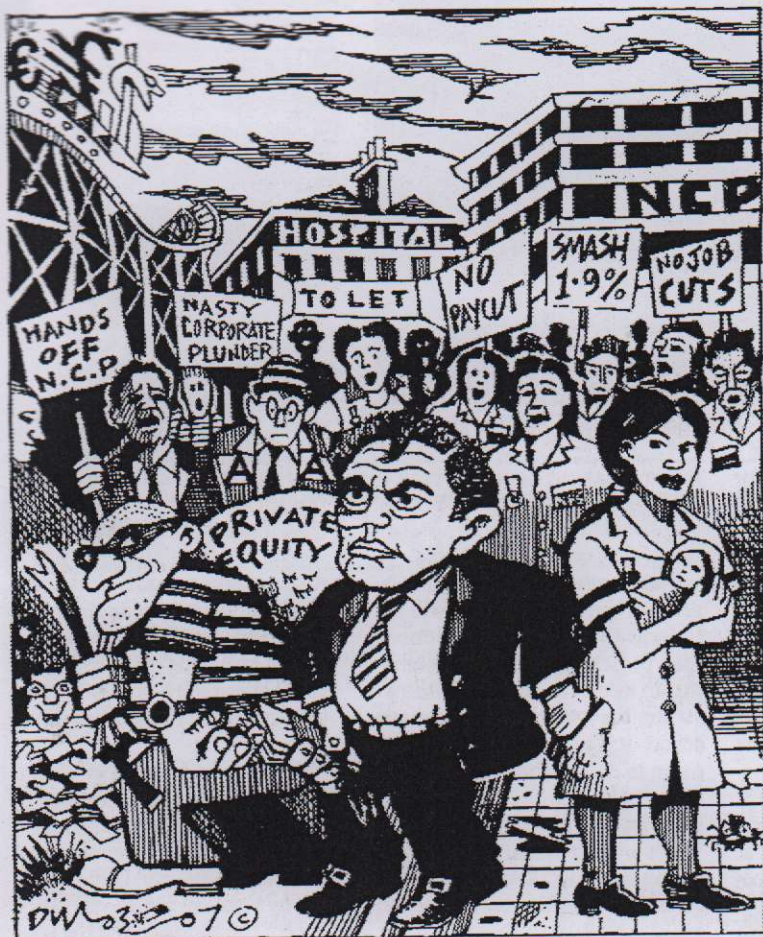


workers power

March 2007 ★ Price £1 / €1.50 Issue 313

Monthly magazine of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

SMASH LABOUR'S PAY CUT for nurses and all public sector workers



**1.9% PAY 'RISE'
IS REALLY A
2.3% PAY CUT**

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Gordon Brown cuts workers pay but hands tax cuts to millionaire 'private equity' asset strippers who sack workers at AA and NCP

**CIVIL SERVICE, NHS AND PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS
ALL-OUT UNITED STRIKE NOW!**

INSIDE

- International Women's Day 4-page feature
- Stock market slide exposes system
- Slavery: Britain's shameful history
- Action to stop attack on Iran!



**League for the
Fifth International**

EDITORIAL

Smash the pay cut - build for an all out strike

Make no mistake - Gordon Brown's announcement on 1 March of a 1.9% pay rise is really a pay cut for millions of public sector workers.

It can be stopped - if those millions all strike together and bring the country to a standstill.

The 1.9% is way below the official inflation rate - the retail price index is rising by 4.2%. That means a real fall in pay of 2.3%.

This affects 850,000 nurses and health workers - and this April they will only get 1.5% in the first stage of the deal. Civil servants and prison officers are also being targeted for the cut. The rest of the public sector, including local government workers, will be the next in line.

Brown's hypocrisy is breathtaking. He said the pay cut showed his "determination to maintain discipline and stability and to continue with the 11th year of sustained economic growth".

So, when he defends tax breaks for asset stripping millionaires in the so-called "private equity" firms, or keeps down taxes on the billions paid in bonuses to idle parasites in the city, Brown calls this "growth". But, when he directly lowers the living standards of millions of workers, he calls this "discipline".

How much clearer could it be that Brown is a politician for the ruling class of capitalists?

His claim to be for the "many, not the few" is a lie - if he was really for the many, he would discipline the capitalists by taxing their wealth and create sustained growth of workers' incomes by raising wages.

Strike together

Trade union leaders rounded on Brown's announcement. The giant public sector unions Unison and Amicus both said they would consult over industrial action. Unison's head of health, Karen Jennings, called it "nothing more than a pay cut", while Amicus' Kevin Coyne said, "We do not believe our members will accept this."

The maximum pressure needs to go up from the rank and file union membership now in favour of strike action. The union leader-



Pay cuts: a sign of things to come under Brown's premiership

ships should actively campaign for an all-out indefinite strike across the public sector - linking the pay claims in a real public sector alliance so that the government and employers cannot pick off one sector at a time to weaken the overall fight. The issues facing NHS staff and civil servants can be linked too - no job cuts, no closures, no privatisation, no messing with our pensions. Together we can win!

The civil servants' PCS union is striking on 1 May. This is a long way off, and we need action fast. But at the very latest the other public sector unions should be ready to strike by then. Let's use the coming weeks to campaign hard for an all-out strike across the public sector as soon as possible. And let's be clear that a one-day strike will never be enough to stop Brown and the bosses.

Last March, over a million local government workers launched the biggest walkout since the 1926 general strike. But the union leaders didn't follow up, and now the attack on pensions has returned. Let's fight for an indefinite strike until they have to back down. Let's seize the initiative and keep it.

Can union members trust the union leaders to go all the way? No, we can't. Whatever they may say on pay, most of the national leaders of the big public sector unions are backing Brown's bid to lead Labour. They want him to take over as prime minister when Blair resigns. And they know that if we bust

Brown's pay cut his whole project will be in tatters - at the end of the day they will side with him rather than with their own members.

That is why there is a real danger that the union leaders will try to limit the action to little more than protests. Instead of mobilising an effective, united, national strike, they will try to fragment action - just as they have in the campaign to defend the NHS.

Rank and file control

That's why we warn: rank and file public sector workers need to take control of this dispute. We need to build joint committees from the base up, linking our struggles across the different unions and the different sectors. We need to organ-

ise ourselves to take action - with the national leaders of the unions where possible, but without and against them where necessary.

That is why Workers Power has been campaigning for three urgently needed initiatives across the working class movement in Britain

- A rank and file movement in the unions, to fight for all officials to be recallable and paid the average of their members, and to organise action without official blessing where necessary

- Joint committees of action at local, regional and national level to link up the fights across the unions, drawing in delegates from local communities and service users, from health service and other campaigns, including private sector workers in dispute, like the workers in AA and NCP, the cleaners and the Fujitsu IT workers in Manchester

- A new workers' party, financed by the political funds that our union leaders are currently squandering by paying millions to the very Labour Party that is attacking our pay and running down our services.

That way, not only can we get an all-out strike to smash the pay cut, we can build a political movement to guarantee permanent increases in workers' living standards by a real revolution - the overthrow of the parasites and the creation of a democratically planned economy that meets public need, not private greed.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN 1

Britain is the worst place in the rich world to grow up in, according to a United Nations report into child poverty. Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, one of the authors, blamed "a society which is very unequal, with high levels of poverty".

Among the reports findings are these facts for Britain

- Child poverty doubled since 1979
- 16 per cent of children live in homes earning less than half the national average wage
- One third of 15-19 year olds are not in education or training
- More than one in three 11-15 year olds are bullied.

Britain and the US - the two most aggressive countries in the world, where the neoliberal agenda of low pay, poor or non-existent services and privatisation has gone furthest - ranked miles behind the others. This is where global capitalism is heading - unless we can stop it.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN 2

Many liberal commentators have, however, picked up on other aspects

- 38 per cent of British 15 year olds have had sex
 - One third rarely sit down to a family meal
 - One third have smoked cannabis.
- But none of these facts have to lead to poor well-being. Escaping the straitjacket of family mealtimes, or experimenting with sex and drugs may be liberating, not depressing.

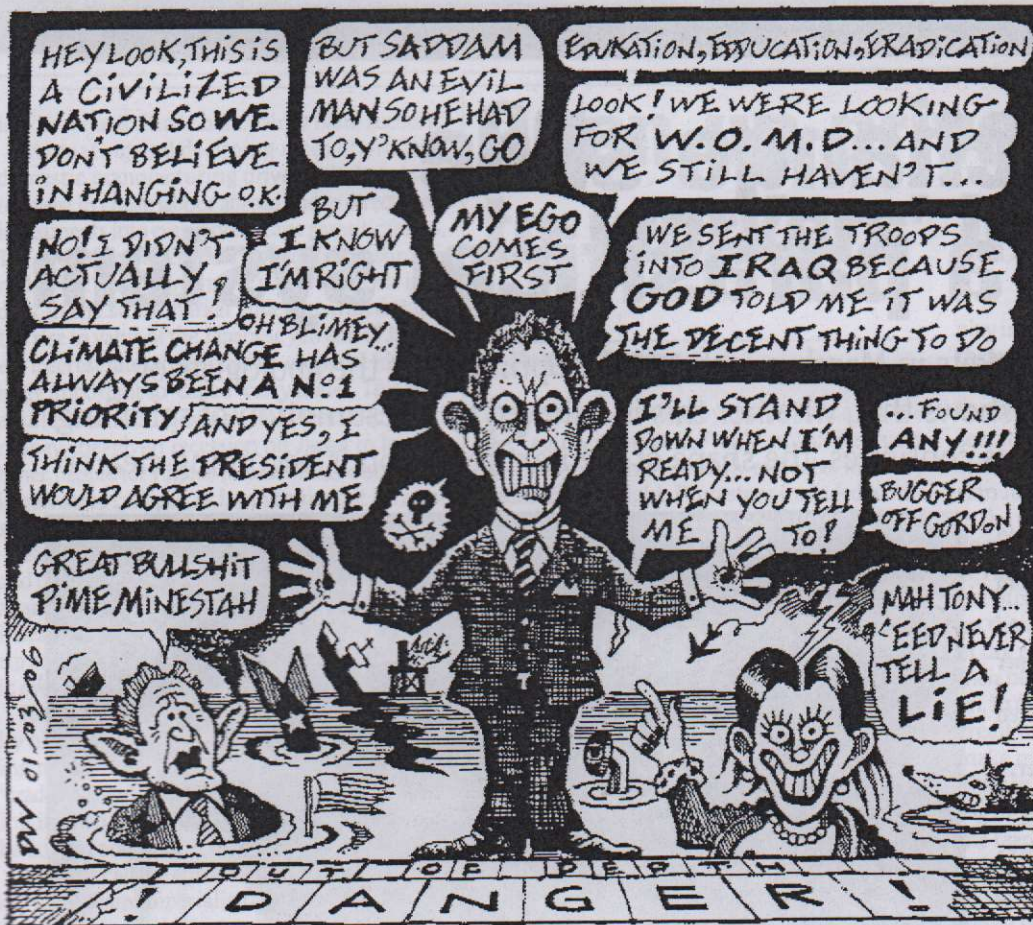
Rebellion against injustice and fighting for a better world are pursuits that give meaning to life, which is why an independent, mass revolutionary youth movement is the real answer to child poverty and youth alienation.

GUIDE TO TROTSKY?

The Socialist Workers Party has published a *Rebel's guide to Trotsky*. Unfortunately, it doesn't even mention what Trotsky thought his life's most important work: the founding of the Fourth International, the world party of social revolution.

The SWP has always mocked the idea of founding a new International and run its own tendency bureaucratically from London.

For a more comprehensive guide to Trotsky's life and work, we recommend Richard Brenner's *Trotsky: an introduction* available at <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=78,426,0,0,1,0>



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6 Postal workers are questioning their union's funding of Labour, reports a *CWU workplace rep*, as the government launches another assault on their jobs, wages and pensions

7 The next strike in the ongoing PCS dispute is not due till May Day. *Jeremy Dewar* says the rank and file must take control

8 *Bernard Harper* exposes Labour's complicity in the murder of a Kurdish deportee, while *Bernie McAdam* calls for working class unity in the face of Islamophobia

9 To celebrate International Women's Day, we look at its origins in the Second International, reprint an article on women's role in the Russian revolution, and examine the position of women today

13 In the first in a series of articles on slavery, *Dave Stockton* explains its origins and the ideology capitalists developed to justify its use

14 The US and Britain are losing the war in Iraq. As a consequence, warns *Jeremy Dewar*, Bush is even more determined to attack Iran

15 *Martin Suchanek* looks at what the German presidency of the G8 really means and what anti-G8 demonstrators can expect in June

16 *Marc Lasalle* surveys the French left's presidential candidates, arguing that the root of the problem lies in failing to provide an revolutionary alternative to reformism

17 Senators brought down Italy's government by refusing to support war in Afghanistan. But, writes *Dave Stockton*, their change of vote exposes the left's lack of principle

18 We interview *Andreas Aullet*, an activist who took part in the Oaxaca uprising and commune in Mexico last year

20 Spotlight on Iran. *Simon Hardy* calls for strikes and direct action to stop war on Iran, co-ordinated by local People's Assemblies

Supplement

Daniel Bensaïd claims that it can be principled for revolutionaries to enter bourgeois governments. *Luke Cooper* replies that this is a total revision of Marxism and would, if implemented, lead to a disaster for the working class

CAPITALISM

Stock Exchange slide exposes a parasitical system

The slides on world stock markets in March punctured the optimism of the apologists of capitalism. *Richard Brenner* shows that, whether this is followed by a resumption of spiralling growth or the slide downwards continues, the shape of the next recession is becoming clearer

Financial journalists in the first week of March took a short break from their normal job of telling us how great capitalism is to explain to their worried readers why:

- The Chinese stock exchange plunged by 9 per cent
- Stock markets around the world panicked and all fell together
- The former head of the USA's federal reserve said America could be in recession by the end of the year
- \$1 trillion was wiped off the value of shares worldwide.

All of a sudden, this most perfect of economic systems was again looking less than... perfect.

So what happened and what does it mean for workers and youth who don't own shares and don't have a stake in the system?

The first sign of trouble was on Tuesday 27 February when the Shanghai stock exchange dropped like a stone. The reason was – apparently – nothing more than a rumour that the foreign investors making millions out of China's cheap labour economy were going to start being taxed for their capital gains by the Chinese government.

These days, in the globalisation phase of capitalism, money is directed and redirected around the world in seconds, depending on where the highest profits, the best returns can be found. So traders who had bought the lie that the Chinese economy is just going to keep on rising forever were open mouthed as investors sold across the board.

Stock markets all over the world started to dive at the news. It wasn't long before people started looking for deeper reasons for the fall – and the state of the US economy soon emerged as the prime culprit, spurring another three days of falls.

Despite being the world's largest economy and still the most powerful nation on earth, the US is in a vulnerable situation. In January orders for durable goods fell by a massive 7.8 per cent. Predictions for economic growth have been revised downwards from 3.5 per cent to just 2.2 per cent this year. Investors are starting to worry that they will not make sufficient profits from their investments, and annual profit growth is now predicted to be under 10 per cent for the first time since 2003. In a survey last month by the US Business Council, three out of four chief executives of big companies expected growth of profits to slow down over the next year – only 1.3 per cent expected profit growth to speed up.

Even more worrying for the US economy is the end of the house price boom. Over there, house



prices are actually falling for the first time in donkey's years. This will limit the ability of ordinary consumers to spend their spare cash in the shops. People will be less inclined to borrow and spend – and it is this that has been powering America's boom, and the massive expansion of production in China too. Banks are making it harder to borrow, and the numbers of people, who can't pay their mortgages and lose their homes, has risen sharply and will continue to do so over the months ahead.

Small wonder then that Alan Greenspan former chairman of the Federal Reserve – America's equivalent of the Bank of England – broke cover and predicted a possible recession by the end of the year.

Given that the United States makes up nearly a third of the world economy, a recession there will have major consequences for the rest of the world – including countries like India and China, whose sharp growth has been spurred by US demand for consumer and durable goods.

Already workers are under attack everywhere. In Britain – despite the economic boom – Gordon Brown wants to hold down public sector workers' pay to well below the rate of inflation: a pay cut in all but name. All over the world bosses and their governments are privatising our services, cutting our pensions and benefits. And all this at a time of global "boom". Imagine what a recession would mean. As it says in the bible, if these things are done when the tree is green, what shall be done

when it is dry?

This month's stock market slide exposed another feature of global capitalism's instability: parasitism. Increasingly investors feast off one another's investments, trading in a bewildering variety of instruments and "derivatives", all essentially charging one another for handling money, levying interest for lending money, or just betting in one way or another on the performance of each other's investments. The fact that such investments do not have even the veneer of a socially useful purpose is, to the capitalist, neither here nor there. Their only morality is profit. As Karl Marx said, for the capitalist, "Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets." But the joke is on them: for all the froth of parasitic speculation, it cannot survive indefinitely without production of real value beneath it. When sufficient capital is withdrawn from real production, the speculative bubble must eventually burst.

At the foundation of all this – the core of the economic system – stands not the swashbuckling entrepreneur, but the exploited worker. All profit ultimately derives from this – the fact that workers are paid under capitalism not the full value of the goods and services they produce, but the rough cost of getting us back to work in one piece the next day. The difference between the two – which Marxists call surplus value – is kept by the capitalist. This unpaid labour is the source of all profit, of all the capital in the world, whether it is ploughed into new sweatshops in China, or sitting

idly in some imbecile billionaire's bank account.

Stagnating and declining rates of profit in domestic manufacturing drive capitalists both to invest in cheap labour abroad and to direct their investments into ever more arcane parasitic forms. The wide array of weird and wonderful investments makes the system even more vulnerable. One incident in the stock market slide illustrated this – the rise in value of the Japanese yen and of Japanese interest rates threatened to wreck the increasingly important so-called “carry trade”. This miserable business, in which financiers borrowed money cheaply in recession hit Japan to lend to other people for higher interest rates elsewhere, is now set to collapse, as Japan comes out of recession.

Far from being a rational system based on steady and unlimited expansion, global capital is revealed as an irrational, unplanned system, in which huge investments can be tied up in what amounts to a rip off schemes to exploit unevenness in economic cycles around the world.

It even emerged that while stock market volatility hit record highs, some people were still making money – apparently volatility itself is now a “tradable item”. Capitalism has succeeded in turning its own instability into something that can be bought and sold.

Marxists call the current stage of global monopoly capitalism imperialism: the fusion of banking and manufacturing capital to form finance capital, and the domination of the global economy by great corporations, and of the world by a small number of great powers.

Beneath all the sound and fury of the market falls, behind all the explanations and denials, the official statements of confidence from the politicians, and the worried editorials in the bosses' papers, one thing is becoming pretty clear. While we do not know exactly when it will happen or how severe it will be, America is heading for recession and this will have a major impact on the capitalists and the working class everywhere.

When we reach the top of the business cycle, when society stands poised precariously on the brink of a downward cycle of economic contraction and decline, then suddenly there is a proliferation of parasitic activities of every imaginable type, then the “confidence” of consumers becomes a critical indicator capable of tipping the system into recession, then big financiers prepare to shaft thousands of small middle class private investors, then workers' pension schemes bear the brunt of falling share prices, then the capitalists prepare to withdraw their money if necessary from even socially critical forms of production if a higher return can be secured elsewhere; then thousands of gleaming new factories in the East will be closed down even faster than they opened up; then the workers are forced to fight ever harder to defend our living standards and stop our families being thrown on the scrapheap and our communities plunged into decay; then far from appearing decked out in gold as a shining system of plenty and progress, capitalism's true face is revealed to millions: a system of decline, of anarchy, in which private ownership of the sources of wealth and progress – above all of human labour – is allowed to strangle human potential in a sordid quest for profit.

Open up private equity to workers' inspection

By Marcus Chamoun

Protests organised by the GMB at a private equity summit in Frankfurt this February have put this normally reclusive industry under the spotlight. Protestors included workers at motoring company AA, who suffered 4,000 job cuts after private equity group Permira bought the company in 2005, and workers at food company Bird's Eye, facing 500 redundancies in Hull after a similar buy-out. Also present were National Car Parks workers facing job losses, speed-ups and union de-recognition, just as 3i is reported to be preparing to sell the company on – at a profit of £245m on an initial outlay of £550m after just 18 months.

Union activists and *Workers Power* readers will probably be aware of the role played by US private equity giant Texas Pacific at catering company Gate Gourmet, leading to the sacking of 700 workers by megaphone and provoking a sympathy strike by Heathrow airport baggage handlers. They may not know that private equity firms own or control businesses accounting for about 3 million jobs in the UK, or a fifth of the private sector workforce.

Free-market defenders of the industry argue that it plays a vital role in recycling capital, promoting growth businesses and start-ups, and restructuring larger, “failing” businesses. They expect to make big returns on selling the businesses they have bought, and take risks that more mainstream investors shy away from.

They also boast that investors in private equity-run businesses receive information about their finances and management that is superior to what the law forces publicly-listed companies to disclose. For us, however, the role they

play in the capitalist system as a whole is part of the problem and only the beginning of the story.

They may be more open about their finances to their investors – usually comprising a secretive club of hedge funds and wealthy individuals, as well as mainstream investors like pension funds – but they do not disclose anything to the public, workforces or unions. Often, they do not even disclose their investors' identities.

They raise much of the capital to buy their target businesses by taking out large mortgages on them – enjoying a huge subsidy in the form of tax relief on interest payments, and leaving their targets saddled with debt when they are sold on. In fact, just as the low interest rates and cheap credit of recent years have encouraged them to make more and bigger acquisitions, any future hikes in rates could see some businesses defaulting or going bust – with yet more job losses and the taxpayer picking up yet more of the bill.

Most crucially, the favoured route to profitability used by these companies is in hiving off assets (often by selling off buildings and factories and then leasing them back – providing an income to yet another layer of parasites), and by huge job cuts and speed-ups at work, putting them in the front line of the class struggle in the workplace.

We should support the GMB's call for an end to tax subsidies to these parasites, and force them to open their books to workers' inspection. But we should combine this with a call for a rank and file movement in the unions to prepare the way for a general fightback against the bosses' drive for more pressure and insecurity at work. And we should demand that any companies threatening job cuts, or bullying staff into working harder so that fat cats can squeeze more cream out of them, are nationalised under workers' control.

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ROYAL MAIL

Postal union's Labour link will not halt government attacks

A CWU workplace rep reports on another government assault on posties' jobs, wages and pensions

Recent strikes in Stoke, Manvers in south Yorkshire, Nottingham and Exeter are signs of a low-level war going on in Royal Mail. What is needed is escalation into a national fight - but this puts the Communications Workers Union's affiliation to Labour under fire.

After a year of slashing jobs and victimising militants in 2006, Royal Mail has come back for more, pleading that a £6 billion hole in its employee pension scheme and competition has caused its profits to plummet.

In response the government agreed a £2.5 billion finance package for Royal Mail that includes the proposal to close the final salary pension scheme for new workers and most likely cut the pensions for the existing workforce. The loan is to be paid off by cuts and ratcheting up workers' productivity - even though the pension fund hole was dug when the government took a decade-long "holiday" from paying into it!

The government has linked the loan to a "phantom share scheme". The London division rightly nails this as a divide and rule tactic and a "backdoor to privatisation". The scheme dangles as much as £5,300 over 5 years in front of postal workers so long as they accept "efficiency savings" (i.e. up to 40,000 cuts, according to The Mail on Sunday 4 March), while opening the door to public shares (i.e. privatisation).

Nigel Stapleton, Chairman of Postcomm, the regulator appointed by Labour to oversee creeping privatisation, has warned: "Since 2004, every initiative that the company has taken to improve efficiency has been absorbed either by higher wage rates or increased pension costs. Royal Mail has failed to bring its costs into line as would be expected of an efficient mail operator."

Labour and CWU: who 'influences' whom?

As London divisional rep Mark Palfrey has pointed out, "The Labour Government has masterminded the unnecessary imposition of competition, backdoor privatisation and the undermining of all postal services." The question isn't whether the union should stop funding the Labour Party, but why it hasn't done so already!

Even Deputy General Secretary Dave Ward told a CWU meeting in Leeds that the union would have to seriously consider its links to Labour if the government's proposals went through. The union's London divisional committee has blasted government plans, and is debating a motion for the union to campaign for a national strike and freeze its funding to the party.

Despite Ward's talk, however, in reality he is

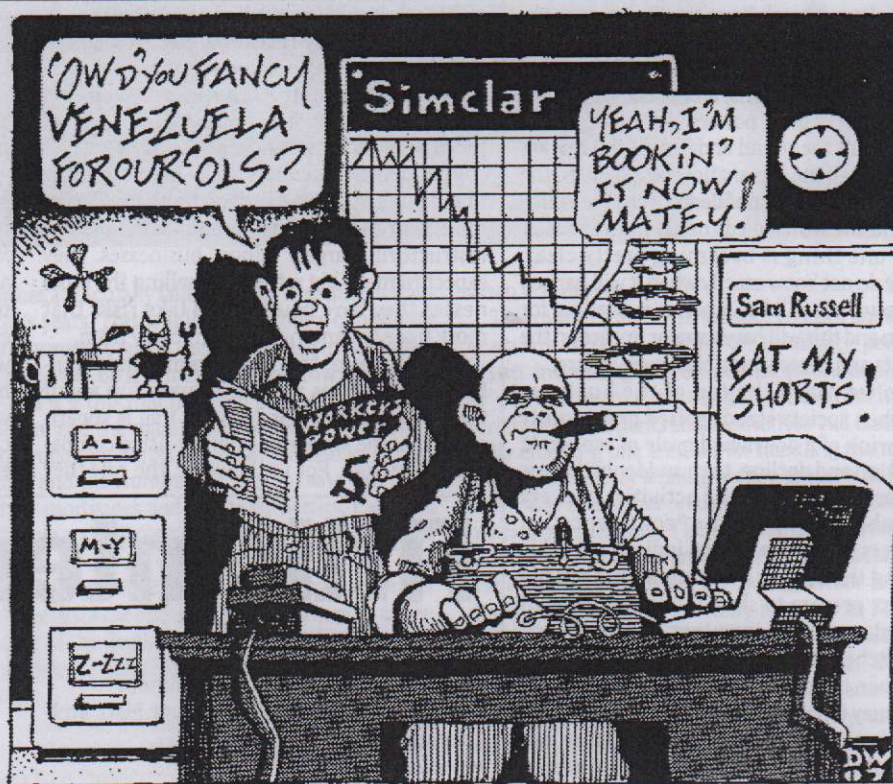
part of a leadership, which still insists that we need to maintain our "influence" with the government. He made this clear when opposing a motion to campaign for a new workers' party. But who is Ward kidding?

The CWU is a major Labour donor, contributing £735,000 between 2002 and 2005, and our "influence" has got us nothing back except attack after attack, not just in the post but also in the other public services we rely on like council housing cuts and NHS privatisation. We are funding our enemy and the enemy of the working class the world over, as Bush and Blair's wars and occupations in the Middle East prove.

In fact, all the "influence" seems to be going the other way. The CWU leadership has failed to come out against the phantom share scheme,

saying they will wait and see. Last year, it signed an Efficiency Agreement, which tied the hands of local reps, who then had to accept the validity of job cuts, despite the union's formal position in favour of a 35 hour week. It even called off a national strike ballot over pay, despite our chronic low wages.

The truth is, the members are way ahead of the "leaders" on this question - as the spate of local disputes shows. That's why we need a rank and file movement to wrest control of the union from the officials, and to use the CWU's political fund to launch a campaign for a new, mass party of the working class. One that will combat privatisation, low pay and cuts - and link that struggle to the fight to overthrow capitalism and open up the road to socialism.



Simclar workers occupied their electronics components factory in Kilwinning in Ayrshire, Scotland, for 24 hours on Friday 2 February to protest against its closure.

The employees had turned up for work the previous Monday to find the gates locked - 420 workers were locked out.

Simclar boss Sam Russell, the eighth richest man in Scotland, left employees with the minimum state-paid redundancy award, despite long years of service and the company making millions in profit over the last 12 months.

When the workers saw a brand new lock on the gate four days later, they broke in and occupied the plant. Unfortunately, their union, Community, advised them to end the occupation.

Workers in Argentina and Venezuela have occupied thousands of factories in recent years.

The Kilwinning workers were right, though: occupation is a key weapon in fighting closures and should be linked to calls on the government to nationalise the company's plants, under the control of the workers and without compensation to the likes of Sam Russell.

CIVIL SERVICE

PCS strike in danger of stalling

Around 200,000 civil servants rallied to the PCS call for a strike on 31 January. But the next strike is not due till May Day, three months later. This is too late argues *Jeremy Dewar*; the rank and file must take control of the dispute

On the 31 January, benefit offices, the driving licence agency and passport offices were shut. The environment and food department and Ministry of Defence also saw solid walkouts. Half a million unprocessed tax forms piled up in offices. Even the Welsh Assembly closed, as the speaker of the house joined the picket line.

The strike was more successful than the previous one in 2004. The anger of low paid civil servants has grown. The initial 104,000 job cuts have been supplemented by year on year cuts of 5 per cent until 2011, and Gordon Brown has demanded public sector wages must be cut. That's what a 2 per cent limit on pay rises means when inflation is running at 4.2 per cent.

So why has the PCS not called further national, service-wide action until May Day? There are three months between 31 January and 1 May, during which most union members are inactive and management can organise to break the next strike.

It's not as if civil servants are unwilling to strike. Thousands of Ministry of Defence managers and technicians in the Prospect union struck over an imposed, below inflation pay offer on 28 February. On 30 March tens of thousands PCS members in the Passport Service, MoD and Land Registry will also strike over pay.

Along with its industrial strategy, the PCS will ask candidates of all parties in the coming May elections for their views on local cuts and closures, hoping to influence the ballot or put pressure on Labour HQ. A PCS-wide strike for 1st May has been called as the next focus for action and to maximize the pressure on the government and the Labour Party to deal with the union.

Strategy for victory

The problem for PCS activists is that we have been here before - 5th November 2004, to be precise. Then a massive one-day strike was followed up by... nothing. Job centres and benefits offices mounted a desultory pay campaign, consist-



ing of two further two-day strikes, six months apart, against deteriorating wage levels and more than 20,000 job cuts. Other groups simply allowed posts to be lost - over half the 100,000 job cuts announced in 2004 have already been achieved - leaving fewer staff to work harder than ever.

Militants should be angry that they may again be let down by a leadership that talks left, but fails to campaign for a strategy to win. What should that strategy consist of? To start with, it should unite all civil servants with demands that meet their needs:

- No job cuts - revert to staff numbers to 2004 levels
- No privatisation - bring contracted out services back in house
- No to annual budget cuts
- £16,380 minimum wage - 10 per cent increase now, across the board
- Tax the rich and halt defence spending to pay.

Such a clear platform would transform the dispute, giving activists a real chance of winning workers to the kind of action needed to win - a national, all-out, indefinite strike. The rank and file members, who have the most to gain and lose from this dispute, need to organise independently from the leadership in order to fight for official backing for such a programme of action - and to try and deliver it

unofficially if necessary.

Local strike committees, directly elected by and answerable to regular mass meetings, can play an important role in establishing an alternative leadership for the strike. They need to link up locally and regionally, within and across departments, as well as forming joint committees of action with other public sector unions to co-ordinate strikes and protests to smash the 2 per cent pay limit.

Only the rank and file members should control what kind of industrial action is called, when it

is called off, and what deals should be signed. Despite the heavy number of Socialist Party members on the national executive and Mark Serwotka's support for Respect, the "left" PCS leadership called off the strike ballot over pensions in 2005 and signed a rotten deal behind the members' backs. We need a rank and file movement to ensure all officials are directly accountable to the members and to democratically control the union without any need for a bureaucracy to mediate between the workers and the bosses.

Left Unity splits - build a rank and file movement

After five years of a "left" leadership that has presided over a disintegrating civil service, it is unsurprising that the Left Unity electoral coalition has split, with a new grouping, PCS Independent Left, standing in this year's elections. But its manifesto offers no alternative strategy for the current dispute and insufficient reforms to democratise the union and abolish the bureaucracy.

It is necessary to expose and replace the current left fakers. But it is not enough. What civil service militants need is a real rank and file movement

- All officials to be regularly elected and instantly recallable, paid

the average wage of those they represent

- Rank and file control over all disputes and negotiations, when strikes should be called and when called off
- For an all-out, indefinite national strike to win our demands across the board
- For elected strike committees to run the dispute and appeal for united strike action with other workers - over the heads of their do-nothing official leaders if necessary.

Workers Power is willing to unite with all forces that want to take this urgent and necessary next step.

RACISM

Racist Labour complicit in murder of Kurdish deportee

By Bernard Harper

A Kurdish asylum seeker deported from Britain has been gunned down. This is blood on the hands of the Labour government. After fleeing from a war torn area, undergoing incredible hardships and suffering from severe psychological trauma, he was sent back to the same brutal situation. He was one of 38 Kurdish "failed" asylum seekers that were deported in February back to Kurdistan, a region that Labour claims to be safe. This is far from true.

The Kurdistan Regional Government is dominated by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, in an alliance, which also includes the Iraqi Communist Party. Both the PUK and KDP supported the imperialist invasion of Iraq. Jalal Talabani, general secretary of the PUK, was rewarded for his collaboration by being made president of Iraq, while KDP leader Massoud Barzani is president of the KRG.

These two parties also have their own special police (Asayish) that routinely terrorises political opponents. It was the KDP Asayish that met the flight from RAF Brize Norton at Erbil Airport, where the deportees were offloaded in the cargo area and beaten up by airport guards.



In the days prior to the deportations, demonstrations were held in London, Manchester and Leicester; on the day of the deportation itself, one was held at RAF Brize Norton airbase. The rally in Leicester attracted over 400 people and began and ended with impromptu marches through the city centre.

Speakers from a number of local organisations, including Leicester Social Forum, the Indian Workers' Association and Workers Power, expressed solidarity with the Kurdish community, which, through the Federation of Iraqi Refugees, had organised the demonstration at very short notice. The Workers Power speaker's call for trade unions and community organisations to build an alternative to Labour and form a new anti-imperialist workers' party was well received.

Demonstrations are important in highlighting the issue of deportations, but they alone will not prevent them. What is needed is for work-

ers in Britain, encouraged and supported by their trade unions, to refuse to allow deportations to happen.

We can do this in many ways: blocking the roads to air force bases, occupying airports like Heathrow, which the government also uses to deport people, and taking strike action so that the planes cannot take off.

The No One Is Illegal campaign has called a trade union conference in Liverpool on 31 March. This important initiative will provide an excellent opportunity for trade unionists and community activists to discuss how workers can provide practical solidarity by refusing to collaborate with the state deportations. More information about the conference can be obtained from info@noii.org.uk.

Trade Union Conference against Immigration Controls

Saturday March 31

Asylum Link, St Annes Church

Overbury St

Liverpool 7

Initial sponsors include

Trades Councils: Tameside, Oxford, Bury, Waltham Forest, Oldham, Chorley and District, Greater Manchester Association. Union branches: Bolton NUT, Unison Manchester Community and Mental Health

Defend Muslims from state terror

By Bernie McAdam

The rise of Islamophobia is a feature of the "war on terror" on the home front. New Labour has cynically tried to shift the blame for the disaster unfolding in the Middle East on to its Muslim victims. The more unpopular and unwinnable these wars become the greater the scapegoating of Muslim communities here:

- Muslim families have been invited to spy on their youth
- Jack Straw has questioned the right of Muslim women to wear the niqab because it makes him feel "uncomfortable" and
- Over 1,000 people have been arrested on terrorist charges, just nine convicted.

In Birmingham nine Muslims have recently been arrested in a military-style police operation. Three have since been released. One of the released suspects reported that he had only been questioned four times... and accused of nothing, let alone presented with evidence of complicity in a terror plot. The fact that the police had so little to go on didn't stop them

arresting the suspects in dramatic raids, involving some 50 to 60 officers.

This is not the first time the cops have terrorised an innocent family in the name of fighting terrorism. Last year, in Forest Gate, East London, they shot an innocent and unarmed man. These interventions by the state inevitably trigger racist attacks on Mosques and Muslims. For instance, after Jack Straw made his racist comments about the niqab, incidents of racist abuse increased sharply.

It is little wonder that Muslims are alienated by Labour's policies. However, despite this, New Labour has continued to try and cultivate links with "respectable" and "moderate" Muslim leaders, in the hope they will be able to encourage passivity in the face of the government's racist attacks.

Echoes of Ireland

Of course the British state has plenty of practice at divide and rule - in the 1970s and 1980s, when the IRA bombing campaign was underway, the government targeted the Irish community indiscriminately. Under the Prevention of Terrorism

Act, 6,500 (mainly Irish) people were arrested; less than 3 per cent were convicted.

Those that were found guilty were often innocent: falsely imprisoned, like the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four. Why? Because of the need to intimidate and demoralise the Irish community from actively campaigning against injustice and British rule in the six counties of Northern Ireland.

The British antiwar and labour movement must not be lured into passivity by Blair's "war on terror". We must reject the argument that terror stalks our streets, or that, when such terror is used, it is unrelated or not a response to Bush and Blair's vastly superior terror machine in Iraq, Afghanistan... and, maybe soon, Iran.

We must stand shoulder to shoulder in common defence and solidarity with the Muslim community when under attack from the state or racist gangs. Working class solidarity and action can break the isolation the capitalist state seeks to impose on oppressed communities, and open the way to a united struggle to overthrow capitalism - at home and abroad.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The origins of International Women's Day



Born at a time of great social turbulence and crisis, when the imperialist nations were gearing up for world war, International Women's Day comes from a tradition of radicalism and revolutionary spirit. *Joy Macready* looks at its origins

The main founder of the working class women's movement was the German socialist Clara Zetkin (1857-1933). She edited a paper for working class women, *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) from 1891 onwards.

Speaking at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party, the SPD, in 1896, Zetkin argued for the inclusion of women in the political struggle of the working class at a time when women were not allowed to join political parties in many countries. Following Fredrick Engels, she argued that the root of women's oppression lies within the family - that there is an inseparable connection between the social position of women and private property in the means of production. Without a socialist revolution, women's liberation could not be achieved and, without involving women in the class struggle, the socialist revolution itself would be impossible.

This was a tough argument, because of many men fear that women would take their jobs and undermine their wages. Zetkin countered: "The more women's work exercises its detrimental influence upon the standard of living of men, the more urgent becomes the necessity to include them in the economic battle." Women's wages should be raised to the same level as men's.

Zetkin's next step was to win the struggle against the bourgeois feminists - most of whom defended the idea of an electoral franchise limited by property qualifications, thus excluding most working class women. Zetkin warned that, even where it was possible to combine forces with bourgeois feminists to fight for universal suffrage, on issues like higher wages and decent working conditions, bourgeois women would prove themselves "enemy sisters". Class independence was crucial.

Clara Zetkin took this struggle into the Second International (1889-1914). Just before its seventh



Clara Zetkin

congress, in Stuttgart in 1907, she organised the First International Conference of Socialist Women. Fifty-eight delegates from 15 countries were present. It set itself the objective of coordinating the struggle for the vote, building mass socialist women's organisations on a worldwide scale, and coordinating action through an international bureau, headed by Zetkin.

One way of making the masses, men as well as women, more aware of all these issues was to hold a special day of mobilisation on an international scale, similar in scope to May Day. In 1908, on the last Sunday in February, socialist women in the USA initiated the first Women's Day. Large demonstrations took place, calling for the vote, and political and economic rights for women. The following year, 2,000 people attended a Women's Day rally in Manhattan, while up to 30,000 female clothing workers were in the midst of a 13-week strike for better pay and conditions.

Two years later, in 1910, Zetkin came to the Second International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen with the proposal that Working Women's Day become an international event. In 1911, more than one million women and men attended rallies in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Sweden under the slogan: "The vote for

women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism."

War and the International

The outbreak of the First World War saw the collapse of the Second International, as the leaders in most countries supported their "own" bourgeoisie and abandoned internationalism and socialist revolution.

Middle class feminists like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst - though militant suffragettes before the outbreak of war - became ferocious patriots. In sharp contrast, Sylvia Pankhurst, who had organised working class women in the East End of London, adopted an openly revolutionary socialist attitude to the war.

In Germany Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were part of an initially tiny group that publicly stood out against the war, denouncing the betrayal of the SPD leaders. The Russian revolutionaries, Alexandra Kollontai, Nadezhda Krupskaya and Inessa Armand, were also powerful opponents of the war. Just before the war they had launched a special paper, *Rabotnitsa*, the woman worker.

Clara Zetkin, as the secretary of the International Bureau of Socialist Women, called a conference in Bern at the end of March 1915. Women from Poland, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland and Russia attended. This conference was the first to re-raise the banner of internationalism and struggle against the war. It issued a call which concluded:

"The working people of all countries are brothers. Only the united determination of the people can stop the slaughter. Socialism alone is the future peace of humanity. Down with capitalism, down with the war, onward to socialism."

The left wing of the socialist women's organisations paved the way for a series of further international gatherings against the war: the International Socialist Youth and Zimmerwald conferences in 1915,

and the Kienthal conference in 1916.

The victory of the Russian revolution in October 1917 rapidly rallied mass forces for a new International and a new, revolutionary women's movement. The victorious Soviet state did all it could to liberate women in the harsh conditions of economic blockade and civil war, granting legal equality and the right to vote, the right to birth control and abortion, setting up nurseries and clinics and many other important measures.

In March 1920, Alexandra Kollontai hailed Working Women's Day in the name of the newly founded Communist International and its affiliated women's organisations:

"Only the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of soviet power will save working women from the world of suffering, humiliations and inequality that makes their life in the capitalist countries so hard. The 'working woman's day' turns from a day of struggle for the franchise into an international day of struggle for the full and absolute liberation of women, which means a struggle for the victory of the soviets and for communism!"



Russian poster from 1920. The caption reads: "What the October revolution gave worker and peasant women"

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

When women set

In February 1917 (old style calendar) women workers from the proletarian Vyborg district of Petrograd marched out of their factories demanding "Bread!" Five days later the workers and soldiers led an insurrection which forced the Tsar to abdicate. The Petrograd women workers' celebration of International Women's Day had unleashed the February revolution. Workers Power reprints this article by *Helen Ward* from 1987 (issue 91) in celebration of International Women's Day and the 90th anniversary of the Russian revolution

The specific role of women workers in the February revolution occurred because of the very acute way the war had affected them. The mobilisation of soldiers and production for the war effort led to enormous deprivation in the cities and villages of Russia. As early as April 1915 there were riots by women demanding bread, and these continued sporadically right through to 1917.

Between 1914 and 1917 the number of women employed in the factories increased because of the conscription of men to the front line. Women earned about half the wages of men. They were concentrated in textiles and chemical industries, where hours were long and conditions poor. They often suffered physical and sexual harassment from the bosses and their lackey foremen. The intensity of the oppression of these women led to explosive rebellions.

International Women's Day

By February 1917 the class struggle was intensifying. Although there were many strikes in Petrograd during January and February, none of them sparked the whole city in the way the women were to do. In preparation for International Women's Day, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the Mezhraintsy group (a group of socialists committed to neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks) planned propaganda and educational meetings for the day. In the Vyborg district on 20 February some workers called for a strike. But all socialist organisations argued that the class was not ready for a mass strike because of inadequate political preparation or contact with the soldiers.

The action was intended to be limited to factory meetings in order to make propaganda. The socialist groups all underestimated the mood of the women workers in the factories. One account records: "The largely female staff of the Vasilesky Island trolley-park [tram station], sensing general unrest a few days before 23 February, sent a woman to the neighbouring encampment of the 180th Infantry Regiment to ask the soldiers whether they would shoot at them or not. The answer was no, and on the 23rd, the trolley car workers joined the demonstration."

On the morning of the 23rd several illegal meetings were held in textile factories in the Vyborg district around the theme "War, high prices and the situation of the woman worker". Anger boiled over at these meetings. One by one they voted to strike, but did not leave their protest at that. Taking to the streets in their thousands, the women marched to

nearby factories, shouting for the workers, women and men to join them. The flying picket was dramatically effective. By 10:00 am ten factories were shut with 27,000 workers on strike. By noon it was 21 plants with 50,000 strikers!

Many accounts report the women entering factories, banging on the gates, throwing snowballs at windows to get workers out. It seems that where factories did not immediately respond to the call to join the action, more direct methods were used. Flying rocks and pieces of iron were persuasively used at some plants. In the Vyborg district there were 59,800 men and women on strike by the end of the day, 61 per cent of all factory workers. Rank and file Bolsheviks played a leading role in pulling plants out alongside the women workers, but many of the leaders were far more reluctant. The Vyborg leader Kayurov wrote later:

"...to my surprise and indignation... we learned... of the strike in some textile factories and of the arrival of a number of delegates from the women workers who announced [that they were going on strike]. I was extremely indignant about the behaviour of the strikers, both because they had blatantly ignored the decision of the district committee of the party, and also because they had gone on strike after I had appealed to them only the night before to keep cool and disciplined."

Despite such indignation the Bolsheviks were able to quickly overcome these feelings and seize the opportunity offered to them. Agreeing to build the strike, they gave political leadership by raising the slogans, "Down with the autocracy! Down with the war! Give us bread!"

In other districts of the city, strikes were less extensive, but no less militant. Over the whole city between 20 and 30 per cent of the workers struck, with over 80 factories shut. The demonstrators from the Vyborg district were determined to reach the governmental centre of Petrograd, but the police blocked their way at one of the bridges. Eventually the demonstrators began crossing the ice of the frozen River Neva. However, the police managed to contain them, albeit with difficulty. A police report of the day explained: "At 4:40pm crowds of approximately 1,000 people, predominantly women and youths, approached Kazan Bridge on the Nevskii Prospekt from the direction of Mikhailovskaia street, singing and shouting 'give us bread!'"

Anger and desperation

The demonstrations were not confined to those who went on strike - women



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Daniel Bensaïd and the “Return of Strategy”

Bensaïd, D, “A new debate is opening; the Return of Strategy”, International Viewpoint, No. 386, February 2007, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1199>

All quotes below are from this article unless otherwise stated

By Luke Cooper

In his recent article “A new debate is opening; the Return of Strategy”, Daniel Bensaïd, a leading theorist of the Fourth International (FI) continues the discussion over strategy which has taken place within the Fourth International. The debate has necessarily raised fundamental issues concerning the fight for political power, the characterisation of state institutions and the application of the transitional programme in the 21st century. In his contribution, Bensaïd argues that it can be principled for revolutionaries to enter bourgeois governments. In this reply, Luke Cooper argues that all such argumentation inevitably involves a total revision of the programmatic principles of Marxism and would, if implemented, lead to a disaster not only for any “socialist” involved but also for the working class as a whole.

The question of participation in bourgeois governments was first posed as a result of the growth of the mass, socialist parties of the Second International at the turn of the last century. The debate between the left and right wings of the Second International established the principle that revolutionaries could not under any conditions enter a bourgeois government because, by definition, such a government is committed to the defence of capital and private property. A century later, the question of political power and the state is again a live one as a result of the rise of the anticapitalist movement.

Bensaïd points to the rise of Hugo Chavez, the general trend to left populism in Latin America and the prospect of building alternative parties in Europe, for example, the Linkspartei/WASG in Germany, as the backdrop for a new debate around strategy in the anticapitalist movement. The League for the Fifth International certainly agrees wholeheartedly on the need for this at an international level. We have argued for such a debate, frequently against Bensaïd’s own comrades, both at the World Socialist Forum and at every meeting of the European Social Forum. However, we disagree with his core thesis that there can be circumstances in which it is legitimate for revolutionaries to participate in capitalist governments.

Bensaïd sees himself as correcting what he believes to be too rightist a perspective acted on by parts of the Fourth International. In particular, he makes a retrospective criticism of the participation of its (later to be expelled)

Brazilian section in the government of Lula in 2002 and the position held by Francis Sitel, of the French section - the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR). Despite this critique of the right, however, Bensaïd’s own position is effectively nothing more than a demand for somewhat stricter criteria for participation in such governments.

Bensaïd accuses Sitel of being too keen to “cre-

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20th century saw “two
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what he calls the
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general strike” and
the “extended
popular war”**

ate something new” without considering the past, and argues that many of today’s “novelties” are just “recycled old utopian themes from the 19th century and the workers’ movement in its infancy”. Too true! The entire Revisionist Controversy at the turn of the Twentieth Century should spring to the mind of anyone who calls themselves a revolutionary communist. However, in attempting to demonstrate the revolutionary continuity of his own position, Bensaïd is forced to misrepresent the history of the communist movement. Although he decorates his article with references to Trotsky, Lenin and the Communist International, these are nothing but camouflage to disguise the fact that what he proposes is fundamentally at odds with the principles and programme for which they fought.

20th century: “two revolutionary hypotheses”?

An example of this can be seen in his conception of permanent revolution. To assert his Trot-

skyist credentials, he argues that Trotsky was right to attack Stalin’s notion of “socialism in one country” and propose instead the strategy of permanent revolution. However, he presents the difference as limited to whether a workers’ government should actively try to inspire revolution abroad and the impossibility of achieving socialism in one country.

These were obviously important differences, but this is an appallingly insufficient analysis of what Trotsky meant by Permanent Revolution. For him, the strategy of Permanent Revolution proposed that the working class must come to the head of democratic or anti-imperialist struggles and lead them on to working class power and the establishment of a workers state.¹

Why Bensaïd has to give such an insufficient explanation of permanent revolution becomes clear as he develops his own analysis of history, which is entirely at odds with Trotsky’s position. He argues that the 20th century saw “two strategic hypotheses” for the overthrow of capitalism. These are what he calls the “insurrectionary general strike” and the “extended popular war”:

“Our starting point lies in the great revolutionary experiences of the 20th century - the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the German Revolution, the popular fronts, the Spanish Civil War, the Vietnamese war of liberation, May 1968, Portugal, Chile. We have used them to distinguish between two major hypotheses, or scenarios: that of the insurrectional general strike and that of the extended popular war. They encapsulate two types of crisis, two forms of dual power, two ways of resolving the crisis.”

Having listed a few examples of the “insurrectionary general strike” hypothesis, he proceeds to present a much longer digression on the “extended popular war”. In particular, he makes a long analysis of the Sandinistas who formed a popular front government in Nicaragua in the 1980s following a successful peasant war. What is remarkable is that he fails to point out that the working class did not come to power in Nicaragua and capitalist property relations were not over-turned.

To make matters worse, he completely ignores one of the great, the truly great, lessons of the 20th century; namely, that in Russia, in 1917, the working class took power by coming to the head of the popular struggle against Tsarist absolutism, imperialist war and semi-feudal landown-

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ership, precisely by implementing the strategy of permanent revolution. Despite not making any analysis of the Russian Revolution, or any strategic criticisms of what he calls the “insurrectionary general strike”, Bensaïd then proceeds to dump it as a “revolutionary hypotheses” for today:

“The guideline for our strategic hypothesis in the 1970s was the insurrectional general strike, which, for the most part, bore no resemblance to the variants of acclimatised Maoism and its imaginary interpretations of the Cultural Revolution. It is this hypothesis of which we are now the ‘orphans’, according to Antoine Artous. What might have had a certain ‘functionality’ yesterday is lost today.”

It was for good reason that Trotsky argued that the working class must stand at the head of the revolution; it is the only force that can expropriate and democratically socialise capitalist property and hand over the land to the peasants, so that production may be harnessed for need, not profit. This is why it is always vital to fight for the working class to create its own organisations that can not only lead the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state but become themselves the machinery of the future workers’ state. By contrast, while Bensaïd calls for the working class to establish its own democratic councils in the factories, he anticipates these existing alongside the institutions of the bourgeois state.

Class, the state and Marxism

Bensaïd draws on the work of LCR member Antoine Artous to argue that it is an “oversimplification” to believe that “dual power may be situated outside existing institutions” and be made to “suddenly spring from nothing in the form of a pyramid of soviets or councils.” He continues -

“Clearly one cannot imagine a revolutionary process other than as a transfer of legitimacy which gives preponderance to “socialism from below” but which interacts with forms of representation, particularly in countries with parliamentary traditions going back over more than a century, and where the principle of universal suffrage is firmly established.”

Thus, for Bensaïd, there may indeed be a parliamentary road to socialism in conjunction with a movement of factory council type bodies. This position, of course, is not new but has long been held by left reformists and centrists. It was associated in particular with the German USPD when it opposed the resolution of the dual power created by the November Revolution in 1918, thereby allowing the German state to reorganise its forces in preparation for the suppression of the workers’ councils. Variations on this theme have surfaced wherever the workers’ movement has begun to outgrow the limitations imposed upon it by the state. It was mercilessly criticised by Lenin and Trotsky as confusing the organisations of i) proletarian (soviet) and ii) bourgeois democracy (parliaments) and ignoring the “host” for such hybrid schemas - the capitalist state.

What is remarkable is that Bensaïd does not even mention the elementary Marxist criticism of this position. Namely, that power does

not reside in parliament but with the unelected police, army, judiciary and top civil servants, whose armed power will be used against any mass movement, which challenges the property rights of capital. Indeed, Marxists have always understood the state to be an instrument of class rule that exists as a means for one class to oppress another. As Lenin put it in *State and Revolution*,

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it is “bodies of armed men” in the defence of capital and expresses the “irreconcilability of class antagonisms.”

Working class politics

The meaning of Bensaïd’s long digression on the “popular war” becomes clearer once he has established his revisionist position on the state. He clearly thinks the “popular war” was trying to address the problem of what he calls “establishing the general will”. He argues:

“The problem we face is not in reality that of the relationship between territorial democracy and workplace democracy (the Paris Commune, the soviets and the Setubal popular assembly of Portugal in 1975 were territorial structures), nor even that of the relationship between direct and representative democracy (all democracy is partially representative). The real problem is how the general will is formed.”

His use of the terms “territorial” and “workplace” here clearly identifies them as liberal democratic and soviet democracy respectively. He suggests that soviets express the interests of only one part of society, the working class (true) and, for him, this is a problem for proponents of radical change because more interests must be expressed to establish a “general will”.

This is a wild revision of Marxism undertaken, again, with absolutely no recognition of the obligation to account for such a rejection of past programmatic positions. For Marxists, it is the exploitation of the working class and its ability to seize control of capitalist production, which

gives it both the interest and the ability to undertake a transition to socialism. It was because other classes, such as the middle class or the peasants, were not wage slaves to industrial production that Marx argued in the *Communist Manifesto*:

“Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.”

Marx continues -

“The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property. All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.”

Far from developing a working class political strategy, Bensaïd is effectively calling for a new populism, a new politics based on the establishment of a “general will” rather than working class interest.

The transitional programme

What emerges is a conception of political strategy that is essentially reformist, based on a parliamentary road to socialism. To make this move complete, Bensaïd proceeds to bowdlerise the revolutionary transitional programme.

For Trotsky, transitional demands were designed to maximise the power of the working class in capitalist society, e.g. the call for workers’ control of industry challenged the bosses’ right to manage and the call for a workers’ militia challenged the monopoly on armed power held by the capitalist state. Both can be shown to be essential to the class struggle when it rises to a certain level of generalisation within capitalist society. Indeed, there are many examples of workers who were not revolutionary communists creating significant embryos of just such bodies, coordinations, mass strike pickets, factory occupations, etc. These forms of organisation need significant levels of class struggle to be fully realised and they are very unstable, because they are so threatening to capital that the proletariat must either proceed to power, or be left vulnerable to a capitalist offensive.

By contrast, Bensaïd has a false and pragmatic conception of the Transitional programme, as he makes clear in an essay entitled “The Baggage of Exodus”:

“It was a question [in 1917] of moving beyond abstract discussion of the intrinsic virtue of the claims, whether reformist by nature (because compatible with the established order) or revolutionary by nature (because incompatible with this order). The

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appropriateness of the demands depends on the concrete situation, on their educational virtue for those who entered the struggle.”⁵

Here, Bensaïd fails entirely to describe what was new about the political method of the Bolsheviks in 1917. His error is summed up in his presentation of demands as either reformist/compatible with capitalism or revolutionary/incompatible with capitalism. This leaves out of account the crucial dimension - the class struggle; what might be “compatible” with capitalism in some periods may be completely “incompatible” in others. To give a concrete example, for decades, French capital was content to recognise equal rights at work to people under the age of 25, last year the fight to defend those rights using the methods of mass mobilisation, direct action and led by the network of coordinations, created a pre-revolutionary situation!

The innovation, first fully codified in the transitional programme, but already present in the struggles of the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary Comintern, was the raising of demands, and methods of fighting for them, that prepared the working class and its organisations for the struggle for power. This overcame the potential gulf between the demands of the “minimum programme”, which did not, in themselves, require the overthrow of capitalism, and the demands of the “maximum programme”, which identified the principal measures to be taken after the revolution. In other words, it linked the fight for all demands, even immediate and partial demands, into the fight for working class power. Bensaïd is guilty of retreating from this to the non-transitional, maximum-minimum conception of programme of the Second International.

What was significant about the programme of transitional demands was not their formal, or static, compatibility or incompatibility with the laws of capitalism but that they identified the key objectives which, if won, would represent strategic defeats for the bourgeoisie and its state and linked the fight for them to the creation of working class organisations that could dispute bourgeois rule.

As we (Workers Power) said in 1983 -

“The system of transitional demands advanced by communists, raising as it does the struggle for workers’ control exercised through organs of struggle such as soviets and factory committees, organises the working class for, and leads it towards, the struggle for the conquest of state power.”⁶

Workers’ Government?

At its Fourth Congress, in November 1922, as part of the debate on the united front with reformist parties, the Comintern discussed what would constitute a “workers’ government”. Bensaïd refers to this and characterises it as “confused”:

“In fact, what Zinoviev defined as the ‘elementary objective of the workers’ government’ was the arming of the proletariat, workers’ control over production, a tax revolution ... One could go on and quote other contributions. The resulting impression would be one of enormous confusion.”

This formulation seems to be calculated to mislead the reader. Of course, there were many contributions to the debate that contradicted one another but what Bensaïd describes as Zinoviev’s position was adopted as the position of the Congress - and it is very clear indeed. It describes the conditions in which a workers’ government could be formed as ones:

“... where the balance of forces between the workers’ parties and the bourgeoisie places the question of government on the order of the day as a practical problem requiring immediate solution”.

For the revolutionary Third International, the critical question was, whose armed power and property was the government engaged in destroying and creating - the bosses’ or the workers’?

Its tasks were as follows:

“The most elementary tasks of a workers’ government must be to arm the proletariat, disarm the bourgeois counter-revolutionary organisations, bring in control over production, shift the main burden of taxation onto the propertied classes and break the resistance of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.”

It went on to say:

“Such a workers’ government is possible only if it is born out of the struggle of the masses and is supported by combative workers’ organisations formed by the most oppressed sections of workers at grassroots level. However, even a workers’ government that comes about through an alignment of parliamentary forces, i.e., a government of purely parliamentary origin, can give rise to an upsurge of the revolutionary workers’ movement.

“It is obvious that the formation of a genuine workers’ government, and the continued existence of any such government committed to revolutionary politics, must lead to a bitter struggle with the bourgeoisie or even to civil war. The mere attempt by the proletariat to form such a workers’ government will from its very first days come up against extremely strong resistance from the bourgeoisie. The slogan of a workers’ government therefore has the potential to rally the proletarians and unleash revolutionary struggle.”⁷

For the revolutionary Third International, the critical question was, whose armed power and property was the government engaged in destroying and creating - the bosses’ or the workers’? If it armed the workers and disarmed the

bourgeoisie, if it put production under workers’ management then, and only then, was it a workers’ government. All other governments, even if they were made up of workers’ parties or appointed by fiery “socialist” presidents, were fakes; they were bourgeois governments disguised as workers’ governments.

By suggesting the Comintern position was confused, Bensaïd avoids having to openly reject these clear formulations. His purpose is to imply that the term “workers’ government” could be properly applied to governments that do not meet the Comintern’s criteria, governments in which the bourgeois state forces remain armed and the working class disarmed. Such a political method opens the way to a Chile 1973 situation.

On the left wing of the Fourth International?

We have shown that Bensaïd, without any accounting, has fundamentally revised the Marxist conceptions of the state, the working class, permanent revolution, the transitional programme and, finally, the revolutionary party. The fact that he is on the left of the Fourth International tells us a great deal about the politics of that organisation. Nonetheless, as we will now demonstrate, Bensaïd can only make inconsistent and partial critiques of the Fourth International’s right wing, because his own revisionism has led him to essentially the same method.

Although he retrospectively criticises the decision of the Fourth International’s Brazilian grouping to enter Lula’s government in 2002, he bases his criticism on the wrong conclusions that he has drawn from his discussion of the workers’ government slogan. In effect, he tries to establish new criteria for whether a government is a working class government or not - criteria that are certainly not based on class or power.

Of course, this should come as no surprise. Given his renunciation of the Marxist conception of the state as an instrument for class rule, the way is open for him to establish, entirely arbitrarily, three conditions by which a government can be judged to be a workers’ government, which revolutionaries may join. These are:

a) The question of participation arises in a situation of crisis or at least of a significant upsurge in social mobilisation, and not from a vacuum;

b) The government in question is committed to initiating a dynamic of rupture with the established order. For example - and more modestly than the arming of the workers demanded by Zinoviev - radical agrarian reform, “despotic incursions” into the domain of private property, the abolition of tax privileges, a break with institutions like those of the Fifth Republic in France, European treaties, military pacts, etc;

c) Finally, the balance of forces allows revolutionaries to ensure that even if they cannot guarantee that the non-revolutionaries in the government keep to their commitments, they have to pay a high price for failure to do so.”

Although he does not say so, it is likely that Bensaïd’s criteria would make it legitimate for revolutionaries to participate in the government of Hugo Chavez. It is worth looking at precise-

THEORETICAL SUPPLEMENT

ly this example to demonstrate how dangerously wrong his criteria are.

Chavez's government has certainly not developed "out of a vacuum" but as a result of large mobilisations since the 2002 coup attempt and it has made limited "incursions" into the domain of private property. These two factors, as we demonstrate in the latest Fifth International Journal, do not at all make Chavez's reforms anti-capitalist nor give his government a working class character. In Venezuela, the state forces, the police, army and judiciary, have sought to thwart Chavez's reforms and will be prepared to fight should he make more serious moves against private property.

In Venezuela, the task of revolutionaries must be to fight for working class independence, workers' democracy and the struggle for power by raising demands that "organise and prepare the class". This strategy means saying from the outset that Chavez is a populist politician who stands at the head of a state that retains a capitalist character.

It is essential, as it was for the Bolsheviks in relation to the provisional government in 1917, that revolutionaries give no support to any government of capital but rather make demands on it and organise the class to fight for them. It is a utopia to think that so-called "revolutionaries" in such a government would be able to make it "pay a high price for its failure" to deliver on its promises - when they themselves would be tainted by the failure of "their government". Indeed, it would simply throw the working class into confusion and disorientation.

It is these flawed and reformist criteria that are the basis for Bensaïd's critique of the entry of the Brazilian Fourth International into Lula's government in 2002. While it is true that Lula's government did not meet these new "criteria", the critique is one based on an assessment of how far that government could be expected to go, rather than on principle or revolutionary strategy.

This theme continues in Bensaïd's critique of LCR member Francis Sitel. He quotes Sitel making various philistine statements that pour scorn on discussions of revolutionary strategy and programme, and arguing that it is necessary to enter capitalist governments to offset the worst neoliberal attacks, and openly calling for "broad parties" with "reformist goals".

Bensaïd's critique of this position simply slips into the most purblind pragmatism:

"Francis Sitel hazards the prediction that a "broad party will be defined as a party of reforms". That's as maybe. But it's an idea that is speculative and sets up a norm in advance. And that certainly is not our problem. We don't have to put the cart before the horse and invent among ourselves a minimum programme (of reforms) for a hypothetical "broad party". We have to define our project and our programme. It is from that starting point that, in concrete situations and with tangible allies, we shall weigh up what compromises are possible, even if it means accepting some loss in clarity, in exchange for greater social spread, experience and dynamism. This is not new. We

participated in the creation of the PT. Our comrades are active as a current in Rifondazione. They play a decisive part in the Left Bloc in Portugal. But these are all specific configurations and should not be brought together under some all-inclusive category of "broad party".

Bensaïd continues by pointing to the instability and fragmentation in the working class and social movements; the uneven success of struggles; and the difficulties this poses in building a radical alternative to neoliberalism - all of which is undoubtedly correct.

He then argues that questions of strategy and programme remain to the fore and this is his central critique of Sitel:

"... In every case, reference to a common programmatic background, far from being something that obstructs future reconstruction is, on the contrary, its precondition. Strategic and tactical questions can then be prioritised so that we are not torn apart because of this or that electoral outcome. We can distinguish the political base on which organising open theoretical debate makes sense. We can assess which compromises allow us to forge ahead and which pull us back. We can adjust to forms of organisational existence (whether to be a tendency in a shared party, part of a front, etc.), depending on our allies and how their dynamic fluctuates (from right to left or left to right)."

The reader is left feeling a little bit bamboozled. On the one hand, Bensaïd has asserted the primacy of programme, on the other, he gives that programme a purely pragmatic (and opportunistic) content. The difference between Sitel and Bensaïd can thus be seen as one of quantity, not quality, given that Bensaïd has advanced a methodology that explicitly asserts the liberal democratic state may be an instrument for revolutionary change and has poured scorn on the revolutionary communist alternative. His objection seems to be that Lula's government did not do enough in the way of reforms to warrant sacrificing ones principles. The point, however, is that if such a government actually did do enough to alarm and outrage the bourgeoisie, whilst still not arming and preparing the working class for civil war, then, to be inside such a government would be to tie the workers to it as the counterrevolution prepared itself to strike. In other words, Bensaïd is advocating the line of the Mensheviks in 1917, the Stalinists in 1936 and the Chilean Socialists and Stalinists in 1970-73.

Conclusion

In the Second International, at the beginning of the 20th century, a great "revisionist controversy" broke out when Eduard Bernstein proposed that capitalism would lead peacefully to socialism, through a series of parliamentary reforms. In her famous pamphlet, *Reform or Revolution*, Rosa Luxemburg demolished the arguments of Bernstein. The issues she raised were strikingly similar to those outlined in this polemic with Bensaïd, that is, "capitalism and the state", the working class and "the conquest of political power."⁸

In one of her most memorable arguments, Luxemburg showed that a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism was no road to social-

ism:

"That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of, and in contradistinction to, the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society, they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society."

Today, these issues are assuming a huge importance; from the participation of Rifondazione Comunista in Romano Prodi's government, to the "Bolivarian Revolution" of Chavez, the question of state power and its class character reverberates across the anticapitalist movement. On this, Bensaïd is quite right but the programme he proposes deserves the same rebuke as the revolutionaries of the early 20th century gave to Bernstein. Indeed, we could do with inspiring a 21st century "Revisionist Controversy".

Footnotes

- 1 Trotsky, L, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, London 1962
- 2 Lenin, VI, "The State and Revolution; Marxist theories of the state and the tasks of the proletariat in the revolution", *Lenin Selected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 272 - 274
- 3 It seems fair to say that this subtle change in terminology is used to disguise the revisionist nature of Bensaïd's approach to the capitalist state.
- 4 Marx, K, "Bourgeois and Proletarians", *Communist Manifesto*
- 5 Bensaïd, D., 2006, "The Baggage of Exodus", *100 Years of Permanent Revolution; Results and Prospects*, ed., Dunn and Radice
- 6 Workers Power, 1983, "Revolutionary Tactics Towards Reformism", *Permanent Revolution*, No. 1
- 7 *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, London 198, p.397
- 8 Luxemburg, R., *Reform or Revolution*, (1901), *Marxists Internet Archive*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/index.htm>

Russia ablaze



Poster reads: "You Are Now a Free Woman, Help Build Socialism!"

queuing for bread quickly joined in. One manager reported coming out from his bakery shop to announce that there was no more bread: "No sooner had this announcement been made than the crowd smashed the windows, broke into the store and knocked down everything in sight."

Such acts were widespread. The Bolsheviks argued against "vandalism" and tried to direct the protests by organising meetings and by calling for a three day general strike plus intensified propaganda towards soldiers. In the following days the number of workers on strike increased steadily. The government sent police and troops in to disperse the demonstrators by any means necessary, but the revolutionary wave was able to meet this challenge by winning Cossacks over and eventually whole regiments joined the insurgents.

Workers were arming themselves in their militia, and it was women workers who played a vital role in breaking the troops from the regime. As Trotsky's account reveals: "A great role is played by women workers in the relation between workers and soldiers. They go up to the cordons more boldly than men, take hold of the rifles, beseech, almost command, 'Put

down your bayonets; join us!' The soldiers are excited, ashamed, exchange anxious glances, waver; someone makes up his mind first, and the bayonets rise guiltily above the shoulders of the advancing crowd. The barrier is opened; a joyous 'Hurrah!' shakes the air. The soldiers are surrounded. Everywhere arguments, reproaches, appeals - the revolution makes another forward step."

The mass strike eventually won to its side the vast numbers of peasants in uniform, the soldiers. Exhausted by the deprivation caused by the war, sickened by its carnage, these soldiers were eager for change. The action of the working class ignited their rebellion and made the fall of the autocracy inevitable. Without its military power the Romanov dynasty could not last a minute. The Tsar's wife expressed the arrogant short sightedness of the autocracy when she wrote to her husband:

"This is a hooligan movement, young people run and shout that there is no bread, simply to create excitement, along with workers who prevent others from working. If the weather were very cold they would probably stay at home. But all this will pass and become calm, if only the Duma will behave itself."

The regime falls

These words, expressing hope that events would be settled by the weather and the tame parliamentarians of the Duma (its Bolshevik deputies were in prison or exile), were forced down the throat of the pampered Tsarina by the revolution. Within the borders of the Russian empire, modern capitalism coincided with a peasant economy that was staggering in its backwardness, and meant misery for some hundred million peasants.

The combination of a land starved peasantry and a highly concentrated urban working class (four million strong) obliged the autocracy to maintain a vicious political dictatorship. But the existence of the autocracy - and then the war - intensified the contradictions of Russia's combined and uneven social development to the limit. When they exploded the seemingly all powerful Tsarist regime fell in a matter of days. As Trotsky and Lenin both observed, the chain of world capitalism had broken at its weakest link.

The development of the revolution and the abdication of the Tsar opened up a whole new period for the Russian working class. The bourgeois provisional government that emerged from the February revolution was unstable, balanced alongside organs of a different kind of power, the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies.

Within the factories, workers were emboldened. Factory committees sprang up, demanding control over pay and conditions. The workers' militia conflicted with the weaker civil militias of the government.

Women workers continued to play an important role. They were among the most determined to win an eight hour day. They sought decent wages and supported demands for equal political rights, including the vote. Three thousand women laundry workers launched the first major strike against the provisional government, demanding the eight hour day, a living wage and expropriation of the laundries. The Bolsheviks sent Alexandra Kollontai to work alongside the women.

Later, the party set up a Women's Bureau, led by Vera Slutskaya. This relaunched the paper *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) and built up sup-

port in the factories, among soldiers' wives and led large demonstrations against the war.

Revolutionary lessons

The role of women workers in the Russian Revolution was magnificent, and taught the revolutionary leadership much. But their very spontaneity meant that they were not always in the revolutionary vanguard throughout 1917; they struck, demonstrated and rioted because of the intensity of their oppression, but this also reflected their newness to political and trade union activities.

This is often true of working class women - their role within the workforce as a "peripheral" element, poorly paid, shifted in and out of work depending on the fortunes and needs of capitalism leads to them being generally poorly organised in unions and political parties. Even where membership of unions is high, women are rarely active in the leadership because of their oppression which denies them time, due to domestic commitments, and they face obstruction by male leaders.

This lack of traditional organisation has contradictory results: on the one hand women can be the most militant fighters, because they are unfettered by the conservatism, which can so often take root inside the union organisations; but, on the other hand, it makes women easy targets for anti-working class propaganda.

In the weeks after the February Revolution liberal bourgeois feminists mobilised thousands of working class women to demonstrate for women's suffrage and continuation of the war! The Bolsheviks were able to establish a mass base among women by mid-1917, which led them once again to demonstrate against the war, but this took special efforts at organisation and propaganda.

The lessons we can learn from the Bolsheviks and working women in this period are rich indeed. The revolution, as Lenin was to point out years later, would never have succeeded without the mobilisation of women. Special forms of propaganda and organisation are needed to win them to the side of the revolutionary party, but, once won, they will be the most brave and militant fighters for they have so much to gain!

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Women today: still not free

Today, women in Britain have the vote, the right to contraception and abortion. There are laws for equal pay and against discrimination. There are benefits, like family allowance. But, argues *Rebecca Anderson*, women are still not equal

Working class women in Britain today have not won equality. The common view that the reforms won in the last century amounted to women's liberation is not born out by reality.

The government's Equalities Review, which reported at the end of February, found that mothers of teenagers are 40-45 per cent less likely to find work than male parents. Its chairperson, Trevor Phillips, blamed employers, discriminating on the basis that mothers might take time off to care for children, could get pregnant again and qualify for maternity leave or may turn down overtime.

Work and Pensions Secretary, John Hutton, blamed mothers. He wants to cut their benefit if they do not find work.

Hutton is well aware that women in full-time employment earn 17.2 per cent less than men, while women in part-time work earn 40.2 per cent less than men. Rather than tackle this discrimination, he wants to force more women, on pain of starvation or losing their homes, into these low-paid jobs.

Discrimination at work

The Equalities Review itself sums up the situation nicely. Britain is not even edging towards equal rights. In some areas, "we have stopped the clock; in some, it is starting to turn backwards".

The gains women fought for are now being clawed back by the state and private business. The Equal Pay Act did not stop companies refusing to disclose details of employees' salaries nor effectively segregating women into jobs, which were systematically undervalued.

Overall, women earn 51 per cent less than men in their lifetimes, partly because of low wages, partly because women cannot work when they have children or relatives to care for.

The Daycare Trust revealed in January that, as the government has forced more women into work, the cost of childcare has soared to



Asian women workers at Gate Gourmet in August 2005

an average of £152 a week, rising to £205 in London. But instead of providing state-run, high-quality, and free childcare, Labour is thinking of introducing a tax credit scheme: subsidising minimum wage paying employers, while guaranteeing private childcare providers a healthy profit.

Family: root of oppression

The basis for the obscene inequality facing women as workers is the family, in which housework and caring for the young, sick and old is predominantly done by women. Not only does this limit women's job and career opportunities, it effectively extends their working day through unpaid domestic labour.

Women's position as carers in the family has been partially relieved by the NHS. But encroaching privatisation and the internal puts decent healthcare out of the reach of many working class families. Women are increasingly forced to take up the burden of caring for relatives in the home, as waiting lists in the public sector grow.

It is easy to see how the family unit benefits capitalism. Without it, the ruling class would have to pay to bring up the next generation of wage-slaves, for services to regenerate workers for the next day's labour, and for the care of the

sick, disabled and elderly. But the burden that capitalism places on women has a destructive effect on the very same family structure.

This is why Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory politicians constantly have to bolster the family as the answer to society's ills. David Cameron's immediate response to a spate of gun crimes involving teenagers in London was to blame the supposedly high proportion of broken families among black families.

"I believe in marriage. I believe in people making a commitment to each other and staying together and trying to bring up their children properly," he said, offering tax breaks to families, which stay together and promote a "culture of responsibility and respecting authority".

Of course, poor job prospects, overcrowded housing, rampant racism and overcrowded schools are the kind of thing a strict family upbringing would laugh off!

Women who do not conform to Cameron's straitjacket of relationship "norms" must be financially punished, morally blamed and legally restricted. Hence, unequal pensions provision for women, discriminatory laws for lesbian and gay couples, and the constant attacks on a woman's right to choose to terminate her pregnancy.

The UK now has some of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. A woman has to convince two doctors that the continuation of her pregnancy will endanger her physical or mental health; then she may find that a quick, private abortion will cost her anything from £455 to £1,500 or more. Even this very restricted access to abortion is now under attack.

Women's liberation and socialism

However, the image of women as passive victims does not fit with reality. Women have been prominent activists in all the recent social movements - anticapitalist and anti-war, pro-NHS and council housing - as well as in the unions. The civil service and local government unions, which have mounted the biggest strikes in the past few years, have a high proportion of women in them.

But women are often held back from leadership positions. Worse, their struggles are often isolated and sold out - as they were at Gate Gourmet, Heathrow in 2005.

That's why to fight back against the fresh attacks on women's rights - and to go on to fight for abortion on demand, socialised housework, childcare and the emancipation of both men and women - we need a working class women's movement. Feminist-led women's movements have stopped short of winning the struggle for liberation. The interests of ruling and middle class women are not the same as those of working class women, as they have an interest in preserving the capitalist system that guarantees their own class privileges.

Working class women have more in common with working class men - and to achieve their emancipation they must fight alongside them. They must struggle both against men's sexism and for women's rights in the context of broadening and deepening resistance to capitalism. It is only through socialist revolution that women and men can destroy the root cause of all oppression and exploitation.

No women's liberation without socialism; no socialism without women's liberation!

SLAVERY

Slavery and the roots of racism

Dave Stockton introduces the first in a series of articles on the history of the slave trade and its abolition. In this article he explains the roots of slavery and the racist ideology that was used to justify it

March and April 2007 will see the launch of a series of events to commemorate the bi-centenary of the abolition of the slave trade within the British Empire. Museums in English cities involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Bristol, Liverpool and London, will hold exhibitions. Special lessons will take place in schools. The London Mayor will unveil a memorial. £16m from the National Lottery Fund will be spent on these celebrations.

Indeed it is high time that slave trade's real scale is told to the population. Unfortunately it will be presented as a story where the slaves are the suffering of victims and the liberators the good Christian (white) men and women who campaigned for it.

What will not be stressed is the role played by the slaves as actors in their own liberation, in uprisings and, in the case of Haiti, a revolution. The fact that these uprisings and the real mass movement in England, France, America for Abolition, were both essential will not be acknowledged. These mass movements involved freed slaves like Olaudah Equiano, who played important roles. They involved women and radical artisans as well as landowners like William Wilberforce or Thomas Clarkson.

The official celebrations will also fail to stress that slavery was an essential part of the birth of modern capitalism. Production of tropical and sub-tropical commodities like tobacco, coffee, sugar and cotton required a mass labour force in the new West Indian and American colonies, recently acquired by Britain and France. It was not possible to persuade European free labour to cross the Atlantic. The answer lay in compulsory transfer. The high levels of exploitation of slave labour in the colonies allowed for a massive accumulation of capital and its transfer to the home countries.

Slaves were captured in the interior of Africa and then marched to the coast for sale. They waited in large forts called factories till ships were ready to depart. Those who survived often fell victim to diseases

and suffered malnutrition and dehydration on the one to two month voyages. About 13 per cent perished on the voyage. It has been estimated that a total of 2.5 million Africans died during these voyages, as a result of being packed into tight, unsanitary spaces in the ships holds. The horrors of the Middle Passage are movingly described by Olaudah Equiano, describing his passage to the Americas as a young child.

"The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place,



Olaudah Equiano

and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. (...) This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs [latrines], into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable."

Perhaps double the number who perished during the voyage died in first months after arrival in camps designed to "break them in". Then came the horrors of the plantation itself. As well as twelve hour days under the tropical sun, which whites blithely claimed Africans were designed by Nature to endure, slave families suffered such high infant mortality rates that the pop-

ulation of Caribbean and Brazilian sugar plantations in the eighteenth century could not be sustained without constant new supplies from Africa. Large scale rape of slave women took place by white overseers and plantation owners.

The people who benefited directly from slavery were the great merchants of the City of London, Bristol and Liverpool, the great landowners who built their fine classical mansions from immense fortunes made from their plantations in the West Indies.

The merchants and landowners were far from unaware of the inhumanity with which their slaves were treated. As a consequence they had to dehumanise the slaves: to put them in a category where the ideals of freedom, justice, that they proclaimed in the British, American and French Revolutions, simply did not apply to the slaves. Their journalists, pamphleteers, and philosophers obligingly produced a racist ideology to justify such wholesale mistreatment of fellow human beings.

How widely this racist ideology spread can be seen by the fact it was not just used by plantation owners but argued in books by many of the leading figures of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote:

"The Negroes of Africa have received from nature no intelligence that rises above the foolish. The difference between the two races is thus a substantial one: it appears to be just as great in respect to the faculties of the mind as in colour"

Even the leaders of the democratic revolution in America, men like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned hundreds of slaves apiece.

The abject misery and poverty that the slaves found themselves in led to massive revolts and struggles to end this terrible chapter in human history.

Next month Workers Power will look at the importance of slavery for early capitalism and the struggles of enslaved men and women to break their chains.

Key Dates

1562 First English slaving expedition by Sir John Hawkins

1673 First slave revolt on Jamaica

1760 Great slave uprising in Jamaica: 'Tacky's Rebellion' takes six months to put down

1772 slavery declared illegal in England, Wales & Ireland

1781 Over 100 enslaved Africans thrown overboard from the slave ship Zong, a fact only revealed because of the cost (£30 per head) to the London insurer

1787 Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded: Granville Sharp as president of a mostly Quaker committee

1789 Olaudah Equiano publishes *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African* a powerful first hand description of slavery. Equiano becomes a tireless campaigner for Abolition.

1791-1804 Haitian Revolution. Slave revolt succeeds and independent state founded

1794 French Revolutionary Convention abolishes slavery in French colonies and grants citizenship to all men (sic) "regardless of colour".

1796 William Wilberforce Bill defeated in House of Commons by four votes

1807 25 March - Slave Trade Abolition Bill passed in the British Parliament

1816 Major slave uprising in Barbados led by Bussa, brutally suppressed

1823 Major slave uprising in Demerara (British Guiana) led by Quamina and Jack Gladstone; defeated and reign of terror ensued

1831 Nat Turner's insurrection, Virginia.

1831-2 Major Slave Revolt ("Baptist War" led by Samuel Sharpe, a deacon) in Jamaica involves 60,000 slaves

1833 Abolition of Slavery British Empire Bill passed, with effect from 1834 but providing for up to six year transition and with £20M voted as compensation to slave owners

1838 1st August - enslaved men, women and children in British Empire became free

1848 Emancipation by the French of their slaves

1863 Abraham Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation freeing the Southern Slaves.

1888 Slavery abolished in Brazil

MIDDLE EAST

As USA switches to support for Sunni sectarianism, we say

Hands off Iran!

The US and Britain are losing the war in Iraq. Faced with the prospect of Iran becoming the regional power, reports *Jeremy Dewar*, the Bush regime is determined to attack the country

The US-led coalition occupying Iraq is rapidly falling apart. The much-heralded 21,500 extra troops sent in January were largely National Guard reservists. The frontline troops consist of war-weary regular soldiers, denied leave for months. A recent poll revealed that only 17 per cent of them still support the war.

Meanwhile, one by one America's allies are withdrawing. Even Britain is to withdraw 1,500 troops in April and a further 1,500 later this year, having finally relinquished its (fictional) control of southern Iraq to the Iraqi government (aka the Shia militias). The number of attacks on US, British and Iraqi government forces reached an all-time high of 186 in December.

Real threat against Iran

However the imperialists have reacted to their impending defeat with increased belligerence. British "withdrawal" turned out to be simply redeployment, sending 1,400 extra troops to Afghanistan (see box). And the Pentagon, as revealed by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker*, is in the advance stages of planning a bombing mission against neighbouring Iran.

Hersh, who made his name by breaking the story of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, has made detailed claims that the US is now capable of bombing Iranian nuclear facilities and military targets at just 24 hours notice. It has ordered two aircraft carriers to join its war fleet in the Gulf. Vice President Dick Cheney and security adviser Elliot Abrams (who was convicted in the Iran-contra affair in the 1980s) have been charged with leading the operation, and working closely with Saudi Arabia's Prince Bandar bin Sultan.

There are other signs of a coming military attack on Iran. Since August, at any one time, 500 Iranian officials have been in US custody in Iraq. The US has secured United Nations sanctions against the regime on the grounds that its uranium enrichment programme could be used to make a nuclear bomb - even though the CIA itself says that the regime is at least 10 years away from succeeding.

Echoes from the build-up to the Iraqi war are unmistakable. As Pentagon spokesman, Bryan Whitman told Hersh, "The United States is not planning to go to war with Iran. To suggest anything to the contrary is simply wrong, misleading and mischievous."

Anti-imperialist united front

US policy is based on the supposed fear of a Shia crescent in the Middle East, stretching from



Iran, through southern and eastern Iraq and southern Lebanon to Palestine. Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, Hassan Nasrallah's Hezbollah and Hamas (not Shia, but Sunni) are all thrown into this ragbag "threat." Having resorted to the parties and militias based on Iraq's Shia population as the basis for defeating the supposed Sunni Saddam die-hards, the inevitable boost this gave to Iran's influence has made Bush turn 180 degrees. Now he is searching for Sunni forces across the whole region to help crush the threat to its dominance. According to both Hersh and former British MI6 agent Alastair Crooke, the US is even backing Sunni groups in Lebanon and Syria, like Fatah al-Islam, which even have links to al-Qa'ida.

The only thing that remains constant in all this is US and British imperialism's policy of divide and rule, in the hope of plundering the region for decades to come.

There are two mistakes that socialists and genuine anti-imperialists could make in the current situation.

The first is to refuse to support Islamist forces - Sunni or Shia - whenever they are actually fighting imperialism and its puppets - to equate the danger of Islamism with that posed by imperialism. For millions of people in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Afghanistan, imperialism and its local agent Israel are the immediate danger. Thus if Iran is attacked by the US and its allies then it is the duty of the antiwar movement worldwide to work for an Iranian victory. If any one thinks democracy will arrive on the American tanks, just look at Iraq.

The second error would be to uncritically support the Shia leadership of the resistance to US imperialism. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad heads a brutal dictatorship. Last year, he outlawed the Tehran bus drivers' union, arrested and imprisoned its leaders, and imposed an Islamic yellow union on the workers. Earlier this month, he arrested 32 women for protesting against anti-women Islamic laws on polygamy and child custody. Student activists are constantly under threat from the fascist gangs that Ahmadinejad is close to.

Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi army has been involved in the religious-ethnic cleansing of Baghdad though he himself has denounced it and called for a purge of the militia. He has imposed the rule of Islamic courts in Sadr City with terrible consequences for women and secular forces. In Lebanon Hassan Nasrallah, for all the courage of Hizbollah's resistance to the Israelis, and his calls for an alliance with secular and socialist forces, is still a religious leader seeking a greater place for the Shia within a confessional state.

Permanent revolution

There can be no freedom for any of the peoples of the Middle East without defeating imperialism's attacks. Whoever stands aside from the resistance struggle will be - rightly - castigated as a stooge of the big capitalist powers.

This does not mean socialists should call on workers to cease their class struggle, nor on women to stop fighting for their rights against the imposition of Islamist dictatorships. It means that they should organise independently of other classes - free of religious affiliation - precisely in order to broaden the resistance to imperialism and to develop it into a struggle for social revolution. In the process, socialists will necessarily clash with their temporary allies, fighting to win over their working masses to the goal of overthrowing capitalism and spreading the socialist revolution throughout the Middle East.

ANTI-CAPITALIST MOVEMENT

Give the G8 a warm welcome to Germany in June

The annual gathering of the world's rulers takes place in Germany this year. *Martin Suchanek* looks at what they are plotting and the reception anticapitalists are preparing

The German Presidency of the G8 has outlined a recipe to push forward the agenda of globalisation and the project of strengthening the European Union. These include a commitment to

- “reduce global imbalances”, i.e. address the weakness of the Dollar and its destabilising effect for the world in coming years
- “measures aimed at improving systemic stability and transparency of financial markets”
- “freedom of investment in industrial and emerging countries. Addressing of global investment conditions”
- “protection of innovations against product and trademark piracy”
- “need for sustainable use of resources”.

Of course this is combined with the usual talk of caring about Africa, the poor and the disadvantaged, ignoring the fact that it is the global capitalist system that creates this poverty in the first place.

More importantly the whole agenda is also heavily focussed on security – a euphemism for the quasi-colonial occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine or Kosovo and the assault on democratic liberties in the G8 countries themselves.

The German capitalist class is determined to push forward the Lisbon agenda which calls for neo liberal attacks across the continent. They also want to revive the EU's constitutional process and make a major leap in the imperialist unification of Europe under German and French hegemony in order to challenge the US on a world level.

This really is the central strategic objective of German imperialism in the coming period

Building an EU superstate

The EU constitution was ratified by the German parliament, without any public debate, almost behind the backs of the population. The politicians – Christian and Social Democrats, Liberals – all fearing that it could be blocked by a “No” in a



referendum, as actually happened in France and the Netherlands.

The German presidency is making a conscious effort to generate public support for the European Union – presenting the EU as a “safe haven”, which will be competitive, secure and able to intervene in the whole world in a European, not in an American way.

There will be an informal EU-summit in Berlin on 24-25 March, celebrating 50 years of the Treaty of Rome, the foundation stone of the Community. A Charter of European Values will be publicly unveiled. To invoke the spirit of 1989 the German government is throwing a huge party around the Brandenburg Gate.

Imperialism and the class struggle

The reality of the “safety” the European haven affords refugees and asylum seekers can be seen daily: people from Africa and the Middle East being stopped, detained or even killed at the EU borders. Tens of thousands annually are being forcibly deported to face torture or starvation. The superiority of the “European way” may be lost on the inhabitants of Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Perhaps “European values” are represented by the wave of attacks

on the working class and the poor, of privatisations and job cuts in Germany and the rest of Europe. They can be seen in the racist attacks on Islamists, and the relegation to second class EU citizenship for the people from the new accession states in Eastern Europe.

Soon the German government will push through its so-called “pension reform”, raising the age of retirement to 67. In large companies like Airbus/EADS, German Telecom, Bayer/Schering, tens of thousands of jobs will be cut or outsourced. This has already led to an increase of struggles to defend jobs, even though they have been partial and derailed by the trade union bureaucracy and the PDS-Left Party which has played no role in developing strategies to win or even to unite ongoing struggles.

Against this background it is no surprise that the left wing of the German Labour movement, rank and file unionists and young anticapitalists are planning a series of actions to give the G8 a warm welcome in June.

A whole series of mobilisations are planned which will build up to against the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm. There are days of action on March 17-18 and massive counter-demonstration against the EU sum-

mit on 25 March. May Day too will act as a rallying point for the G8 events.

On Saturday 2 June a demonstration in Rostock is expected to attract anything from 100,000 to 150,000 people. This will open a week of meetings and actions. These will include an Alternative Summit and, on Wednesday 6 June, a mass blockade of the summit. In addition there will be days of action against climate change, racism, war and occupation.

The protests will see the European “safe haven” in action. A tiny group of the world's rulers will seek refuge – from their own people – behind 12,000 riot police and soldiers. There will be massive police surveillance of the demonstrators and violent repression if need be. In addition, the navy, the air force and the army will also be deployed. Already several bookshops, flats of activists, etc. have been searched for posters and leaflets calling for supposed illegal actions.

The section of the League for the Fifth international in Germany, Arbeitermacht, and Revolution, the socialist youth organisation, have called on all forces to support the demonstrations and actions against the G8 summit, to blockade it as effectively as possible. To achieve this we have helped to build anti-G8 alliances of an internationalist, anti-imperialist and class struggling character in Germany and Austria. We are doing this through contacts in the Anti-Imperialist Network of the European Social Forum.

We also call on all these activists to unite, to act together against the G8. However it must not just be a one-off. We need to lay the foundations for a European-wide and even broader, co-ordination to unite our struggles, against imperialist war, racism and capitalist exploitation. Unity in action against the G8 and what they represent can be a step forward in the fight for a new world party of socialist revolution – the Fifth International.

FRANCE

Presidential elections in France: the 'Unitary Left' shatters

Marc Lasalle surveys the wreckage of the "unitary presidential campaign" of the French left, the problems of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) arguing that the root of the problem lies in failing to provide an alternative revolutionary leadership to reformism

The campaign for the French presidential elections, due on 22 April and 6 May, is now in full swing. The two front-runners: Nicolas Sarkozy for the right wing UMP party and Ségolène Royal for the Socialist Party (PS) have already launched their campaigns. Sarkozy is in the lead. These elections come on the heels of intense class struggles over the last two years - the successful campaign against European Constitution, the uprising by youth in the banlieues (the neglected outer suburbs of French cities) and the mass youth struggle against the CPE in 2006.

Against such a background we might expect the Left to be optimistic. However, it looks increasingly that the five candidates to the left of the PS will experience a decline in their votes. This has led to bitter arguments on the anticapitalist left and within the LCR itself.

In 2005, during the campaign for the Left 'Non' in the referendum, an alliance emerged between the French Communist Party (PCF), ATTAC (the anti-globalisation organisation), LCR and even a fraction of the PS around a limited critique of neo-liberalism. In towns and neighbourhoods across the country, several hundred collectives were formed and continued political activity after the Referendum.

The LCR expressed great hopes for this alliance, even seeing it as the embryo of a new party encompassing both PCF and LCR and others. Since the downfall of the USSR the LCR has stated repeatedly that the distinction between reform and revolution is not a fundamental one for a new party or a government. It need only be "anti-neoliberal".

A united left?

Based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the PCF's real intentions, a comedy of errors began. Finally, after a series of national aggregates of the collectives, the PCF refused to sign a statement that they would not enter a neo-liberal government with the PS. The PCF, with its much larger if less active membership, easily mobilized a sufficient majority to defeat the LCR.

This should not come as a surprise. Since the 1980s the PCF has several times served as junior partner in Socialist Party coalitions, supporting policies like the large-scale privatisations of the Jospin government. It needs pacts with the PS to preserve its shrinking base in the town halls, regional assemblies and the French parliament. It is in short a reformist party to which such things matter above all else.



Olivier Besancenot

However the LCR, by walking out of the collectives, and deciding to stand Olivier Besancenot, appeared to be splitting over reasons it had not previously claimed were important. It is therefore not surprising - given their platform differed only in the degree of radicalism of its reforms - that the right wing of LCR, plus the remnants of British SWP supporters in France, have called for Besancenot to stand down and support farmers' leader José Bové.

Of course it is unprincipled to politically support a candidate, like Marie Georges Buffet, who makes it clear she will join a Royal government given half the chance. But it would be unprincipled to enter any capitalist government, even a self-proclaimed "anti-neoliberal" one. Why? Because it is one that would attack the gains of the workers and defend the interest of the bosses. It would support France's military actions, its corporate plundering of the semi-colonial world. Events in Italy show this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The LCR's programme

Olivier's program calls for permanent contracts for all, an end to flexible working and overtime, a wage increase of 300 euros, a minimum wage (SMIC) of 1500 euros per month. It calls for renationalisation of privatised industries and the rejection of neoliberal reforms in the health service and education, citizenship for the sans papiers, the abolition of the "monarchical powers of the presidency" and a Constituent Assembly to replace the Gaullist Fifth Republic.

Where it is totally silent is on how to fight for these demands. For example, the "prohibition of all sackings." Who will prohibit them and how?

This is not included in this programme. Is it simply to be voted by deputies in parliament? Is it by working class direct action, imposing workers control and creating a workers government? Likewise on getting rid of the Fifth Republic: what sort of republic will replace it - a capitalist one or one based on workers' councils?

Whilst Olivier claims his programme is "anticapitalist" the revolutionary struggle necessary to expropriate the capitalists, create a socialised and planned economy and to smash the repressive apparatus of the bourgeois state, on all these questions the programme is silent. This programme is left reformist, not revolutionary.

Despite our criticism of the LCR's platform and tactics we believe that Olivier Besancenot is the only candidate who could claim to represent the key struggles over the last few years and rally the most class conscious and militant forces to his campaign. However the LCR now has to face the undemocratic hurdle of gaining the support of five hundred mayors or regional councillors, which could lead to them getting knocked out before the first round.

However, revolutionaries should give him critical support, participate in his campaign and prepare the ground for the next round of attacks, whether from the Gaullist Sarkozy or the "Socialist" Royal. We will argue for an action programme of resistance to Sarkozy and Royal and for a new workers party, built by mass forces in the unions and the whole range of anticapitalist, antiracist, antiwar movements. We say from the outset that any new party must have a revolutionary programme and a democratic centralist party organization.

ITALY

Accidental death of a government – a parliamentary farce

The sudden death of Romano Prodi's centre-left government, caused by left wing senators abstaining on a vote to endorse Italian support for the war in Afghanistan, and its just as rapid resurrection exposes the lack of principle not only of Rifondazione Comunista, but the Fourth International. *Dave Stockton* looks back at a remarkable week in politics

On 2 March a vote of confidence in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Italian Parliament, brought an end to the crisis of Romano Prodi's L'Unione government. This had erupted on 21 February when the coalition of assorted bourgeois and reformist workers parties, lost a key vote in the Senate, endorsing Italy's support for the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan. Two senators, Franco Turigliatto and Ferdinando Rossi, both from left parties within the coalition, refused to vote for Prodi. The executive of Rifondazione immediately moved to expel Turigliatto from the party. He in his turn resigned his seat in the Senate, a move that cannot take immediate effect.

The premier, in a deft manoeuvre, which cruelly exposed the basic unseriousness of his opponents, quickly tendered his resignation to President Giorgio Napolitano who, after a few days constitutional play-acting, rejected it and invited him to go back to the Chamber and the Senate for a new vote of confidence.

On Wednesday 28, one week after the crisis began, the Senate passed a confidence vote by 162 votes to 157: Turigliatto and Rossi voting for Prodi this time. On March 2 the lower house endorsed Prodi by a comfortable 342 to 253.

Prodi positively crowed with triumph. On Afghanistan – which 62 per cent of all Italians and 73 per cent of government supporters want all Italian troops withdrawn from – and the expansion of the US base in Vicenza, which last month 200,000 demonstrated against, he said:

"I stand by Italy's choice to ally with the greatest supporters of the United Nations, to position itself at the heart of a Europe which is linked with the United States and to remain a faithful ally in the alliances we have joined."

On the liberalisation and deregulation of the economy he clearly indicated his contempt for the



Romano Prodi

trade unions and the rank and file members of the workers parties in his coalition.

"Opening the way for greater competition irritated some categories but we went ahead just the same. And we will make other extremely important decisions."

He even boasted:

"Through deregulation we have begun to free up some historic interests, interests which were even legitimate and established but which were hindering Italy's development."

The premier also claims to have hog-tied his nine coalition allies into a "non-negotiable" 12-point programme. This commits them to supporting the government's foreign policy, including the occupation and war in Afghanistan, to supporting the expansion of the US military base at Vicenza, the building of a high-speed rail connection (TAV) to France, and the "reform" of the Italian pension system. In short it enforces surrender on all the major issues the Italian left has been campaign-

ing about in the last year or so.

The farce of Turigliatto and Rossi's "bringing down" of Prodi, the former's theatrical resignation of his Senate seat, then their vote of confidence in him, is worthy of Dario Fo – ironic since Fo's wife is also a senator and has also been involved in the threats to "vote against Prodi". Moreover Turigliatto is not only a member of Rifondazione Comunista, of its left wing faction Sinistra Critica (the Critical Left) but he is also a member of the Fourth International.

He explained his cowardly climbdown in an interview on 27 February.

"Tomorrow I will vote 'yes' but I am highly critical (of the government) and will retain total freedom when it comes to voting on individual measures."

As for Rossi, a member of the Italian Communists' Party (PDCI), the same pathetic excuses were trotted out, "On issues such as the war (in Afghanistan), I will only vote for the government if it holds a confidence vote... Otherwise, I

reserve the right to dissent."

It is clear therefore that such dissent is totally Platonic. It has no real consequence. In action these gentlemen allow Prodi to carry out his anti-working class and imperialist measures against the workers of Italy and the villagers of Afghanistan.

Sinistra Critica at its recent conference said of Rifondazione's participation in Prodi's government: "The balance sheet... is catastrophic." Yet in action these "critics" actually support neoliberal actions at home and imperialist wars abroad. Oh yes in words they are opposed but words without the corresponding deeds are just hot air.

In *Socialist Worker* a correspondent from Italy refers to the situation thus:

"These are sad days because they signal the end of the left alternative which Rifondazione has represented over the last few years. But it's also a time when we can lay the basis for an alternative left and real opposition to the right. This basis is Sinistra Critica"

But these have not been "sad" days. What sort of language is this for revolutionaries to use? It is not a sad thing to free oneself from unfounded and foolish illusions in the likes of Fausto Bertinotti. But the statement that Sinistra Critica is the new alternative shows the illusions in reformism, in parliamentarism, in participation in bourgeois governments have not been shed, have not even been seriously questioned.

This is the necessary and inevitable outcome of having tossed aside compass of revolutionary Marxism, the principles developed by Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky a century ago. Is it any wonder these people get lost in the thickets of bourgeois parliamentarism? They see their votes, their resignations and expulsions as high tragedy. No, comrades, they are low farce. Italian workers will have to look for a serious alternative somewhere else.

MEXICO

Eye-witness to the Oaxaca commune

Last year the people of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, rose up and ran their corrupt governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz out of town. The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) ran the city as an alternative government from June last year till October, when the Mexican state repressed it, leading to arrests, killings and several months of martial law

Workers Power interviewed Andreas Aullet, a member of the Argentinean Trotskyist group, Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo, who was in Oaxaca and is now touring Europe to build solidarity.

Workers Power: Can you tell us how the APPO was set up and how it worked?

Andreas Aullet: The APPO was made up of more than 250 organisations and they were split up into two main groups.

The first group consisted of the traditional organisations of the working class such as the teachers, the Federation of Public Sector Workers of Oaxaca State (the regional TUC), health workers, education and non-education workers of the Oaxaca Autonomous University, peasant groups, and popular and civil society organisations. These groups sent their own traditional leaders, such as Enrique Pacheco, head of the teachers.

The second group was of organisations created by the struggle itself, neighbourhood and barricade committees, student organisations, the Co-ordinating Organisation of the Women of Oaxaca, taxi drivers and delegates from towns and villages around Oaxaca. These new organisations elected delegates whenever the APPO met. While the APPO did not meet all the time, it could be called very quickly, within 24 hours, although not all bodies sent delegates all the time. Everyone could speak and agendas were produced for every meeting.

WP: What were the political debates in the APPO?

AA: One of the key debates was about political leadership. Some wanted Ortiz to go but were not against his party, the PRI. Others wanted the PRI to go, too. There were arguments about whether



Preparing to repel police attacks in Oaxaca

the APPO should call upon the federal state to get rid of Ortiz or to drive him out of office. A negotiating committee was elected to negotiate a deal with the federal government - Pacheco was on the committee - but the APPO kicked out the deal.

Other debates were on social and economic questions, such as land distribution. The Stalinists wanted to set up a commission to study the land problems before doing anything. Others wanted to the APPO to act as a government. The right wing populists wanted the APPO to become part of the federal state, while the left populists wanted the APPO to act as a government, but were very vague about what it should do.

The PTS argued that the APPO should become a government and we also called for a revolutionary constituent assembly, to which workers and peasants throughout the state should have sent delegates. Mass mobilisations, strikes and demonstrations would have been needed.

Such a constituent assembly could have carried out far-reaching measures on the land, dealt with exploitation, improved rights for

indigenous groups and so on. We believe it was possible for the working class to take power in Oaxaca, but we needed a statewide general strike, which was blocked by the Stalinists, Pacheco and others. Also, because Oaxaca was the highpoint of the struggle in Mexico, we also argued for a general strike throughout the country in support of the commune.

But the national trade union leaders and [cheated bourgeois presidential candidate] López Obrador's campaign isolated the APPO. The main bourgeois parties control the trade union leadership and did little to support Oaxaca, and, although Obrador's National Convention pulled a million people on the streets, no debate on the way forward took place.

Then there were the Zapatistas. Some individuals came to Oaxaca but the movement went away north, with their idea of changing the world without taking power.

WP: What has happened since the repression?

AA: President Felipe Calderón and his party, PAN, passed the budget, with support from the PRI and the PRD, Obrador's party. The budg-

et cuts education and health services, with more money for the army. The price of oil was raised. The situation will worsen next year with more privatisations and price liberalisations as part of a deal with the US.

A wave of demonstrations were called by the PRI and the main Mexican workers' confederation (CTM, controlled by PRI and PRD) and the National Union of Workers (UNT), a smaller but more oppositional trade union federation but one still controlled by the PRI. The main slogan on the demos was "Down with PAN, Up with Tortilla" (PAN is the name of Calderon's party and also the word for bread).

There have been several strikes, but the CTM leaders have sold them out. The more left UNT unions have taken action, but their leaders have also attacked activists. For example, there was a social security workers' strike over pensions and cuts to the benefit system. The UNT leaders suspended many militants from the union - then, of course, the bosses attacked them. Some were sacked and one of our comrades faces imprisonment.

In Oaxaca there is an attempt to reorganise the struggle - there was a demonstration in early February of 300,000 against the governor and for the release of the political prisoners.

WP: What is the future of the class struggle in Mexico.

AA: There will be more repression around the country. The question of political prisoners will become more important in the rest of Mexico. There will be attacks on social security, health and education, and more privatisations and job losses. We expect to see an intensification of the class struggle.

A key task is the need to build a revolutionary leadership and a party to stop the betrayals and sell-outs - a revolutionary party that can fight for working class power.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We fight to:

- Abolish capitalism and create a world without exploitation, class divisions and oppression
- Break the resistance of the exploiters by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution smashing the repressive capitalist state
- Place power in the hands of councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry, the poor - elected and recallable by the masses
- Transform large-scale production and distribution, at present in the hands of a tiny elite, into a socially owned economy, democratically planned
- Plan the use of humanity's labour, materials and technology to eradicate social inequality and poverty.

This is communism - a society without classes and without state repression. To achieve this, the working class must take power from the capitalists.

We fight imperialism: the handful of great capitalist powers and their corporations, who exploit billions and crush all states and peoples, who resist them. We support resistance to their blockades, sanctions, invasions and occupations by countries like Venezuela, Iraq or Iran. We demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. We support unconditionally the armed resistance.

We fight racism and national oppres-

sion. We defend refugees and asylum seekers from the racist actions of the media, the state and the fascists. We oppose all immigration controls. When racists physically threaten refugees and immigrants, we take physical action to defend them. We fight for no platform for fascism.

We fight for women's liberation: from physical and mental abuse, domestic drudgery, sexual exploitation and discrimination at work. We fight for free abortion and contraception on demand. We fight for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men and against their harassment by the state, religious bodies and reactionaries.

We fight youth oppression in the family and society: for their sexual freedom, for an end to super-exploitation, for the right to vote at sixteen, for free, universal education with a living grant.

We fight bureaucracy in the unions. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice, and earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. Rank and file trade unionists must organise to dissolve the bureaucracy. We fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers control.

We fight reformism: the policy of Labour, Socialist, Social-Democratic and the misnamed Communist parties. Capitalism cannot be reformed through peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by force. Though

these parties still have roots in the working class, politically they defend capitalism. We fight for the unions to break from Labour and form for a new workers party. We fight for such a party to adopt a revolutionary programme and a Leninist combat form of organization.

We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must, therefore, be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a socialist political revolution is the only way to prevent their eventual collapse.

We reject the policies of class collaboration: "popular fronts" or a "democratic stage", which oblige the working class to renounce the fight for power today. We reject the theory of "socialism in one country". Only Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution can bring victory in the age of imperialism and globalisation. Only a global revolution can consign capitalism to history.

With the internationalist and communist goal in our sights, proceeding along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International.

That is what Workers Power is fighting for. If you share these goals - join us.

www.workerspower.com

★ Fighting Fund ★

The Workers Power summer school, this year organised jointly with Revolution, is going to be an opportunity for our members and supporters to discuss and develop Marxist politics. It will also be an opportunity for us to bring over international supporters.

During the summer camp we will develop our analysis of the impending environmental catastrophe and begin to move towards some programmatic answers. Likewise we will continue our theoretical work on imperialism.

The *Fighting Fund* will raise money to help finance this important camp.

The G8 is also meeting this summer - in slightly more luxurious conditions. The league will be there to greet them in force. But again this costs money. The *Fighting Fund* will help finance students and youth to get to Germany.

This month our members and supporters raised £80 for the fighting fund. This brings our total over the last few months to £545. If you liked this issue of Workers Power and want to help us with our work to build a new revolutionary fifth international then please send a donation to the address in the *Fighting Fund* box on the right hand column of this page.

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Stop the war drive against Iran

By Simon Hardy

The imperialist occupiers may be desperate to dig themselves out of the Iraqi quagmire but this in no way reduces their warmongering. The US - with its British lap dog in tow and its Israeli guard dog straining at the leash - is preparing for air strikes against Iran.

The United Nations Security Council - a thieves' kitchen of the leading capitalist powers - has called for sanctions to try to starve Iran into submission. How can antiwar and working class activists, youth and socialists force the immediate withdrawal of the troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, and stop the attack on Iran?

Action not words

In 2003 two million marched in London against the war on Iraq. The huge marches against Israel's war in Lebanon last summer, against the Labour Party conference in September, and in defence of Iran on 24 February all showed that the mass antiwar movement can still be mobilised.

Yet the leaders of the antiwar movement in Britain - the heads of CND and the trade unions, the handful of antiwar Labour MPs and the SWP spokespersons of Respect - are content to keep the movement at the same level as before, calling demonstrations and meetings, but refusing to escalate the action.

With the war less popular than ever and the troops seething with discontent, it is time to step up the action, to go beyond marches to direct measures to stop the war machine.

True, Lindsey German did tell the rally after last month's 60,000-strong demo, "We will demonstrate, strike and take action until all these wars are at an end." George Galloway added, "If Tony Blair takes Britain to war with Iran, there won't just be demonstrations on the streets of Britain, there will be riots."

The problem is that German is not demanding that the union leaders call strike action nor calling on the rank and file to prepare for strikes, should the union tops duck the issue. Galloway is even worse. Riots are symptomatic of a lack of leadership. Often they lead to the most vulnerable parts of the movement being banged away for months or years; very rarely do they bring about serious change. Galloway is abdicating leadership, not providing it.

At the People's Assembly on 20 March, we will put forward proposals to help defeat the imperialist war drive and fight for the

means to achieve it.

Socialists must argue for what is necessary to defeat the war machine. This means using class struggle tactics to beat the imperialists. Socialists should agitate for mass boycotts of military supplies, and blockades of airbases and transport hubs, used to convey weapons of destruction to the occupying troops. We should appeal to workers in supply industries to refuse to handle weapons, as Scottish rail workers did in 2003.

When the Iraq invasion began, workers across the country walked out and staged lunchtime demonstrations; thousands of school students took to the streets. The day the US, Britain or Israel attack Iran, we must repeat this, but on a scale many times greater. Every union leader should call now for strike action in the event of an aerial

- **Mass boycotts of military supplies and blockades of bases**
- **Strike and occupy town centres if they attack Iran**
- **People's assemblies in every town to co-ordinate resistance**
- **Support soldiers' right to organise and refuse to fight**
- **No compliance with war on Muslims self defence is no offence**

attack on Iran. Antiwar Labour MPs should disrupt parliament. Students and workers should walk out and occupy town and city centres.

Mass assemblies should be held in every city to co-ordinate resistance from below. The revival of the Peoples Assemblies has the potential to go much further. We should organise democratic assemblies, with delegates from unions, faith groups, youth and community organisations. The wave of struggles against the Labour government, the fight to save the NHS and halt privatisation, the PCS strike movement can all be brought together in a combined fightback which could bring this weak government to its knees.

Some will say that, by doing so, we put British troops at risk. We must reply that it is Bush and Blair's illegal war that puts troops at risk, and that we are trying to stop

it. We should link this to a clear call for the right of British troops to organise separately from their officers and refuse to fight the resistance.

Others will say that this action will aid "Britain's enemies". But the enemies of the British government and its generals are not the enemies of the British working class. We do not have to endorse in any way the political programmes of this or that Islamist faction of the resistance to say clearly: Iraqis and Afghans fighting for an end to foreign occupation of their country are fighting for a justified aim and deserve our solidarity.

Of course Labour will try to shift the blame onto the "enemy at home": the Muslim community. A wave of Islamophobia will sweep the country when the imperialists bomb Iran. Government ministers and police forces will wage a campaign of terror at home against Muslims, cheered on by the capitalist press. Violent racists, like the BNP, will try to carry out verbal and physical attacks.

Every antiwar activist must wage a fight against racism and the persecution of Muslims. Workers must not comply with the government's war on Muslims and support the right to mass self-defence.

Revolution against imperialism

War is an integral part of the system of global capitalism. The wars of the last years are a sign that the system is crisis-ridden. The attacks on living standards at home, privatisation of welfare and public services, ever greater reduction of civil liberties, the hateful persecution of Muslims and young people, the growth of surveillance, vast spending on hi-tech weaponry, mounting inequality: all these are signs of a system in decline, a system that must be overthrown.

Imperialism contains within itself its own gravedigger. All around the world, there are hundreds of millions who detest imperialism and war and face a daily struggle against the capitalist ruling class. This is the force that can defeat imperialism: not MPs, pacifists, charities, vicars and Imams, but the working class millions of the cities and countryside around the world.

A revolutionary mass movement can take action against the war and against the rule of the capitalists itself, converting the imperialist war into a war of the working class against the imperialists. Internationally we need a revolutionary party that can struggle not only for the defeat of the imperialist powers, but for an end to the entire capitalist system.