what should be done – politically – by the working class to oppose it. They could not do this because it would threaten to blow their organisation apart. That was the price for not relating their politics to the everyday struggles of the workers that they led. The furthest the IWW went was pacifist opposition to the war, again expressed in a classic song:

"I love my flag I do, I do
Which floats upon the breeze
I also love my arms and legs
And neck, and nose and knees
One little shell might spoil them all
Or give them such a twist
They would be of no use to me
I guess I won't enlist"

But the IWW leaders offered no explanation of the cause of war and no political programme that could turn the war into a revolution. They were found wanting because they had

embraced the idea of the vanguard (themselves) but had separated that idea from the notion of a revolutionary party committed to winning over the entire working class.

Haywood said that because personal injury prevented him from enlisting he had no business offering advice on what to do to others.

The state, however, seized the opportunity that US entry into the war offered to move against an organisation that it regarded as both "undesirable" and "un-American". Despite the IWW not breaking any laws, raids were launched against all their offices. Their members were rounded up. Many were killed by reactionary gangs. And the entire leadership was arrested and put on trial for treachery. When the trials came in 1918 Haywood and the other leaders were all given jail sentences, some as long as 20 years.

The IWW was smashed and never recovered. Frank Little was lynched. Big Bill and the Saint were chained together and shipped to Leavenworth for a 20-year stretch (though Haywood eventually made it to the Soviet Union).

After that the IWW went into sharp decline, with anarchists taking over its leadership and by 1924 splits had turned it into a rump organisation.

But despite that failure the IWW's tactics, its indomitable spirit, its courage and humour in the face of the class enemy and its advocacy of industrial unionism – workers' control, rank and file organisation, a fight against craftism, racism and sexism, militant class struggle action – all mark it down as a revolutionary movement.

Its spirit was summed up when, after the 1918 trial, one of the defendants who was given 20 years, Ashleigh, said: "When the verdict came we bore ourselves proudly as kings in the exalted dignity of a cause that knows no defeat – the cause of the working class. Just think of labor, powerful, yet blind, stumbling, fumbling, hesitating – yet slowly awakening to its historic mission: that of fighting on the world-wide arena of the class struggle, for the freedom of the whole world."

They are our Wobblies. And always will be.

WOBBLIES!

Edited by: P Buhle & N Schulman.
Verso 2005, £14.99



One hundred years of the Industrial Workers of the World is celebrated in print with this wonderful graphic history. Illustrated and narrated by a wide range of American artists, including Harvey Pekar of American Splendor fame, the book charts the history of the IWW from its 1905 inception in Chicago to the present day.

I have to say I am a fan of the comic strip and would like to see more in the labour movement. The Writers and Readers publishing co-operative of the late 1970s and 1980s produced the excellent Beginners series that, for me, was an engaging introduction to Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. And of course many strikes, including the Great Miners' strike of 1984-85, have unleashed a multitude of artists from the rank and file, producing everything from bulletins, badges and banners, to stage plays, films and inspirational songs.

In this comprehensive account we find, among many others, the fiery

Mother Jones, the bard of the hobos Joe Hill, the legendary "Big" Bill Haywood.

Bill, speaking at the Wobblies' inaugural conference, says its purpose is, "to confederate the workers of this country into a working class movement because the American Federation of Labor ... does not represent the working class."

The outstanding feature of the Wobblies, on the other hand, was their desire to organise the most downtrodden of the class: the hobos, migrant workers who travelled the States onboard railway freight cars, in search of a dollar.

The story of the Wobblies is one of working class heroism and solidarity. It is a tradition that ran deep in the hearts of the US working class and is a reminder to us of the socialist future of the United States and the whole world. After you've read our article on the IWW, I suggest you run out and get yourself a copy of this inspiring book.

www.workerspower.com

Against Section 9

Dear Workers Power

Around 500 people gathered in Bolton for the first national demonstration against Section 9 and against all deportations, called by the Sukula Family Must Stay campaign.

There were union banners from East London Teachers' Association, South Yorkshire TGWU, Oldham Trades Council, various Unison branches, Manchester NUJ, among others and lots of anti-deportation campaigns including from Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham and Revolution the socialist youth group.

Chanting, "Refugees have the right, here to stay, here to fight!" "No borders, no nations, stop the deportations!" and slogans against Section 9, Blair and Clarke's draconian powers to try to starve out "failed" asylum seekers, the mood of the demo was lively and militant. As we marched into the town square, onlookers joined in the demo and gathered for the rally.

Natalie Mills, secretary of Bolton Metro Unison struck a defiant note saying Unison members who refused to implement section nine would have the full backing of the union.

Janet Alder, sister of Christopher Alder murdered by racist police seven years ago and still fighting for justice, condemned this system as a racist tyranny and applauded the bravery of the Sukulas and others fighting back. "The tide is beginning to turn!" she said to loud cheers, "We can defeat the government on this."

As chair of the campaign and president of Bolton NUT, I called on workers in Unison to continue their stance to refuse to carry out the government's barbaric racist policies and for Unison and other unions to ballot their mem-

bers to support industrial action and for the trade union movement in general to recruit migrant workers. "The Sukulas from the beginning have fought this campaign on the basis of being against all deportations and all immigration controls. Immigration laws kill! We must defeat section nine."

The next step is to organise militants in the trades unions and to get more high profile support in the unions and the left.

This march showed the way forward in beginning to unite the various anti-deportation campaigns. If we can keep up the momentum of this campaign and gather pace on the 22 October demo in Cardiff and the trade union conference organised by the NUJ and FBU for 26 November we can begin to see the way to win.

Jason Travis
Chair of Sukula campaign

Refugees in Bradford

Dear Workers Power

I work for a housing association in the Bradford area. I support refugees who have just received indefinite leave to remain. I want to tell the truth about the way asylum seekers and refugees are treated to counter the lies of the government and media.

The local authorities in Yorkshire & Humberside have an agreement with the government that numbers will not ever be greater than 0.5 per cent of the population. The actual numbers are even less, and getting smaller.

Asylum seekers have no choice over where they live and most are housed in private accommodation. Councils provide a smaller number of properties under a contract with the Home Office and they receive extra funding from the government to do this. The

properties chosen are in poor condition or ones local people do not want to live in. If asylum seekers prove their case and accepted as refugees, they have to find their own housing or sit on the council waiting list just the same as anyone else and as a result many refugees become destitute.

Once refugees receive their letter of permanent status they are left with no support and are given no information on services they need. The major problem refugees are facing at the moment in Bradford is receiving a permanent national insurance number. The current waiting list for receiving a number is 16 weeks! Refugees can receive a temporary national insurance number, which allows them to work but are unable to claim benefits.

Every refugee is entitled to a 30 per cent back payment once they have their status but they have to produce all relevant documentation to prove who they are. I took a client to the social security office in Bradford where he had to attend an interview for his back payment. The adviser asked for all his relevant documentation. But his passport was with the Department of Work and Pensions for his application for benefits. The social security office called DWP, which said that they had sent his passport back to the Home Office because they were questioning whether it was fake! This just shows how refugees are treated like criminals and humiliated.

We need to build the Asylum Lies campaign and talk to people in schools, colleges and workplaces about the racist discrimination that asylum seekers and refugees are facing in society this can be done through building anti-deportation campaigns and anti-racist actions.

Rebecca Smith
Bradford

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

CAPITALISM

Long ago capitalism developed the material and human resources to end poverty and inequality on a world scale. Yet it will not do this. It cannot because of its fundamental features: private ownership of production and the division of the world into competing nation states. The factories, the land, the mines, oil fields and banks are all owned by a tiny handful of billionaires, whose power and wealth is defended by national armies, police forces and security services.

To liberate humanity from hunger, insecurity, war and disease this tiny ruling class must be overthrown. Only the working class has the strength, the centrality to production and the interest to carry this through. Capitalism must be abolished by a workers' revolution, and a society without class divisions, without bureaucratic, military and police repression, must be created. Only in such a society will the last traces of national and racial oppression, the oppression of women, youth, lesbians and gays finally disappear.

The exploiters will resist this revolution with savage ferocity. But their resistance can be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution, disintegrating the forces of repression, the capitalist state.

The capitalist politicians, top civil servants, judges, the police and army chiefs must be swept away – the army and the police force must be smashed and replaced with a militia of the armed working people.

All power must pass into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, directly elected by the workers and poor farmers and subject to instant recall by them. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

For the exploiters it will certainly seem oppressive, indeed they will lose all their wealth and power. But for the all the formerly exploited classes it will be the most democratic society ever seen. And even this state will only be a transitional form on the road to a completely classless and stateless society: communism.

To achieve this, all large-scale production and distribution must be taken into social ownership and be democratically planned. Under workers' control, we could share the work between all able people and every improvement in productivity could be used to reduce the length of the working week. Poverty, social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents could be systematically overcome.

IMPERIALISM

Imperialism is the highest and most violent stage of capitalism. In the imperialist system a few great capitalist powers and corporations exploit billions in all countries and use their vast military machines to crush anyone who resists them.

For this reasons we support all resistance to their invasions and occupations. We demand an end to the occupation of the Iraq and we support the Iraqi people's armed resistance. We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland of Zionist occupation. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all other imperialist pacts.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION

We fight all racism and national oppression and defend refugees and asylum seekers. We demand the opening of the borders, giving all migrants the right to work, social security and full citizenship rights. We fight to deny the fascists any platform for their views and support organised self defence against fascist gangs and racial attacks.

We fight for women's liberation from physical and mental abuse, from bearing the sole or main burden of domestic labour, from suffering sexual exploitation, unequal pay and discrimination at work. Women must have control over their own fertility, including the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.*

Lesbians and gay men must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We must fight the oppression of young people. We demand an end to the harassment of young people by government, state and press. Young workers should get equal pay and the same rights as other workers. Schools and colleges must be run by the representatives of school students, education workers and local working people. We fight for independent revolutionary youth organisations linked to a revolutionary youth international.

DEMOCRACY

We must fight for the abolition of all the many undemocratic elements in Britain today: the monarchy, the House of Lords, the unelected judiciary, the state church. There should be no privilege for any one religion. The rights of all faith groups to practice their religion must be protected but all religious schools must be abolished. All blasphemy laws must be abolished and restrictions on the right to criticise religion opposed.

TRADE UNIONS

We must fight the privileged officials in the trade unions who sell out our struggles. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice and earn the no more than average pay of their members. Rank and file unionists must form a movement in and across all unions to dissolve the trade union bureaucracy.

REFORM AND REVOLUTION

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist actions of the Labour Party in government and in opposition. Labour, for all its organised links to the trade unions, is a capitalist party in its programme, and leadership. It is a bourgeois workers party.

To lead a social revolution the working class needs a new type of party which unites its most conscious and active militants, giving a lead in the trade unions and other mass organisations in their day to day struggles and directing them towards the social revolution. For this purpose an action programme of transitional demands is essential.

STALINISM

For decades Stalinism was wrongly described as Communism, has betrayed the working class. It established a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite. It blocked the road to democratic planning and socialism. This led eventually to the collapse of the USSR and other so-called socialist states.

Where Stalinist states survive – such as Cuba and North Korea – they must still be defended unconditionally against imperialist blockade, attack and the restoration of capitalism. But without a political revolution of the workers and the establishment of workers' council democracy they too will eventually collapse. The theory that you can build 'socialism in one country' has been plainly falsified by collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states.

We must reject the strategic legacy of Stalinism: 'democratic alliances', 'popular' fronts with capitalist parties or a 'democratic stage' which obliges the working class to renounce the struggle for power in the here and now. In every country, the workers must organise independently and fight to come to the head of the struggle. In the age of imperialism and globalisation only an international, global revolution and permanent (i.e. uninterrupted) revolution can consign capitalism to history.

THE INTERNATIONAL

With the goal of revolution and communism, advancing along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International – a workers' party organised across national boundaries to fight for world revolution.

If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist – join us!

Playing with Politics?

Rachel Hodgins reviews *Playing with Fire* by David Edgar, National Theatre to 21 October

The past few years have seen a welcome revival of political theatre in Britain. David Edgar started his career as one of a generation of political playwrights and, unlike many of his contemporaries of 30 years ago, has been producing political drama since then.

Edgar's *Destiny* (1976) dealt with the rise of the far-right and sought to expose the National Front as a fascist organisation. *Playing with Fire* covers some of the same ground 30 years on, but this time Edgar has a more complicated message to convey about the state of the nation.

The play opens as New Labour apparatchik Alex Clifton – first politicised by Live Aid and with a history of feminist activism – is dispatched up to the fictional borough of Wyverdale to introduce performance indicators and diversity criteria to a solidly Old Labour, and failing, council. Edgar makes good use of the scope for humour in the ensuing clash of ideas, and it isn't until the end of the first act that the real dangers of the incompetence of the Labour group, and the cuts and targeted spending they are forced to implement, become apparent. When a young white man is killed in a fight in an Asian area, the council's planned "celebrations of faiths" on St George's day turns into a race riot.

Edgar's perspective on what happens is unusual and sometimes frustrating – when the violence erupts, the audience has spent most of its time watching meetings

about New Labour local government reform. The second act doesn't bring us much closer to an understanding. Our information comes from the soul searching of the councillors and their horrified adviser, and from the testimony of many of the characters at the subsequent inquiry.

"Britannia", a BNP-like party that wins two councillors after the riots, blames showy spending of EU grants on Asian areas. A muslim community elder blames a health project for white prostitutes set up on a mainly Asian estate, and the racial abuse suffered at the hands of local football fans. Alex blames herself, the Labour council leader despairs of everything he has ever done in politics. The audience is left piecing together what has gone on off-stage from these subjective and half formed impressions.

Edgar's understanding of how Wyverdale – and Burnley, and Oldham – got to the point of such racial segregation and hostility is also unclear. When we see glimpses of Wyverdale's citizens they appear in the first act as jovial stereotypes and in the second as groups divided by insubstantial cultural categorisations and united by a number of common needs. Edgar is clearly not a fan of identity politics. But while cross-cutting racial and gender oppressions come in for some interesting scrutiny in several scenes, the issue of class is left to the Labour Council leader to refer to in the most oblique and emotive

of speeches about public funding and the days when politicians stayed within range of the people their decisions were affecting.

New Labour gets an easy ride, too. Apart from some gentle teasing in the first act and some sympathy-eliciting hand-wringing in the second, Alex and her minister boss are portrayed as genuine people trying to make Wyverdale perform better for its own good. Edgar's decision not to look at the international or even the national context for what is happening in this one borough means that there can be no real analysis of where Alex's misguided targets have come from. Racial tensions can only be explained by individual incidents on the estates and a local segregationist housing policy. "The cause that matters is the cause you can address", repeat Alex and her minister, and Edgar seems to have decided to keep the field of his search for causes to a manageable size.

Playing with Fire is clever and entertaining. Anyone working in or near local government will recognise that Edgar has managed to create a very watchable drama about the results of the past few decades of reforms.

In the current context, when the bombings in London, an increasingly racist political and media debate about citizenship, and more racist asylum policies have made his subject matter more and more relevant, *Playing with Fire* seems to skirt around the edges of the debate.

Iraq: imperialism's bloodbath

By Keith Spencer

“A difficult day in Basra, but we have to put this behind us and move on.” So said Brigadier John Lorimer, one of the officers in charge of British troops occupying southern Iraq.

On this particular difficult day, 20 September, two British special forces soldiers were arrested in civilian clothes in the possession of explosives and detonators. The British sent 13 warrior tanks to break the two soldiers out of jail – they were met by a large hostile crowd of 2,000 people who fire bombed eight of the tanks.

The sight of tanks and soldiers in flames on TV brought a dose reality into peoples homes, cutting through the complacent stories of “stability” in British controlled Iraq. It revealed that the British strategy for ruling in the south is breaking down.

Over the past two years the British occupying forces have promoted various Islamic clerics to positions of power and incorporated their militias into the local security forces. In March, Islamist militia-men, the al-Mahdi Army, attacked women students at Basra university for not being dressed appropriately and mixing with men – the British troops did nothing. This year there has been wave of assassinations around Basra of former Baathists, journalists and secularists: some reports putting the numbers killed as high as 1,000.

This wave of killings and beatings has occurred because the British army has been able to maintain its “control” over Basra only by allowing the more conservative sectarian, religious militias to exercise control in the city. These forces are now turning their attention to the British army.

In the rest of the country the situation is even worse. In one day in mid-September several suicide bombs killed 150 people and left 500 injured. US forces cower in their forts at night and when they leave, they suffer growing casualties from roadside bombs. Whole cities are taken over by insurgents and then are subject to massive bombing raids and joint assault by US forces and its puppet Iraqi army.

The attacks on Fallujah, Sumara and Tal Afar and Sadah have displaced hundreds of thousands. Tens of thousands of civilians have been slaughtered, thousands more rounded up and tor-



The carnage after a suicide bombing in Baghdad

ture or disappeared by the Iraqi army and police – dominated by the Shia Badr militia and the Kurdish Pesh Murga. It is little wonder that there is a constant stream of recruits for the resistance and the suicide bombers.

As the mayhem and deaths continue, Iraq goes to the polls on 15 October to vote on a new constitution – the latest “democratic milestone” that is supposed to turn the occupation and country around.

Many Sunnis in particular the resistance, see the constitution and its devolved federal structure as a US plot to weaken, Iraq and further impoverish the Sunnis, as oil revenues are hived off to the Kurdish and Shia areas.

Under the constitution the federal government will control foreign and fiscal policy but the regions will control everything else including local militias, laws, newly discovered oil and so on. The Kurdish area, which is already de facto autonomous, will even have its own supreme court as it rejected clerics sitting on the all Iraqi supreme court. It is

a fraudulent federalism however – the great majority of the Kurds want self-determination and independence but the US has vetoed this option.

It is not the case that the Kurds and Shias support the constitution and the Sunnis reject it. The Islamic Party, a Sunni organisation, supports it while followers of Moqtada al Sadr have had 100,000 strong demonstrations in Baghdad against the constitution, seeing it as a blow to the unity of Iraq.

For women the constitution is a further backward step. It supposedly offers a choice of using secular or religious laws in disputes such as with partners and families. However it really is no choice as under Islamic law a woman counts as half of a man, and it is likely that most men would choose Islamic law. Voting for the constitution will also enshrine all the US “laws” on privatisation passed when Paul Bremer the US envoy was in charge.

As the Sunni areas are going to provide the main opposition to the constitution it is no accident that it is pre-

cisely these areas that are being bombed and assaulted daily at the moment. Anywhere between 200,00 and 300,000 people are now displaced refugees in the central Sunni triangle. Having a genuine referendum is clearly laughable in the circumstances that exist in Iraq today yet will undoubtedly be trumpeted as a “democratic triumph”.

THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

The US antiwar movement is stronger than ever. On the 24 September 300,000 marched in Washington and other cities. The ongoing violence has exposed the lies about “progress in Iraq”. The growing number of deaths and injuries of US soldiers and the necessity of drafting of the National Guard for long periods has left the Bush strategy in Iraq looking threadbare.

Bush now faces a vibrant antiwar movement and a country where two-thirds of the population want the troops out now or as soon as possible. Opposi-

tion to the war has been fuelled by Bush's crass insensitivity to soldiers' families: he recently ended a ceremony of handing medallions to the mothers of soldiers killed in Iraq by saying “Now, don't go and sell them on e-bay.”

In contrast the UK the antiwar movement is at a low ebb. The union leaders joined with the Labour leadership to ensure that Iraq disappeared from the Labour Party conference agenda. A march through London on the 24 September attracted around 30,000 people – the smallest of the 12 demonstrations against the war and occupation.

What can be done to rebuild the movement in Britain? It cannot be done, as the SWP and Stop the War seems to think, by going from one demo to the next. The anti-war movement must re-build local groups as well as networks within the unions. It must start pushing for action such as civil disobedience, direct action and strikes and occupations to get the troops out. It must campaign in defence of civil liberties and against the anti-terror laws being used to frighten the Asian communities off the streets. The movement needs a strategy that can mobilise people for effective action against the occupation and it needs to be run democratically.

Stop the War should drop its shameful equivocation on calling for the immediate withdrawal of the troops. It should campaign against the idea, pushed by Labour lefts and the Liberal Democrats, that the UN should replace one set of occupying troops by another, this time “Muslim force”. The Iraqi people must settle their own problems free of outside interference and occupation.

Lastly, the antiwar movement must unconditionally support the resistance fighting to drive out the occupiers, while reserving the right to criticise and condemn acts which undermine the unity of the resistance – the sectarian killings and market bombings. If we want a progressive outcome to the struggle in Iraq then we should fight for socialists and trade unionists to lead the resistance, both militarily and by other means like strikes and occupations, as the southern oil workers have done on occasion. The antiwar movement should build links with Iraqi organisations that oppose the occupation to aid this process.

Only the people of Iraq can decide their own future, one that if it is to be free of imperialist domination has to be a revolutionary and socialist Iraq.

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.

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

Tel: 020 7820 1363

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