

# **workers power**

September 2007 • Price £1.75 / £1.50 Issue 318

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

## **Refuse to fight for Exxon & Shell**



**TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN NOW!**

**INSIDE:**

**CLASS WAR AT HOME AND ABROAD**

**SUPPORT PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS**

**BUST BROWN'S PAY RESTRAINT**

**GET THE TROOPS OUT**

**UNITE THE STRIKES!**



**League for the  
Fifth International**

## EDITORIAL

# Turn retreat from Basra into defeat for British imperialism

By Kuldip Bajwa and Jeremy Dewar

On Monday 3 September, Britain finally pulled its last 500 troops out of Basra. Only the Sun - as if in involuntary self-mockery - hailed them as "the Lions of Basra!" All bar a few military spokesmen and Labour ministers admitted that it was a total defeat, that the occupation had utterly failed. There now remain just 5,500 British soldiers in Iraq holed up, under fire, in an airbase.

But, while there is evident relief among Iraqis, rank and file British soldiers and their families and the antiwar majority at home, this does not signal an end to Britain's military aggression. On the contrary, many of the troops will soon be moved to southern Afghanistan, to the bloody conflict in Helmand province. How many of them, how many Afghans, will have to die before the union jack comes down and the last post is sounded there too?

## Soldiers, not your war!

Last month, the Ministry of Defence told soldiers they could no longer "blog, take part in surveys, speak in public, post on bulletin boards, play in multi-player computer games or send text messages or photographs" (*The Guardian*) about anything to do with the wars they were fighting.

This affront to democracy blows the cover on the rights of soldiers. They have none.

As we go to press, 242 soldiers have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. A further 2,394 have been wounded, 1,741 of whom were evacuated on medical grounds. Lance Bombardier Ben Parkinson, 23, lost both his legs to a landmine in Helmand; he was offered just £152,000 compensation. Up to 150,000 others are still awaiting an "offer" from the MoD, many two and a half years after their injury.

Rank and file soldiers are lied to before a war, maimed and gagged while on the battlefield, and forgotten and discarded if they make it back home. They have nothing in common with the ministers, bureaucrats and generals, who command war. Whether they realise it or not, they have far more in common with Iraqi workers and poor farmers, who, like the vast majority of soldiers, want to see an immediate end to the occupation.

We say to the soldiers, organise independently from your officers and demand your full democratic rights. Link up with the antiwar movement, especially Military Families Against the War, and speak out against these wars. Most importantly, refuse to fight against the Iraqi and Afghani resistance, who have every right to defend their country.

Will this mean Britain will lose the war? Absolutely, and it is losing it anyway. The sooner it is lost, the more Iraqis and British squaddies will live. These wars are capitalist wars for profit, imperialist wars to rob countries already impoverished by a century of looting of their natural resources.

Soldiers, your enemy is at home. By refusing to fight this war, not only will you be defending Iraqis' right to self-determination, you will also make it far more difficult for the warmongers to use the British army to fight another imperialist war and send another generation of working class soldiers off again to mutilation and death.

## Mass direct action can stop the war

On 8 January 2003, two Motherwell train drivers refused to move supplies, destined for the Gulf, to the giant Nato weapons store at Glen Douglas, saying they were opposed to the war. None of the other drivers covered for them. The cargo of destruction never moved.

On 20 March 2003, the day the war broke out, thousands of workers and tens of thousands of school students walked out on strike. They took to the streets and occupied town centres. Youth stood their ground against head teachers' intimidation and police brutality.

We can - and must - recreate these kinds of protest.

Unfortunately, the Stop the War Coalition has settled into a routine of annual demonstrations, teach-ins and set-piece debates in parliament. All these are legitimate tactics, but, on their own, they are insufficient.

For example, Stop the War has called a demonstration at 2pm outside parliament on Monday 8 October. The protest is to coincide with the reconvening of the House of Commons. Good, but it's a weekday. In every workplace and union branch, workers should discuss taking strike action in order to attend. School pupils and students should organise support for mass walkouts.

We should approach workers in transport, the civil service and the armaments industry and urge them to summon up the spirit of the Motherwell Two - and refuse to move supplies to the front.

Of course, we will need to convince people that they will be part of a mass protest, that they will be supported in case of victimisation. That's why we need to call meetings in every town and city to discuss the war and set up committees to organise the kind of action that can speed up and complete Britain's troop withdrawal.

## Stop Labour's war on Muslims

Gordon Brown wants to continue the attack on civil liberties, pursued by Blair. In July, he claimed that Britain needed tougher laws to "confront a generation-long challenge to defeat al-Qa'ida-inspired terrorist violence". His plans include

- Extension of detention without trial to a maximum of 58 days
- Allowing police to question suspects after they have been charged
- Introduction of a new unified border security agency
- Use of evidence gained from telephone tapping in court
- Increased use of biometric visas and biometric ID cards for foreign residents.

Since 1997, the Labour government has introduced at least 15 repressive pieces of legislation, many explicitly targeting Britain's two million Muslims. Unless Muslim elders and imams preach subordination to "British culture" - by which is meant British imperialism, not British workers' traditions of struggle and solidarity! - then they, too, will fall under suspicion.

The government encourages lecturers to spy on Asian and north African students, teachers and employers to restrict female Muslims' right to wear headscarves.

These laws are intended to demonise opponents of the war, crack down on dissent, and stifle free speech. They are designed to divide the antiwar movement and to terrorise its most militant sections.

We should oppose all surveillance on students or victimisation of those, who refuse to comply with dress codes. Students, teachers and all workers should expose all examples of discrimination against Muslims. We need to counter the lies of the British National Party and other racists, who try to whip up hatred and blame migrants for unemployment, shortages or low pay.

Every instance of racism - the ideology imperialism invented to justify its colonial wars - must be met with solidarity with its targets: protests and physical defence.

War is a dirty business: Britain a past master at dividing its opponents, and turning retreat into a platform for a new attack. That's why the antiwar movement, whilst our rulers are on the run, needs to go all out to get the troops withdrawn from all the fronts of the phoney "war on terrorism". If we do so, we can turn British imperialism's retreat in Basra into a defeat for the system that creates wars: imperialist capitalism.

# Fifth International

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# OUT NOW!

The summer issue of our journal, *Fifth International*, is now available. Since the appearance of the last issue of *Fifth International* in February events have continued to bear out the perspectives of our tendency; the world situation is one of mounting instability, caused both by attacks by the ruling class and stiffened resistance from those coming under attack. The third element of the situation is a severe crisis of leadership within the resistance movements.

In this South Asia special, Luke Cooper examines the background to the mass opposition to the regime of Pervez Musharraf, while Simon Hardy looks at the underlying reasons for the renewed war in Sri Lanka, and how a new strategy is needed if the Tamils are to win their freedom and link up with the workers of the majority community fighting back against neoliberalism.

There's plenty here also for those attending the anti-G8 protests. Martin Suchanek looks at how German imperialism is planning to take the lead in getting the project of an imperialist superstate back on the rails. Dave Stockton traces the mounting crisis of the anticapitalist movement and what measures are needed to overcome it.

We also publish extended reviews on Marta Harnecker's *Rebuilding the left*, a book on the Latin American movements and Sheila Cohen's *Ramparts of resistance*, which chronicles the ups and downs of the American and British trade unions. Shorter reviews of the anthology, *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, and Timothy Cheek's *Living with Reform: China since 1989* are also included.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### DEFEND KAREN REISSMAN

On the last three days of August Manchester mental health workers went on strike against the suspension of union activist Karen Reissman.

Reissman was suspended because of comments made during the Manchester nurses strike earlier this year, which supposedly brought the local NHS trust into disrepute. How? By criticising cuts which would put vulnerable patients at risk.

The mood on the picket lines was positive with lots of support from drivers on their way to work and several bus drivers donating to the strike fund. This, despite the Manchester Evening News running a front page article about how damaging the strike would be to patients, who would have to be transported up to 100 miles away for treatment... neglecting to mention that this was a management decision made 6 weeks in advance.

The three day strike culminated in a march and rally in the city centre, in which 200 people from the health service, other trade unions and students took part. Speakers at the rally pointed out that the struggle was not just about Karen it was about defending the NHS and the rights of trade unions. At the moment the bosses have refused to reinstate Karen and more strike action is due.

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### PRISON OFFICERS DEFY LAW



The Prison Officers Association successfully defied the anti-union laws last month,

For more on the current wave of strikes and public sector pay revolt, turn to pages 4, 5, 6 and 7.

## AUTUMN OF DISCONTENT

# Mounting strikes show workers are turning anger into action

Gordon Brown says public sector workers must accept real pay cuts for the good of the economy. *Jeremy Dewar* argues that a united strike could force him to eat his words

Is Britain approaching a hot autumn of disputes? This summer's postal conflict went far beyond the confines of one-day strikes, when members spread "wildcat" action across Scotland and the north of England. Civil servants, local government employees, teachers and healthworkers – millions in all – are being consulted over strike action, too. Add to these numbers, dramatic strikes by tube workers, prison officers, social carers and mental health nurses – and Gordon Brown's "smooth transition" to power looks decidedly rocky.

If we all unite and strike together, we can bust Labour's pay restraint and shift the balance of class forces in Britain in the workers' favour. Then anything would be possible...

## A victory!

"Worst strike in a decade", "Strikers cause tube chaos", "Tube strike union digs in" – screamed the London evening headlines on 4 September.

The Rail Maritime and Transport union had just called 2,300 members out on the first of two three-day strikes. The effect was immediate and dramatic. All bar the Northern, Jubilee and (most of the) Piccadilly lines were down. London was gridlocked.

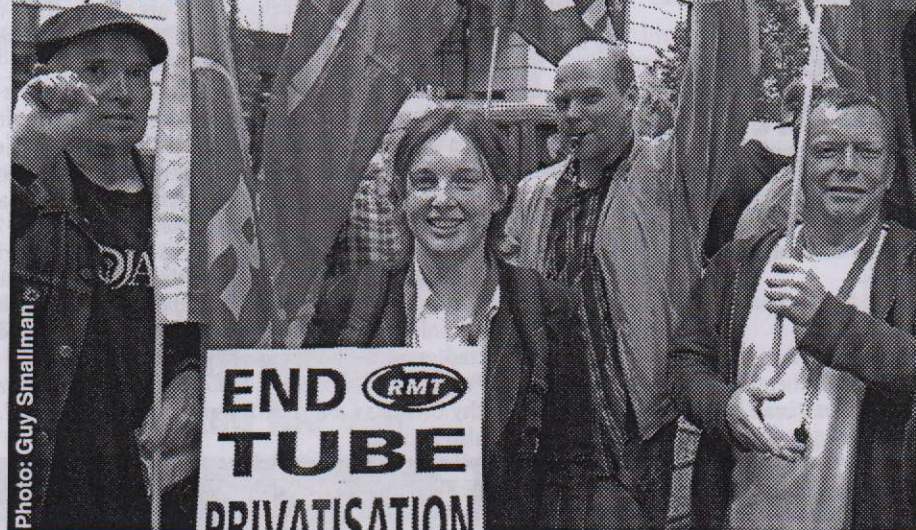
London's evening papers are renown for stirring up commuters' hatred for the rail unions, but millions of workers would have immediately recognised the strikers' plight.

Gordon Brown drove through the privatisation of the tube infrastructure four years ago against widespread opposition. Metronet, a consortium of giant corporations, including privatisation specialists Balfour Beatty, WS Atkins and EDF, won the contract to maintain two-thirds of the trains, track and stations.

Then, after gobbling up billions in government subsidies, driving its skilled and experienced workforce to distraction by management incompetence, and running up a £1.9 billion debt... on 17 July it went into administration. Labour's public-private partnership turned out to be very similar to the Tories' sell-offs.

The union's demands that workers' jobs and pensions are safeguarded, and that the network is re-nationalised struck a chord with millions of public sector workers, whose own jobs and pensions are at risk, and who face creeping privatisation. The power of 2,300 workers – the invisible and forgotten men and women, who board the last trains to work on the track overnight – to bring the capital to a grinding halt was an inspiration for their own impending battles over cuts to pay, jobs and services – especially as it appears that the workers won their demands within 24 hours!

Metronet workers – scoring a victory for us all



## Crumbling services, rising profits

To understand the level of anger among public sector workers, it is necessary to look at the state of Britain's public services. Despite record levels of investment since 2000, millions know that our schools and hospitals, central and local government services are creaking under the strain.

Why? In a word, it's the market.

Every penny Chancellor Brown authorised had to be linked to the profits the private sector makes out of public services. Need a new hospital? Sure, but it has to be built using the Private Finance Initiative, costing 30 per cent more than the public sector and providing companies annual profit rates of 15 to 25 per cent over 30 years. Schools can be turned round, but only by allowing companies, charities and rich individuals to run them as Academies, setting the pupils' curriculum and worsening the staff's pay rates and conditions.

To boost the private providers, Labour penalised the public sector. TNT and UK Mail use Royal Mail's delivery network at a subsidised rate, cherry-picking profitable business mail. Private treatment centres are guaranteed millions of operations a year, forcing NHS hospitals to buy their services, even when they are more expensive, because they are effectively paid for anyway. It is so expensive for public organisations to terminate 25-year contracts with catering companies, like Sodexo, that, once in, they can do what they like.

The government has used the ensuing chaos to attack services, jobs and conditions. Former health secretary Patricia Hewitt famously told NHS staff that their priority was to bal-

ance the books not to care for patients. As a result, 21,000 jobs have been cut and wards, departments even whole hospitals closed. Schoolteachers and college lecturers lack resources, and face cuts and closures. Forty thousand Royal Mail jobs are on the line, and 2,000 post offices face the axe.

In the civil service, over 100,000 – nearly one in four – jobs are to be slashed. Local authorities contract out as much as they can, and use the single status agreement, supposed to raise blue-collar wages, to downgrade posts and rob workers of hundreds of pounds.

These attacks are co-ordinated across the public sector. They are part of a national – and international – offensive, attacking jobs, pay, pensions and conditions, but also the public services millions depend on. The bosses call it neoliberalism. It is how they hope to increase their already huge share of society's wealth at the expense of our means of existence.

## Rising tide of struggle

Over the summer months, unlike the weather, the struggle against these attacks hotted up.

First the Communication Workers Union launched a series of weekly all-out, then rolling, sectional strikes. Unlike the Public and Commercial Services union strategy in the civil service, which led to only two national strikes in seven months, the CWU action severely disrupted business. Soon, 200 million items of post lay undelivered in the mail centres.

Added to this, rank and file posties were working to rule – "doing the job properly" – and walked out whenever management tried to victimise

militants or force them to cross picket lines. This culminated in a week-long wildcat strike that spread across Scotland and down to Liverpool and Newcastle, involving 6,000 posties. Suddenly, Royal Mail wanted to negotiate!

At the same time, 600 social care workers in Glasgow launched an all-out indefinite strike against the downgrading of their jobs. Some faced pay cuts of £1,000! The mainly female workforce refused to go back to work until every member's job was satisfactorily graded. Attempts to offer some of them more money at the expense of others just made them more determined to fight on. Eventually the Unison members won a magnificent victory, inspiring others, for example in Edinburgh, to take strike action.

#### No reliance on TUC leaders

What this shows is the enormous well of anger at the base of the public sector unions. Given a lead, thousands respond with militant action. Furthermore, millions more can see that strikes over pay and jobs are linked to the future of the services themselves. The Metronet fiasco shows what privatisation brings.

Gordon Brown announced the public sector pay cuts on 1 March. On 30 August, he repeated his stance; "We have succeeded in tackling inflation and having a stable economy because of discipline in pay over the last ten years. That discipline will have to continue. We will do nothing, nothing, to put that at risk."

So why have the union leaders still not united the strikes and brought all public sector workers out together? On every picket line ordinary workers already see the need for this. You don't need to be a £70,000 a year general secretary to realise "unity is strength". It's on the union banners, stupid!

The truth is the big union leaders – Dave Prentis of Unison, Tony Woodley of Unite and Paul Kenny of the GMB – are wedded to a stupid strategy, relying on Labour to deliver what their members need, pouring millions into Labour's empty coffers to get it re-elected.

They are committed to negotiating a compromise: a few more pennies in the pocket, in return for concessions that further break up public services and lead to more job losses. The last thing they want is a workers' united front against the government. This would both threaten their positions as well-paid, respectable union leaders, and Gordon Brown's ability to win the next general election.

So the CWU and POA strikes are called off as soon as the unions are offered talks. NHS staff, local authority workers and civil servants, teachers and lecturers are endlessly "consulted" by their union leaders – and endlessly reply that they do not accept the cuts, and are prepared to strike. Now is the time for the rank and file of the unions – who have to live on reduced wages, work in worse conditions, deliver deteriorating services – to unite and seize control of their disputes and their unions.

#### How to win

Let's call mass meetings and elect strike committees in each workplace to agitate for immediate action. No more delays – no calling off strikes merely for "talks"! The Glasgow care workers showed the advantage of walking and talking at

the same time. We should demand real pay rises for all and no job cuts, no changes to working conditions or pensions, no more privatisation!

The different sections of workers under attack should come together in every town and form action committees to organise solidarity: rallies, demonstrations, joint strikes. Those who depend on the threatened services should also join in, as should private sector workers – like the strikers at Coca-Cola's Wakefield plant. We want to build mass opposition to cuts and privatisation.

A rank and file movement, linking up the most militant sections within and across each union, must come together. As well as demanding official leaders unite and call an all-out indefinite strike across the board to smash the 2 per cent pay barrier, such a movement should organise to deliver action from below – without the bureaucrats when necessary. The posties showed how fast this could spread and win results. The POA showed that not even the law can prevent determined and disciplined workers' action from taking the initiative.

The POA leadership's decision to defy the anti-union laws is an inspiration to all workers, and exposes the cowardice of the rest of the TUC leaders – the so-called left wing quite as much as right – who claim that the laws must be obeyed. By seizing the initiative, the POA wiped the smug smile off the employers' and ministers' faces.

What were they going to do? Send them to prison?

The struggle will intensify in the autumn. If rank and file activists seize control of the disputes and wield them into a single fist, we can punch a hole in Gordon Brown's anti-working class programme. We can take a step forward in wresting control of the unions and transforming them into democratic, fighting organisations, and in breaking the grip of the Labour Party over the unions. Instead, we can start using the unions' funds and power to build a new workers party that can lead the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system once and for all.

## WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

- **Unite the strikes to bust the 2%**
- **All-out indefinite strikes – the quickest and surest way to win**
- **Elect strike committees to run disputes and control talks**
- **Form local solidarity groups**
- **For a rank and file movement to fight the bureaucracy**

# Prison officers defy anti-union laws

**F**or the first time in decades, a national trade union had officially called unlawful strike action. The Prison Officers Association had defied the anti-union laws.

When the breakthrough finally came, it was from the most unlikely source. At 7am on 29 August, 20,000 prison officers walked off the job with no warning, no secret ballot and no sign of when they would return.

The results were stunning. All 129 prisons were affected; new inmates were returned to police cells; court cases were postponed because there was nowhere to incarcerate the guilty. Ministers rushed to the High Court, winning an injunction ordering a return to work. But even this had no effect; concessions were needed, and they came. By 7pm, justice minister Jack Straw agreed to "meaningful talks", something he had refused to enter into until then.

Rising workloads, falling pay levels, and having to deliver a worsening service: this was the background to the strike. The government's decision to stagger its miserly 2.5 per cent pay offer, making it worth only 1.9 per cent over the year, was the final straw. With inflation officially running at 3.8 per cent – and in reality much higher for working class households – this would mean a real pay cut.

Socialists and many workers often find themselves on the wrong side of the prison

service. It is an arm of the state, in the last analysis there to protect capitalist property and social hierarchy. Socialists aim to break up this repressive apparatus and replace it with a working class justice system.

Nevertheless, the POA members, like millions of other public sector workers, confront deteriorating pay and conditions. Under Labour, Britain's prison population has risen from 61,467 to 80,205. Jails operate at 112 per cent capacity, as the government tries to appease middle class demands for tougher sentences. Chief inspector of prisons Ann Owers believes such conditions have directly led to 50 inmates taking their own lives this year.

As one striker, Kirk Robinson, told *The Guardian*, "When I started here we were locking up criminals. Now it's mostly people with a drug habit or psychiatric disorders. I'd guess 80 per cent."

The prison system targets those that challenge the capitalist order and its victims – the poor and the oppressed. But we do support prison wardens' right to organise and to strike, and their demands for better pay, just as we support prisoners' demands for democratic rights and better conditions. Any action that weakens the ability of the capitalist class to exploit and rule us has to be a good thing. Especially if it proves that anti-union laws are toothless... if we only have the guts to defy them.

## POSTAL WORKERS

# Press on for full victory!

As we go to press, union leaders are locked in secret talks with Royal Mail. Strikes have been suspended. A *CWU rep* calls on the rank and file to get ready to relaunch the action

Postal workers surprised and scared Royal Mail bosses this summer. The climax of their action came when 6,000 workers joined an unofficial "wildcat" strike. Suddenly the bosses were ready to talk after months of arrogant refusal. Who says strikes don't work?

Unfortunately, Communication Workers Union leaders immediately suspended all action and agreed to total secrecy during the talks. Then they extended them under the same conditions. This is as worrying as it was unnecessary.

If it was the indefinite strike, launched in Glasgow, that brought Royal Mail tops Allan Leighton and Adam Crozier to the table, then a nationwide indefinite strike would have kept them there until a satisfactory offer had been made.

Also, the bosses love secret deals, stitching the workers up behind our backs. That's why the CWU should have insisted on open talks with representatives of the wildcat strikers in the room. Let's hear what these chiselers are saying.

Now that September's, here postal traffic is starting to climb. An all-out indefinite strike would not only hurt Royal Mail, but also business customers. Private mail companies, like TNT and UK Mail, haven't got the network to scab on a mass scale. If we have not won by the new deadline, 9 September, the CWU should launch such a strike, immediately.

### What kind of deal?

But what would an acceptable deal look like?

First, we need a moratorium on job losses. This means breaking with the strategy of the CWU leadership that has centred so far on the agreement that accepted "genuine" efficiency cuts and banned strikes against them. Second, we should reject deals that would discriminate against new starters, and create a two-tier workforce of part-time staff on worse pensions, terms and conditions. Both concessions would seriously weaken the union.

Therefore we should not settle

### How to win the strike

- Defend jobs and conditions: no efficiency deals that trade jobs for pay
- Raise our pay to £400 a week, the UK average pay rate
- Escalate the action: up to and including an all-out strike
- For rank and file control: strike committees of recallable delegates, elected in mass meetings, to control the dispute and all negotiations - for a rank and file movement in the CWU
- Solidarity committees in every borough, town and city: Unite the public sector strikes!

### What we fight for

- For a rank and movement in the unions to end bureaucracy: for all officials to be regularly elected and recallable, and paid the average workers' wage
- For nationalised public services run under workers control, without any compensation to the profiteers
- Unions, workers: break from Labour and form a new workers party - one that doesn't lie to us in order to get into power every four years, but one that mobilises millions of workers to overthrow the capitalist system that lies behind the attacks on the working class and the poor
- For international solidarity with all those resisting America and Britain's wars - troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now
- For a socialist society, based on democratic planning not private profit, that abolishes poverty, exploitation and discrimination, and provides for a sustainable future - and freedom for all!

for the status quo plus a few quid. Instead, we need to reverse the whole direction of change since 2006, when Labour opened the market in postal services. Labour is using competition as a battering ram to force through 40,000 job losses, wage cuts and turning full-time posts into part-time ones.

Labour aims to prepare Royal Mail for privatisation. We are already some way down that road; we need to turn round; we need to close the market. The huge support for the strikes, especially in the big offices that are the fighting muscle of the union, and the unofficial strikes show we have the power to do so.

### Showdown with Labour

Gordon Brown is committed to privatisation: from the London Underground to the civil service to the NHS. He wants Royal Mail to go the same way. So why do CWU general secretary Billy Hayes and his postal deputy Dave Ward continue to support the party of privatisation?

Already Postcomm - the pro-privatisation "regulator" Labour set up to introduce and develop postal market - has stated that, if it fails to "modernise" its business and cut costs, Royal Mail should split its sorting and delivery operations in two.

According to the Financial Times, Postcomm may force Royal Mail to contract out parts of its collection and sorting operations to private companies "to safeguard universal delivery" - while loosening the requirement to deliver to every address every day. This casual casting away of daily deliveries is a foretaste of things to come; if it ain't profitable, it won't get done.

The union should immediately suspend funding to Labour. We have given them hundreds of thousands of pounds, they are cutting tens of thousands of jobs. We say, not a penny more for Labour! Instead, we should look to the millions of public sector workers, who are also facing job cuts and below-inflation pay offers, and whose unions are considering strike action.

Brown is worried about an

autumn of discontent - let's realise his fears. Our leaders should name the date for a united strike with Unison, the Public and Commercial Services union and the National Union of Teachers, and publicly call on their leaders to join in.

### Rank and file - take the lead

But we shouldn't rely on Hayes, Ward and co. taking these steps. On past experience, they are more likely to recommend a terrible compromise, like last year's efficiency agreement.

It was the initiative and militancy of the rank and file that brought Royal Mail to the negotiating table and "find" £23 million for a new offer. The "do your job properly" campaign, the wildcat walkouts in Oxford, Preston, Scotland and beyond, the 2.5 million backlog of undelivered items of mail: these were our doing. But we're not the ones negotiating in secret.

Rank and file leaders need to get ready to relaunch the strikes, if, as seems likely, it is necessary. A conference called by the militant branches would be a first step. It could initiate an immediate plan of action and found a rank and file movement in the CWU to keep the pressure on the leadership. It could call emergency responses to Royal Mail provocations and victimisations, or spread such action when it kicks off.

Crucially, such a movement could warn against any further suspension of strikes, any more secret talks, any rotten deal. And it should take the initiative by leading strike action itself, if the official leadership fails to do so.

We could organise tens of thousands in our union behind a rank and file movement that fights for the aims and action we need. We could link up with militants in other public sector unions, and throw back the government's plans to downsize our jobs and break up Royal Mail. Now is the time, let's seize it with both hands.

For more on the CWU see [www.workerspower.com/index.php?cwu\\_union](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?cwu_union)

# Striking posties speak out

Workers Power supporters met many posties on the picket lines over the summer and discussed the future of Royal Mail, strike tactics and the union's relationship with Labour. All spoke out on the record, but in a personal capacity. Here we print some of the interviews

*Paul Cox is the CWU area rep for south west London*

**Workers Power** *This dispute seems to be about more than just pay. What do you think this strike is really about?*

**Paul Cox** As the dispute has developed the issue of pay, amongst the CWU membership at Nine Elms, has become less and less important. The real issues that are ensuring continued support of over 95 per cent of staff can be broken into two main categories, industrial and political.

**Industrial:** the defence of our current terms and conditions, protection of our pensions, maintaining full time jobs and earnings and most importantly the right of the CWU to negotiate on behalf of its members.

**Political:** the need for this government to abide by its manifesto commitment to instigate a review of competition within the postal market and for them to rein in, or preferably sack, Leighton and Crozier.

I believe that the real aim of Royal Mail is to remove the CWU from the workplace and then push ahead with their plans for privatisation. Therefore the success of these campaigns will determine both the future of the industry and the future of the CWU.

**Workers Power** *You know Workers Power thinks an all-out indefinite strike is the likeliest way to win. Is that realistic?*

**Paul** My own personal view is that the current strike action is beginning to have the desired effect and therefore an all-out indefinite dispute is not required yet. Should the dispute remain unresolved by the middle of August the option of all-out action will need to be seriously considered.

**Workers Power** *Finally, the CWU has decided to continue funding the Labour Party during this dispute. What would you say to those CWU members who think it's time to withdraw funding?*

**Paul** I believe that the major problem we face is the "Labour" government and not necessarily the Labour Party. There are still a number of very good MPs who are supporting us. The CWU has a policy, agreed at this year's Annual Conference, which commits the CWU to ballot the membership on future funding of the Labour Party, should they fail to carry out the above mentioned manifesto commitment. At this moment in time we need to maintain any

influence/leverage we still have. Should the government fail to deliver on its promises, I will have no hesitation in campaigning for the withdrawal of all funding.

Royal Mail. We should not go back to the efficiency agreement that's for sure.

An all out strike is possible, but it will be hard to win the argument without a rank and file movement fighting for it and making people realise its possible. The walkouts that happened in the last month show that union members were willing to take all out action if forced, I think Royal Mail realised that and that's why they decided to negotiate. The rolling strikes were biting some and they needed to do something but they realised that they couldn't just start victimising union members without stirring up a reaction.



The picket line at Nine Elms, south London, where Paul works

*Andy Young is a workplace rep at Richmond Hill Delivery Office in Leeds*

**Workers Power** *How did the first round of 'rolling strikes' go in your delivery office and Leeds?*

**Andy Young** My office has been fighting cuts for a year so people realised we needed to strike. Nearly all voted yes in the ballot, 100 per cent stayed out and at times picket lines have seen up to 30 attending (out of an office of 40) and very lively with support from the public. We have elected a strike committee to organise the strike in the office. Morale is high though people were beginning to question whether we were really hitting Royal Mail hard enough.

**Workers Power** *You know Workers Power thinks an all-out indefinite strike is the likeliest way to win. Is that realistic?*

**Andy** Well, first off, it is the only way to really win. In other words, we could take some deal that would give us a little pay, maybe knock the rough edges off some of the attacks, but basically that won't stop the cuts and direction that things are going - we'll be on picket lines again next year, in 2009, 2010, 2011, etc. Each time we'll be weaker so we should hit back as hard as possible with the aim of really flooring

*Nigel Ludbrook works at a delivery office in Harrow*

**Workers Power** *How is the situation in Harrow?*

**Nigel Ludbrook** The strike's about 95 per cent solid. A few walk in but not many. People are not happy that the talks are secret; they think they're trying to hide something. Both sides realise they've got to climb down in some way. I think the final agreement will be a watered down version of what we really want, and maybe a bit of an insult after us going out on strike.

**Workers Power** *You know Workers Power thinks an all-out indefinite strike is the likeliest way to win. Is that realistic?*

**Nigel** I think a lot of people would get cold feet due to financial difficulties and may be tempted to go back in. I think a longer strike would be more powerful than just the odd day, but workers would benefit from knowing when the strike was going to end. If we were going out on 1 October for a month then at least you could prepare for that month.

**Workers Power** *The CWU has decided to continue funding the Labour Party during this dispute. What would you say to those CWU members who think it's time to withdraw funding?*

**Nigel** I fully support the idea of withdrawing funds from Labour. I've personally gone to the CWU and asked if I can withdraw and still continue to be a member, which they confirmed I can. I'm waiting for a branch meeting so I can voice my opinions there. I think we need a party, but Labour has totally forgotten what people wanted them to come into power for.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

# Protests mount against airport expansion plan

A dynamic protest camp, direct action and demonstrations at Heathrow catapulted climate change onto newspaper headlines. *John Bowden* offers some socialist solutions

This summer's mass flooding made people realise that climate change is happening and the profound effect it will have on our lives.

Along with the people directly impacted – 2,000 evacuated, 45,000 without electricity and 350,000 without clean water – millions watched the events unfolding on the news and wondered when the same would happen to them. When the water subsided, millions also saw the after-effects – the permanent damage to people's lives and the immense destruction of homes, workplaces and infrastructure.

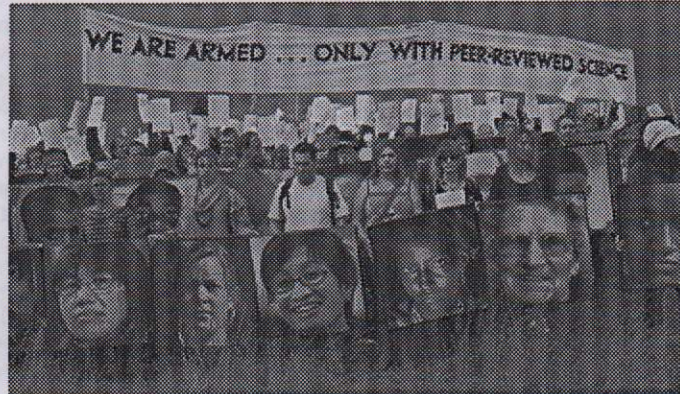
Shortly after the floods, another item hit the news: hundreds of people set up camp near Heathrow to protest against the government's proposed expansion of the airport and the increased carbon dioxide emissions this would create.

These protestors were subject to victimisation and demonisation by the government, media and police – complete with accusations of terrorism – just because they took action to halt global warming. BAA, the company that owns Heathrow, sought to ban many from the protests, yet the decision to double Britain's airport traffic by 2030 was taken behind closed doors – the people had no say in it.

But the heavy-handed tactics of government ministers, BAA, the judiciary and police backfired. The demonstrators inspired thousands to fight back against environmental destruction and against air travel pollution.

## Global warming

The new runway at Heathrow will add to the emission of greenhouse gases at a time when the world's scientists predict that this will raise the average global temperatures even more. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change believes that at this rate the earth could warm up by as much as 6.4 degrees centigrade during the 21st



century - and most of this will be due to greenhouse gas emissions.

Global warming - or climate change - will cause sea levels to rise by more than 59cm and lead to a massive increase in droughts, floods, cyclones and high tides, warns the IPCC. If this happens, it is predicted that millions around the world will lose their lives and hundreds of millions their homes and their livelihoods. The material basis for human society, the natural environment, would be threatened.

The floods we have seen this summer in Britain and internationally – in India and Bangladesh, where millions have been uprooted from their homes – will become regular features, as will events like Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and this year's heatwaves in southern and eastern Europe.

This can be stopped. But we need global, co-ordinated action to cut the burning of fossil fuels, like coal, gas and oil, and replenish the world's devastated great forests, which absorb carbon dioxide and offset global warming.

So why don't the capitalists and the Labour government take this action? In a word, profit.

It is more profitable to stick with air travel than re-invest billions into modernising Britain's trains: far cheaper for the world's governments to make airline fuel tax-free and encourage the status quo than plan an international shift away from carbon emitting transport systems. It would hit profits to divert revenue

towards flood defences and building decent, carbon-neutral housing for cheap rents.

## Workers can stop climate change

Private ownership of energy production, industry and transport systems means there is a powerful lobby for maintaining unsustainable, polluting technologies. Business secrecy hinders a rational shift towards environmentally sound policies. Furthermore, the division of the world into competing nation states means that even minimal changes – like those proposed by the Kyoto protocol – are vetoed by the world's biggest polluter, the USA, on the grounds that it would

hurt its economy.

The key to radical change is organising the growing anger over capitalism's blind drive to catastrophic environmental destruction into a growing movement – in Britain and internationally. The movement will need to call for a revolution in production, transport and energy use that only a mass workers' movement can deliver – a global plan for sustainable development and workers' control of production.

We should start by calling for a workers' inquiry into the plans for airport expansion in Britain, for all business secrets of BAA and the airline companies to be open to the inspection of experts chosen and trusted by the workers' and environmental movement. All final decisions should be subject to a workers' veto and all work carried out under workers' control.

We should take these demands right into the working class movement. Only the working class has the consistent interest in sustainable development to meet the needs of the planet's billions, and only it has the ability to take the power from the bourgeoisie and replace its blind market forces with a democratic plan of production.

## What we fight for

- Nationalise home insurance companies, who increase their premiums and refuse or delay paying those hit by the floods, and merge them into a fund for compensation for all
- For massive investment in flood defences and council housing with built-in clean energy production and saving to meet the need for cheap rented accommodation
- Stop the government's airport expansion plan. Tax the polluters
- Win the workers involved in the building and running of airports and airplanes and their unions to taking action, up to and including strike action, in support of our cause. No job losses and no attacks on conditions. Expand employment through public spending on public transport, flood defences and clean-up
- Nationalise BAA and all airports, aviation and transport companies without compensation and place them under workers control. For a democratic plan to massively expand public transport in the most environmentally friendly way possible
- For a planned shift away from the burning of fossil fuels and towards sustainable energy production. For a socialist planned economy to save the planet!



**BROWN'S BRITAIN**

# Why are the unions funding Brown's turn to the bosses?

Gordon Brown is out to prove he is different to Tony Blair. After all, that's how he hopes to win the next election. *Joy Macready* looks at his first hundred days in office and finds that, beyond a doubt, he is a prime minister for the ruling class not for the working class

**W**hen Gordon Brown took the keys to No. 10 Downing Street, undoubtedly union leaders Paul Kenny of the GMB, Tony Woodley of Unite and Dave Prentis of Unison thought they had "their man" in charge at last. But his first hundred days should have undeceived them.

On the substantive issues of domestic policy – the wages of public sector workers, whether councils can build the social housing workers are crying out for – he has proved himself the same sort of market maniac as Blair. Indeed this should be no surprise since, as Chancellor, he had a veto over all these policies for the last ten years.

On Iraq, the one thing that people most hate Blair for, Gordon Brown, despite the withdrawal of troops from Basra, has made it clear this does not mean an end to invasions and occupations, alongside his US masters. As Chancellor he supported all of Blair's wars – in Iraq, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. Now he is drumming up support to send "peacekeeping" troops to Darfur.

British military commitments to the occupation of Afghanistan, meanwhile, are increasing. Troop numbers will approach 8,000 this year.

**Robbing the poor to pay the rich**

For the past ten years Brown has reassured business that Labour is on its side, defending "free trade" and ensuring security for British foreign investment, along with commitments to lowering business taxes and abolishing company regulations. Because of Brown, Britain now boasts massive tax breaks for billionaires and corporate raiders; a third of Britain's top companies – 220 giant enterprises in total – pay no tax whatsoever.

In his last budget, he even reduced the corporate tax by another two pence in the pound. Meanwhile, he got rid of the 10 per cent tax bracket, which recognised



**Sir Digby Jones (former head of the CBI and Tory party member) and Dame Shirley Williams (right wing splitter from the Labour Party and Liberal democrat): both advisors to Brown**



that those with the lowest incomes should pay a smaller percentage in tax.

As a result, anyone earning less than £18,000 a year will pay higher taxes than before, while those earning more will pay less. Part-time workers and those on the minimum wage will get it in the neck.

And Brown will continue to attack workers' rights, wages, pensions and conditions to ensure the most cut-rate business environment in Europe. He has set himself on a collision course with the trade unions and dug his heels in.

Under the guise of a pay rise, Brown decreed a 2 per cent pay limit for public sector workers. But with inflation running at nearly 4 per cent, this is a real pay cut. In a classic piece of spin, these increases are staggered over the year, so workers have to survive on lower wages for the first six months of the year.

**Friend of the unions?**

During the Prison Officers Association dispute, Brown told the workers that they must be "disciplined" in order to have a strong stable economy. What he really meant was that we would have to shoulder the burden of an economic downturn.

Obviously in Brown's world there is a different "discipline"

for the bosses, such as Bob Diamond at Barclays, who received a £23 million bonus – a 100-fold increase on his basic salary. Boardroom pay at the UK's top companies soared 37 per cent as directors were rewarded with inflation-busting increases in basic salaries, big cash bonuses and substantial payouts from share schemes. These are the same corporations that Brown refuses to tax.

Brown has shown his true colours – he will govern in favour of the bosses. So why is it that the trade unions still fund the Labour Party with millions of pounds every year? The unions generate three-quarters of Labour's income. It is not just criminal that the Labour Party threatens sequestration of union funds during industrial disputes, but also that the trade unions hand over millions to the party that is openly attacking them.

Brown is even trying to change the Party constitution so that the trade unions lose their vote on policy decisions. If he succeeds in abolishing the union bloc vote, he will take Labour one step closer to being an open bourgeois party, no different from the Liberal Democrats.

Look who Brown has rewarded in his government: Lib Dems, Shirley Williams (Middle East) and Matthew Taylor (rural affairs); former Tory and leader of the bosses' union, the CBI, Sir Digby

Jones; sitting Tory MPs, Patrick Mercer, the former homeland security spokesman, and John Bercow, international development spokesman before the last election.

Mercer was sacked from the Tory front bench by Cameron for suggesting that being called a "black bastard" was part and parcel of Army life for soldiers from ethnic minorities, and that their complaints about racism were made because they were bad soldiers.

What about the union leaders, have they been brought in to shape policy and wield power? No – not one. There were none. Actually their fawning on the Labour leader only earns them kicks, delivered to prove to the rich that Brown is not in the union leaders' pockets.

**Socialist alternative**

The burning task of the working class in Britain today is to found a new workers party. This must not be a return to "old Labour" with its rosy promises in opposition always betrayed in government, with its obsession with elections and trimming policies to win them. It must be a party that leads the workers in the class struggle – the struggle for real power to change the economic basis of society not the shadow of it.

In short, it should be a revolutionary party with an anticapitalist programme. This will need a democratic debate on strategy in the unions, in the socialist groups, in the migrant communities, and amongst youth not just on the burning needs of the day, but on how to change society, how to break the power of the bosses for good.

If this is combined with unity in action against the bosses and government attacks then we in Workers Power believe that a new working class party can become a mass party of the British revolution, inseparably linked to workers around the world in a new, Fifth International.

## EDUCATION

# Our schools are being turned into factories to produce new workers

The Tories and Labour are having a public spat over education. *Bernie McAdam* of Sandwell NUT reveals what they have in common: privatisation and segregation by class

Labour and Conservative politicians are vying with each other for the “prize” of smashing up the comprehensive education system. There is no fundamental difference on their shared aim of dismantling state schools and setting schools back 50 years. Their policies are intricately entwined with the specific, short-term needs of British capitalism.

### What is their agenda?

Instead of offering equal educational opportunities to all, they want middle class and better off working class parents should be able to send their children to state schools, where they will receive a good quality education, leading to university or a high-tech career, free from too much disruption from “under-achieving” students from ethnic minority or poor backgrounds.

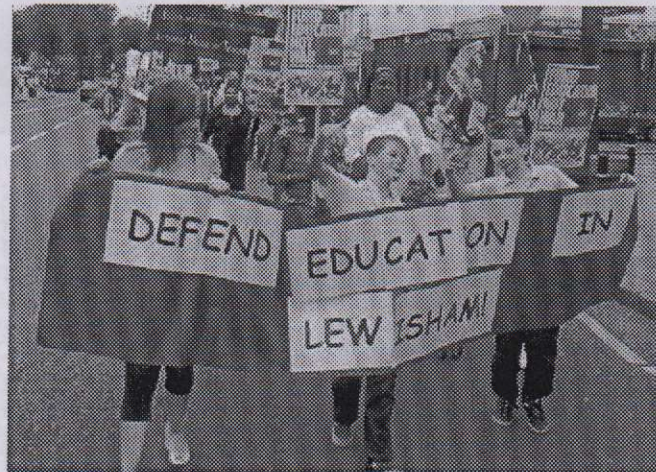
Meanwhile, they believe the rest of the youth should not be bothered with ideas that they won't need at work. The mainstream politicians think their education should consist of basic literacy, numeracy and “vocational” training, that is, a curriculum set by local capitalists, who require a certain set of skills to produce their goods or services profitably. In short, they want segregation from an early age, just like the old, but never abolished grammar school system.

But in order to inflict this defeat on the vast majority of the working class, Labour and Tories need to re-establish the right of schools and middle class parents to select the intake, and the right of the bourgeoisie to control the schools, free from local authority control. The “debate” is strictly set within this narrow objective.

Tory MP Stephen Dorrell argues in a recent policy review that parents should be allowed to set up their own schools with local authority funding. As David Cameron said, “We will make it easier for anyone to set up a school”.

But this is already enshrined in Labour's Education and Inspe-

ctions Act 2006, which allows parents to set up schools, and relied on Tory support for its passage. Former schools minister Lord Adonis advocated for parents “options to improve schools or where there is demand, helping them set up their own new schools”. The Elmgreen School in West Norwood, London is one such example, with its Parents Promoters Foundation setting up a school with local authority funding.



Dorrell also states the Tories will expand city academies and increase their “freedom”. But Labour has trail blazed the academies and intends to establish 400.

### So what is really happening?

#### Academies, PFI and trusts

Labour's Building Schools for the Future programme enshrines its strategy for transforming education. To qualify for funding to rebuild schools, it insists that local education authorities include plans for privatisation, through setting up academies, Private Finance Initiatives and the contracting out of services.

Under PFI rules, the school borrows finance from the private sector, and issues a contract to a consortium of companies to build schools. Then the companies lease the buildings back to the school at extortionate rates. The fat cats also acquire the right to profit from selling off “excess” land and running services, such as catering. Anyone, who has eaten

a school dinner recently, knows that this hardly proves the superiority of market forces!

The academies programme goes a step further. Comprehensive schools, some deemed to be failing, but worth around £25m, have been sold off to private business sponsors for up to £2m. They are then to be funded by central government, that is, with public money but no public control.

The sponsors appoint govern-

trusts with a notable sponsor. As in all competitive markets, there will be losers; better funded academies and trust schools will damage neighbouring schools.

Then there is the pressure on schools in poorer areas to become vocational trust schools. Here the sponsor is an employer or a training provider, skewing the curriculum for what is “best” for working class kids, grooming them for their pre-ordained role in society. Starting next September, the 14-19 curriculum will offer new diploma courses linked to five employment sectors: construction, engineering, health, creative/media and information technology.

### Socialists and education

Schools should be about developing human potential, not profit. They should properly explain the nature of society and provide the tools to understand how each part relates to others and to the whole, not limit children to being trained as an isolated cog in the machine. For socialists, education should prepare young people to play an active role in society - and in changing society.

Every school should be directly controlled by parents, school students, teachers, other education workers and the local community. Therefore the fightback against the capitalist takeover of education must involve an alliance of education unions (National Union of Teachers, Unison, etc.), parents, school students and the local working class.

The NUT should spearhead the campaign, using strikes and occupations to stop the development of academies and trusts. It should demand the return of all academies to local authority control, and the breaking of all links with big business. It also needs to be a national campaign of action and not left to individual local campaigns.

Nothing could be more important than defending the rights of the next generation of workers. We should stop at nothing to stop the capitalist take-over of our schools.

# Migrant workers fight for their rights

Foreign workers are an increasingly common sight in Britain's workplaces. *Rebecca Anderson* reports on how the bosses exploit them, and how they are starting to organise resistance

Last year 713,000 migrants came to Britain to work. Once here, they found some of the most appalling conditions and an astonishing rate of exploitation. According to the TUC

- A quarter of migrants have no written contract
- Over a quarter face payment problems: not being paid for hours worked, discrepancies between pay and payslips, unauthorised deductions and errors in pay calculation
- Migrants are ten times more likely to be paid less than the minimum wage than the average worker.

In a throwback to the industrial revolution, nearly a third of all foreign workers live in accommodation controlled by their employers. This gives the bosses opportunities to deduct excessive rents at source, demand unpaid overtime on pain of eviction, and make a packet from with overcrowded and unfit flats.

And these are the conditions of migrants, who have got official leave to work in Britain. There are estimated to be between

500,000 and two million undocumented workers in the UK, who have even less rights, and hence even more vulnerable to super-exploitation.

## Migrant workers get organised

When bosses hire migrants below the minimum wage, then this undermines the wages of all workers. When they get away with not issuing contracts to foreign labour, then all workers fighting for their rights are set back. When any worker is at the mercy of her or his employer because they don't have access to accommodation, lawyers or the right to remain in the country, then the cause of our class is damaged.

Migrant workers are an integral part of the working class in Britain. They may have no legal papers. They may have poor English language skills. But they are full members of the international working class, and they can speak the language of class struggle!

Increasingly, workers and the unions have recognised this and started to struggle alongside migrant workers and fight for their

rights.

Last year, GMB and Amicus union members on at Cottam power station in Lincolnshire discovered that Hungarian workers on the construction site were being paid less than themselves. But when the Hungarians joined the GMB, the employer terminated their contracts. What the bosses didn't expect - but got - was a strike by 50 of their brothers, demanding their reinstatement.

The GMB now organises thousands of Polish, Lithuanian and other workers, particularly in Southampton and along the south coast. Because of language difficulties, the union initially set up a separate Polish branch, but this made no sense, with members working side by side attending separate meetings. Now they have a single branch with translators - and it's one of the best attended branches in the union.

T&G Unite is another union that has oriented towards migrant workers with its Justice For Cleaners campaign. This has won some spectacular recognition deals for cleaners at the world's most power-

ful banks, like Goldman Sachs, and has started to raise wages for this extremely low paid group of workers.

## Make all migrants legal

The day after the Goldman Sachs deal was signed, T&G cleaners joined a demonstration in support of asylum seekers awaiting deportation in Harmondsworth detention centre. In May, they marched in London, demanding legal rights for all migrant workers.

It is impossible to separate the issues of the racist immigration controls and the rights of migrants at work. These laws, which create second class and illegal status workers, are a gift to the bosses and gangmasters, who cream super-profits from migrant labour. They are a weapon, which employers use to divide workers and keep wages and conditions at rock bottom.

That's why the unions should not only launch a mass recruitment drive among newly arrived workers, but also inscribe on their banners, "Full citizenship rights for all workers who want to come here!"

# Homes for sale, but not for rent

*Natalie Sedley* unpicks Labour's housing proposals and finds they fall short of what's needed

Housing Minister Yvette Cooper says Labour will build three million houses by 2020. But only 45,000 to 50,000 of these each year will be "social homes", i.e. for rent. And there is no indication of how many of these will be council run.

To give an indication of how far short this falls of demand, council housing stock has plummeted from 5.5m in 1980 to less than 2.8m today, with 1.5m families currently on waiting lists. This shows the scale of investment needed.

The recent housing Green Paper "Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable" plans an £8 billion programme for affordable housing by 2011.

The stated aim of seeing "a wider range of organisations bringing in

more resources to build affordable housing" and "promoting greater private sector involvement in social housing" make it clear that the key players will be "registered social landlords".

These are formally non-profit making, but can award their managers and consultants inflated salaries, and even sell off land to build lucrative private homes, without any democratic accountability. They also provide much less security to tenants, and charge higher rents. Between 2004 and 2005, when inflation was around 2 per cent, one survey found that social landlord raised rents by over 10 per cent.

This target for rented accommodation also compares badly with the 70,000 homes that will be built

for sale - labelled "affordable" but without any indication of price. With average house prices set to top £300,000 in the next five years, buying a home is beyond the reach of many in society.

And if the crisis that recently hit the US housing market, where prices have tumbled, has a knock-on effect in the UK, it could lead to repossessions on a mass scale, as people are stuck with inflated mortgage payments but unable to sell their homes.

We need to call for decent, secure and affordable housing and support the campaigns run by Defend Council Housing against privatisation, demolition and disposal of council land.

But we should go much further than the existing campaigns.

We need a massive expansion in council housing. Instead of luxury apartments for yuppies, the government should build affordable new homes for everyone who needs them - a quarter of a million council homes a year. The empty second homes of the rich should be squatted and requisitioned, the keys given over to the homeless.

Further rises in interest rates, job insecurity and cuts in real pay levels threaten many more with the prospect of eviction. We call for the nationalisation of all mortgage companies and for an end to the extortion racket that they run.

How could we pay for such a programme? Easy - tax the rich! Housing is a right, not a luxury, and should be paid for out of society's collective wealth.

## THEIR SYSTEM

# Credit crunch and

What will the crisis in the world's credit system mean for the working class asks *Richard Brenner*

**S**erious instability in the world financial system - which we drew attention to in our last issue (see Workers Power 317, www.workerspower.com) - has deepened over the summer.

One big question is on everyone's lips, from the traders of Wall Street, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo through to workers in factories and offices around the world: does this mean the long period of expansion in the US economy is coming to an end? If so, what will it mean for the working class around the world?

On 1 September, US President George Bush and Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke both made major speeches designed to calm down the American people and to avoid a crisis of business and consumer confidence.

The immediate cause of last month's panic in the financial markets was the crisis in the "sub-prime" mortgage market in the USA. Loan companies lent a huge amount of money to people with poor credit histories in order to buy houses when interest rates were artificially low. Rocketing house prices (they doubled between 1995 and 2005) have made it more and more difficult for American workers to afford to buy a house. Now with rates rising, thousands are finding it impossible to keep up their payments.

Aware of this mounting crisis and the panic from banks and business, Bush said that Congress should give greater powers to the Federal Housing Administration to help people with sub-prime mortgages. He offered tax breaks to help some borrowers get new loans, and he called for restrictions on creditors to stop them lending to people who can't pay - closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. This will not solve the sub-prime crisis, but will it stop its spread? And has Bush suddenly started to care about the plight of working class Americans?

### July: credit crunch begins

No chance. His real motivation is to stop the sub-prime crisis turning into a meltdown of the financial system and a recession in the



USA. He is worried about US capitalism not its workers, and with good cause.

The problem for the bosses is that the sub-prime loans are linked to other areas of the economy, not just mortgage lenders. The loans were packaged up into new forms of debt called Collateralised Debt Obligations and sold on the financial markets. Nobody knows how much of this bad debt is in the system, who will end up carrying it, or even what it is worth! In June and July some US investment funds that had bought CDOs began to show huge losses, and rating agencies were forced to downgrade these types of debt, instantly making them worth far less than before.

This started a chain reaction. Many banks, hedge funds and other investment groups had borrowed huge amounts of money at cheap interest rates in order to buy masses of these CDOs and similar types of high-risk debt. They hoped to make a quick profit of millions, and pay back their debt. But now interest rates were rising. Their interest payments were rising too, while the assets they had bought were downgraded and falling in value. Caught between these opposing trends, many funds were forced to offload assets - shares, bonds, anything - on to the market to meet their obligations, and the prices of these assets began to fall.

Everybody needed to sell high-risk assets but nobody wanted to buy them at a decent price. Many had to borrow money at low rates to roll over their debts, nobody wanted to lend it. Stock markets

plummeted as the "contagion" spread to other assets and markets. Billion-dollar corporate takeovers were put on ice as the funding dried up - leaving a \$300 billion of excess debt. Major banks tried to pass on debts but found no takers, and were forced to dig into their own pockets - for billions of dollars in some cases - to prop up their failing investment funds.

This contagion spread around the world. One of America's biggest home loan companies, American Home Mortgage, filed for bankruptcy, and a French bank BNP Paribas froze three of its funds worth 2 billion euros saying the market for lending had disappeared. Banks from Europe to China turned out to have bought sub-prime debt that left them exposed to losses, with the German SachsenLB bank coming close to collapse.

Credit dried up as investors fled from risk to "higher quality", safer forms of money - i.e. decided to pull their money out of circulation and keep it in the bank, dumping shares for bonds and complex derivatives for cash. A leading executive at US bank Bear Stearns said credit markets were in the worst turmoil he had seen in 22 years.

**The International Monetary Fund and the OECD both warned in early September that the US economy is likely to go into recession and global growth rates are likely to fall**

The bubble had burst, and the credit crunch began in earnest. Markets fell, and banks everywhere appeared to be paralysed.

### August: central banks act

On 9 August, first the European Central Bank, then the US Federal Reserve were forced to act to stem the widening panic. They pumped billions into the banking system to keep it afloat, but to little effect. Stock markets took this as a sign of weakness and plummeted in London (where the FTSE 100 lost nearly 4 per cent of its value on 10 August), New York, Germany, France and the Asia-Pacific. The contagion spread.

A week later, the powerful US Federal Reserve suddenly did a u-turn. Until then, Bernanke had insisted that inflation was the main problem facing the US economy; rising prices were making the crisis in the sub-prime sector even worse. His predecessor, Alan Greenspan, who had reacted to financial crises or downturns with interest rate cuts, blowing up an IT stock bubble in the 1990s and then a housing bubble after 2000. Bernanke would not do the same. A string of anti-inflationary interest rate rises last year were only halted when it became clear that US economic growth was stuttering. Economic growth in the US slowed to 0.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2007, its lowest since 2003.

Now on 16 August Bernanke lowered the discount rate, the particular interest rate at which banks can borrow money in emergencies from the Federal Reserve. In a widely reported speech the next day he made no mention at all of fighting inflation; instead, he emphasised the risk of a recession in the general economy. "Financial market conditions have deteriorated, and... the downside risks to growth have increased appreciably," he said. The Fed hinted that at their 18 September meeting they would lower interest rates to stimulate the economy.

In the short term this stopped share prices falling, on the hopes that real interest rates would fall in September. Some speculators even used this situation to buy shares

# capitalist crisis

cheap in the expectation of them rising under the impact of Bernanke's announcement! Other senior bankers and traders expressed their continuing doubts. Analysts at Rabobank said that the Fed was going soft on inflation, "Bernanke's knees are getting wobbly."

### US recession on the cards?

Some commentators claim that the crisis in the credit markets is unlikely to lead to a recession in the US, let alone internationally, because non-financial corporations are not heavily indebted to the banks. The implication is they won't go into crisis, and even that they don't need to borrow to continue to invest and grow. According to the Bank of International Settlements, corporate debt levels have indeed been falling: the debt of non-financial US corporations fell from a high point of over 38 per cent of total assets in 2003 to around 32 per cent in 2006.

But the accounts that companies publish understate their real debt, by valuing assets at fluctuating market prices rather than costs. National accounts are much more revealing. Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that the net debt of non-financial companies rose from 20% of asset replacement value in 1989 to over 50% at the end of last year. And in the USA, compared with output, corporate debt is rising too. Common tricks like selling assets and leasing them back disguise debts still further by hiding them off a company's balance sheet.

So could the crises remain limited to the financial markets?

A pow-wow of heavy hitter economists and bankers doesn't think so. The Federal Reserve annual economics symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming met at the start of September to discuss the crisis. Martin Feldstein, president of the National Bureau of Economic Research, gave a grim analysis, pointing to three dangers to the US economy: declining home prices, the sub-prime mortgage crisis; and a fall in homeowners borrowing money on the value of their homes. The "effect of home price declines and declines in consumer spend-

ing could push the economy into recession.

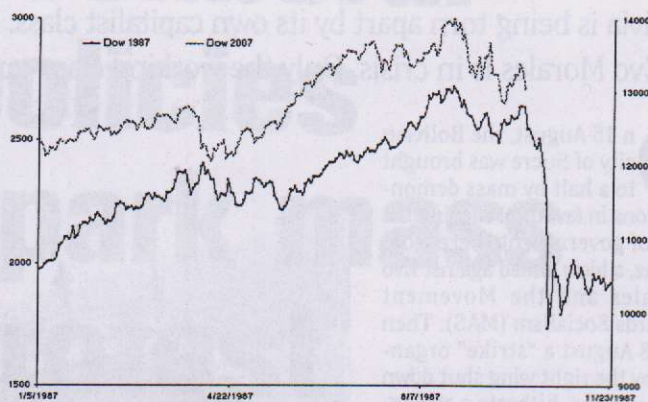
This was backed up by the Case-Shiller US house price index released earlier in the week. This found that, in 15 out of 20 major cities, house prices were falling - on average by 3.2 per cent. A year ago, home prices were rising by 7.5 per cent nationally, so this reversal marked the biggest year-on-year decline ever recorded in the 20-year history of the index. This accelerating fall in house prices threatens to turn into a full-blown recession. Worry has returned, and the markets are completely banking on a near-certain interest rate cut to bail them out.

The economists at UBS think a 1 per cent rise in the cost of capital, with drops of 10 per cent in share and house prices, would drag America's output growth down by 2.6 per cent next year, pushing the economy into recession. The Economist magazine added, "Americans are still a big source of demand for the rest of the world. A sharp drop in that demand would hurt." In other words, even if many companies have enough cash to fund current investment plans without credit, a crisis in America that left consumers with considerably reduced purchasing power would aggravate the trend towards economic downturn.

Major recessions have their source in the sphere of production as the rate of profit comes under pressure. But they often first become visible as financial crises, as in 1929, 1987 and 1998, when the big bosses realise what is happening and panic. It takes time for them to cause a downturn in manufacturing and services on the ground. But that is when, reducing the consumption of millions of ordinary people, the crisis bites, cutting a swathe across society.

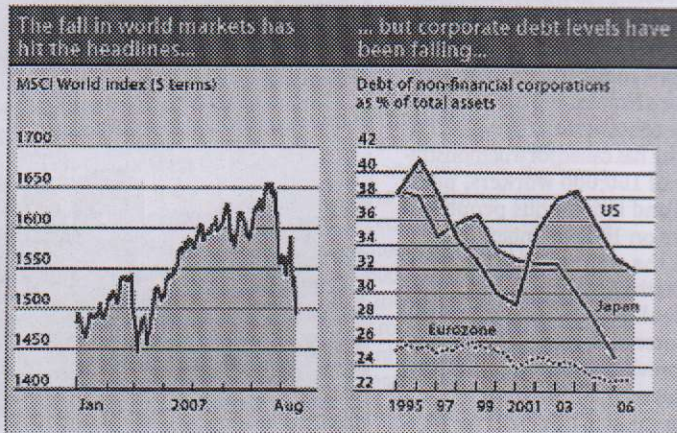
### Who will pay for repossessions and recession?

So what is coming? Some things are already clear. For the US working class, mass home repossessions, homelessness and poverty housing will rise as low paid workers looking for mortgages find that lending is cut off. In Detroit there were 8,683 mortgage repossessions in



### Jumping to conclusions?

There could be crash this autumn but it's not guaranteed...



### ...but even low levels of corporate debt can't stave off a downturn indefinitely

July 2007, an increase of 70 percent. Clearly many hundreds of thousands of working class people face losing their homes as the crisis bites.

Medium paid workers will feel the squeeze in Britain, the USA and Spain as mortgage repayments rise; pension funds have already been hammered by the dives on the stock exchanges. And, if the bosses' central banks cut interest rates to try to fend off recession and stimulate the economy, the employers may have to resist inflationary pressures by holding down pay: just witness how Gordon Brown's freeze on public sector pay. In an international slow down or crisis, tensions will rise as the capitalists fight one another over which countries and regions will bear the costs of capital devaluation and destruction

that crises always demand.

As we wrote in July, the wild spread of complex financial instruments, the expansion of credit and share ownership, the rise of fictitious capital, the vast expansion of capital exports, are all driven by the fundamental contradictions at the heart of the capitalist system. As more profit is generated than can be profitably invested, financial crises occur; they are the first signs of crises that ultimately demand the destruction of capital to restore the conditions for profitable accumulation.

We cannot know for certain exactly when the next crisis will unfold in full, or how long or deep it will be, but we can see it coming into view and what it will mean for ordinary workers - and we must prepare for class struggle.

## LATIN AMERICA

# Bolivia faces civil war

## Workers can organise to crush right wing plot

Bolivia is being torn apart by its own capitalist class. Faced with a right wing offensive, the government of Evo Morales is in crisis. Only the working class can thwart the reactionary plots, writes Keith Spencer

On 15 August, the Bolivian city of Sucre was brought to a halt by mass demonstrations in favour of moving the seat of government there from La Paz, a blow aimed against Evo Morales and the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). Then on 28 August a “strike” organised by the right wing shut down Cochabamba, hitherto a stronghold of the MAS.

After a year-long campaign by the country’s financial and landowning elite, obstructing and frustrating the Constituent Assembly’s work, the country now faces a major political crisis. Throughout this Morales and the MAS have made concessions to the right. But now he has called for a demonstration of 100,000 workers, peasants and indigenous peoples in Sucre on 10 September, to pressure the right to stop its sabotage of the Assembly, and its moves to declare autonomy for the resource-rich southern and eastern provinces, known collectively as the media luna (half moon). In the midst of this crisis the Bolivian working class has started to organise itself. It must take decisive action to thwart and smash the counter-revolution planned by the right and their US backers.

### Right wing on the attack

For nearly a year the right wing, both within the Constituent Assembly (CA) and on the streets of the provinces it dominates, has thwarted the wishes of the majority of Bolivians to see the Assembly take measures to radically improve their daily lives. Immediately these include complete nationalisation of the country’s oil and gas reserves, improved rights for Bolivia’s indigenous majority, and the land redistribution.

The right wrung an early concession from Morales that the CA had to have a two-thirds majority to pass articles for the new constitution. Since then it has used this to demand referenda on various important items. In addition



Indigenous people march outside the building where Bolivia’s Constituent Assembly meets in Sucre

the Assembly has had to have the duration of its sittings, their extension and other procedures submitted to the existing National Assembly. Thus in effect the CA is not a sovereign body and has various rights of veto for the right wing minority built into it. The right too have held a pistol to the head of Morales, with the threat of secession of “their provinces”.

The most recent of these acts of sabotage was to demand that the CA debates moving the government to Sucre, the official capital and seat of the judiciary. The CA meets there but all government functions reside in the administrative capital La Paz. The aim is to sow dissension in the popular camp, some of whom (especially in Sucre) wish to see the lucrative functions of central government moved to a small provincial city.

The real reason the right want-

this move is that La Paz is too near the impoverished high Andean plateau - the altiplano - and the huge shantytown of El Alto. With more than 800,000 inhabitants, El Alto is the focus of the working class and radical popular movements. These are represented in and headed by the Fejuve - the Spanish acronym for Federation of Neighborhood Councils. Led by the Fejuve, the masses of El Alto have succeeded in overthrowing two right wing governments and presidents in the last few years. The right wishes to move the government well away from the revolutionary pressure these masses can exert!

In July, the demand to move to Sucre was met by a protest of more than a million in El Alto, rejecting the move and calling for the defence of national unity. President Morales called the demonstration “historic”

while supporters of the move to Sucre called it an “illegal threat”. On 15 August in Sucre, with a mass demonstration for the move held outside it, the CA voted not to discuss the move. This led to about 50 right wing and local delegates withdrawing from the CA and several going on hunger strike.

Despite their apparent defiance, Morales and the MAS have made major concessions. First, they introduced a complicated system into the CA, giving the right wing minority plenty of opportunities to undermine workers’ demands. Second, they went back on the crucial oil and gas reforms. Pressure from the oligarchs, Brazil’s Lula government and their own timidity weakened the hydrocarbon law that would have transferred to the state more control of profit-making companies. The government has privately given the latter assur-

ances that, whatever it may say in public, it will not act against companies operating “legally and in good faith”.

“Foreign mining investors believe that mining code revisions to be announced by the government will be neither draconian nor confiscatory in terms of a higher tax burden and are therefore pressing ahead with their projects.” (Economist Intelligence Unit, Bolivia: Country Profile 2006)

Meanwhile, in Santa Cruz, the oligarchs’ main base, the civic committee demanded absolute control over land, resources, the justice system, the police and army. This is effectively a declaration of independence, saying: “La Paz has no role in Santa Cruz”. This was what sparked the million-strong demonstration against autonomy.

Alongside these legislative measures, semi-fascist groups, based on the richer students, have attacked and intimidated the left. Similar bodies have been set up in other states including Cochabamba, the city that led the fight against water privatisation in 2003. The mass campaign against the governor Manfred Reyes Villa saw a commune set up as an alternative to the state assembly. But, attacked by the right and betrayed by Morales and the MAS, who refused to recognise or arm it, it lasted only a few days. Since then many activists have been targeted and arrested by the police.

Rather than buying off the oligarchs, Morales’ compromises have emboldened them to go further towards independence and the crushing of popular forces in the provinces they control. Bolivia is effectively splitting between the media luna provinces, controlled by the oligarchs, and the highland areas, including El Alto, where the MAS still dominates.

#### Which way forward?

To reverse this split in the popular forces, to throw back the right wing and help the masses in Cochabamba and elsewhere regain the initiative, requires a mass nationwide mobilisation of all those who have struggled for control of the natural resources, the water, the hydrocarbons, the mines and the land. A massive general strike, with blockades and occupation of land, such as Bolivia has witnessed twice already this decade, is needed to throw back the right and defeat their plans to seize the natural resources of the country.

The Constituent Assembly must

meet under the permanent pressure of the worker-peasant majority - in El Alto would be best - and declare itself completely sovereign over the National Assembly, the judiciary and above all the police and the army. It must mobilise and arm the masses - organised by the Fejuve and its equivalents in other cities and towns - to enforce this sovereignty. It must rapidly pass the decrees the people want.

But who will lead such a decisive struggle against the right? Certainly not Evo Morales and the MAS. The reason is that the MAS cannot defeat the oligarchy because it is a popular front party. This means it is a party that welds together capitalists, the middle classes, workers and peasants, but is controlled by the bourgeoisie. This contradiction is one that allows the right to mobilise and organise whilst much of the left is tied to the timid MAS, unwilling to mount a serious fight against the forces of reaction.

However, sections of the working class are now organising. In October 2006, the Congress of Factory Workers of Bolivia agreed a document that called for the “definitive victory of socialist revolution”. The congress called for independent and militant action of the working class, for a political instrument (i.e. a party), and for a social revolution.

This was followed earlier this year by the Confederation of Bolivian Workers (COB) repeating its call for the creation of a “political instrument” of the workers. The call was originally made two years ago but put on ice after the election of Morales. However, in the spring the COB reaffirmed the need for a party, correctly identifying that the conciliation of the MAS has “strengthened the counter-revolution in Santa Cruz”. Alongside the COB, organisations like the COR-El Alto (the El Alto trade unions) are also critical of the MAS.

The organisations breaking from the MAS and calling for a new workers party must convene a conference to set up democratic structures and open an urgent programmatic debate. The forces involved, such as the factory workers, COB and the COR-El Alto, appear to already agree that the party has to be anticapitalist and fight for social revolution. Only a revolutionary party - based on the organisations of the working class - can provide the courageous leadership the masses deserve in the fight against the right wing counter-revolution.

# Chile: neoliberal policies spark mass protest

By Simon Hardy

A demonstration of tens of thousands has rocked Santiago - the biggest since the fall of the military dictatorship 17 years ago.

The United Workers Centre of Chile (CUT), the largest of the country’s union federations, organised the protests against the government’s neoliberal policies. The action grew so popular that the Socialist Party and even some government ministers felt they had to join in. Despite police violence that left over 50 injured and 740 arrested, the scale of the protests sent a message to the government that its failure to change would not be tolerated.

According to the United Nations, 47 per cent of Chile’s wealth, primarily from copper mining, is owned by only 10 per cent of the population. One big reason for Chile’s particularly unequal wealth distribution is the legacy of the right wing military dictatorship under Pinochet. Chile was used as a test bed in the mid-1970s for the economic experiments of monetarism and neoliberalism. The thing they had in common was to make the working class pay for capitalism’s economic problems.

When Socialist Party candidate Michelle Bachelet was elected president in January 2006, many saw it as another blow to Bush and neoliberalism. She made promises of “social justice” and measures to address inequality, with talk even of her lining up with Bolivia’s Evo Morales and Venezuela’s Hugo

Chávez. Instead, she has been much more like Brazilian president Lula da Silva, bowing to the IMF and US, and promoting only feeble reforms. Her government soon ran into demonstrations by school and university students, demanding improvements in education.

In May and June 2006, the “uprising of the penguins” (pupils so named because of their black and white school uniforms) culminated in an 800,000-strong demonstration in Santiago. There were more student protests in March this year on the anniversary of the Day of the Young Combatant, commemorating the deaths of two youths killed by Pinochet’s dictatorship. The students transformed the demonstration from being just a commemoration of the past to a living struggle for the future, as they battled police across the capital, raising the demands of the previous summer.

Workers and youth need to maintain pressure on the government to force it to meet their movement’s demands. Last month 14,000 miners struck for better labour rights and won, after the state-owned copper mining company lost \$40 million because of the strike.

Workers, faced with stagnant wages in the face of soaring profits for their employers, and youth, faced with failure to modernise the education system, are more and more turning to direct action. More strikes and street protests, up to and including a general strike can halt the government’s neoliberal policies. Clearly, also, a political alternative to these policies, and indeed to the Socialist Party, is needed - a revolutionary communist one.

## VENEZUELA

# Fight begins over programme of new socialist party

Keith Spenser reports on the formation of a new mass party by Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian movement. But, he asks, which class will it truly represent?

Since his landslide re-election last December, during which he openly pledged a transition towards socialism, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez has launched a campaign to found a new party - the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

Since March, 5.7 million people have signed up, and 18,000 branches or "battalions" have been founded.

Chávez has called for all other socialist parties to dissolve, putting special pressure on the three largest: the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), Homeland for All (PPT) and Podemos (*Por la Democracia Social*), a social democratic party. Some 70 per cent of their members have enrolled for the PSUV. Even the far left Party of Revolution and Socialism has split over the question of whether to join the PSUV.

Of course no working class party should be pressurised to dissolve. But given the mass character of the PSUV, the fact that these masses are overwhelmingly workers, peasants and the urban and rural poor, and that socialist and revolutionary ideas are being debated in it, it would be sectarian for revolutionary communists to do anything other than join this party and participate vigorously in these debates.

Even more important, Chávez has called for the PSUV to be part of the founding of a new International. He stated in August:

"2008 could be a good time to convoke a meeting of left parties in Latin America to organize a new International, an organisation of parties and movements of the left in Latin America and the Caribbean."

## A revolutionary programme?

The documents drafted by the PSUV National Promoters Team for debate in the party's base units include some bold anticapitalist formulations. One document, starting from the recognition that "capitalism in its imperialist phase



has reached its limits", goes on:

—"The conclusion is clear, to end poverty, it is necessary to give power to the poor and construct socialism; to end war, it is necessary to put an end to imperialism".

Another document argues that the PSUV should set as its objective the construction of "a government based on councils of popular power, where the workers, *campesinos* [peasants], students and popular masses are the direct protagonists of political power."

It sets as its goal a socialist society: "a democratically planned and centralised economy, capable of ending the alienation of labour and satisfying all the necessities of the people", one which would "plan production and the satisfaction of collective necessities in harmony with the requirements of the ecosystem."

Where the proposals are much weaker is on the central question: how can the workers and peasants lay their hands on political power, how can they use that power to create a planned economy? How can the armed power of the businessmen and bankers, the generals and police chiefs, the judges - all of whom oppose such measures - be broken once and for all?

Venezuela, despite having entered a revolutionary situation since the masses crushed the anti-

Chávez coup in 2002, remains a country with a predominantly capitalist economy, and a capitalist state that defends the property of big business.

True, the large, partially armed, popular militia, the new communal councils, the minority of factories under some degree of workers control, the cooperatives, all show that there are important elements of *dual power* existing between the workers' new organisations and the institutions of the capitalist state. A revolutionary period has begun, but the *revolution*, that is the overthrow of this state, has not yet occurred.

To date many statements by Hugo Chávez show that he does not envisage any necessity for such an overthrow. Chávez insists that that the PSUV is not "a Marxist-Leninist project" and that "the dictatorship of the proletariat... is not viable for Venezuela in these times". Instead, he argues for "a Venezuelan socialism, the original Venezuela socialist model" and for the PSUV to be "a political instrument that helps us conquer that objective".

For Chávez, the PSUV is not envisaged as a weapon for making a revolution but a means for reforming the state machine by a series of presidential decrees and referendums.

It is precisely on this key question - what social class shall lead the revolution and take the power - that the Promoters' document becomes deliberately vague.

The party, it says, should represent "the alliance of the people with the Armed Forces, just like that of the workers with the middle classes of the countryside and city (small and medium *campesinos*, small industrial bourgeois and urban and rural commerce)."

This multi-class alliance, what Leon Trotsky called a popular front party, has been witnessed many times before in Latin America. The radical parts of the bourgeois state apparatus, especially junior military officers, want to give themselves the maximum independence from foreign imperialism. To do so they must mobilise the masses by promising to meet to their urgent social needs. But they must also stop the working class going on to establish its own class rule, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Nevertheless, the PSUV is in the process of debate and its outcome - revolutionary socialist or bourgeois populist - is not yet decided. If it is debating socialism, organs of workers and peasants' power, workers control of production and the planned economy, it would be shameful sectarianism for revolutionaries to stand aside from this process. They should argue that the PSUV becomes the revolutionary party of the Venezuelan proletariat, not a party existing to support a great leader or the armed forces.

Revolutionaries in the PSUV should argue that the party still faces the task of leading workers and peasants councils to seize power, smash the old state machine, expropriate capitalist property and run it under workers' control. They should argue that the party must indeed become Marxist and Leninist and adopt a Trotskyist transitional programme. These are the central tasks of Marxists who join the PSUV and any international initiative Chávez may promote in the months ahead.



## PALESTINE

# Continue the resistance

Since President Mahmoud Abbas' declared a state of emergency, the Palestinians remain divided between rival Hamas and Fatah administrations. *Marcus Chamoun* explains that Israel, the real source of power in the region, is exploiting this to inflict a historic defeat

The Western media portrays the struggle in Palestine as one between "extremists" and "moderates", with the Palestinian factions' willingness to live peacefully alongside Israel as the decisive factor.

In reality, Israel's oppression of the Palestinians is at the root of the conflict. The Israeli state was born in flames in 1948, with 750,000 Palestinians driven from land their families had lived on for centuries. About five million Palestinians now live in refugee camps, while those that remain in Israel are second-class citizens, discriminated against in employment, housing, education and political life.

To keep the Palestinians subordinated, Israel constantly needs new immigrants: hence its appeal to Jews across the world to come and settle there. But to provide land for them, Israel needs to expand and so displace more Palestinians. The occupation of the West Bank, the blockade and bombings of Gaza, and the building of settlements all prevent a viable Palestinian state coming into existence.

This is why the advocates of a "two state" solution are misguided. Only a single state for Arabs and Jews can restore Palestinian rights - ending the occupation and allowing the return of the refugees - and guarantee physical security for the Israeli people.

It is this conflict between Israel, receiving billions each year in US military aid, and the poorly armed Palestinians that defines the politics of the various factions. The so-called extremists, including Hamas, are prepared to defend their people from this pro-imperialist, aggressive settler state. Those portrayed as "moderates", now including Fatah, are willing to act as agents of the USA and the Zionist state.

Fatah, historically the secular nationalist party of the Palestinians, lost the elections in January 2006 to Hamas because it capitulated to Israel, lining its supporters' pockets in the process. Its acceptance of the 1993 Oslo accords, accepting Israel's "right to exist", has reached its logical and intended conclusion: an openly collaborationist administration at war with half the Palestinian people.

Meanwhile in Gaza, a Hamas administration under siege consoles itself for failing to oust the collaborationists in Ramallah, by imposing religious social and cultural norms, with all their negative consequences for women, secularists, minorities and the workers' organisations.

Recent protests in Gaza by Fatah supporters, targeting the homes and families of Hamas leaders, mark Fatah's determination to act as a "fifth column", opening up a new front of struggle, not against the Israeli occupation, but against Palestinians.



Fatah supporters demonstrating in Gaza

Abbas' and his entourage are certainly being rewarded for their cooperation. Tax revenues and foreign aid withheld when the PA was led by a "power sharing" administration including Hamas have been released - to the Fatah controlled West Bank only - allowing the payment of civil servants and security forces and easing the humanitarian crisis. The "peace process" - that endless game of conferences, meetings and declarations - is back in play, now that Israel has a "partner in peace" to negotiate with.

When it comes to substantive matters, however, the rewards seem scant. A US hosted peace conference scheduled for November will not address the issues of Jerusalem, refugees or final borders. Meanwhile, the IDF creates "facts on the ground", stepping up settlement activity and completing the apartheid Wall snaking through the West Bank, annexing yet more Palestinian land.

In Gaza, resistance is rewarded by starvation and lethal violence. Each day brings news of missile strikes, shootings at fences and border crossings, or IDF incursions. People already dependent on aid, without freedom of movement, a livelihood, or other basics of social and economic life, are now subject to life-threatening cut-offs of food, fuel, medicines and even writing paper. A block on funding for power generation by European Union donors has led to electricity black-outs and the collapse of basic services, with reports that Gaza City "is sinking in piles of garbage that are scavenged by people looking for something to take, while others volunteer to burn the piles to get rid of them".

Hamas' demands on Fatah following their "coup" in June were surprisingly moderate: the restoration of a "power-sharing" PA government. This was not down to any modesty on Hamas' part, but a tacit admission that its own programme and methods of struggle only lead back to the same negotiating table at which Fatah has sat for the last fifteen years. The "armed struggle" - guerrilla war by an elite of fighters - can only end in this way, however sincere or self-sacrificing its participants, or how widespread their base of support.

If in the West Bank the danger is of "moderates" negotiating defeat, in Gaza it is that Hamas might accept the confinement of resistance to this enclave and build it as an Islamic state, negotiating separately with Israel for scraps of concessions. For all Israel's rhetoric about not negotiating with "terrorists", it suits its interests perfectly to play off one part of the Palestinian people against another. A hierarchy of Palestinian dispossession gives "moderates" an incentive to behave and provides a visible warning of the price of "extremism".

If in the West Bank the job is therefore to complete the unfinished business of June, of removing a pro-imperialist government, then in Gaza it is to deepen and broaden the resistance - ultimately wresting its leadership from the hands from the Islamist reactionaries.

Mass struggle, involving all of the oppressed, women and minorities included, would dispel Hamas' pretension to being the only force for Palestinian resistance. The arms of the resistance must be placed at the disposal of the mass organisations, and not just the leaderships of the armed organisations. Mass and democratic organs of struggle must be built, to prevent the replacement of one corrupt dictatorship with another.

Crucially, the workers' movement, drawing on the solidarity of anticapitalists and workers organisations in the neighbouring Arab countries and across the world, must protest and attempt to break the blockade of Gaza.

## MIDDLE EAST

# Occupation in tatters: time to blow it apart

Facing the imminent departure of British troops and with the Iraqi government on the verge of collapse, US imperialism desperately searches for a solution. *Mark Booth* reports

“The British have given up and know they will be leaving Iraq soon. They are retreating because of the resistance they have faced. Without that they would have stayed for much longer, there is no doubt. The British have realised this is a war they should not be fighting.”

This was the stunning verdict on Britain's four and a half year occupation of Iraq given by Moqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Shia resistance Mahdi army, to Patrick Cockburn of The Independent newspaper. The problem for British generals and politicians, trying to rubbish this as propaganda, is that it is a verdict shared by Britain's allies.

Earlier this month, Ken Pollack, a foreign affairs expert at the Washington-based Brookings Institution, said: “I am assuming the British will no longer be there. They are not there now. We have a British battle group holed up in Basra airport. It is the wild, wild west. Basra is out of control.”

Recently retired US general Jack Keane was even more scathing. He accused Britain of “general disengagement from what the key issues are around Basra”, of never having “had enough troops to truly protect the population”, and leaving the city “gradually deteriorating, with almost gangland warfare”.

But such comments are unlikely to have much effect on British policy, which is to effectively withdraw from Iraq. In a week's time, 500 troops will abandon Basra Palace their last base in the city, leaving just 5,000 soldiers, holed up in Basra airport.

As always in war, however, retreat is far from an easy or safe option. Forty-one British soldiers have been killed this year, by far the heaviest death rate since the invasion itself, as the insurgents sense their demoralisation and vulnerability, every patrol is tar-

geted. Nightly mortar attacks on the palace and the airport compound make sleep difficult.

In an attempt to hide the truth from the British public, the Ministry of Defence last month took away soldiers' rights to “blog, take part in surveys, speak in public, post on bulletin boards, play in multi-player computer games or send text messages or photographs without the permission of a superior” (The Guardian). The truth and rank and file soldiers' basic democratic rights are incompatible with British imperialism.

US anger is directed at both the political and the military consequences of British withdrawal. Not only is the “coalition of the willing” that led the invasion of Iraq in 2003 without a United Nations mandate now effectively reduced to one: the USA. But it also leaves the US “surge” of extra troops that started in February in tatters.

There are now between 170,000 and 190,000 US troops in Iraq, the highest number ever. General Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, the US ambassador to Baghdad, will present an assessment on the impact of the surge to Congress on 15 September. No doubt they will make out it has been a success of sorts. But with 3,723 US casualties and rising civilian deaths, this is a blatant lie.

## Dictatorship or partition?

“Democratic institutions are not necessarily the way ahead in the long-term future” Brig. Gen. John Bednarek, one of the commanders of the Task Force Lightning offensive in Diyala province told CNN. With the situation in Iraq worsening every day, the US forces are preparing to discard the tattered sham of a democracy they still use to justify the invasion.

Faced with the inability of the Iraqi government, riven by religious and ethnic divisions of the occupying powers own creation, to unite and govern Iraq, the occupying power is preparing the

ground for the installation of military strongman willing to do its bidding without having to pander to different ethnic or religious groups and not prone to influence from Iran or Syria. Criticism of the Iraqi government from US officials is mounting and army officers are quietly rephrasing their statements to the press to reflect that they are no longer in Iraq for democracy but to provide “security” and stability”.

If that fails then the utterly barbaric solution of partitioning Iraq along religious, ethnic lines between Sunni, Shia and Kurdish groups in order to divide the insurgency and allow the imperialists to play the different factions against one another will be carried out

What would be the horrific consequences of any such partition were seen recently in tragic massacre of more than 500 members of the non-Muslim Yezidis. A small religious minority of Iraq with no economic or political power the Yezidi, like the Christian and Turcoman minorities within Iraq have found themselves squeezed between the sectarian fighting between Shia and Sunni factions. Attacks like these would only increase under partition as sectarian groups attempted to establish their dominance in areas by ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The blame for the sectarian strife however does not rest with the Iraqi people. It is the end result of the imperialists attempts to control Iraq. The imperialists policy of divide and rule, playing Sunni and Shia groups against one another, installing a confessional system of government that forced Iraqis to align themselves with either Kurd, Sunni or Shia factions and the extreme violence and brutality visited upon the Iraqi people by the occupation itself has created fertile grounds for sectarianism. The idea that the occupying forces are protecting the Iraqi people from this violence is farcical. Attacks on civilians have

increased since the start of the American “surge” in Baghdad as local militia's which defend the population are driven out of the area's they protect, leaving the populace prey to sectarian militias. In Basra the British forces do not venture from their base at the airport and are constantly attacked by the very people they claim to be defending.

## Troops out now!

But Britain's imperialist strategists do have an exit strategy: to pour more troops into Afghanistan. This is being promoted as a “good” war. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Liberal democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell and Major General Richard Dannatt all want to conquer Afghanistan. Brown has even hinted at British military involvement in Darfur, while quietly backing sanctions and the threat of air strikes against Iran and the siege of Hamas-controlled Gaza in Palestine.

The coming conferences and day schools, called by Stop the War must focus on pressing home our demands for the immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan! Lift the sanctions on Iran! Aid to Gaza, and recognise the elected Hamas government now!

As well as mass demonstrations, Stop the War, along with Military Families Against the War, should directly aid rank and file soldiers to meet and organise independently from their officers, and to encourage them not to fight these wars, to disobey orders. They should organise direct action at military bases.

Above all, they should organise solidarity with and support for all those fighting against the imperialist invaders in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- All troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq now!
- Victory to the resistance!

## PAKISTAN

# Fight for a constituent assembly

As Pakistan heads for an election, the country is at a crossroads caught between the army, the imperialists, the Islamists and the old capitalist politicians. *Luke Cooper* analyses the direction the mass movement needs to take

Pakistan's military dictator Pervez Musharraf was in a dire situation this summer. Having suspended the country's Chief Justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March, his regime was destabilised by the huge street protests and a 48-hour general strike, mobilised to resist this decision. This movement started amongst lawyers, but was soon joined by the workers and the urban poor. Protesters numbered tens of thousands, waves of strike action called by unions close to the opposition parties shut the country down. Armed clashes erupted between pro- and anti-Musharraf forces.

At the same time Musharraf's backer George Bush was displeased with him because of the free rein he felt the Pakistan military was giving the Afghan insurgents in the northern tribal areas of Pakistan. Under his pressure Musharraf moved to crush the Taliban in the border areas and targeted pro-jihadi Islamists based in Islamabad's Red Mosque. The carnage which took place during attack on the Mosque, with hundreds were killed, represented a blow to part of the president's traditional power base. Pakistan's military has always relied on its Islamic credentials for legitimisation. This relationship, strained after 11 September 2001, has now broken as the successful suicide attacks on the armed forces over the last month of so have demonstrated.

In August too the Supreme Court reinstated Chaudhry and allowed a series of political dissidents to return to Pakistan, including ex-President Nawaz Sharif. Musharraf must now stand for re-election between 15 September and 15 October since all his attempts to get around this by pressurizing the judiciary have spectacularly failed. The US has also demanded "free and fair elections."

This turn of events has obliged Musharraf to search for support amongst the popular "pro-democracy forces." In effect this means turning to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) whose leader Benazir Bhutto's actually supported, "crit-



Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif might go head to head in the forthcoming elections

ically", the Red Mosque massacre and then entered negotiations with Musharraf on a power sharing deal. However this has caused ructions within the PPP. Negotiations have repeatedly broken down because of the PPP's insistence that Musharraf cannot remain both head of state and head of the armed forces, and must renounce the power to dismiss parliament. Bhutto has said she will return, with or without an agreement with the president, probably in October, in time for the elections.

In contrast to the PPP, the conservative Islamic party of Nawaz Sharif the PML-N has talked openly of the need for a 'decisive struggle' against the military and street protests to bring regime change. In returning to Pakistan on 10 September Sharif can present himself as the last democratically elected leader. In being more unequivocal in its opposition to Musharraf, the PML-N hopes to win wider support from both Islamic and pro-democracy voters.

But Sharif offers no genuine alternative to the masses. His last government was ferociously right wing and a disaster for the working class. As an economic crisis gripped the country Sharif made the masses pay for it with 100,000 workers sacked, food subsidies slashed and utility bills soaring – while Sharif and his supporters pocketed millions from state coffers.

We have said from the outset that the lawyers movement had the potential to link up with the masses, bring down the regime, and create the possibility for a revolutionary struggle for power by the working class. Clearly, this potential still exists. The overthrow of the military regime remains an immediate question. Indeed, it is more isolated and vulnerable than ever. But we cannot ignore that there are, at the same time, powerful counter-revolutionary forces.

### Forces of counterrevolution

One form of the counterrevolution is rise of the Islamist militants who attack leftists and women who refuse to abide by their interpretation of Sharia. Despite the fact that the so-called Taliban resistance in Afghanistan and the border regions must be supported insofar as they are fighting US and British imperialism, in domestic Pakistani politics they are a completely reactionary force.

However at the moment a "democratic counterrevolution" is the more immediate danger. A deal between the PPP and Musharraf, endorsed by elections, which are a sort of plebiscite, could be used to demobilise the masses, confuse the working class vanguard and continue the enslavement of Pakistan to the US imperialism. Benazir Bhutto could then use her a 'democratic mandate' both to attack the

working class and prosecute more aggressively US imperialism's war in Afghanistan and the border areas. This would be a real setback and defeat for the masses from which only the Islamists, given a martyr's halo, would be the long term beneficiaries. This would be equally true if Nawaz Sharif were to win, despite his present demagogic attacks on US policy, he also talks of the need for a 'constructive relationship' with Washington.

### The way forward

Ultimately, any party that does not link the democratic struggle to a workers' revolution and socialism will be unable to liberate Pakistan from the yoke of corruption or military rule. Pakistan has been ruled by the military for forty out of its sixty years of existence, in which time the military has developed powerful economic interests, a process that has deepened over the last eight years.

All now depends on the masses – their politics, leadership and organisation. The movement of lawyers was able to rally mass forces but is now divided on how to continue. Its right wing argues that the struggle finished with Chaudhry's reinstatement, while its left wing insists on continuing to fight for the overthrow of the regime. The revolutionary situation is far from over. Indeed, there is no easy, "stable" way out for the Pakistan ruling class, bourgeois parties and military – given the crisis of the war in Afghanistan and the border regions, the anti-neo liberal demands of the masses – not to mention, the effects a world recession in the coming period would have too. Nevertheless, clearly counter-revolutionary forces compete with the revolutionary ones.

It is now more urgent than ever the most advanced, radical sections of the poor, the democracy movement and the working class unite in a revolutionary party that can fight for a workers and peasant government, based on democratic workers and peasants councils.

More on Pakistan see [www.fifthinternational.org](http://www.fifthinternational.org)

## RUSSIA

# Scramble for gas and oil stokes up imperialist rivalries

Tensions between Russia, Britain, the EU and the USA rose to new levels over the summer: expelled diplomats, missile threats, and a scramble for the resources of the North Pole. *Andy Yorke* asks whether we are witnessing the start of a new cold war

**J**une: Russian president Vladimir Putin denounced the plans for the US missile defence system to site key radar and anti-missile batteries in Poland and the Czech Republic, stating in response Russia would be forced to target these facilities.

July: Russia threatened to use its United Nations Security Council veto to block US and European Union moves towards an independent Kosovo, while the British government expelled four Russian diplomats over the Alexander Litvinenko murder case and Russia expelled four British diplomats in retaliation.

August: Putin stated his navy would patrol the Mediterranean once again, opening up a mothballed base in Syria, a US designated "rogue state". A Russian expedition laid claim to a large chunk of the Arctic, sparking what could become a scramble for the mineral and oil wealth of the North Pole.

In the same month Russia conducted joint military exercises with China, and the two powers deepened economic and security ties with one another and with key Central Asian states at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This meeting saw Iran invited as an observer, whereas a similar US request was turned down. Russian papers close to Putin trumpeted the meeting as a "Warsaw Pact 2".

On 17 August Vladimir Putin announced that Russian long-range bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, would resume worldwide "combat patrols" in defence of Russia's "economic interests". Soon Britain was scrambling jets as one Russian sortie approached her airspace.

## Rising imperialist tensions

Russia's recent recovery has been meteoric. 1998 saw the collapse of its economy, followed by the 1999 Kosovo war, in which the US and Nato bombed Serbia, Russia's ally, into submission. Then came 11 September 2001, and the US went on the offensive, invading Afghanistan and Iraq, whilst a disapproving Russia just looked on.

George Bush expanded Nato right up to the borders of Russia, setting up mil-

itary bases and investments in oil and gas rich Central Asia and the Caucasus, and even sponsored "velvet revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004-05) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). Pro-Russian regimes were replaced by pro-US ones.

Thus Russia's power and influence in the states, which had been subordinate to it within the USSR and the Tsarist empire, was whittled away. The rise of the USA threatened to strip Russia of her semi-colonial territories, markets and resources, ones its ruling class needs to develop further as an imperialist power.

But in the last two years, these trends have gone into reverse. With the US facing defeat in Iraq, and only holding its ground in Afghanistan, the Putin government is taking steps to rebuild its military strength and extend its power in its "near abroad" at the expense of the US.

No one should get carried away, of course. Most of these moves, such as the new bomber patrols, are symbolic, aimed at whipping up nationalist support for Putin ahead of December's parliamentary elections and the March 2008 presidential elections. Putin is required to step down after two terms, and the bloc of energy oligarchs and state apparatchiks around him is determined to install a successor, who will continue the policies that have hugely enriched them over the last decade.

Also, Russian military power remains a fraction of that of the US. Russia's current defence budget is £16 billion. While this is up nearly 400% from 2001, Washington's defence budget is about 20 times bigger. Russia's ageing fleet, tanks and airplanes (it has not produced a new airplane in ten years) pale in comparison to the USA's high-tech military and world network of bases.

Nevertheless, Russia is taking real steps to rebuild its military power, this year announcing a £97 billion investment in the armed forces to modernise it by 2015, with Putin determined "to retain leadership in the production of military equipment" and make development of the aviation industry its number one priority, breaking the monopoly of the US and EU in this crucial military and economic field.

**Russia announced a £97 billion investment in the armed forces to modernise it by 2015**



Russian police break up anti-Putin rally

## The "energy superpower"

In February Putin denounced the US at a Munich energy summit for its unilateral approach, sidelining institutions such as the UN where Russia has a veto. "One state, the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way," he stated, noting that the growth of new powers such as China and Russia could create a multilateral world, at the expense of the US superpower.

But while Russia and China have important interests in common, they also have divergent ones. They are in competition with one another for energy supplies and influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, where neither wants to be dominated by the other. These countries in turn will seek room for manoeuvre by playing off Russia, China, India, and the US against each other.

Russia is keenest to strengthen the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation both as an alternative to NATO, bringing in Iran, while China wants to it looser and probably would keep its distance from Iran, to avoid provoking US retaliation against its exports. The SCO is not yet anything like Warsaw Pact 2.

So Russia will remain a military David compared to the American Goliath for some time to come. However, it holds one economic weapon, which can strike the US and EU imperialists at their weakest point.

There has been much debate about Russia becoming the world's "energy superpower". In January 2006, Russia cut off natural gas supplies to the pro-US Ukraine, in the process stopping the flow of oil to Europe, which relies on Russia for a quarter of its natural gas consumption. The move sparked accusations of Russia using energy as a "weapon". Much of the recent "green" rhetoric of the rulers of the US and Britain is directly related to strategic fears of dependence on oil from rival or dissident states, such as Russia or Venezuela.

Indeed, the reversal of Russia's fortunes relies completely on its energy resources and power. Russia holds the world's largest natural gas reserves – 25 per cent of the total – and the eighth largest oil reserves; it is the biggest exporter of natural gas, the second biggest of oil. Equally importantly, Russia has benefited from oil prices rocketing from around \$10 a barrel in 1998 to over \$70 today. Energy is now responsible for 20 per cent of Russia's GDP and 64 per cent of export revenues.

Russia's economy is booming as a result. Every \$1 per barrel increase in the oil price translates into as much as 3.4 per cent added to GDP, or \$1.5 billion of additional annual budget revenues. Putin has, since 2000, put all the key energy sectors under state control. This involved a crackdown on the billionaire tycoons that used their wealth and power to sponsor opposition media and parties, and who threatened to open up Russia's immense resources to US oil multinationals, and thus potentially subordinate the energy sector – the goose that lays the golden egg – to US imperialism.

The result is a Putin government that is just as "Big Oil" as Bush and Cheney's, with siloviki or "power people" from the security services and military serving in the top echelons of the Putin government and on the boards of Russia's state-owned energy giants, Rosneft (oil), Transneft (pipelines) and Gazprom (natural gas). Igor Sechin, deputy head of the presidential administration and possible Putin successor, is chairman of Rosneft; first



Vladimir Putin has got Russia's army marching again

deputy prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, chairman of Gazprom; and Viktor Khristenko, minister of industry and energy, chairman of Transneft.

Of course the siloviki are not just politicians but, through corruption or links with the private sector, they are just as much a part of the Russian "oligarchy" as the private capitalists, who continue to flourish under Putin's regime – Russia is second only to the US and Germany in the number of billionaires it has.

As a result of these moves, since 2003 the state has controlled, planned and developed more and more of Russia's energy industry. The state is now the key centre for accumulation and investment, able to use the energy wealth to rebuild its economy and its military power.

#### Power from the pipeline

In addition to its own resources and pipelines, Russia controls many of the major pipelines that take oil from producing regions around the Caspian to Europe. Russian companies are exporting capital to expand their stakes in gas and elec-

tricity companies in the countries surrounding it, including the old Eastern bloc and even further afield. Gazprom, the world's biggest natural gas multinational, has established stakes in the energy sectors of sixteen EU countries, and is using the bait of investment opportunities in Russia to prise open more acquisitions in European energy companies in a search not for just profit but for access to the latest technology, necessary to develop Russia's reserves.

The Russian government has used the courts to seize oil and gas fields back from foreign oil multinationals. Joint ventures or exploration and production grants were agreed on generous terms in the desperate days of the 1990s, as the government tried to jumpstart the economy. Citing "abuses" or environmental damage, Putin's government is clawing back control, forcing BP and Shell to give up some of their most lucrative operations. In December 2006 Shell was forced to sell a controlling stake in the Sakhalin-2 oil and gas development, the biggest foreign investment in Russia, to Gazprom.

#### The scramble begins

Putin's attempts to take this sector under state control, to seize back fields relinquished to Western multinationals, to build up a reserve of £150 billion and stability fund of £100 billion from oil taxes and state production, and to expand abroad into Central Asia and the world market are all parts of a struggle to build up Russian imperialism, so it can take its place among the so-called Great Powers, one straddling the Eurasian landmass and its resources and denying their tribute to the US, ultimately able to confront the American Goliath on its own terms.

Russia's growing energy power hits US and British companies, like ExxonMobil and BP, which have falling or even, in the case of Shell, negative reserve-replacement ratios. With the rise of "oil nationalism" in countries like Russia and Venezuela, and without much direct ownership or control of reserves, the oil majors of the US and Britain face falling influence and profits in the future.

Yet the US and EU economies rely on this energy for their economies. Poland, Germany, even Britain all rely on Russian oil. Three-fifths of its gas exports go to the EU, and several smaller countries in its periphery, such as Bulgaria, Turkey, Poland and Slovakia, get all or most their natural gas from Russia. Even Germany (41%) and France (25%) are reliant on Russia for a major portion of their gas supplies. Russia's temporary halt to Ukraine's supplies reminded EU imperialists that oil and gas are not just sources of wealth, they give the state the power to bring industrial economies that rely on it to their knees.

As a result, the scramble for non-aligned sources of oil, such as those in the Caucasus or Central Asia, become more important, and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq – planned long before 11 September – are testament to this intensifying struggle and source of imperialist tension. Hence the battle to build rival pipelines from Central Asia and bring its oil and gas wealth to world markets, along with aid and competition for military bases between the US and Russia, in these states.

The "Great Game" – as they called this conflict in the 19th and 20th centuries – is on again.

For more on Russia please visit [www.fifthinternational.org](http://www.fifthinternational.org)

## FRANCE

# As Sarkozy tries to ban right to strike, can workers break him?

France's new right wing government has French workers, youth and migrants in its sights. *Marc Lassalle* calls for a new party and revolutionary action to oppose Nicolas Sarkozy

Despite the opposition of thousands of French workers, who took to the streets in protest, right wing President Nicolas Sarkozy drove through parliament a law aimed at crippling the right to strike in public transport. The law requires workers to declare themselves as strikers 48 hours before taking action, and obliges unions to maintain a minimum level of service. They even have to facilitate the deployment of scabs to break their own strikes!

The new measures represent a historic restriction of the right to strike and are directed first against rail, bus and Paris metro workers because these sectors have proved, alongside the teachers, the vanguard of militant trade unionism over the past 10 years.

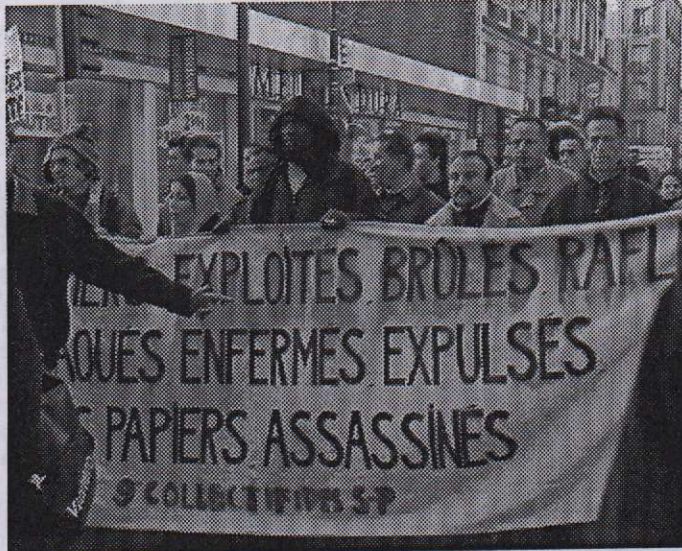
Sarkozy's goal is to take away workers' sharpest weapon: the strike. He needs to break the vanguard of the French workers and put legal shackles on the unions, as Margaret Thatcher did in Britain in the 1980s.

Only then will the government have free rein to attack pensions, the health system, schools and universities, the youth of the sprawling suburbs – the *banlieues* – and undocumented migrants – the *sans papiers*. He has promised the employers' organisation, Medef, that he will make the 35-hour working week "more flexible", i.e. make employees work longer for the same or less pay

## First three months of Sarkozy

Since his election, Sarkozy has paralysed the left parties and convinced the trade union tops that a negotiated surrender is the best they can hope for. He has co-opted into his government several Socialist Party bigwigs: Bernard Kouchner, rewarded with the Foreign Ministry, Dominique Strauss-Kahn as French candidate for the IMF, Jacques Lang to head a parliamentary reforms commission.

The trade union leaders, too, have been embroiled in a series of discussions with Sarkozy over his "reforms". They are frightened of



Sans papiers demonstration demanding rights for migrant workers

appealing in the workplaces and streets of resistance to these neoliberal attacks. They are reconciling themselves to a long Sarkozy era, hoping to find a place, albeit a reduced one, in his new system of incorporating the unions. Bernard Thibaut, leader of the CGT, the most militant of the large union federations, expressed his desire to meet Sarkozy. Shamefully, the CGT has stated that that it is neither in "opposition" nor in "resistance" to Sarkozy.

Sarkozy's first measures directly benefit the employers. His recent tax package includes

- A new "fiscal shield" setting a cap at 50 per cent of income for the total taxes to be paid to the state by a single person (this would only benefit the 93,000 richest families!)
- The effective abolition of inheritance tax
- Exemption for the bosses from paying insurance (social security, pensions, etc.) for employees' overtime.

The cost of these measures is 13 billions euros. So Sarkozy aims to balance the budget by creating a new levy on health expenses. Every year, the first 50 euros that a citizen spends on treatment will not be reimbursed. This will hit the lowest

income families, forcing them to choose between necessary medical treatment and other vital expenses.

In the autumn, Sarkozy will press on with the bosses' agenda. He intends to reintroduce the first employment contract (CPE), allowing a boss to fire a worker at will, even though this was defeated last year by the mass action of young people and workers. This time it will be extended to all workers.

## LCR and the new party

In the face of these attacks the reformist left has been paralysed. Even the self-proclaimed "revolutionary" parties have not outlined what they believe is the strategy to resist and defeat Sarkozy. A partial exception is the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. Since the election, it has correctly called for a national movement of resistance.

Having won nearly 1.5 million votes for their candidate Olivier Besancenot, the French section of the Fourth International, has a major responsibility to initiate the resistance. But this requires clarity on the action that is needed, particularly the solidarity action up to and including a general strike with every section under attack – particularly the youth of the *banlieues*

and the railworkers. If the guards regiment of the French workers movement is defeated because it do not get assistance from the rest of the unions, then a disorderly retreat could unravel. Bold action now, in the first phase of Sarkozy's attack, is vital.

The LCR has also called for the foundation of a new party, based on all those "defending an anticapitalist programme in struggle and in elections, politically independent from the Socialist Party and refusing to manage the [governmental] institutions with it". Meetings will be held in September – in towns, workplaces, schools and universities – to debate the forms and means to fight back against the government. After the LCR congress, a second phase is foreseen with general meetings in every region, building towards a national congress to found the new party.

Members of the League for the Fifth International in France welcome this development as a step toward the formation of a new workers party in France, based on a revolutionary programme. But we argue that the LCR must link these discussions to active resistance to Sarkozy. This way we can win new layers of activists to a new fighting party.

This party should be based on a programme with clear "transitional" demands, leading from the struggle to meet the urgent needs of the masses to the overthrow of the entire capitalist system, i.e. private ownership of the means of production, and the smashing of the bourgeois state.

The LCR, however, argues that the new party should focus on the local elections next year. While this may be a good way of popularising its programme, it should not be the absolute priority. The party should rather be "launched" in the resistance to Sarkozy's attacks. The local branches should organise actions and campaigns against them, uniting the various partial fightbacks into a general strike to bring down Sarkozy and replace him with a revolutionary workers' government.

## 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

# How the Bolsheviks won leadership of the masses

As we continue our series commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Russian October revolution, we republish an updated article on the role of the communists in fighting against the threat of military dictatorship in summer 1917, originally written by *Dave Hughes* and edited by *Dave Stocking*

The Russian workers, particularly those in Petrograd, had suffered a very real setback after the mass street demonstrations of the July Days (3-4 July according to the Julian calendar). Although the Bolsheviks had opposed any attempt to seize power as premature, given the balance of class forces across Russia, they had demonstrated at the head of the armed masses. Now as the demonstrators dispersed, recovering from its fright, the Provisional Government went onto the offensive. The bourgeois press accused the Bolsheviks of leading a failed putsch, slandered their leaders, like Lenin and Zinoviev, as “German agents” attempting to sabotage the Russian military offensive then underway.

Key Bolshevik leaders such as Lev Kamenev, close allies such as Leon Trotsky and Anatoly Lunacharsky from the Interdistrict Organisation (the Mezhrayontsy) and hundreds of rank and file Bolsheviks were arrested and imprisoned. Military cadets, former police officers and members of the proto-fascist Black Hundreds, carried out individual shootings and lynchings. In such witch hunt conditions the party decided that Lenin and Zinoviev should go underground, first in the countryside near Petrograd and later in nearby Finland.

The circulation of the party press halved in the month following the July Days. The morale of party members in the factories was at first shaken by the sudden turnaround in the situation. Yet as early as mid-July Yakov Sverdlov, a superb organiser and the senior Bolshevik leader left at liberty in the capital, was able to report “the mood in Petrograd is hale and hearty. We are keeping our heads. The organisation is not destroyed.” Less than a month later the tide had turned again and was now flowing strongly in favour of the Bolsheviks. By the end of August the party had 240,000 members, three times that in April. What had brought about this rapid and dramatic change?

The answer lay not simply in the steadfastness of the Bolsheviks cadres, embodied in organisers like Sverdlov, nor yet in the principled yet flexible character of Bolshevik tactics and strategy, important as these were. It lay in the failure of the counterrevolution to inflict a decisive defeat on the vanguard of the working class and stabilise the military, political and economic situation of the country.

Firstly the “Kerensky offensive” at the front rapidly collapsed in the face of mass mutinies and desertions by the Russian troops and a German and Austrian counteroffensive. Prince Lvov, who had headed the government since the February revolution resigned and Alexander Kerensky, the war minister, and the leading figure in the cabinet since early May, took over as premier.

Kerensky wanted to play the part Napoleon Bonaparte played in the French Revolution – that of stemming the revolutionary surge and isolating and destroying its most radical representatives the Bolsheviks, much as Napoleon crushed the remnants of the revolutionaries of 1792-4 (the Jacobins and their immediate successors). He demanded the banning of the Bolshevik party but the Mensheviks and SR ministers vetoed this, knowing that this would be a dangerous, even an impossible, step. He ordered the disarming of the workers factory militia, the Red Guard, and in this he was successful. He ordered the despatch to the front of some of the most radical regiments in the city garrison. But as Trotsky later observed this was to send 40,000 thoroughly politicised agitators to the trenches.

The High Command piled on the pressure for Kerensky to “restore order” in the army grew. Alexei Brusilov the army’s commander-in-chief publicly demanded:

“There cannot be dual authority in the army. The army must have one head and one authority.”

He wanted the complete and total restoration of military discipline, including the officers’ right to shoot ‘mutineers’. However Kerensky, whose own role as would be Bonaparte and ‘strongman’ rested on a balancing act between the soviets and the counter-revolution played for time by dismissing Brusilov and replacing him with Lavr Georgievich Kornilov, hitherto commander of the Petrograd military district – a man of no less counterrevolutionary opinions but more limited intelligence – he was described by a fellow commander as having “the heart of a lion but the brains of a sheep.”

No sooner was Kornilov appointed than the imperialist bourgeoisie and the landowners began to rally around him, giving him lavish receptions and calling him the “saviour of Russia.” It was plain they saw him as their saviour from the working class and its soviets, i.e. as

## 1917-2007

just the man to instal a counter-revolutionary dictatorship.

However – their ambitions aside- neither Kerensky nor Kornilov was a Napoleon. More important still the dynamic element of the Russian revolution, the proletariat and its Bolshevik vanguard, were far from being a spent force.

### Lenin and the soviets

Lenin – temporarily removed from the scene of action in the capital, for once misestimated the strength and completeness of the counter revolution. He was correct to characterise Kerensky's intentions as bonapartist but he judged this to be more complete than was in fact the case. There were, as yet, only conflicting elements of bonapartism rather than a finished bonapartist regime in Russia. These clashing elements went by the names of Kerensky and Kornilov. Their conflict, when it broke cover at the end of August, was to lead to a decisive weakening of the forces of the counterrevolution. In short the situation in Russia in July and August was more that of a "democratic counterrevolution," one that preserved the legality of the mass workers organisations – soviets, the workers parties, factory committees etc, but which directed severe repression against its vanguard, the Bolsheviks.

By mid-July Lenin had also come to the conclusion that the key governmental slogans that the Bolsheviks had used to such good effect up to and in the July Days – 'All power to the Soviets' – and 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers' were now outmoded. From hiding he warned the Bolsheviks:

"Too often has it happened that, when history has taken a sharp turn, even progressive parties have for some time been unable to adapt themselves to the new situation and have repeated slogans which had formerly been correct but had now lost all meaning—lost it as "suddenly" as the sharp turn in history was "sudden".

Methodologically Lenin was right that when a major turning point occurs in a revolution the old slogans cannot simply be repeated unchanged in changed circumstances. The above slogans had been in effect a call on the Mensheviks and the SRs to take the power, with a promise that the Bolsheviks would, whilst remaining in complete opposition to them with the soviets, not attempt their armed overthrow and moreover defend their government against any attempt to do so by the counterrevolutionary forces. But the July Days proved that the Mensheviks and SR's would cling to their alliance with the bourgeoisie, even when hundreds of thousands of workers and soldiers offered them the power. Lenin's analysis was as follows:

"The cycle of development of the class and party struggle in Russia from February 27 to July 4 is complete. A new cycle is beginning, one that involves not the old classes, not the old parties, not the old Soviets, but classes, parties and Soviets rejuvenated in the fire of struggle, tempered, schooled and refashioned by the process of the struggle. (...) We must, at the beginning of the new cycle, proceed from the triumphant bourgeois counter-revolution, which triumphed because the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks compromised with it, and which can be defeated only by the revolutionary proletariat. Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks must now prepare for an armed insurrection against the Provisional government and the present Soviet regime

In fact Lenin was not only overestimating of the completeness of the counterrevolution's triumph but also linking the call for power to the Soviets too narrowly to the perspective of a peaceful transfer, one which he had argued since April was possible. The dual power - or rather the pole of it represented by the workers' soviets, had indeed been greatly weakened by the Mensheviks and SR's support for the counterrevolution. But even now their support was far from total. They themselves had good cause, to fear the counterrevolution represented by Kornilov. He plainly wished to destroy the soviets and the soldiers' committees' altogether. This was revealed in a remarks he made to his aide general Lukomsky.

"It is high time we seized all these German spies with Lenin at their head. And as for the rest we shall hit this Soviet of workers and soldiers so hard it will never dare to come out again."

Indeed he actually assigned one of his adjutants the task of shooting all the deputies of the Petrograd as well as the Kronstadt sailors' soviets.

The triumph of the counterrevolution would mean the end of the right wing socialists and populists too. Rumours of an impending coup were rife in the last weeks of August. If Kornilov actually moved to do this then it was likely the Mensheviks and the SRs – or at least their followers - would have to fight. That or the Bolsheviks would completely outflank them by initiating and leading the workers resistance.

However Lenin was correct to warn the party not to fetishise the existing soviets with their Menshevik leadership. Lenin looked to other organs like the factory committees, where Bolshevik influence was growing massively, as a more revolutionary mass base for the Bolsheviks to strike for power.

But in fact the soviets proved more responsive, more democratic and more active as instruments of the revolution than Lenin supposed. Moreover the slogan All Power to the Soviets could and would take on different meanings to that of being simply a call for a Menshevik and SR government.

Thus it is noteworthy that the Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd, whilst they de-emphasised the slogan in this latter form, never withdrew it in its broader meaning – that the working class and the soldiers must break with the bourgeoisie and take power through their own democratic councils. At the Second City Conference of the Petrograd party many speakers came out against Lenin's position as argued for by Stalin. One delegate argued:

"There were moments when we had to fear the dispersal of the soviets but this time has now definitively passed."

Volodarsky supporting him added:

"People who claim the counter-revolution is victorious are making judgments about the masses on the basis of their leaders. While the Menshevik and SR leaders are shifting rightwards, the masses are moving leftwards. Kerensky, Tseretelli and Avksentiev are caliphs for one hour. (...) Bearing this in mind, it is clear that the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' is not obsolete."

The party's refusal to go all the way with Lenin was indeed fortunate since the Bolsheviks would soon have to deploy the slogan again. Briefly in September, it was used once more as a call on the Mensheviks and SRs to break with the Provisional Government and Kerensky. More famously it was used in October as a call for a Bolshevik majority government.

The whole debate shows how utterly false is the Stalinist and bourgeois historian's common viewpoint that the Bolshevik Party was a monolithic block under the iron grip of an always correct (or, for the academics, dictatorial) Lenin. As we saw in April, in the July Days and as shall see again in the run in to the October Revolution itself the party engaged in vigorous internal debates about the correct way forward. Lenin often had to argue hard for his line and was neither always successful nor always tactically right, despite his overall strategic brilliance.

### The plot thickens

In fact Kerensky's bonapartism rapidly proved not so much a dictatorship as a precarious balancing act between revolution and counter-revolution. From 12 to 15 August he summoned a 'State Conference' in Moscow to mobilise support for his attempts at "strong government." Held in the Bolshoi Theatre, home of the Imperial Ballet, Kerensky tried to placate both the serried ranks of the representatives of big business and the officer corps to his right and



Kornilov in Moscow, raised up on the shoulders of counter-revolutionary troops



## 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

the Menshevik/SR soviet delegates to his left. Referring to the July Days he ranted:

"May everyone know, and may those know who have already attempted to raise an armed hand against the people's government, that these attempts will be crushed by iron and blood" (...). Our patience has reached a limit and anybody who exceeds that limit will come up against a force whose repressive strength will remind these criminals of the old regime."

Kerensky's hysterical assertions of power fooled neither side, but least of all did they convince the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie that he was the man of destiny, the man to save Russia. In fact during Kornilov's own highly theatrical arrival for the State Conference in Moscow was greeted by Radichev, a representative of the Cadet Party, with the significant cry - "Save Russia and her grateful people will crown you!"

Meanwhile, the army high command and the bourgeois parties stepped up their plotting to carry out a full scale counterrevolution, to install a military dictatorship.

Even before July the Bolsheviks had established themselves as the leadership of key fighting units of the working class. Their influence in the factory committees had increased, with 82% of the delegates at the August All Russian Factory Committee Conference endorsing their call for soviet power. They led a successful general strike in Moscow against the State Conference, even though the strike had been fiercely opposed by the right wing leadership of the Moscow soviet.

More and more sections of workers were demanding a break from Kerensky and the Provisional Government. This was demonstrated by a frankly pro-Bolshevik resolution from the young workers of Putilov:

"We, the youth, having learnt from the experience of our fathers how dangerous it is to fraternise with the bourgeoisie, declare that it will be a fearful hour when we, the youth, for the salvation of the revolution take to the streets to destroy with our young hands those parasites who live off the blood and sweat of the toilers. [We express] our profound scorn for the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who continue to cohabit with the bourgeoisie and allow themselves to be led on a leash by Kerensky and Tseretelli."

Major battles lay ahead and this was patent to the most class-conscious workers. But the July Days had taught the workers the need for discipline and clarity about their objectives, the need to avoid premature and sporadic outbursts.

Kerensky's government though increasingly exposed was still trying to crack down on the organised workers. Kerensky was himself plotting a coup, but it was to be his coup, not the Bolsheviks. On 24 August he closed down the Bolshevik press once again. But unfortunately in his decisive circles of the bourgeoisie were preparing to oust him and his government. On the 27 August the bourgeois Cadets resigned from the Provisional Government and General Kornilov, announced that he was marching on Petrograd "to restore order in the capital". There was of course no disor-



Kerensky at the Moscow State conference

der in the capital but the long depressed stock market suddenly soared as the capitalists anticipated the counter-revolution's victory. Privy to the whole plot was Sir George Buchanan, the British ambassador whose Embassy was something of an organising centre for the coup within the capital.

Kerensky who was privy to and indeed in agreement with Kornilov's measures to crush the Soviets and soldiers committees, suddenly realised to his horror that the general intended to overthrow the whole Provisional Government, including himself. That would be the end not only for his own bonapartist ambitions but possibly his life. Thus Kerensky, in fear and trembling as to the consequences of doing so, turned to the Soviet to save himself.

### Kornilov's coup and the united front

The Mensheviks and the SRs too panicked when they realised a coup was underway. For six months, under the cover of the "dual power regime" they had allowed the forces of counterrevolution a chance to gather their strength and strike back. Now in terror they had to turn to the Bolsheviks to rescue them. The Party was now put to the test of leading a united front of resistance to the counter-revolution.

The news of Kornilov's march on Petrograd led to huge mass meetings in the factories. Every one of them vowed to defend the city and urgently demanded arms from the Soviet Executive. The Baranovskii Machine Construction factory resolved:

"We demand that the Central Executive Com-

mittee of the Soviet, give arms to the workers, who not sparing their lives, will stand as one in defence of the just rights of revolutionary democracy, and together with our brethren soldiers, will erect an impassable barrier to the counterrevolution."

Thousands of Petrograd workers threw themselves into the struggle to stop Kornilov, at least 25,000 enlisted for the Red Guards who were coordinated by the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. The government was forced to re-arm the militia they had disarmed in July. At Putilov 8,000 of the workforce were sent to perform defence and agitation duties. Those who remained behind achieved three weeks output of cannon in three days in order to defend the revolution!

The Menshevik leadership of the Petrograd Soviet were obliged to set up a Committee of Struggle against the Counterrevolution and to invite the Bolsheviks to participate in it. There were three delegates apiece from the SRs, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks plus delegates from the main trade unions. But this no longer represented the real balance of forces as Sukhanov a Menshevik-Internationalist recorded in his *Memoirs*.

"The committee making defence preparations had to mobilise the worker-soldier masses. But the masses insofar as they were organised were organised by the Bolsheviks and followed them. At the time theirs was the only organisation that was large, welded together by elementary discipline and linked with the democratic lower levels of the capital. Without it the committee was impotent."

The Bolshevik party had grown so rapidly that by the end of August it had some 240,000 members nationwide. Kerensky was thus forced to cower behind a proletarian wall defending Red Petrograd, fearful of what rearming the Bolsheviks would mean. In the short term he simply had no alternative. The Bolshevik leaders were released from jail and the party's propaganda and agitation was given free rein. Bolshevik militants were prominent in all the mobilisations to halt Kornilov.

The problem for the Bolsheviks was how to use these mobilisations to win the remaining sections of masses, soldiers as well as workers, definitively away from the Mensheviks, that is how to unify the contradictions between the rank and file Mensheviks and SRs and their compromised leaders?

### Kamenev and Lenin develop the policy

Until the outbreak of the Kornilov coup Lenin had stuck to his line that because the counter-revolution had already occurred in July, talk of a military coup was Menshevik play acting. He vigorously demanded no blocks or alliances with the Mensheviks. Only as the reality of the situation bore in on him and the opportunities it offered became clear did he change his tactics.

Fortunately once again the Bolsheviks on the ground realised the necessity of united action with the Mensheviks, the SRs and even Kerensky. Kamenev formulated the basis of a united front. Lenin too now realised the key to success lay in 'indirectly' campaigning against Kerensky 'by demanding a more and more active,

## 1917–2007



Cossacks, peasant cavalry that Kornilov was relying on to lead the attack on Petrograd

truly revolutionary war against Kornilov'. The aroused workers must be mobilised to press partial demands on Kerensky which would develop the militant mood and reawakened confidence of the rank and file while exposing the weakness and vacillation of their leaders. He formulated demands on them, including the arrest of the Cadet leader Miliukov and Duma President Rodzianko who were backing Kornilov. He included the legalisation of the transfer of the land to the peasants, and workers' control over grain distribution and the factories.

The Bolsheviks immediately demanded the arming of the Petrograd workers and the summoning of the militant Kronstadt, Vyborg and Helsingfors garrisons to Petrograd. The demand for weapons and training for the workers was immense, as Trotsky described "In the districts, according to the workers' press, there immediately appeared "whole queues of people eager to join the ranks of the Red Guard." Drilling began in marksmanship and the handling of weapons. Experienced soldiers were brought in as teachers. By the 29th, Guards had been formed in almost all the districts. The Red Guard announced its readiness to put in the field a force of 40,000 rifles."

Involving the workers in the fight for their demands in the revolutionary defence of Petrograd was for Lenin, the means of taking them forward politically. That is why he insisted that demands be presented:

"...not only to Kerensky, and not so much to Kerensky as to the workers, soldiers and peasants who have been carried away by the course of the struggle against Kornilov."

In denying Kornilov the right to overthrow Kerensky Lenin was in fact digging Kerensky's grave, and the graves of all those who sought to compromise with him. As Lenin put it:

"We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say that we must take into account the present situation. We shall not overthrow Kerensky right now. We shall approach the task of fighting against him in a different way".

This means of waging the struggle against Kornilov and Kerensky proved a resounding success. Kornilov was stopped in his tracks as his army dissolved around him under the pres-

sure of Bolshevik agitators and sabotage by militant railway workers. Trotsky describes the scene as the Cossacks approached Petrograd:

"From the direction of Petrograd innumerable delegations continued to arrive from regiments sent out to oppose the Kornilovists. Before fighting they wanted to talk things over. The revolutionary troops were confidently hopeful that the thing could be settled without fighting. This hope was confirmed: the Cossacks readily came to meet them. The communication squad of the corps would seize locomotives, and send the delegates along all railroad lines. The situation would be explained to every echelon. Meetings were continuous and at them all the cry was being raised: "They have deceived us!"

This led to mutiny amongst the approaching troops. Even the so-called Savage Division of Caucasian mountaineers, when they realised that there was no "pro-German uprising" in Petrograd arrested their officers and deserted Kornilov. Within days the advancing column literally dissipated like steam.

The political prestige of the Bolshevik Party took a giant leap forward in the aftermath of Kornilov's defeat and Kerensky's humiliation. The demands of the united front, addressed to Kerensky, the SRs and the Mensheviks, but carried into life by thousands of rank and file workers in the committees of struggle, was "only" for the limited goal of defeating Kornilov. But by combining unity in action with a merciless

critique of Kerensky and the conciliating Menshevik and SR leadership of the soviets the Bolsheviks proved to hundreds of thousands of workers that they were the only consistent defenders of the revolution. The united front was a bridge to the masses and a weapon against their reformist misleaders.

General Kornilov's defeat at the hands of the Petrograd workers opened the final phase of the Russian Revolution. The workers had arms once again. A new confident tone was to be heard in factory meetings throughout the capital city. Factory after factory replaced their Menshevik or SR delegates to the Soviet with Bolsheviks.

In September the Petrograd Soviet passed its first Bolshevik resolution calling for a government of 'the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry'. In opposition the Mensheviks could only muster 15 votes out of 1,000 delegates for the Provisional Government! The Moscow Soviet passed a Bolshevik resolution four days later. The spectre of a Bolshevik majority at the nationwide congress of soviets was looming and with it the possibility that All Power to the Soviets might mean political power in the hands of the Bolsheviks and their allies.

**Workers Power has republished our pamphlet on the Russian revolution "The Road to Red October" which is available for £2 from [www.fifthinternational.org](http://www.fifthinternational.org).**



Red Guard factory unit armed by the revolution and prepared to defend Petrograd

# 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.

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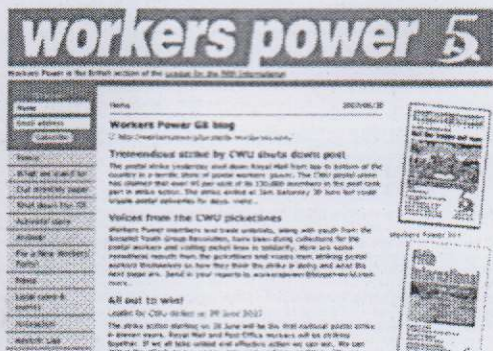
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## The Iraqi resistance and the working class

One of the most contentious issues in the antiwar movement is the resistance of the Iraqi and Afghan people to the US and British occupations. What attitude should those of us, who oppose Bush and Brown's war, take to the people in Basra, Baghdad and Helmand, who are taking up arms against the occupying troops?

Some – especially supporters of CND – will tell us straight away that no support can be given to any form of violence. Communists reject this pacifist argument on moral as well as logical grounds. If this were true, then every national liberation struggle, every slave rebellion, every popular revolution in history should never have happened.

This helpless pacifist attitude only ever disarms the oppressed and never the oppressor. Communists judge our attitude to armed conflicts from an entirely different standpoint. We ask which side in a conflict – if any – is pursuing aims that take forward the struggle for genuine national liberation, for democratic rights and socialism.

How, then, should we view the specific conflict today in Iraq? We have to begin by assessing the big picture. The over-riding aim of the forces resisting the British and the Americans is to drive the occupying armies out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Is this a goal that the working class shares?

It is. The invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan were gross violations of the democratic rights of their peoples, of their self-determination. The fact that their regimes were dictatorial did not give another power the right to "liberate them" or "bring them democracy." In fact the imperialist occupiers have done neither, but have helped themselves to Iraq's invaluable oil reserves, and forcibly privatised the Iraqi economy, opening it up to exploitation by huge US multinationals.

Communists therefore not only support the right of the people of Afghanistan and Iraq to resist this rape and pillage of their countries, but also aim to help them. This does not mean engaging in stupid terrorist actions in Britain that only help the government whip up hatred for "the enemy" and bring in ever more repressive laws.

It does mean campaigning to mobilise a mass movement of working class people and youth to obstruct the government's war

drive, to take direct action to cut off its arms supplies, to call on soldiers to refuse to fight for Bush, Brown and the oil barons.

At this point in the discussion, the reformists in the working class movement, like the Labour MPs and the trade union leaders, will start raising the spectre of radical Islamism. Turncoat ex-leftist journalists like Nick Cohen of *The Observer*, Christopher Hitchens and David Aaronovitch, in the violent language that they reserve exclusively for the left, will accuse communists of capitulating to right wing or even fascist Islamists, of disregarding the rights of women, of pandering to anti-Semitism, or even, as Aaronovitch wrote of this paper, of being "Taliban Trots".

### Whoever leads the movement against the Americans and the British today will rule Iraq tomorrow when the occupation is defeated

Quite apart from the fact that communists fully expect to be denounced by such people, their argument wilfully misrepresents both the whole history of communist policy towards Islamist resistance movements and the tactics that communists propose today for the advance of the struggle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Iraq today the working class movement – the new trade unions and the communist parties – should be organising an independent force of workers and youth to participate in the resistance. That they have failed to do so leaves the initiative entirely in the hands of the Islamist forces.

Iraq and Afghanistan are awash with weapons; the working class organisations could create a militia, if they only had the will. Iraq's secular traditions, and its long history of communist organisation, would mean that the workers could provide a pole of attraction for those, who want to fight the occupation but are committed to democ-

racy and socialism rather than to Islamist policies.

What approach would a working class force take to the other resistance organisations? It would maintain its independence, and it would also appeal for united action against the occupiers, to maximise opportunities for victory. It could frame its appeal for united action in such a way as to mobilise the greatest possible support from the working class and the youth, who currently look to the Islamists because they are the only forces struggling against the invaders.

They would appeal to the other resistance organisations to mobilise the women as well as the men, challenging the sexism and discrimination that Islamists can never challenge and wish to institutionalise still further. They would fight for trade union action against the imperialist multinationals and the puppet government.

They would fight to bring the working class to the head of the struggle to liberate Iraq, and to win greater support than the Islamist organisations, so that once the occupiers are expelled, the working class itself can establish a government of its own, a socialist government based on direct working class democracy. One thing is indisputable; whoever leads the movement against the Americans and the British today will rule Iraq tomorrow when the occupation is defeated.

This policy was first codified by the revolutionary Communist International in the early 1920s. It is called the anti-imperialist united front, and its necessity today is very clear in the case of Iraq. That is why, all around the world, communists of every country should support the resistance to the American and British occupation, and should work to encourage Iraqi and Afghan workers, poor peasants, revolutionary youth and socialists to form an independent component of the resistance, struggling to come to the head of the movement, to develop the rebellion against national oppression into a revolution against imperialism and the rule of the capitalists.

For the policy of the anti-imperialist united front to become once again a guiding principle of the working class around the world, we need one thing: a new Communist International, a Fifth International.