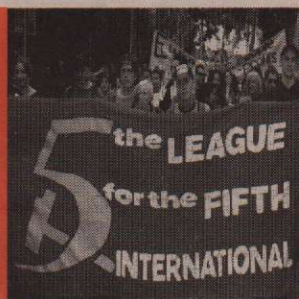


Can Respect  
be reformed?  
page 5



A split in the  
League for  
the Fifth  
International  
pages 6 & 7



Austria:  
Vienna was  
anti-Bush-city!  
page 8



## Profit is the cancer eating the NHS

# Rip it out!

**“A**n NHS Burning and in Chaos” is how the Keep Our NHS Public Campaign describes the situation facing staff and patients at hospitals up and down the country. As we go into the summer even more cuts programmes are underway.

- In Lincolnshire £50 million of cuts have led to ward closures at four hospitals
- In Surrey and Sussex the district auditor's report says, “the entire health economy is at risk”
- In Sheffield hospitals are being forced to make cuts of £20 million in services, already resulting in job cuts.

We could go on and on, listing stories like this. Across the NHS local trusts are cutting back staff and services to the detriment of consumers (see [www.keepournhspublic.com](http://www.keepournhspublic.com) for more information).

What's worse is that this is only the beginning. At the moment it is mainly indebted trusts that are being forced to cut back. But many more will have to make cuts to balance books for 2006-07. The current round of job losses look like being just the tip of the iceberg, with as many as 100,000 threatened. This is the equivalent of a staggering one in ten NHS workers.

How could this all have happened? After all, profits are up, the economy is growing, and government spending on the health service is at record levels.

To coin a phrase: It's Labour stupid! This government is letting the market rip in the NHS.

Patricia Hewitt, the Health Secretary, told every NHS Trust that it had to balance the books this year and every year. Hospitals, she said, should put financial management before patient care.

Hewitt and her government are driven by an ideology - neoliberalism - that means health care should not be a public service, but something that has a market value. They are slowly dismantling the NHS, planned and run on the basis of need, in favour of a series of commodities, to be bought and sold on the market at a profit.

This process has two stages.

- Existing NHS hospital and primary care (GPs) trusts are required to meet targets in order to receive funding, thus creating competition between trusts.

- At the same time, government money is diverted out of the NHS into the growing private sector, with its profit margins guaranteed by the government.

With the market bandwagon underway, the direction of development is clear: NHS trusts will not be able to compete with the heavily subsidised private sector; so the privateers will expand; and billions in public money will be channelled into their profit.

The consequence for healthworkers and patients is equally clear.

Huge job cuts are presented as “creative destruction”, a term coined first by the IMF and World Bank, to justify job losses in the public sector, on the basis that private companies would create new jobs.

### The fight back has begun

Demonstrations are occurring almost every week now against hospital closures and job cuts. From Manchester to Maidstone, from Ayrshire to Whipps Cross, thousands are turning out, disgusted that the NHS is making cuts in the middle of an economic boom.

As we go to press, Leicester healthworkers and community activists combined are planning to march directly on Patricia Hewitt's office on 8 July.

Healthworkers are also fighting back. At this year's Unison conference NHS trade unionists called an organising conference to co-ordinate industrial action. On 19-20 July, elected Unison health sector leaders plan to name the day for a national demo and day of action.

Strike action, supported by community demonstrations and solidarity from other unions and youth can stop the current round of cuts. By linking up nationally, the campaigns can force the government to retreat.

But to stop these cuts coming back



year after year, we need to rip the cancer from the organism: nationalise the hospital buildings, the private treatment centres and the drug companies, with no compensation to the profiteers, and place them under the control of the workers and community they serve.

Then we can democratically plan a modern health service to meet everyone's needs. How shall we pay for it? By taxing the rich and the mega-corporations!

The problem we all face in bringing this strategy to fruition is that Labour, Liberal Democrats and Tories are all dead set against it.

We need a real workers' government that fights for the interests of our class, just as the mainstream parties fight for the bosses' interests. And for that we need to break the unions - like Unison, which organises healthworkers - away from their craven support for Labour, and force them to form a new workers party.

### Where has all the money gone?

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown like to boast they have doubled NHS spending since 1997. So where has all the money gone

The Wanless Report estimated that underspending between 1972 and 1998 meant that a whopping £220 billion extra money was needed just to bring the service up to scratch.

Gordon Brown also insisted on maintaining Tory spending limits between 1997 and 2000. He started as he was to continue: by putting business interests first, workers' needs last.

Since then, Brown has forced all new hospital building to be managed through the Private Finance Initiative. PFI forces the NHS to borrow money

at commercial rates, rather than cheaper, government rates, to hand over the running of the building to private firms (who then make a packet out of leasing space to WH Smiths and McDonald, and cutting wages), and then to lease it back over a 40 year period, after which the hospital belongs not to the NHS, but to the privateers.

This is like all of us paying a 40-year mortgage, then losing the house! Meanwhile, the NHS drug bill have risen rapidly - by a whopping 40 per cent, as the pharmaceutical giants demand their cut.

No wonder the hospitals are financially sick. The NHS is keeping all these companies in the best of health.

## FOR A NEW WORKERS PARTY

## Thousands march against terror raid

By Peter Main

**T**wo thousand people marched through the streets of Forest Gate on 18 June in protest at the police raid last month and to show support for the families concerned. The march stopped briefly outside the two houses, which armed police broke into the middle of the night of 2 June, before going on to the local police station and then to a final rally.

Among the speakers at the rally was Abul Koyair, one of the two brothers arrested and held for eight days before being released without either charge or explanation. His brother, Abdul, was unable to attend because he still has not recovered from being shot by the police during the raid.

Several speakers, including the cousins of Jean Charles de Menezes, who was shot on an underground train at Stockwell station by police last July, pointed to the similarities in both cases: the same racist assumptions, the same willingness to act on unreliable "intelligence", the same shoot-first-ask-questions-later approach, and the same leaking of completely false information to the media, which are only too happy to spread stories justifying police actions.

George Galloway, Respect MP for nearby Bethnal Green, got a predictably enthusiastic reception when he called on the police to take action against a known gang of political terrorists, known as the Labour Government, who were guilty of the deaths of hundreds of thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan. He called for unity between all the forces opposed to the war.

The cheering was just as loud for Andrew Murray, from the Stop the War Coalition, when he outlined three measures, which would successfully combat terrorism: withdrawal from Afghanistan, withdrawal from Iraq, and solidarity with the Palestinian people. He went on to stress the need for unity between Muslims and non-Muslims to prevent government divide and rule.

In terms of audience participation, however, there was nothing to equal the barrage of booing and whistling which met Stephen Timms, the local Labour MP and a cabinet minister at the Treasury. He regretted the "difficulties" which the families and the local community had had to face and praised the way they had conducted themselves. He appealed for understanding of the "delicate job the police have to do".

But the demonstrators, remembering the brutality shown by the 250 armed police who wrecked the two houses in the course of their raid, were not placated by his words, but angered by his lack of understanding of the prejudice that the his party is whipping



up against the Muslim community.

A different note was sounded by the father of Babar Ahmad, who was also arrested in a night time raid, beaten up and held for questioning for days before being released without charges. Babar has since been re-arrested and is now being held in prison awaiting the hearing of an extradition order from the United States, based on "intelligence", which neither he nor his lawyers are

allowed to see.

His message, relayed from prison by his father, was one of congratulations to the brothers for insisting on speaking out against their treatment by the police and to the demonstrators for refusing to keep quiet and accept police excuses. He urged the demonstrators to maintain protests and not listen to those, including within the Muslim community, who would advise them to

be quiet and to co-operate with the government and police.

This clear-sighted and brave message of defiance brought applause and cheering from the crowd. Brushing aside the calls for some vague "unity", it got to the heart of the matter: unity for what and against whom? Both the government and the security forces, including the Metropolitan Police, realise that the Forest Gate raid was a

complete disaster for them.

And not just in "public relations" terms. Whatever their personal or institutional attitudes, it has dawned on them that antagonising the Muslim and other oppressed communities is counterproductive.

Instead of the ignorant and racist attitude, which assumed that it was necessary to mobilise 250 armed police - a force capable of holding down an entire district - in order to arrest two men, they are now trying to develop more sophisticated tactics. These will include moves to incorporate "community leaders" into police planning for future raids.

In the short term, the government hopes this will give them a means of demobilising any opposition to their rotten regime. In the longer term, they want to create a network of reliable informers against those, who are opposed to government policy. By working through "respectable" figures, such as businessmen, religious leaders and community activists, they hope to boost such people's prestige and ability to control more radical elements - above all the young people - within their communities.

Because of the social role of religion and the inevitable development of class divisions within communities, there will always be people willing to play such a role. In Forest Gate this was already apparent at the first protest meeting called by Respect just a few days after the police raid. When Yvonne Ridley, a prominent Respect campaigner, called for a policy of non-cooperation with the police, she was immediately contradicted by Hanif Abdulmuhit - who sits on Newham Council for Respect!

Unity between different communities and different political currents is an obvious advantage for all involved, providing they are clear what they are united about. All the speakers, who pointed to the Labour government's record in the Middle East as the major cause of terrorism, were absolutely right. But that means there can be no collaboration with the state that is waging that war and no unity with those who want to collaborate.

Instead, what we need is to unite all those who agree on the need for a continuous campaign of mass mobilisations against the government and its policies, a campaign on a scale that can force the government to back down. Such a campaign would also be the most powerful argument against those few people, who are so outraged at government policy that they consider resorting to terrorism, in the mistaken belief that explosions in British cities could persuade Blair and company to change course.

## Blair targets Muslims

**J**ust when you thought that the government would just have to conclude that storming a family's home, shooting an innocent man, locking up the family and spreading vicious rumours about them in the press was really a step too far, Blair turns around and attacks the whole Muslim community for not doing enough to make his job as a warmonger easier.

Under the guise of a cross-examination by the Commons liaison committee, Blair has taken aim at the Muslim community. In his speech, he blamed the community leaders for not preventing terrorism and for the "false sense of grievance" that Muslims feel living with the heavy hand of the state targeting them on the street, in school, at work and now in their homes. His main argument is that Muslim leaders sympathise too much with these grievances - an attitude that ensured the extremists would never be

defeated, he says - and then encouraged the moderate leaders to inform on the more radical Muslims.

What Blair doesn't mention is that of more than 500 people arrested under the Terrorism Act since September 11, 2001, four-fifths have been released without charge. And most of the others still held have not had access to proper legal representation, access to the evidence or to a fair trial.

To wage a war against the "enemy within", Blair is consciously using the old divide and conquer tactic to drive a wedge between the constituent parts of a community already under siege. He is attempting to build up an army of undercover police informants to sow mistrust, fear and despair that will eventually tear the community apart. He is trying to whip up even greater racism within the wider British population. In a recent poll, more than half of all

Muslims, 52 per cent, said they felt people were 'more suspicious' of them since the 7/7 bombings. Nearly a third said they or members of their family had experienced hostility from non-Muslims since "because of their religion".

Everyone in Britain, Muslim and non-Muslim, must stand shoulder to shoulder against Blair's attacks on the Muslim community. We must point the finger of blame for terrorism across the globe on the policies of Blair and his cohorts in the Labour Party - they are the murderers of ten of thousands of innocent civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must build up self-defence within our communities and counter every attack by the police, as well as counter attempts by the state and the press to demonise Muslims. In order to win, we will have to use strikes and occupations to fight for an end to the occupation and for troops out now.

## Imperial College bans wearing the veil

Joy MacReady

**I**mperial College's decision to ban women from wearing the niqab is an unambiguous example of the Islamophobia fostered by Bush and Blair's war against terrorism. The ban on the veil and half veil was announced suddenly last autumn on grounds of preventing terrorism and theft - without any proof that this measure will have any affect on either. The July bombers, as one student pointed out, did not try to hide their identity.

This act must be seen in the wider context of state racism against a sizeable Muslim minority in Britain. In Britain, there are close to two million Muslims. The international situation in which the Muslim religion is being stigma-

tised as harbouring terrorism and being associated with extremism and fundamentalism is intensifying this retreat into a religion seen as under attack.

In the face of growing social deprivation, exclusion and outright racism, religious identity is increasingly a reference point for a population in search of its place within a society that offers little opportunity for integration.

It is certainly true that many young women are forced to wear headscarves by parental and peer pressure; it is also true that some young women also choose freely to cover their head as an identification with their religion. If women choose to wear the niqab, this is their right and should be defended. If female students express the desire to rebel against the headscarf and parental

authority, then the school and the authorities should certainly provide support and protection against reprisals, from parents and peers, just as socialists insist society protects young people against forced marriages and other reactionary cultural practices.

But banning the headscarf will not liberate these young women nor take the struggle for secular education forward. On the contrary, it will reinforce the role of Islam in their lives. Expelling students who refuse to remove their headscarf will lead to them being excluded from secular education which can challenge their religious beliefs. It will also hand an enormous weapon to the religious fundamentalists who would pose as the defenders of religious rights and individual liberties

against authoritarians. It will accelerate a drive towards private schools religiously, racially and sexually segregated, just what the right and fundamentalists want.

As socialists, we demand a secular education system which means removing religion from the curriculum (abolition of religious education) and from any official role in the school/college e.g. a ban on school religious services, on religiously funded or influenced advice services, the public display of crosses in school classrooms, etc.

It does not mean the banning of private expressions of religion in school. Indeed we defend these rights as a matter of individual liberty, for example the right of Sikhs to wear turbans, Jews to wear skullcaps, Muslims to wear the

headscarf.

Socialists are in favour of the self-emancipation of the oppressed. Young women forced to wear the veil must be supported in their struggle for liberation by concrete means within schools, colleges and communities by setting up support networks.

Opposing the ban does not mean that socialists are indifferent to young women who choose to wear the headscarf. We must convince them to break free from this symbol of oppression, as part of a wider struggle to challenge the sexual oppression inherent in organised religion. But this can only be achieved through debate and discussion on the nature of religion within and outside the classroom, not by imposed bans.

## In defence of democratic centralism

Workers Power has suffered an unprincipled split (see pages 6 and 7). Plans for a split were made behind the backs of the majority of Workers Power and the overwhelming majority of the League for the Fifth International. Why the attempt to take their own comrades by surprise? Why the attempt to wreck the League's forthcoming congress? Quite simply because the comrades were tired and demoralised by having lost a long political battle. They remained a minority despite all their efforts.

The split - the first serious one in our long history - was also unprincipled because it was national in character. The splitters were clearly frightened of the judgement of our international congress. They did not dare to go to it.

Already, free from our influence, the minority is ditching positions Workers Power has held since its foundation. In a direct capitulation to the outlook of the Weekly Worker and the ISG, some of our ex member are now arguing that individuals and minorities should have the right to argue different lines from that of the majority - even to recruit people to minority positions. This centrist position, condemned by Leon Trotsky, betrays their individualistic outlook.

A communist, speaking in public on political questions, is not exercising her or his "free spirit". We leave that to anarchists and liberals. We regard arguing for a democratically agreed policy as an elementary duty - even if we, as individuals, disagree with it. Why? Because we retain perfect freedom to persuade our organisation to change its mind. Meanwhile, the test of practice is what is needed, not just the test of discussion. If individuals just say and do what they want, if only the majority really carry out the line, how can this test of action ever take place?

Of course an organisation itself has the right to publicise differences of opinion within its ranks to the outside world if it believes this will help build that organisation's influence. But a Leninist organisation is a combat organisation and makes no such liberal promises to its members. It does promise internal democracy to arrive at decisions and then unity in action - and part of that action is arguing, agitating for the policy of the organisation in the working class and in political life. Of course a mass party, with hundreds of thousands of activists, constantly able to turn its words into mass action can and must communicate internal debate in its daily papers.

But, in Trotsky's words, "the homogeneity and cohesion of a revolutionary propaganda organisation must be incomparably greater than that of a mass party" and cannot "admit a purely fictitious unity under the cover of which two independent organisations address the external world with different theories, different programmes, different slogans, and different organisational principles. Under these conditions an open split would be a thousand times preferable to such a hypocritical unity." (In Defence of Marxism p 161)

Some of the splitters once knew this, and wrote like this in Workers Power.

But the real question we will pose to the splitters is what is the programme you deserted us for? Will they "return" to total and unvarying support for Labour? Will others demand a pick-and-mix policy, based on "keeping out the BNP" or relating to local supporters of "good" Left Labourites? Some are quite phobic about Respect, while others sought to trim our criticisms of it. A few actually supported Workers Power's line of calling for a new workers party - but "only in the RMT and FBU"!

As Trotsky said after a similar unprincipled split, "Your political passports comrades, and not forged ones please" - or stolen ones too, we might add!

Workers Power and the League for the Fifth International will continue to fight for its programme and policies. We believe that were in an extended period of instability and mounting levels of struggle on a world scale. The organisations of the working class and the oppressed are repeatedly thrown into struggle.

A crisis of leadership is visible in mass organisations and left groups alike. What is needed is to fight for revolutionary clarity right in the heart of those forces, nationally and internationally, that are fighting neoliberalism and imperialism, those who are trying to form new workers parties or to create fighting formations in the unions.

That is what Workers Power had done for three decades and will continue to do. In spite of the splitters and deserters.

# Bring on the strike ballot and vote yes!

By a postal worker

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Royal Mail have been locked in negotiations for the last month, without resolving the dispute over pay. On the contrary, Royal Mail seems to have resorted to diktat and ignoring the union. So it was announced at the end of June that a ballot would go ahead for a national strike: the first in ten years, if it sees a solid yes vote.

Papers were to go out to members 10 July unless Royal Mail came forward with significant concessions. As we go to press, the CWU has postponed the ballot for a second time, this time claiming an improved offer has been made and is being studied. Ominously, however, the details have not been announced.

This is not good enough. A massive yes vote is what we need in every office and mail centre, in order to show Royal Mail we're serious about these issues and defending our union's position. Otherwise, the bosses can simply make a few small concessions and keep the union negotiators talking, knowing that we're going nowhere.

CWU leaders are in danger of losing momentum and confusing members with on-off negotiations, maybe even dropping the ballot for some measly concessions. After coming this far, and given the huge attacks facing postal workers, union members need to democratically control the ballot and the strike itself to avoid such a sell out.

Dangers ahead...

Delegates voted unanimously for a strike ballot at May's CWU national conference, in response to Royal Mail's provocative actions. In the two months preceding conference, management embarked on a series of attacks to sideline our union, first holding a referendum, over the CWU's head, on an employee share scheme - the first step towards privatisation - and then imposing a joke pay offer of 2.9 per cent after breaking off negotiations. This is in fact a pay cut!

So we get a measly £9 a week, while Royal Mail CEO Adam Crozier got a £900 a week pay increase, and top Directors received bonuses of over a million quid each! While we're sweating off the pounds, hauling bags of mail in the summer heat, the fat cats keep getting fatter.

Beyond these first probing attacks, bigger ones are in the pipeline. In the last six months, Royal Mail's real agenda has leaked out, centred on imposing the "Dutch model" that its huge multinational archrival TNT uses in Holland. This will see machines sorting mail, leading to 40,000 job cuts, the closure of up to half of the mail centres, and a massive conversion of full-time posts to part-time jobs. All of this imposed, if necessary.

And some local areas Royal Mail has tried to get delivery staff to cover vacant duties (for instance, those of people on holiday) at no extra cost, claiming the summer months are lighter in mail. This clearly points to the introduction of team working and annualised hours (making us do short summer shifts but long winter shifts to cut down on overtime). This "flexibility" will increase profits at our cost.

Behind all of this lies the hidden goal of New Labour and Chairman Allan Leighton: the full-scale privatisation of the Royal Mail and the Post Office, where six branches are already being franchised out to WH Smith.

Royal Mail has tried to go round the union to test the water and see whether

we will resist. These unilateral actions, where Leighton and co. go straight to the workers instead of through the union, or impose changes over its head, are the face of the future. They will pick up in pace and scale if we don't smack them back down. A national strike, one that hits Royal Mail hard, is the way to do that.

... and meeting the challenge

The CWU has just issued a pamphlet to members, "Shaping Your Future", to explain the issues behind the ballot with the latest copy of Voice: "It's about stopping Royal Mail imposing their plans without union agreement. Negotiation and agreement must replace diktat and imposition." As speaker after speaker at conference said, the company's actions are tantamount to creeping derecognition.

The union has stressed that Royal Mail must negotiate on all issues affecting our future - including jobs and pay. This includes meeting the average wage of £400 a week and putting forward the union policy of the 35 hour week, with no loss of pay, in order to reap the benefits of machine sorting.

That's excellent - leaders like Billy Hayes and Dave Ward went silent on the 35 hour week in the first six months of 2006, when we faced Royal Mail's first wave of cuts. But, even if we won a 35-hour week, there could still be up to 20,000 jobs lost under the "Dutch Model".

Also the union has accepted the open postal market. Rather than fighting to restore the monopoly of Royal Mail and

nationalise the operations of private firms, the union merely sees Royal Mail's future as the most efficient, competitive postal company of many. As long as the market is open, these attacks will continue; the Dutch Model is their natural end point. Our goal needs to be to link the strike to the wider struggle to fight privatisation and close the postal market.

Royal Mail is trying it on with this insulting pay offer, because it's not yet ready to impose the Dutch model. That's why CWU members should take management by surprise - by launching an all-out indefinite strike to win the following demands:

- For £400 a week basic
- For an immediate 35 hour week with no loss of pay
- Close the postal market; nationalise the private mail companies with no loss of pay
- Abolish Postcomm; for workers control over jobs and conditions.

If postal workers are approached with a fight worth winning, they can be persuaded to make the sacrifices needed for victory. There are plenty of examples in recent years of unofficial wildcat strikes winning after weeks on the picket line, most recently in Belfast and the midlands. Imagine the effect we could have with full union backing and simultaneous action across the country. Royal Mail couldn't fly in managers from across the country to scab on the dispute if it's nationwide.

## Rank and file control

The union has set up steering groups at branch, region and national level, but these remain undemocratic. At branch and regional level many, if not all of the steering groups are made up of annually elected area reps and officials, not unit reps who are instantly recallable by mass meetings. And at the top, the Postal Executive controls the negotiations, without any real accountability.

So, when they dropped the timetable for the ballot and gave Royal Mail one week - and then another - to talk about it, postal workers had no idea what was going on. Two paragraphs on the CWU website indicated that a new offer had been made, but not what it was. If the threat of the ballot had drawn a better offer, then surely that would be a good reason to continue with it and get them to improve it again. If it's a crap offer, then we should speed up the ballot. Either way, why were we kept in the dark?

This, along with bureaucratic sell-outs of members' interests in the recent pensions dispute in unions such as the PCS and Unison, show that it is necessary for rank and file union members to control the strike. The steering groups should be made up of accountable and recallable reps, based in the workplaces, and control all negotiations along with the form the strike takes.

## Journal of the League for the Fifth International OUT NOW!

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

Globalisation: The contradictions of late capitalism

# Respect: SWP makes a turn to the trade union leaders

Respect's 16 new councillors, elected last May, were all Muslim activists. Trade union and socialist candidates fared less well. The coalition's call for a union conference is designed to correct this imbalance but, asks *Jeremy Dewar*, will it solve the crisis of working class leadership?

Respect has launched a call for an open conference, "Organising for fighting unions" on Saturday 11th November. Its agenda includes support for the TUC's Trade Union Freedom Bill, opposition to the attacks on pensions and privatisation, and the crisis of working class political representation. The Socialist Workers Party, which is behind the initiative, believes it could become the biggest meeting of union activists for many years.

Bob Crow, Mark Serwotka, Matt Wrack and Paul Mackney, general secretaries of the RMT (rail), PCS (civil service), FBU (firefighters) and UCU (lecturers) unions respectively, openly support the conference, as does Tony Kearns, deputy general secretary of the CWU (post and telecoms). Five hundred leading activists and lower level bureaucrats have also signed up. While most are from Respect and the SWP, some – like Jon Rogers of Lambeth Unison – are Labour loyalists.

Such a conference represents a real opportunity for militants across the unions to gather and hammer out a strategy to meet the challenges ahead

- How to stop the offensive on the public sector: the privatisation and marketisation of the NHS, schools and colleges, postal and government services; Gordon Brown's pay freeze; the cuts and poor working conditions resulting from the market reforms; the re-nationalisation under workers' control and without compensation to the privateers of public utilities, the rail network and contracted out services

- How to halt and reverse the retreat on pensions across the public and private sectors and link this to a fight to link the state pension to the European Union decency threshold, currently set at £360 a week and for full and equal rights for young and women workers

- How to stop the jobs massacre in manufacturing through militant strike action, occupations of threatened plants and forging international solidarity with foreign unions

- How to smash the anti-union laws: demanding their total repeal; defying them whenever they are used to defeat workers' action; striking in solidarity with workers, whose ability to fight is restricted by the courts and the police

- How to organise the two-thirds of the working class outside of the trade unions, fighting against low pay and for full and equal rights for youth, women and migrant workers

- How to break the unions from Labour and force them to found a new mass party of the working class, together with the militant social movements and the radical youth; using this break to instigate a democratic debate about the structure and programme of the new party, including the opportunity of launching a revolutionary party as part of a new International.

The very fact that leaders of the most militant unions in the country are prepared to back such a conference shows the level of anger and hatred against the Labour government, brewing up among union members, but also that these leaders believe they need extraordinary measures and networks to help them defend



Militant unions, like the RMT, could launch a real alternative to Blair and Brown's Labour Party without making concessions to the propertied classes

their own privileges against a rampant capitalist offensive and the supine pro-Labour, pro-Gordon Brown leaders of the big four unions: T&GWU, GMB, Amicus and Unison.

However, it will be a fight to ensure such an outcome to the conference. We urge all union branches and activists to support the conference and register now. But they should also call on the organisers to open it up to resolutions so that it is not another talking shop, which gathers rank and file militants together, but fails to make the leaders accountable. The experience of the Socialist Alliance trade union conference on the political fund in 2002, the RMT's conference on political representation in January this year, and June's Univeristy and College Union Left conference all failed to turn words into action.

Indeed, the SWP leadership has a record of shielding left reformist

leaders from criticism and obstructing rank and file members from placing demands on them or attempting to hold them to account. Not only is this the way John Rees acts inside Respect to keep George Galloway free from restraint by manifesto commitments, conference decisions, or national council scrutiny (most famously after the Big Brother debacle), it is also the way Lindsey German operates in Stop the War Coalition, refusing to call on them to issue strike calls on the outbreak of war in 2003.

This method – theorised by Alex Callinicos as the united front of a special type – might explain why the literature for the conference and the agenda itself fails to mention the twin key tasks facing the unions and the working class as a whole: the need for a rank and file movement and a new workers party. However, their suppression will make them no less necessary in the

struggles that lie ahead.

Overshadowing all of this is the question of Tony Blair's succession. Every other day, Gordon Brown is showing his Blairite credentials: a public sector pay freeze here, a nuclear weapons re-armament programme there. Yet the crisis in the NHS deepens and unemployment grows, the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan collapse into chaos and police units shoot down unarmed ethnic minorities. No wonder Labour's vote is dwindling to naught.

For the left union leaders, they fear three or four more years of neoliberal attacks under Blair and then Brown – or, even John Reid or Alan Johnson – followed by a Tory administration. The centre-left Labour Compass poll last weekend projected that Tony Blair's legacy could be 15 years "in the wilderness" for the party.

Crow, Serwotka, Kearns, Wrack and

Mackney need to rebuild the fighting capacity of the unions now: not a rank and file movement to dissolve the bureaucracy, but a network to support the left wing of that bureaucracy. For example, they don't want to defy and repeal all the anti-union laws, they want mass support for the Trade Union Freedom Bill, which keeps many of them in place, and a strategy that relies on a House of Commons, stuffed full of Tories and Blairites.

Maybe some of these left fakers (not one of them has stood firm on the pensions issue) are aware of the WASG in Germany or the likelihood of a significant left electoral challenge to the Socialists in France. Maybe they would support a loose alliance at the next general election. But that is for the future; what they won't support is the clear call for a new workers party and a democratic debate among their own members about political strategy.

The SWP, on the other hand, sees in its most recent electoral breakthrough both potential and danger. It has made a series of concessions to win over middle class Muslim leaders, not only from Labour, but from the Liberal Democrats and even, in one case, the Tories. It knows that it could even lose its whole group of councillors in Tower Hamlets or Newham if the class struggle demanded more than these new converts to Respect could deliver. After all, Birmingham's Kashmiri based People's Justice Party swung from Labour to Respect before joining the Lib Dems recently.

So the SWP leadership of Respect is now making a turn to the trade unions – or, rather, the trade union leaders. It probably hopes that it can use the run up to the conference to build local organising committees and recruit from them into Respect and eventually the SWP itself. It may even hope to hook another leader like Serwotka. In general it wants to move the centre of gravity inside Respect towards the working class and make it more palatable to ex-Labour reformists.

That is a difficult balancing act. It also will not change the unprincipled character of Respect as a cross-class populist project. However, the conference it has called could still provide a forum for revolutionary socialists to engage with a broad layer of militants and fight for a rank and file movement and a new workers party.

**Organising for fighting unions conference**

**Saturday 11th November Shoreditch Town Hall, London**

For more information email [sam@respectcoalition.org](mailto:sam@respectcoalition.org) or phone 020-7613 5624

# Can Respect be reformed?



By Jeremy Dewar

There are many critics of Respect, not least within its own ranks. The Respect Party Platform, created by the International Socialist Group supporters after last year's conference, calls for greater accountability of leaders and elected representatives and campaigns for the coalition to move towards a party structure. It wants a regular national newspaper, leaflets and bulletins, union caucuses and lively local branches. In short, it wants Respect to have a life outside of elections and George Galloway's media forays.

At the same time, the Respect Party Platform's founding statement declares no political differences with the present leadership. Respect, it says, was "founded on socialist principles".

Others, like the Weekly Worker and various labour movement activists, do have political differences. They want Respect to adopt and campaign for more progressive policies: free abortion on demand, abolition of immigration controls, lesbian and gay rights.

However, even these left critics fail to call for the expropriation of the banks and major corporations, a democratically planned economy and a federation of socialist states – let alone tackle the question of whether such a programme can be won through reforms or will need a revolution. Only one resolution, out of 45 discussed by last year's Respect conference delegates, mentioned the word "socialism" – and that was defeated!

## Regime and policies

Of course, both problems – Respect's lack of democratic structures and its political inadequacies – are related. Leaders protect themselves with bureaucratic structures precisely because they fear the rank and file will try to force them to fight for policies they disagree with.

The problem with Respect is that it was conceived of in such a way that the "leaders" – invited to George Galloway's house to discuss setting up Respect in November 2003, behind the backs of the old Socialist Alliance and the Stop the War Coalition – were guaranteed such protection in advance. The self-appointed leaders negotiated the parameters of the new coalition – and then set out to recruit its base.

What were these parameters, or limitations?

George Galloway, a sitting MP, expelled by Labour but never a member of the Socialist Campaign Group, needed a base for his re-election. He could attract national press coverage and hold out hope for electoral victory. In return, he demanded no reduction of his bloated MP's salary and no bar on his freedom to act independently of the coalition, to speak in its name without accountability.

Salma Yacoob represented the Muslim Association of Britain and could offer the chance to win over some of the more radical mosques and, through them, antiracist and antiwar Muslim

voters. But this too came with a price. Respect had to accommodate the imams and community leaders – i.e. the small business owners in the Muslim community – in much the same way that Labour and the Liberal Democrats had done for decades.

Of course, Respect's ability to win a base among the Muslim working class and radical youth is a great gain. It is a rather stupid slur to claim that Respect's critics are all somehow Islamophobic and don't want to win over these oppressed and militant elements.

However, Respect refuses to campaign for free abortion on demand. Its manifesto ambiguously includes the slogan "For a woman's right to choose", but not the word "abortion". In fact it has no section on women's rights, though employment, youth, pensioners, even "rural Britain" get a mention. This is because the MAB will not endorse candidates that counter the reactionary social positions that Islam, like all religions, seeks to impose on society.

Mark Serwotka was the one union leader, who signed up to Respect. But, while he has graced Respect platforms, Serwotka has not led a campaign inside the PCS civil service union that he heads up to affiliate to Respect, let alone appeal to other union leaders – or members – to break from Labour and join Respect. Nor has he placed his work in the trade union movement under the discipline of Respect. Serwotka and Respect have merely used each other's name as a flag of convenience to promote the one's anti-Labour credentials and the other's union clout.

Put bluntly, Respect courts the Muslim vote but fails to promote the class struggle of women, workers and youth within the Muslim communities.

## Populism

Finally, John Rees promised to deliver a few thousand, disciplined SWP members, a print shop and some Socialist Alliance members and networks. The SWP's conditions on the new coalition, however, were quite remarkable. Respect should not become a party, even though it stood in elections, i.e. stood for power. And Respect should not be "too socialist", or, as Lindsey German told the Weekly Worker in November 2004, "I would not have joined Respect if it had just been socialist."

Alex Callinicos, like Rees and German on the SWP's Central Committee, was even more explicit: "Not everyone who has strongly committed to Respect would be comfortable with being called a socialist" (IST Discussion Bulletin, 2005). Respect was designed to be a non-socialist electoral coalition: one, where socialists play an active role, but do not fight for their own programme. After all, that would make their allies uncomfortable.

Such a political bloc has a name: populism. It can be quite radical – as Respect is when it comes to Iraq, the anti-union laws, public services – but it shies away from the big questions of private property, plan or market, and the role of the state. By doing so, it ends up supporting the status quo, the rule of capital.

This form of liberal politics differs from traditional social democratic reformism only insofar as it does not rest for its support specifically on the working class, and does not claim to aim for the goal of socialism.

## Respect and the party

This explains why the SWP is so resistant to Respect becoming a party. The SWP still claims to be a Marxist, indeed a Leninist party, the necessary instrument for socialist revolution, which in turn is the only solution to capitalism's tendency towards destruction of the planet, economic crises and wars. In order to convince many sceptical SWP members – and some of its leaders – to swallow the Respect tactic, it had to be posed as – in fact, limited to – a way to build the real party, the revolutionary socialist party.

So the trappings of inner party life were abandoned as old fashioned; branch meetings gave way to picnics. Even basic trade union norms, such as publishing the minutes of the National Council and leading figures taking their orders from elected committees, were jettisoned, on the ridiculous premise that such things would reduce the great George Galloway to the role of office boy.

Everything had to be subordinated to the goal of gaining more MPs and councillors. What Respect stood for, i.e. what it agitated for among wide layers of the working class and oppressed, had to be modified so that the coalition would not splinter and the views and prejudices of the hoped-for voter would not be challenged.

## Upside down

This is completely the wrong way round. And unnecessary.

Over the last nine years, hundreds of thousands of formerly loyal Labour supporters have left the party and stopped campaigning and voting for it. Labour came third, behind the Liberal Democrats, with a mere quarter of the vote cast in May.

The RMT was kicked out of Labour in February 2004, and four months later, the FBU disaffiliated after 86 years. Bob Crow and Matt Wrack represent these militant unions today. If they and their executives, along with Serwotka and the PCS openly campaigned for a new workers party, their activists would enthusiastically respond.

And militant minorities within other unions, like CWU, TGWU, Unison, UCU and NUT, would immediately join them. All these unions face Labour attacks – or bosses that Labour supports through anti-union laws and the sacred right to shut down plants and move production to cheaper countries.

Antiwar and antiracist activists are also looking for an alternative to Labour. So too are thousands outside of the official Labour movement, like those mobilised to defend council housing stop the privatisation of services and prevent NHS cuts. Youth especially, at the forefront of struggles against war and extreme poverty, can be won.

Add to these, the thousands of Scottish Socialist Party and Respect mem-

bers, who have already broken from Labour, and the real forces for a new mass workers party are already there.

## Combat party

But a new party must not be built, as Respect is being built, on the same model as old Labour, dominated by MPs, councillors and a few "union barons", armed with the stolen votes of their members (the bloc vote). It should be a combat party. It should be the property of the membership, not of the celebrities.

Instead, it should provide a real lead in the struggles ahead: a network of trade unionists, who can deliver solidarity action in defiance of the anti-union laws; boycotts of anti-asylum legislation and physical defence against racist attacks; co-ordination of the defence of public services, uniting service providers and users in action.

Of course it would fight elections and use its positions to denounce the system and boost resistance. But these would be measures of our successes on the battlefield. The real prize would be the rebirth of revolutionary socialism, as the party grows and steels its members in the class war.

## Workers power

The aim of such a party would be to fight for power. A workers' party needs to set itself the goal of forming a working class government, one that really pursues the interests not of the capitalists but of the overwhelming majority who have no source of income aside from selling our ability to work.

Any consistent struggle for the interests of the working class cannot limit itself to resisting this or that brutal attack or correcting this or that injustice, but must aim to uproot the basic cause of all the poverty, injustice, war and class division in the world today: capitalism.

A workers' government will need to take the main levers of the economy into social ownership and institute democratic working class planning of production and distribution.

In this way the mad drive for cost-cutting, the permanent attempt of the capitalists to make us work harder, the neoliberal thirst to break up and sell off our services could be brought to an end. The real drive behind our economic and social life would no longer be private greed but public need.

But every attempt in history to introduce socialist measures has met with furious and sustained resistance from the capitalists.

Like in Chile in 1973, even a government based on a majority in parliament would soon find out where the real power lies, if it tried to dispossess the capitalists: not in the debating chamber of Westminster, but in the barracks, with the army and police chiefs, the unelected senior civil servants, the corporate boardrooms and the secret services. Suddenly Basra would come to Britain, and all the hatred and violence that the British ruling class seemingly reserves for its colonial victims would be revealed and be directed against us.

That is why Workers Power argues

that any new workers party should adopt a clear revolutionary programme. It should state unambiguously to fighting workers and the new generation of youth that it will take organised mass force – a revolution to overthrow capitalism and free the working class.

Is it too soon to make this point? Should we somehow wait until a "better" time to clarify how we can be free? This argument, at first sight so sophisticated and clever, is in fact utterly self-defeating. The working class movement is not suffering from too radical a policy, but from the cowardice of its leaders and the confusion of even its most determined forces. The time to start changing that is now.

## United front

Workers Power will unite with other forces in the fight to create a new workers party. That is why we initiated the call for January's conference on the crisis of working class representation inside the RMT. It's why we joined and are energetically trying to build the Campaign for a New Workers Party.

It's also why we fully support the Organising for Fighting Unions Conference and, despite our principled differences with Respect, want to win its working class and oppressed members – including its mass Muslim base – to the project of a new party, grounded in the organised working class and committed to socialism.

It is not and never has been Islamophobia, which caused us to turn our back on Respect. It is the politics of populism and the dead hand of bureaucracy, which means Respect will not grow into the party the working class needs.

Even if the union general secretaries supporting November's conference all joined Respect, unless they fought for their unions to affiliate en masse and demanded Respect becomes a working class party, it would make no more difference than Bob Crow's voting Lib Dem or Billy Hayes' flirtation with the Greens.

Workers Power will raise the voice of revolution at November's conference, just as the voice of reformism will be counselling caution, and undermining delegates' sense of the ability to strike out on an independent path towards a new party for the workers.

The beauty of the united front tactic lies in its simplicity: march separately, strike together. We neither have to – indeed, for the tactic to work, we must not – mute our revolutionary message, nor refuse to take one small step in the right direction with reformist leaders and workers. Unlike the SWP leaders, who will be anxious not to shatter the illusory unity of the top table, we will be trying to win a minority and, over time, a majority to revolutionary socialist policies.

Those policies would have to be fought for within the democratic structures of a new party. It is to the creation of a new workers' party – as part of a the struggle for a new world party, a new Fifth International – that Workers Power has committed itself, as part of the fight for the revolutionary transformation of society.

# A split in the League for

A split has occurred in the League for the Fifth International. A minority of members – most of them members of the British Section – have been expelled for secretly drawing up detailed plans to split the League on the eve of its seventh congress, due before the end of July

This split plan had not the slightest excuse. Until the discovery of these plans, no disciplinary measures have been taken by the majority against the minority. No violation or restriction of their rights to argue their positions within our organisation has occurred. Nor have the splitters, up to the last minute, argued that their views and those of the majority were programmatically incompatible. Therefore to secretly plan to split the League and indeed, as we will show, to damage it in every way they could, was a totally unprincipled and disloyal act. No serious organisation could tolerate such a violation of its fundamental right to exist. To expel them is an elementary act of self-protection.

A grouping of members had been waging an internal struggle for two years, first as an informal grouping, then as a tendency, then finally as a minority national faction in the British Section and then as an international faction. No disciplinary measures whatsoever were taken against them. They were accorded all their rights, they presented alternative documents, were able to speak to them in all the sections of the League they chose to attend. Since the launching of our pre-congress period in January, 10 internal bulletins have carried this discussion over international perspectives and the tactics and tasks for building the organisation. Over the last month the sections have held national aggregates of members to decide on which basic documents, those of the Majority or the Minority should be the basis of debate at congress.

The only problem for the minority faction was that outside the British Section and the four members of the Australian section their support was negligible. They recognised they had no chance of winning a majority at the congress and were unwilling to continue within the League after it. They described the prospect of having to remain in the League as being “trapped”.

This is nonsense. The League is a voluntary organisation and no one is obliged to remain in an organisation whose programme and policies they reject. Had the comrades simply announced that they were leaving for fundamental political reasons we would have condemned these political positions and said farewell, with some regret since some of the comrades have been members for twenty years or more. But instead of a honourable exit, they broke obligations that should be elementary for working class militants as long as they remain members of an organisation.

## Evidence of split plans

Indeed the actions they were planning to carry out – in order to damage in every way the organisation they were members of – were truly shameful, a



real stain on their political record. This method will disfigure the internal life of any new organisation they attempt to create and should make them objects of scorn and suspicion within the broader labour movement. If this is how they behave to an organisation that has treated them with respect as long time comrades, which has fully accorded them all their rights, what further degeneration can be expected?

The evidence for this appalling behaviour is undeniable: thanks to the fact that we have been sent all the faction's electronic correspondence with one another. What does it reveal?

At a meeting of the Minority Faction at the Workers Power (Britain) pre-congress aggregate on the 10th June, they decided to split from the organisation, make preparations for a new organisation and campaign to inflict maximum damage on the League.

The main issue of debate had been whether to split at the League's Seventh Congress in July or to boycott the Congress, break discipline and intervene against the League into the International Conference of the REVOLUTION youth group, and hold a 'founding meeting' in London while the League meets in the Czech Republic. All of them make it clear that the only question was which could cause most damage to the League.

It is clear from the emails that, in an online 'referendum', a clear majority favoured an early split before the congress, because they feared their own demoralisation as a result of having to argue with the majority at the congress. They

feared that they would either “get trapped” by having no excusable pretext for leaving or would have to walk out after a heavy defeat. Instead they have decided to hold a founding conference in London with the British minority and the two Australian delegates. The latter were brazenly encouraged to get the money for their fares paid from the League for attending its congress and then attend the split meeting instead.

The International Faction talk spitefully about the need to ‘maximise the chaos and disarray into the ranks of the organisation we leave behind’, to ‘disorientate and demoralise’ majority members and to be ‘particularly aggressive’ to young supporters of the majority to ‘make them ask themselves if politics is really for them’ (Mark H, ‘Re: Congress and Tactics’, June 23rd 2006) They then propose expropriating contact and membership lists, materials and equipment from the London office in the week before the split as part of a plan to materially cripple the League (Mark H, ‘Re: Congress and Tactics’, June 23rd 2006).

In addition Workers Power (Australia) voted unanimously at its aggregate to support one of its members ‘ignoring Majority faction dictates at the Revo Conference 2006’ i.e. to break from the League policy of continuing the work of strengthening international democratic centralism within REVOLUTION and instead fight for it to completely break its links with the League. (Lisa F, ‘WPA Aggregate/Faction meeting’)

The Faction planned to cease paying League subs from July and began transferring money to a

new bank account, having discussed a subscription scale for their new organisation. Some of them it seems have already cancelled their subscriptions.

The Faction has entered into communications with organisations and individuals hostile to the League in Austria and has a project of “regroupment discussion” listing an assortment of centrist and sectarian organisations, including some who split from the League over issues on which the then faction leaders totally supported the majority.

Clearly as a result of this extended (but inadvertent) confession, the International Secretariat of the League had to take action to protect the League. It has expelled the faction, with of course the right to appeal to our Congress – though it is hard to see what such an appeal could consist of faced with such damning evidence. As one of the faction leaders remarked in one of his emails: “if there are any more leaks we are dead ducks.”

## Political degeneration

We will not suggest that the reason for this was that the comrades are all bad people, however reprehensible their actions. People do not split an organisation they have built for thirty years in a fit of moral collapse. The reason is a rapid process of political degeneration.

In essence, the Faction evolved from a rejection of national perspectives in Britain. In 2004 the relative downturn in the class struggle, in the antiwar movement in the anticapitalist or antiglobalization movement after the high point of 2001-2003 convinced the faction leaders, then

only an informal grouping, that the key issues of WPB's perspectives – the fight around the slogan of a new workers party, the need for a rank and file movement, the fight for the Fifth International in the European Social Forum – all had to be dropped in favour of a tailist and routinist perspective in the trade unions.

Connected with this they wanted to stick with the tactic of critical electoral support for Labour, exaggerating the scale of Labour's pro-working class reforms, the continued loyalty to Labour, the illusions in Gordon Brown etc. Thus they maintained that there was no resonance for a call for new workers' parties or electoral alternatives to New Labour. They minimised the significance of the RMT and FBU breaks from Labour, they minimised the significance of the real decline of the Labour vote that year.

There was, they said, no resonance for the call for a new working class party. The majority correctly characterized this as tailism, basing their demands not on the needs of the working class but on the existing consciousness of the main body of the class. In this way they failed to give a clear political lead to the vanguard who showed a desire to break from Labour, though it has as yet arrived at no clear decision on what the political alternative should be. The Minority would have had us abandon the role of Marxists which is to show the right way, to trailblaze, to offer political leadership, not to follow where the working class as a whole was going, only raising slogans where they already have ‘resonance’. In two national confer-

ences of Workers Power (Britain) the minority suffered first a narrow and then a more clear defeat.

In fact the Minority had no unified alternative to the Majority's approach. Part of the Minority opposed the demand for a new workers' party in principle, claiming that the tactic did not apply because there is already a workers party in Britain – the Labour Party. The other wing of the Minority, less dogmatic but also less consistent – argued that the demand could apply, but used tailist logic, saying it should only be used where there is resonance for it, ie within the RMT or the FBU, but not across the working class movement as a whole.

Should they form a new organisation, one of their first challenges will be overcoming the fact that they are split down the middle on a central question for the class struggle in Britain today.

The minority, perhaps because they included so many “old leaders” of WPB – Mark H, Keith H, Stuart K – became embittered by these defeats. Some minority members had had longer or shorter periods outside the group in the late nineties or early 2000s, missed its reviving and reorienting struggles and indeed felt somewhat hostile to them because they were different to the type of struggles they had experienced when they entered politics in the mid-eighties. Others had voluntarily left the leading bodies of the section and international tendency for apparently personal reasons. This whole stratum, many of them long time white-collar trade union militants of some standing and a good record of struggle, nevertheless proved year in year out totally

# the Fifth International

incapable of recruiting to the organisation. They became embittered and jealous of those who were recruiting and building.

Meanwhile our work in the anticapitalist movement and amongst youth prospered and whilst there was steady loss from the older comrades, to private life, careers, health and family problems, the younger comrades kept the British Section growing. The attempt to get the older comrades to collectively discuss changes to their routine or to learn anything at all from the youth work was greeted with cries of indignation, accusations of disrespect and even persecution. The comrades effectively boycotted the areas of work that they did not approve of, like campaigning for a new workers' party. Again and again the comrades sought an alibi in the supposedly adverse objective conditions.

They developed perspectives that denied any overall upward swing in the international class struggle, observing only "that it is uneven." In fact they turned a blind eye to clear evidence that the intensity of class conflict is rising sharply in most countries in the world: in Latin America, the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, the USA and the Far East. They have yielded to the fashionable glut of 'Chinamania' – emphasising a long term, largely contradiction-free rise of China to the status of imperialist power and main rival of the USA.

They have openly toyed with revising Lenin's theory of imperialism to remove the issue of decay and stagnation. They have suggested that the world is in a Kondratiev-style long wave that will ensure expansion till at least 2015 and which will act to dampen down class struggle. Again this represents a yielding to current neoliberal bourgeois ideology. Because the League rejected this and defended our analysis of globalization as a period where the tendencies to stagnation in the world economy were still present, despite powerful counter-vailing tendencies represented by the massive export of capital to China and India, the Minority faction cried that we were 'catastrophists', misrepresenting our views as if we believed that capitalism is on the verge of collapse.

The faction also systematically ignored or grossly underestimated the strength and scale of the movements resisting neo-liberalism and imperialist war, regarding them as dead or as good as dead. Unfortunately the wish is father to the thought. Seeking a return to "more propaganda" and regarding the League's turn to combining propaganda with agitation focused on the youth and the vanguard fighters against neoliberalism as "voluntarism", they adopted a more and more passive propagandist approach. With this was combined a tailist and routinist approach to trade union work. If there was resonance, i.e. if workers were already raising certain demands then good, so could we. If not we couldn't and shouldn't.

They advocated too the abandonment of the League's struggle to fight for a Fifth International in the global movements of resistance in the European and World

Social Forums. Instead they talked of a regroupment perspective with (unspecified) Trotskyist left centrists.

In short, in the name of resisting "voluntarism" they attempt to move the League firmly in the direction of passive propagandism and a discussion circle existence.

## Against democratic centralism

They then went on to attack the youth work that had been so successful in Britain and Austria, and the abandon of the democratic centralism which has been established in REVOLUTION.

They also proposed to retreat from the League's own international democratic centralism to a semi-federal system – an International Executive Committee elected by the sections not the congress, and therefore not accountable to the League as a whole. This strategy would liquidate not only our programme but, in undermining democratic centralism, would weaken the unity and effectiveness of our whole organization. of the masses in struggle, through agitation as well as propaganda.

To undermine democratic centralism, to minimise a militant orientation towards the new struggles and movements of workers and youth, to try to break up a small but real international organisation, in effect means to give up the struggle for a revolutionary fighting organisation.

The international leadership and the great majority of the membership of the League rejected this whole approach. For us it represents a shying away from the tasks of a new period of growing struggles where big questions are posed, not least a major crisis of leadership of the working class. This period requires revolutionaries to address our criticisms and fight for our alternatives not just among small circles of left centrists predominantly drawn from the intelligentsia. We have to bring these ideas to the vanguard. It represents a petty bourgeois capitulation in face of the enormous tasks of the class struggle and the corresponding responsibilities for revolutionaries.

The League at its Fifth and Sixth congresses (in 2000 and 2003) analysed the new period which opened with the turn of the century, developed tactics for it and indeed adopted a new programme in 2003 – From Protest to Power. In rejecting all the major elements of the League's perspective and tasks, the Minority covertly rejected key elements of From Protest to Power. While they were in the League they denied this, but we can safely predict that they will dump it unceremoniously now that are "free". What they replace it with will indeed be interesting.

The Minority wanted to undo all this work and naturally found themselves in conflict with the majority of the League who have led this work and been recruited through it. Faced with new tasks, with a mounting level of struggle, with the need to turn the good old truths into good new truths, to sharpen our weapons and use them, the Minority drew back.

The Faction assembled many of those comrades who were skep-

tical and unenthusiastic about our strategic and tactical developments even in the earlier part of this new period. They eventually (2004-06) came to oppose them more totally and to seek to reverse them. That was their right. No one ever denied them it, despite the frankly hysterical accusations of intolerance, bureaucratism and even Stalinism emanating from the ranks of the Faction in the last few months.

To yield in an impressionistic way to bourgeois economic propaganda about the strength and expansive power of capitalism, to retreat from the League's programme, to retreat from its democratic centralism, to retreat from the tasks of today and run hell for leather in the direction of fruitless discussions with Trotskyist fragments, gives the opposition the same character as the these fragments themselves: a petit bourgeois one, i.e. a collapse into centrism.

As Trotsky said "centrism hates to hear itself named." Mark H in particular took it as a personal insult. "The Majority have declared class war on us" he blustered. As though what was at stake was a struggle against the bourgeoisie. No, the struggle against the pressure of petty bourgeois influences, whether these emanate from the disilluminated and tired intelligentsia or the privileged upper strata of the trade union movement is a constant one within revolutionary organisations. It does not mean driving them out or purging them and nothing like this has ever occurred in Workers Power in Britain. Yet on the second day of the conference Mark H declared, "Workers Power is on the verge of a split". And indeed, we now know he was right, because the night before he had agitated for just such a split.

## Fighting for unity

The majority, at this time unaware of this, indeed unaware of the minority's determination to be free of the discipline and the seriousness of a democratic centralist organisation, did all it could to prevent a split. It replied with a statement "To Split would be a Crime" in which we said:

"The Majority declares without hesitation: to split would be a crime. The existing leadership has taken not a single step to persecute, let alone expel, any member for holding oppositional, critical or minority views. Nor will we ever; we defy anyone to prove otherwise.

"In fact these provocative and alarmist statements are not designed to be an honest description of the Majority's actions or objectives. Rather they can only be understood as a declaration of the Minority leaders' intent. They are agitating for a split, preparing their supporters to commit an unprincipled act of desertion.

We believe that the Minority's trajectory away from our fighting perspective and programme, and their attempt to revise our Bolshevik organisational methods (opposition to international democratic centralism), is no accident but has a clear – indeed obvious – social character.

The Minority expresses a conservative reaction to new tasks under the pressure of the intermediate strata, the left trade union leaders' fear of political independence, the scepticism of the centrists and the torpor of the labour aristocratic layers in Britain. In accordance with its inner logic this process has now culminated in a classic petit-bourgeois rebellion against democratic centralism – the highest form of proletarian organisation.

When the Minority leaders respond 'this means a split', they unwittingly confirm this class prognosis. Proletarian revolutionaries have never held the view that to designate a trend as petit-bourgeois means that it must be driven from our ranks, but that it must be challenged politically, must be fought, because its victory would seriously damage the organisation and set back its struggle for revolutionary leadership.

We are aware that many members of the Minority have an honourable record of commitment to the class struggle and to our revolutionary programme and methods. Precisely for these reasons we want not to drive them out but to win them back from their current course. We are confident that this can be done and that the march of events will prove us right."

Alas, our optimism was proved wrong. Secretly and dishonestly the faction had already decided to split the organisation. It planned to harm it in every way it could. We have prevented it choosing their moment to cause maximum surprise and disruption.

The Minority believe their departure will demoralise us. They think their past prominence and services to the organisation – real indeed – reflect their current importance. They delude themselves. They believe that new younger comrades cannot match, cannot repeat their achievements. They are wrong.

They should remember the achievements of their own youth in the 1980s. True, to lose senior members who for that very reason make an important financial contribution, to lose trained journalists and theoreticians, to lose significant trade unionists will be a setback. We will not try to deny it. But for two to three years these comrades have shown more and more their negative sides. They also obliged us to engage in a scarcely interrupted internal struggle, one that has occupied many hours. Not a waste of time since internal struggle is a school – not the exhaustion of nerves that petit bourgeois dilettantes imagine. If the issues are important so is the struggle to adopt or preserve a correct line.

Still Workers Power has continued to grow, to intervene in the class struggle, to train and develop new cadres. Now we will certainly have to prioritise even more ruthlessly the use of our resources and make bigger sacrifices. But the ending of this struggle will increase the human resources, the time and energy that we will be able to devote to intervening in and recruiting in the class struggle. We will go forward to new successes; we have no doubt about that.

## Why we expelled them

Below is a short summary of the plans of the minority faction. It was on the basis of these plans that a decision was taken to expel the faction en masse. A more detailed dossier of their plans can be found at:

<http://fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=14,402,0,0,1,0>

● **The International Faction have planned to 'maximise the chaos and disarray into the ranks of the organisation we leave behind', 'disorientate and demoralise' majority members and to bully people out of politics, behave 'particularly aggressively' to supporters of the Majority to 'make them ask themselves if politics is really for them'** (Mark H, 'Re: Congress and Tactics', 23 June 2006)

● **The International Faction plans to steal materials and equipment from the London office in the week before they split as part of a plan to materially cripple the League** (Mark H, 'Re: Congress and Tactics', 23 June 2006)

● **The International Faction have discussed sabotaging the Revo International Conference by fighting for Revo 'to break completely from the L51'** (Reference to this is made in a series of emails from Mark H, Dave E, Michelle R, Carlene W, Bill J)

● **Workers Power Australia has voted unanimously at its aggregate to support one of its members 'ignoring Majority faction dictates at the Revo Conference 2006' i.e. to break L51 discipline** (Lisa F, 'WPA Aggregate/Faction meeting', 27 June 2006)

● **The International Faction have already made plans, including the commissioning of articles, to publish the first journal of their new organisation in September** (Various references are made, but in particular see Dave E, 'Minutes of meeting held 19th June', 22 2006)

● **The International Faction have made preparations for a website for their new organisation** (Dave E, 'Minutes of meeting held 19 June', 22nd 2006)

● **The International Faction have been drawing up contacts lists for their new organisation by raiding the League's and Revolution's** (various references but in particular Dave E, 'Minutes of meeting held 19 June', 22nd 2006 and Dan J, 're:security', 25th June 2006)

● **The International Faction have begun transferring money to a transitional bank account** (various references but in particular Dave E, 'Minutes of meeting held 19 June', 22nd 2006 and John C, 'Finances', 21st June 2006)

● **The International Faction have planned to cease to pay League subs in July and some have 'jumped the gun' and cancelled them for June** (Stuart K, 'Congress Tactics', 23 June 2006)

● **The International Faction have begun discussing a subs scale for their new organisation** (Bill J, 'Subs', 22 June 2006)

● **The international Faction have entered communications with organisations and individuals hostile to the League in Austria** (Dave E, 'Minutes of meeting held 19 June', 22 June 2006 and Carlene W, 'email from Austria...', 27 June 2006)

● **Members of the International Faction intend to use the crisis in Manchester as a pretext for a split** (Mark H, 'Re: Congress and Tactics', 23 June 2006)

● **WPA has revealed it has 'no intention' of producing a 3 Year Plan for Congress as decided by the last IEC** (Carlene W, Australian aggregate, 22 June 2006)

# Austria: Vienna was anti-Bush-city!

By Michael Proebsting  
ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt

The 21 June was not only a day of handshakes between George Bush, the Austrian chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel and the rest of the Europe's top politicians. It was also huge a day of protest against Bush, against the aggressive military policy of US imperialism but also of the European Union.

From the beginning the aim of the campaign Bush Go Home – in which ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (ASt, the Austrian LFI section) and the youth organisation, Revolution, played a leading role – was to demonstrate to the public in Austria and internationally that masses people totally reject the imperialist policy of the Bush administration. This was what we meant by our slogan: Turn Vienna into an Anti-Bush-City! Which is exactly what we did.

In the morning, more than 2,000 school students staged a strike and marched towards the area where the US-EU summit took place. This school student strike was mainly organised by Revolution and the social democratic youth. Our contingent – more than 400 pupils – marched at the head of the demonstration and was by far the most militant and best organised.

In the evening there was a huge demonstration, for which Bush Go Home had been mobilising for two months, and which, at a later point, was also supported by the Stop Bush coalition of the Social Democratic youth, the Communist Party and the Green Party. While the police claimed there were only 15,000 marchers, at least 25,000 were there – an enormous success given the small size of Austria (eight million



inhabitants) and the fact that this was a normal working day.

The demonstration showed that hatred for Bush's reactionary war policy goes far beyond the left wing milieu and has deep roots in the working class

and among youth.

There were a number of problems with the reformist led Stop Bush coalition. This social democratic/CP-dominated campaign, which also included the Austrian sister organisation of the

British SWP, split away from the Bush Go Home alliance some time ago, because we mentioned Palestine and the right of self-determination in our call, and because we gave space to organisations and speakers, who stand

in solidarity with the resistance in Iraq.

While we – the Bush Go Home coalition – attempted to reach an agreement with them on the basis of the right for both sides to choose their own speakers, they refused to do so. The main differences were that they refused to have Awnial Kalemji – the speaker of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance, which represents a number of Iraqi resistance organisations, at the closing rally, or a speaker of ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt at the opening rally. Both were rejected because they accuse us of being "anti-American" and "anti-semitic". So, in the end, we had separate opening and closing rallies. At our rallies all speakers nominated by us spoke.

Among them was also George Galloway, who spoke at our rally to show his protest against the exclusion of al-Kalemji by the reformist Stop Bush coalition. Galloway was invited and paid by the Stop Bush coalition but was outraged by the hostile position of the alliance towards the democratic right to free speech for a representative of the Iraqi resistance.

Other speakers at our rallies included Tobias Pflüger, a German left-wing member of the European Parliament on the PDS list, who recently lost his parliamentary immunity because of alleged violence at a demonstration, Cihan Keskin from Grup Yorum in Turkey, and Leo Gabriel from the Austrian Social Forum. For the ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt our comrade Roman Birke, a leading organiser of the school student strike, spoke.

All in all, it was a very successful mobilisation, which demonstrated both the popular hatred against the war policy of US imperialism and the rising mobilisation capacity of anti-imperialist organisations, including our own.

## Chile: May 2006, the uprising of the penguins

By Diego, a sympathiser of the League for the Fifth International, in Santiago, Chile

The past two months in Chile has seen more than one million secondary school students fight against neoliberal reforms in education. This culminated on 5 June in a general strike of students, supported by thousands of workers all over the country, despite the Chilean TUC refusing to support the campaign.

School uniforms in Chile consist of a black blazer and white shirt, and so the students' nickname is "the penguins". Their struggle, which included fierce clashes with the brutal police force inherited from dictator Augusto Pinochet, came to be known as the "uprising of the penguins" – el levantamiento de los pingüinos.

For three decades Chile has been a model of neoliberalism, even predating Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and born out of Pinochet's brutal coup, which saw thousands of trade unionists and students murdered and imprisoned. But now a whole new generation in Chile has joined the continent-wide resistance to neoliberalism.

The central demand of the school students' movement was an end to the hated LOCE (Organic Constitutional Education Law), which became law in March 1990, when Pinochet left office. Since then, schools and colleges have been underfunded and sold off to the private sector.

According to the opinion polls, 84 per cent of the Chilean people support the students' struggle, and a mere 14 per cent the government's handling

of the crisis.

The students were very well organised (see box) and hungry to learn not only about the education system, but also about wider politics.

On the Saturday 3 June, two days before the national strike, the students invited all the political and social organisations to have their say in the Instituto Nacional Barros Arana in Quinta Normal, Santiago. They allowed delegates of political organisations to go into the occupation and to speak and discuss with the students.

The following Monday, more than a million students, teachers, medical workers and others joined the strike. And despite the CUT (the Chilean TUC) refusing to support the students' strike call, there were still strikes and demonstrations in many towns and cities.

During the day the students decided to stay in their occupations, because, during the previous weeks, dozens of confrontations with the police took place in the major cities. Thousands of students were arrested. To regain their breath and retain popular support, they decided to organise meetings, music and popular theatre in the occupations.

**Our comrades visited and distributed thousands of copies of two editions of a special student bulletin, which we called "El Pinguino Rojo y Negro" (The Red and Black Penguin). We were immediately invited inside the occupations to have discussions. In the evening we joined the demo in central Santiago with thousands of youth. Other activists came to the city centre to protest against the government and to support the students.**

At five o'clock in the afternoon scuffles broke out between youth and the riot police around the National Library. The protesters moved to the Uni-

versidad de Chile and the neighbouring Instituto Nacional, which was occupied by the students. Groups of youth emerged from the university and confronted the hated riot police and water cannons with bricks and stones. In response, other groups of students climbed on top of the roof of the university and pelted the squads of riot police below with wall paint.

During the night, right-wing group of neo-nazis organised attacks on some of the occupied schools, so students set up security commissions, armed with metal bars and clubs, and the university students went to the support of many of the occupations.

The students have forced the gov-

ernment to make some concessions, such as free student travel cards, free lunches for the poor students, a promise to review the long hours, and to provide grants for the poor students.

But the government has also set up a special commission to delay and confuse the students. It will take three months to produce proposals.

But the students want not only a quality education; they want the abolition of the LOCE, the law passed by the Pinochet dictatorship. So they are ready to return to the struggle, if this commission and the Parliament do not deliver what they are asking for. Any hope that President Michelle Bachelet (elected in January) would be different

to her predecessors is already fading among many students. Posters appeared in Santiago, stating "Bachelet – speeches for the poor – government for the rich".

The most important thing, it is that this struggle was a turning point in the struggle in Chile. It has opened a new chapter, following the years of dictatorship, the transition period, and the "development" of the economy. Antineoliberal and even anticapitalist ideas have come into the fore once again. These weeks of mass struggles by young people provide enormous opportunities to build support for the revolutionary socialist programme in the months and years to come.

## How the students organised

In secondary schools, students elected delegates for every class and the delegates met and elected a school president. These school presidents then went to regional meetings and elected delegates that were sent to Santiago, for national meetings. Here in the capital, they elected their spokespersons, both young women and men, to be the official representatives of the movement.

All the leaders at all levels could be recalled by their respective assemblies, if they did not represent what the students decided, and they could then be replaced by other delegates, who would.

Not one delegate representing the students could speak on a personal basis; they could only speak about what had been agreed by the student's

assemblies. They never leaked information to the media about what they were preparing or deciding to do. In every school they organised commissions: for security, cleaning, propaganda, cooking, the collection of food and money, entertainment, and so on. No drugs or alcohol were allowed on the school premises.

Students took turns, occupying the buildings, ensuring that at least 30 students were inside during the day. Some students slept over night. They took turns shopping, cooking and soliciting donations for food and stereo systems that could be brought onto school premises. Most of the youths' time was spent in discussions about the way forward.

Students also dealt with criminal individuals or agents provocateurs, who infiltrated their demos to steal or

cause trouble, by capturing them and giving them a good hiding.

The students rediscovered the best elements of revolutionary democracy: free speech, a democratic way to conduct polemical battles, democratic students' councils with the power to take action and to demote any leader or group that broke the discipline of the movement, and community solidarity.

This is a very important gain in a country that still bears the scars of dictatorship and the rotten compromises made by the reformist parties, both Socialist and Communist (which only called for a reform of the law), that saw a transition to democracy which guaranteed impunity for Pinochet and his torturers, and left the state apparatus of repression, the police and the army, stuffed with those trained under Pinochet.



# Greek students fight neoliberal education reform!

By Luke Cooper

May and June saw a huge rebellion by workers and students in Greece against government plans for neoliberal reforms of higher education. As many as 100,000 students have occupied over 400 university departments. University lecturers have also held a series of walkouts against the reforms.

On 23 June, the many workers came out for half a day and civil servants came out for the whole day in support of the students.

Since it came to power in May 2004, the right wing New Democracy government has sought to implement an aggressive neoliberal reform in the face of mounting opposition from the Greek working class.

There has been a war of attrition, as each government attack has been greeted with stop-start opposition by Greek workers, including a series of one-day general strikes. However, like in France earlier this Spring, it has been an attack on the rights and conditions of young people that has prompted a rebellion to shake the whole country.

The New Democracy government sought to bring in reforms of higher education that would

- Allow for the creation of privately owned and managed universities
- End the restriction on police entering the grounds of higher education institutions (they are currently banned from entry without consent of university authorities)
- Change the management structure of existing universities towards a private sector business model
- Increase the competitive pressures on students by restricting opportunities to re-sit exams and place limits on the time students can spend at university.

The new management structures would completely disenfranchise students from decision making structures and, alongside the new "freedom" for police to enter universities as they so wish, mark a clear attack on student radicalism.

The changes in university management towards a business model were



naturally intended as the first step on the road to full scale privatisation: the development of a market and the introduction of the profit motive.

They are rooted in the Lisbon and Bologna neoliberal economic agenda, currently being pursued by Europe's governments, that aims to Americanise Europe's economies by 2010. This means a co-ordinated attack on the working class – its social rights, welfare and security system – geared to increasing the global competitiveness and profitability of European capital.

## Resistance of the social movements

The mobilisations and forums of the anticapitalist and social movements over the last seven years have played an important role in making Europe's workers and youth politically conscious of the reactionary character of this co-ordinated bosses' offensive.

The European Social Forum (ESF) that took place in Athens at the beginning of May hosted mass student meetings. These brought together militants from the student movements that have emerged across Europe over the last period, and provided an important catalyst for the uprising of the last two months.

Between 12 and 16 May, students occupied 16 university departments.

By 28 May, a national movement had emerged; 8,000 students demonstrated in Athens. This was followed three days later with 194 university departments going into occupation and lecturers across Greece voting in mass meetings to launch strike action against the attacks. Student co-ordinations were established inside universities and at the district level. These drew in striking workers too.

As the movement entered June, the number of university departments entering occupation shot up to over 350 across Greece. On Thursday 8th June 40,000 students, demonstrating in Athens, were met with violent repression by the police who used tear gas and baton charges. This police repression had the effect of raising the stakes, and further radicalising the already militant movement.

The national co-ordination of students called on the GSEE (the main trade union federation) to launch a general strike against the attacks, following the repression of 8 June. More protests and demonstrations took place on 15 June, as the movement grew larger still.

The internationalism of the youth was clearly expressed by the slogan, "We're going to do what they did in France".

The movement is dominated by the forces of the Greek left that supported the ESF. The largest left party, the Greek Communist Party (KKE), that condemned the ESF as a tool of imperialism has a typically sectarian approach to the movement and has called its own demonstrations rather than supporting those organised through the student co-ordinations. There is however, pressure from the KKE's rank and file to participate, and many have in practice.

Likewise, Pasok, a liberal party with links to the unions, who at the national level support the government reform programmes, have split in the universities, with around half their student membership supporting the protests.

This has left the leadership of the movement open to the far left, who were already a significant force in student politics, but some way behind the KKE and Pasok. For example, in the last student elections, in which around three-quarters of students usually participate, the EAAK, a coalition of far left groups, polled around 8.5 per cent, compared to 14 per cent for the Communist Party and 26 per cent for Pasok.

The left reformist party Synaspismos, which polled just 2.5 per cent in the last student elections, and the sister organisation of the Socialist Workers Party, the SEK that polled 0.3%

(under the name of its front, Genoa 2001), have also been involved.

The movement has already forced the government to back off, if not back down. New Democracy has postponed the parliamentary vote on the education bill till the autumn. Its tactic is to lure student leaders into talks over the summer break, and hope the occupation movement does not revive in the autumn.

But this movement will not be so easily demobilised. The students have the bit between their teeth and have learnt from the French anti-CPE struggle that the key to victory is linking up with workers' action. Already, Greek primary school teachers have voted for five days of strike action in September, while the TUC and civil service unions struck and marched in solidarity with students in Athens and Thessalonika in the last week of term.

But already this movement has shown that it could achieve far more than tearing up the education bill. It has already drawn solidarity from workers and inspired them to take up their own demands against the government.

The student co-ordinations should use the summer months to organise delegations to the factories and offices, the transport and communications centres, to call on the workers to fight for a 35-hour week to reduce unemployment, for real wage rises, for decent public services paid for by the corporations and the rich.

It is important the government knows the movement means business. Over the past few months and years, the Greek youth and working class have showed their courage and willingness to defeat this neoliberal government. What they have lacked is a leadership to match.

The key to transforming a governmental crisis into a workers victory is the general strike – not just for one day or half a day but indefinite. Such a strike will not just oppose this injustice or that grievance but pose the question of who runs society.

In the course of this struggle the Greek workers and youth must begin the task of constructing a revolutionary party that can answer the question of "who rules" with the answer – we do!

# Poland: fighting for gay rights

Last month thousands of people defied a government ban and joined a heavily-policed Pride march in Warsaw to protest ongoing discrimination against Polish lesbians and gays, writes Chris Newcombe. The Warsaw Equality March was given the go-ahead by Warsaw city officials who, bizarrely, also gave permission for a "counter-protest" by the far-right All-Polish Youth (MWP) to follow the same route!

## A history of homophobia

Former mayor, Lech Kaczynski, had banned the two previous gay parades. In 2004, his excuse was that a gay march would provoke a counter-demo and so create disorder. Thus, instead of protecting the right of equality marchers to protest, he blamed them – in advance – for the violence threatened by a far-right rabble!

In 2005, he said that homosexuals didn't need to protest – they could be

"cured" – but, perversely, he still gave permission to counter-demonstrators. He also permitted a so-called "March for Normality" the following weekend – the "normal" marchers turned out to be 200 homophobic religious bigots and neo-nazis.

Defying the ban on the Equality March, lesbians and gays saw their ranks swell to about 3000 by others who were incensed by Kaczynski's dictatorial stance. About 200 mostly far-right skinheads pelted them with stones and bottles, but were chased off by the police – who Kaczynski later criticised for not arresting the equality marchers!

Unfortunately, some lesbian and gay rights activists drew the conclusion that the police are reliable protectors – a dangerous illusion, as was shown later that month. When a banned equality march went ahead in Poznan, the heavily-armed police viciously broke it up, attacked and arrested many marchers. Bigot Kaczynski – better known to

Poles as Kaczor or Duck – is now president of Poland. In the run up to last year's presidential election, he used homophobia to help build an electoral base among the most reactionary religious elements, and was repaid with the support of arch-catholic Radio Maria. (During the referendum on EU membership, even former Polish Pope John Paul II admonished this radio station for its fanatically anti-EU propaganda.)

In the elections for Poland's Sejm (parliament), Kaczor's party Law and Justice (PiS) posed as a "social" party who would soften the neoliberal reforms proposed by its main rival and expected coalition partner, Civic Platform (PO), thus protecting pensioners and the poor. This gimmick paid off, but although PiS became the largest party, it fell well short of a majority, and when negotiations with PO failed, it formed a minority government.

This proved too unstable, so PiS formed a coalition with the populist Self

Defence (Samo Obrona) and the arch-catholic League of Polish Families (LPR). One result of this was that the ministry for women and equality was simply abolished. Meanwhile, LPR leader Roman Giertych became a deputy prime minister and education minister. One of his proposals is to replace one physical education lesson with instruction in Polish patriotism! He is also virulently homophobic.

## Polish Pride 2006

Giertych "appealed" to the MWP, which is the LPR's youth movement, to call off their counter-demo – and promptly went on TV to denounce the "perverts" and "communists" marching for equality! That didn't stop around a hundred skinheads pelting marchers with eggs. Though Giertych had dissociated himself from this, there is no doubt that it was organised by his youth movement, which includes neo-nazi elements.

Meanwhile, the PiS-controlled finance ministry has been preparing its assault on the social security system it promised to protect. This will hurt most the very people hoodwinked into voting them in – the poorest, concentrated in the east of Poland where unemployment reaches over 30%. The government is also busy planning tougher laws to deal with the inevitable protests this will unleash.

The attack on welfare is not surprising, however. The real masters of Poland are the imperialist multinationals who control key sectors of the economy. The state – neoliberal or "social" – will do their bidding.

Right now, protest is patchy, but there has already been a series of strikes by doctors and nurses in the crisis-ridden public health sector. When Kaczor's cuts really begin to bite, lesbians, gays and health workers will be joined by others – workers, students, youth and pensioners ready to shout: PiS off, Ducky!

# Bolivia: take the struggle further

By Keith Sellick

President Evo Morales' party the Movement Toward Socialism secured a majority in the elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA). However despite a 70 per cent turn out, the MAS failed to get the necessary two-thirds for it to have a free rein to rewrite the constitution, despite setting up local groups to register and bring out the vote mirroring popular organizing strategy of Chavez in Venezuela.

Morales said after voting on the Constituent Assembly: "The discriminators, the exploiters, the marginalisers, the haters toward the peasant movements have to be stopped, as well as inequality and injustice. Once there's a new constitution, we'll implement a gradual and democratic process of peaceful change."

### Morales: An anti-capitalist alternative?

Morales, under pressure from the masses, made moves against the multinationals in May. He sent in the army to take control of the gas field and forced the multinationals – Repsol YPF, Exxon Mobil, Total, British Gas and BP – to sell a controlling stake to the Bolivian state.

But Morales countered any notion about nationalisation by saying that the foreign companies had a right to make a profit. These moves were far less than the revolutionary movement has demanded. The Bolivian people need 100 per cent nationalisation – with no compensation – under workers' control.

### Constituent Assembly?

Also in May, the MAS produced its programme for the Constituent Assembly called "Refound Bolivia". This document, while talking of state ownership and regulation of natural resources and handing land back to the peasants, recognises the right to some "form of private property". It also specifically mentions the struggles of Andean indigenous people: "From 1826 to today, Bolivia has had more than a dozen of constituent assemblies. In all of them, the majority natives population was marginalized."

Refound Bolivia reduces the power of the Catholic Church by redefining Bolivia as a secular state with respect for

all religions and beliefs. Ayмара, Quechua and Guarani are named as official languages along with Spanish, and Bolivia's indigenous population is ensured the right to their own political systems, cultural traditions and management of natural resources.

But some indigenous groups have said they feel betrayed by the document. One group CONAMAQ, a nongovernmental organization, took to the streets against the MAS, and ended their relationship. It claims the MAS had not given them enough representation in its selection of candidates for the CA. It made its own proposals emphasizing indigenous forms of political organisation. Its leader said: "We're not interested in communism or capitalism. We want to return to the system of Ayllus [the ancient indigenous village communes] we had before the colonization."

CSUTCB, the indigenous-led peasant trade union federation that worked with the MAS on Refound Bolivia, accuses Morales of being "too European" and claims that Hugo Chavez is wielding too much power in Bolivia.

Quechua activist Marta Orozco, who worked with Morales before his presidency, said some of the dissatisfaction from Indian groups is because "Morales is a syndicalist, not an Indianist. But it's all healthy self-criticism, a necessary part of the process." The problem is that demands for autonomy converge with the method of attack of a major sector of Bolivian capital – the bourgeoisie of the south east in Santa Cruz. They want autonomy in order to seize control of their region's natural resources and thus undermine the state's ability to respond to the people's demands for massive programmes to fight poverty.

In addition to the vote for the Constituent Assembly, there was also a referendum on autonomy for the regions pushed by the Right. The government backed "No" vote won by 53 to 47 percent but showed a divided country as the Yes vote won in four out of nine Bolivian provinces – Santa Cruz, Tarija, Pando and Beni – all rich in oil and gas. The bourgeoisie in Santa Cruz has been agitating for secession in all but name in order to protect its control of the gas fields. In the much poorer

western provinces, the Altiplano, the No vote won by a large majority.

### Struggle for workers' control

Both the Constituent Assembly election and the autonomy referendum show a country deeply divided on class and ethnic lines. Only a clear revolutionary policy can unite the workers and poor peasants against the bosses, the landowners and the foreign multinationals.

At the moment the eyes of the masses on the Constituent Assembly. They expect great things from it and therefore it must be a focus for the next round of struggle. To do this the Bolivian union federation the COB, popular assemblies and coordinating bodies such as the Fejuve based in Al Alto, which led last year's campaign for the nationalisation of the oil industry, and the indigenous organisations, must mount a militant campaign focused on demonstrations and a general strike to force the CA to meet the masses' full demands: the nationalization without compensation of all the oil and gas reserves, the reversal of the 1985 neoliberal decree that enforced the privatization process, the taking back into state hands all

privatized industries under workers' control without compensation, the confiscation of the great estates to be redistributed to the peasants.

It should immediately take measures to nationalise large scale industry, impose a punitive tax on wealth, and use the resources to launch a massive programme of public works (schools, hospitals, infrastructure) to employ people on full union wage rates. The CA should also arm the masses in a workers and popular militia. This is vital to defend workers and peasants against the state forces or hired killers of the bosses and landowners.

The Constituent Assembly should also confirm and extend to indigenous peoples their full right to self determination, up to an including secession. This is necessary to prove to the rural population in the Aymara and Quechua speaking areas that the working class has no intention of continuing with their oppression. Nevertheless the right to secede does not mean that workers should advocate secession or autonomy.

Clearly in present conditions this would play right into the hands of the bourgeoisie and the landowners. This



has to be explained to the indigenous rural communities. The natural resources need to be used for the benefit of the working class, peasants and poor of the whole of Bolivia, not the rich.

In this way the working class can bring about the revolutionary integration of the indigenous peoples – who are all workers, peasants or the urban poor – into the working class and peasant movements. But it can do so only if it recognises and answers the demands of the oppressed indigenous peoples.

### For a revolutionary party

The burning issue is that despite a huge array of struggles, the Bolivian working class has no revolutionary party to unite all those in every sector and lead the struggle for democracy, wealth redistribution and nationalization towards a revolution against capitalism. This is despite revolutionary situations opening in Bolivia in 2003 and 2005 where the workers threw out rightwing presidents and could have gone on to seize power. Both times the excuses of the COB leaders was that they couldn't seize power, because there was no revolutionary party to lead this. Yet they have done nothing to create such a party.

Militants in the COB must immediately restart the discussion about forming a revolutionary party based on the trade unions, linking up with Fejuve and other organisations of the poor and peasants to debate and discuss forming a new party and its what sort of programme it should have. Revolutionaries should of course argue for an anticapitalist, socialist programme. Such a party would be a real alternative to the populism and sell-outs of the MAS and Morales.

The workers and peasants have already showed their ability to fight, organize and lead struggles in several countries, from Argentina in the South to Mexico and Venezuela in the North. Now they must build the organizations they need to take their struggles further by forming revolutionary workers parties out of the leading militants and activists of these mass movements.

This way this historic wave of struggles in Latin America can go all the way to create a Socialist United States of Latin America.

# Mexico: greet the president with mass action

Populist candidate for president, Lopez Obrador, has challenged the outcome of the elections after appearing to lose by a few thousand votes to Calderon of the right-wing National Action Party.

But whoever wins, Lopez or Calderon, the workers and peasants will still have to struggle against a neo-liberal government committed to privatisation and the free market.

And those struggles are already gathering momentum. In Oaxaca there has been a month-long struggle of teachers against the right-wing state governor Ortiz. The teachers went out on strike in May over pay, occupying the city centre, setting up their own radio station and then calling out workers and community activists in support. On the 14 June, helicopters flew overhead spraying tear gas and Ortiz sent in the police to smash up an occupation of 70,000 people, teachers and their families, in the main square. Hundreds were beaten and organisers claim two people were killed. But the teachers fought back and retook the square from the police.

The next day a march of 120,000 supported the teachers followed by a march of 400,000 people the day after – the biggest mobilisations in the city and local state's history. The teachers have occupied town halls and government buildings in

the region. Students occupied the university and lent the teachers use of their own radio station. What started as a strike over pay in May became a mass movement to oust the state governor.

The people of the city have already formed a Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (Appo), which meets in the former government palace. Appo is urging everyone to organise popular assemblies at every level: neighborhoods, street blocks, unions, and towns. "No leader is going to solve our problems," its manifesto says. The goals, in addition to forcing governor Ortiz to resign or be impeached, is to retake the wealth of natural resources to benefit the people.

Meanwhile, miners came out in a national one-day strike on 1 March while workers at the Cananea and La Claridad mines, which produce half the country's copper, have been out since in a bitter strike. There is also a bitter strike at Sicartsa, a large steel company.

To support these strikes the leaders of mine, telephone and university workers called out their members for a general strike on 28 June – four days before the elections. But they called it off the day before claiming they didn't want to harm Obrador's chances in the elections.

And this is the problem. Obrador as mayor of Mexico city carried out populist measures such as public works that ben-

efited the urban poor and earned popularity ratings of more than 80 per cent. Last year, more than a million people came out in support of him against a politically motivated prosecution, which quickly folded. But along with these measures he has jailed strikers and had the police smash up student protests. He has said he opposes the sell-off of the oil industry and the North American Free Trade Agreement and has been heavily criticised by the Mexican business community for being a leftist and a "dinosaur". His last election rally drew crowds of 150,000 people in Mexico city. But even *The Economist* magazine came out in support of him as being an "outsider" and as someone who could "reform" the Mexican state.

Obrador is a populist with a mass base in the electorate. As a result he has the ability to pass reforms but also to carry out the policies of the bosses and their northern neighbours in the US. The danger for workers and peasants is that they hold back on their own struggles in the belief that Obrador offers something different and will "give him a chance" and time to implement his policies. If he delivers any reforms, it will be as a response to the emerging mass movements and their demands.

But they could achieve more if they organised independently for their own demands, including those unacceptable

to Obrador. They should stand their own democratically agreed candidates of struggle in elections, and went on to found a party of struggle that could unite all the organisations in a political alternative.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Workers and peasants must immediately restart actions against the bosses. The postponed general strike must be recovered as soon as possible. Other unions must be called out in support. Strike committees must be formed to take control of action and to link up the unions, students and organisations of the poor and peasants.

The rebellion in Oaxaca is of great importance and must continue. The Appo should debate its next steps and lay out its goals. It must continue its struggle, organising the defence of demonstrations and occupations by arming the people, and take over basic economic tasks such as the distribution of food, communication and transport. By spreading support into other towns and rural areas of the regional state it can offset the Mexican state concentrating its forces on Oaxaca and avoid being isolated.

Such links could develop a national Appo movement and debate out a strategy to oust not just Ortiz but the new president himself. Then the question is, what power should stand in their place?

The answer to this lies in the future development of the Appo itself. It should not put in his place not another corrupt ruling class politician but a workers' government to rule in favour of workers and peasants. The goal should be to build out of the Oaxaca struggles the Appo into a workers' council, formed of delegates from the workplaces, schools, campuses, working class districts, peasant settlements – and crucially, soldiers – to create an alternative state government.

To carry out that strategy a popular assembly, much less populist leaders, will not be enough. And the Zapatista guerrilla movement, which leaves politics and elections to be monopolised by the capitalist parties, has also failed its test. The Mexican workers must organise and develop a party of their own which bases itself in the trade unions and popular organisations. Revolutionaries must join with the workers and argue for a party that can not just challenge capitalism but overthrow it for good, taking the nation's resources into the hands of the workers, peasants, and poor.

Vincent Fox's neo-liberal reforms have been met with a rising tide of resistance in Mexico. The close presidential vote is a reflection of this: it shows the polarisation of society. The masses of Mexico have must put their trust in their own strength and ability to continue their resistance and fight to free themselves from global capitalism.

# 'Grab your rifles and resist'

This call to arms was made by Hamas leader Nizar Rayan recently as the Israeli military bombarded the Gaza strip. **Simon Hardy** explains how the attack proves that a two state solution is a false road

Those who thought that the dismantling of the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005 by Sharon was a sign that the Israelis were willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the Peace Process must be scratching their heads by now. The supposed peace process which in reality was merely an attempt to maintain the status quo of a powerful Israeli state and a weak Palestinian 'authority' has solved nothing for the ordinary Palestinians still living in misery and poverty in the region.

The capture of an Israeli soldier by the community and political party organised Popular Resistance Committees has led to the Israeli government invading the southern tip of the Gaza strip, bombing the only power station that provides essential electricity to Gaza city. The closing of the borders and the continued reliance of businesses on generators have led to severe shortages of fuel. The sewage pumping stations have fallen silent and most Gaza residents have been left without power.

The Israelis have carried out indiscriminate artillery fire that has already killed many Palestinian civilians. As Dr El-Farra, a community activist in Gaza said on the US radio show *Democracy Now!* "There's no balance of power between the Israeli army and the militia or the resistance movement here in Gaza. Israeli knows that very well. So what's happening in Gaza now is collective punishment. I don't understand,

why to destroy the infrastructure? Why to deprive the population from the electricity? It is collective punishment. This will not bring the soldier back."

The Palestinians demands were not impossible to meet; even as far as Israel was concerned. The groups that abducted him initially demanded the release of all women and child prisoners in Israeli jails. Israel refused, then abducted and incarcerated many Hamas MP's and government ministers in retaliation. The Palestinians demanded the release of 1,000 political prisoners, and in reply the Israelis have prepared an invasion. A rocket attack on the Israeli city of Ashkelon, which injured no one, led to the Israelis launching a 'wider military offensive' as this paper went to press. We can expect to see Palestinian casualties

The overall aim of the Israeli government is to undermine the democratically elected militant Islamist Hamas government in Palestine. The Israelis are using the abduction of one IDF soldier as the excuse they need to launch an invasion of Palestine in order to destroy the ability of Hamas and other groups launch rocket attacks into south Israel. As Israeli President Olmert explained to Haaretz newspaper, they wanted "...to create a new equation - freeing the abducted soldier in return for lessening the pressure on the Palestinians".

The Palestinians are caught between a rock and a hard place. Whatever they do the Israelis can respond with increas-

ing force and violence against the population. They can do this because the worldwide consensus amongst the ruling powers is that Israel has to be able to 'defend itself'. The oppression of the Palestinians is, as far as the Imperialists in Washington and Brussels is concerned, an unfortunate by-product of this political reality. Tony White, the White House spokesperson said "Israel has the right to defend itself and the lives of its citizens."

## What future?

The existence of Israel is the fact on the ground that will always deny the Palestinians any kind of viable statehood. Israeli has the most powerful army in the Middle East, backed to the hilt by the world's only super power, the USA. Its Zionist ideology dreams of creating a greater Israel, one that can only come about by the slow ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and the creation of an Apartheid wall in the West Bank, designed to annex most of the land to Israel.

Workers Power believes that organisations like the PLO and Hamas cannot wage a consistent struggle for the liberation of Palestine. They are nationalists that are based on the middle classes; they have no working class solution to the situation, instead relying on the armed guerilla wing to act as leverage in bourgeois negotiations. It is a strategy that Sin Fein pursued in Ireland and

the ANC carried out in South Africa. It leads to the guerilla movement's political wing in government caught between its supposed radical past and its new role as a conciliator with the imperialists. Hamas may have got into power on a hard-line anti-Israel position and an anti-corruption ticket, but soon it will be forced to back down on its more radical positions and will inevitably be embroiled in corruption scandals of its own. Where can the Palestinians turn next?

## A socialist solution

If the bourgeois nationalism of Fatah and the PLO and the Islamic fundamentalism of Hamas have led to failure then what is the way out? Socialist believe that only the mass activity of the working class and popular masses can bring about real social change. The negotiations with the UN and other power brokers are a diversion, because these institutions in the final analysis support Israel.

Only the working class of the region alongside the oppressed Palestinians can fight an open revolutionary struggle that really challenges Israel's power, breaking it up from within and destroying the Zionist state. As long as Israel continues to exist and be supported by the imperialist powers then all of the democracy and 'reforms' in Palestine have a Damocles sword hanging over them - the continued threat of Israel's military might that could invade at any time.

A two-state solution, which is what effectively exists now, can never provide the peace and stability that the Palestinians want. Over 6 million Palestinian refugees, some of them now fourth generation, live in camps dotted around the middle east, in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and as part of a Diaspora community of Palestinians all over the world.

They are the legacy of the creation of Israel in 1947, which resulted in ethnic cleansing and a mass exodus of Palestinians from the land that the UN unilaterally gave to the Israelis. Any strategy for peace that does not take into account the unresolved refugee issue will always fail, as the refugee camps give birth to new generations of fighters, willing to sacrifice their life for a homeland they have never known.

## The League for the Fifth International demands;

- The immediate release of all Palestinian political prisoners being held by the Israeli government
- The unconditional withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and West Bank
- A mass movement that can bring down the apartheid wall in the West Bank
- The right of return of all Palestinian refugees
- For a revolutionary party which can fight for a socialist one-state solution.

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) has often been held up as a model left unity but it now finds itself in crisis, reports **Luke Cooper**

# Scottish Socialist Party: left regroupment in crisis

In Scotland, former Scottish Militant members Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes, who set up the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), have recently been engaged in a fierce public battle that threatens to split the party wide open. Any party formation with competing political trends within it, in this case competing centrist tendencies, reformists and nationalists, is necessarily unstable because each seeks to pull the party different strategic directions. The trigger was an apolitical scandal involving national convenor Sheridan in November 2004. The Murdoch owned *News of the World* claimed that Sheridan had been having an affair while his wife was pregnant with their first baby. The response of the SSP executive committee (EC) was to ask Sheridan to step down as convenor of the party and Sheridan agreed, with both parties agreeing to claim that this was because he wanted to 'spend more time with his family'. The *News of the World* published its allegations and Sheridan launched a libel case contesting them.

These responses - the libel case and the forced resignation - further illustrate the electoral opportunism of the SSP in that it could not bring themselves to say simply that it was a private matter, unconnected to the SSP and its politics.

Sheridan's sidelining by the executive committee, led by his former collaborator, McCombes, has resulted in 18 month factional struggle within the party. There has been rumours, that Sheridan allegations originate with EC

members around McCombes, that Sheridan is an unrepentant sexist and bully. While Sheridan has not returned as convenor of the party, he has remained a prominent front man for the party.

Sheridan's libel case has infuriated the EC as the party's internal life has become played out in the courts. Lawyers representing Murdoch's *News International* have demanded minutes of the meeting that led Sheridan to resign. The court agreed and the party was asked to hand them over, but they refused and McCombes spent a week in jail as a result.

For all this personal scandal underpinning the struggle within the SSP it is very much a political crisis. At root this crisis has arisen out of the failure of the SSP, despite limited electoral success, to make a significant breakthrough.

The International Socialist Movement (ISM), set up by Sheridan and McCombes after they left the Militant, has been the largest force in the party over the past eight years with a clear majority on the party's EC. But there has been increasingly a split between Sheridan and McCombes over the party's orientation and their respective positions on Scottish independence.

McCombes and his supporters in the right wing of the ISM and the Scottish Republican Socialist platform have argued for the party to place its biggest campaigning emphasis on the fight for an independent Scotland even if at first it is formed on a capitalist basis. This has led to them supporting an

"Independence Convention" with the Green Party and the SNP and to Scottish Socialist Voice, controlled by the McCombes wing, arguing that the 2007 elections are "a referendum for an independent Scotland".

Some on the right-wing of the party have even advocated they publicly call for a tactical vote for the SNP at these elections and have been furious with SSP branches that have stood candidates in SNP strongholds for "splitting the independence vote". Sheridan by contrast has pushed the SSP to campaign more on working class issues and seems to rightly balk at the possibility of a stitch up with Scotland's bourgeois nationalist party.

This conflict led to the dissolution of the ISM earlier this year and since then there has been the formation of two competing factions within the SSP: one led by the McCombes wing called the United Left platform; and one led by Sheridan, supported by the SWP and Committee for a Workers International, called the SSP Majority.

Sheridan wrote an open letter to the SSP membership at the end of May that was a tirade against the McCombes faction entitled. The document stressed the need for socialist and working class politics without explicitly attacking the Independence position of the McCombes wing. After all how could it when Sheridan had been so complicit in developing the policy and McCombes was taking it to its logical conclusion? Whatever the truth of the

rumours of Sheridan's alleged sexism the letter made several come-ons for sexist support including accusing his opponents of wanting to turn the SSP into "a gender based discussion group".

Sheridan seems to have rallied the party's rank and file to his side and looks set to secure a majority at the National Conference in the Autumn. What will be left of the SSP then though is difficult to say.

The CWI and SWP's support for Sheridan is significant because they will court his support for the two main left-of-Labour initiatives they lead south of the border, the Campaign for a New Workers Party and Respect respectively. Galloway is already on record as saying a Galloway-Sheridan partnership would be a "dream ticket" for the next elections. The seemingly imminent split in the SSP may increase the fragmentation in the left alternative initiatives or it may well provide a stimulus to a new formation.

If so, the lessons of the SSP will have to be learned. The SSP has always been a small centrist party with various smaller components that have united around a reformist programme that its leaders hoped would allow them to "hit the big time" in terms of electoral gains. At the first signs that the strategy was faltering, and with little growth, indeed stagnation and decline in party membership, those same campaigns inevitably pulled in different directions.

The RMT affiliation presented great

opportunities for the SSP to turn to the trade unions and campaign within them for a new working class party. But because it presented itself as a (fake) left reformist alternative and was tied to being a "Scotland only" party it could not play this role.

The rightward shift of Labour and its effects on the relationship to the trade unions and consciousness of working class militants has advanced far beyond the period of the SML's breakthrough in the 1990s with nine years of Labour's neo-liberal programme and war.

The moves to build alternatives in the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party and Respect have all suffered from opportunistic centrist leadership - that on the one hand presents reformist and populist politics to the working class and on the other shy away from a fight with the union bureaucracy to build the pressure for them to form a working class alternative.

The fragmentation of the existing initiatives must be overcome by forming a principled united front around the need to fight for a new working class party in the unions, for fighting trade unions, rank and file movement and against the anti-trade union laws, if we are to realise the opportunities that lie ahead. We in Workers Power are committed to carrying on the fight for these demands and raising the banner of revolutionary socialism as the only solution to the nightmare of global capitalism.

## End the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan Victory to the resistance!

**G**eorge W Bush, US president and commander-in-chief, visited Baghdad for five hours on 13 June. During that time, 36 Iraqis were killed. Meanwhile, 2,000 supporters of Moqtada al-Sadr took to the streets, chanting, "Iraq is for the Iraqis!"

On the same day, the Pentagon announced the death of the 2,500th US soldier since the invasion. The following day, the puppet Iraqi prime minister launched Operation Forward Together, aimed at re-taking control, not of some far-flung corner of the country, but... Baghdad, itself.

As a PR stunt, this ranks as low as Bush's famous "Mission Accomplished" speech on 1 May 2003.

Despite the completion of the Iraqi cabinet with the appointment of Ministers of Defence and the Interior, despite the killing of al-Qa'ida leader al-Zarqawi, and despite the Iraqi government's National Reconciliation Plan, which offered an amnesty to those fighters, who put down their arms... Iraq is becoming more violent, daily life more intolerable and the occupation more untenable.

### Repression fuels resistance

Baghdad's central mortuary received 1,595 bodies in June, up from 1,375 in May and 1,155 in April. Most of these corpses had bullet-holes in the head, a sign of sectarian executions. Internet bloggers and Iraqi journalists in Baghdad report that the Iraqi police is in the hands of such death squads.

No one expects the 75,000 extra Iraqi and US troops in the latest clampdown to make any difference – except by disrupting the power and water supplies even more and increasing the number of arbitrary arrests and house raids. One US soldier, recently interviewed by US journalist Nir Rosen, explains what such raids entail.

"Our entrance included accidentally stepping all over the family's freshly prepared lunch of salad and kebabs – Arabs typically eat on the floor. After kicking down every door, bursting open every cabinet and flipping over every mattress, unearthing every prayer rug and breaking every lock in the house in search for weapons and bombs, we proceeded to detain a 15-year-old kid and tossed him

in our Humvee while his mom cried and pleaded with us that he was innocent."

"If I were an Iraqi under US occupation," he continued, "I'd be an insurgent... For every insurgent or jihadist we caught, we created two times as many fighters."

While this account explains why so many US veterans come back and dive into antiwar activity, others are more complicit in war crimes. The Pentagon is investigating claims that five American soldiers raped and killed a young Iraqi woman and three members of her family. It has charged three US troops of shooting dead three Iraqi prisoners and threatening to kill a fellow soldier if he reported the crime.

And these are just the crimes that Donald Rumsfeld's officers feel are too repugnant to cover up. According to Dr Stephen Miles' recent book, Oath Betrayed, American doctors have been complicit in torture – month-long sleep deprivation, exposure to freezing water, forced feeding of pork to Muslims, use of threatening dogs, denial of pain relief drugs – and failing to conduct proper post-mortems at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison.

Their motto was: "No blood, no foul".

### Ramadi: another Fallujah

Currently, US troops have started amassing outside Ramadi in western Iraq. Many of the tactics used in the build-up to the invasion of Fallujah in November 2004 are being deployed. Then the US military destroyed 70 per cent of the buildings, killing around 5,000 inhabitants.

Ramadi's main hospital, like Fallujah's, has been starved of IV fluids, surgical sutures, antibiotics, anaesthetic drugs, and other equipment and supplies. There are shortages of water, electricity and gas. 250,000 civilians have already left the city and are living in tents under the burning midsummer sun. The remaining 150,000 are daily warned by US broadcasts that, should they leave their houses, they will be considered resistance fighters. Marine snipers shoot even at shadows in windows and doorframes.

Nightly air raids are "softening up" the remaining city dwellers and tanks are moving into the suburbs. Despite the global outrage which raised the slogan "No more Fallujahs!" 18 months ago, another major tragedy looks inevitable.

### Imperialism

What is happening in Iraq is, unfortunately, not unique. It is part of what George W Bush's father proclaimed, 15 years ago, as "the new world order". It is part of what revolutionary socialists named 100 years ago as imperialism.

British troops in Afghanistan are playing the same role there. In June, the UK deployed 3,150 troops in the southern province of Helmand. Six were killed in the first three weeks, as many as died in the previous five years of occupation.

Despite their numbers, they are already confined to barracks, pinned down by a resistance made up of farmers, tribal and Islamist guerrillas.

Back in April, safely in his ministerial office, the then Defence Secretary John Reid confidently told a press conference that the UK troops could get through their three year stint "without a shot being fired". In less secure surroundings, Major Huw Williams explained the rethinking that's been required,

"We thought we would play the 'British not American' card. But it hasn't been so easy. There's a lot of history here..."

And indeed there is. In the 1830s, Britain briefly occupied Afghanistan as part of its drive to raid the Indian sub-continent of its natural resources. Likewise after the First World War, the British army occupied Iraq, this time coveting its oilfields. Iraqis and Afghans view today's occupation forces in precisely the same light. These too are wars of plunder.

• British firms have made at least \$1.1 billion profit out of the occupation of Iraq alone

• US Vice President Dick Cheney's Halliburton alone has been awarded contracts in Iraq worth \$20 billion

• \$8.8 billion of Iraqi and \$1 billion of Afghani aid money has not been audited properly and has gone "missing"

• A quarter of all "reconstruction" aid has been spent servicing the occupation.

But, by far the biggest profits are still to come. And they're from oil. Exxon, Chevron, Shell and BP are already profiting from oil production. Soon they will benefit from unique Production Sharing Agreements, which will stretch 25-40 years into the future, and guarantee these firms' generous cuts against the actions of elected governments. In other words, attempts to nationalise the oil industry or raise taxes on the multinationals will be illegal.

So much for democracy! With one stroke of the pen, the US/UK installed Iraqi government has signed away the wealth of the whole people.

This is what the war in Iraq is about. And it is why the international working class must support the resistance. A victory against the occupation will be a victory against the imperialist powers, which hope to use this massive wealth and control over oil supplies to extend their empires into every corner of the globe.

Every defeat for the occupiers will demoralise their troops and encourage

divisions among their leaders. The Italian, Japanese, Slovak and Romanian troops are all being withdrawn as the occupation has run into a wall of popular resistance. Now we must make the others follow.

Workers and everyone, who opposes this imperialist war, should not be confused by predictions that withdrawal now will lead to civil war. The occupation has already placed Iraq on the verge of civil war by deliberately turning Sunni against Shia, Kurd against Arab. The imperialists have used the oldest trick in the book, divide and rule. Their withdrawal is a precondition for Iraqis determining their own future.

We must mobilise for a massive turnout in Manchester on 23 September for the Stop the War Coalition's Time To Go demonstration. Our message to the Labour Party conference that the demo is designed to confront should be as clear as possible:

• Troops Out Now!

• Victory to the resistance!

Defeated troops cannot be immediately redeployed in Iran, Syria, Venezuela. A routed imperialism cannot retain military bases in Iraq to protect the oilfields, as it is currently planning. A victorious resistance will give hope to all those around the world – including the working class, oppressed and poor in Britain and the US – to fight back against the global capitalism, the system that cannot live without wars.

## Iraqi oil workers leader to speak in London

Hassan Juma'a, president of the 23,000 strong General Union of Oil Employees, based in Basra, is coming to London in July. Everyone should try and listen to him speak.

The GUOE organises Arab and Kurd, Shia and Sunni alike. It calls for the unconditional and immediate withdrawal of all troops. It organised a strike to cut off oil supplies to the US troops during the siege of Najaf in August 2004.

GUOE also fights for workers control of society and industry. It

organised a successful conference against privatisation last year, and is behind a follow-up conference on 25 July in Basra. The union has successfully fought for decent wages in the industry, to kick out the US contractors and create more jobs to soak up Iraqi unemployment, and for gains for the whole community, like decent housing.

It is hardly surprising, with this record, that, on 20 June, the Iraqi government froze the GUOE domestic and foreign bank accounts. This follows other anti-

union measures: disbanding the lawyers' union, freezing the writers' union accounts and decreeing that all trade union activity illegal.

All trade unionists must rush letters of support to the GUOE and its sister unions and make vociferous protests to the foreign office.

Hassan Juma'a will speak at the Iraq occupation Focus meeting

7:30pm Thursday 13 July, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London WC1

## 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 at the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New World Party of

Socialist Revolution – the Fifth International.

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

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020-7407 2907 or email us at workerspower@bopenworld.com

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