

workers power

May 2008 ★ Price £1 / €1.50 Issue 325

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

- **Punished at the polls for kicking the poor**
- **Row over 10p tax rate exposes anti-worker policies**
- **Pay cuts for millions of public sector workers**



BREAK FROM LABOUR

WORKERS NEED THEIR OWN PARTY

No holding back on union struggles to save this hopeless government

Inside:

- **Food price rises spark revolts**
- **SWP's Left List humiliated in elections**
- **Workers strike back to defend pay**
- **Nepalese Communists take power**
- **May '68: France on edge of revolution**



**League for the
Fifth International**

EDITORIAL

New Labour rots away

By Jeremy Dewar

It was appropriate that the scale of Labour's unpopularity became apparent on May Day – not only international workers' day, but 11 years to the day since Tony Blair came to office.

And what a pummelling they got. With a mere 24 per cent of the vote, Labour fell a full 20 points behind the Conservatives, and even behind the Liberal Democrats: its worst result for 40 years. Labour lost nine councils, 331 councillors, and the mayor of London.

The collapse in Labour's vote was neither sudden nor unforeseeable. It won a 67-seat majority in the 2005 general election with just 35.3 per cent of the votes, and 22 per cent of the electorate. Their sweeping victory was a mirage; caused by the grossly unfair first-past-the-post electoral system and abstention by millions of workers.

The problem for Gordon Brown's team is not just mid-term blues, inflation and the economic downturn. It runs deeper than that. New Labour has hit the rocks.

The Blair-Brown project won dominance in the Labour Party after its defeat of 1992. They said that Labour had to win over middle England, i.e. the middle classes, if it was ever to gain power again. The pair set about severing the party's paper-thin ties to socialism by ditching Clause IV. Instead it proclaimed a Third Way, preserving the Thatcher revolution: anti-union laws, low inflation, rising house prices, privatisation, shifting the tax burden from rich to the poor, "choice" in education and health, i.e. two-tier public services. All this would keep the middle classes happy. And for a decade – thanks to a near continuous economic boom – it did.

The working class, it was argued, had nowhere

else to go. Despite deteriorating council estates, poor quality schools and hospitals and stagnant incomes, they would vote Labour simply because it was not the Tory party.

Despite the fraying of workers' support at the edges, the supine capitulation of the trade union leaders and Labour left MPs ensured no alternative was built. The middle class cashed in on soaring house prices and, above all, the rich – the City of London and the giant multinational corporations – got richer.

It was when this boom faltered, that the New Labour ship foundered. The middle class, whose loyalty to New Labour was based on the latter's ability to provide undeserved privileges, returned to the Tories. Once house prices started falling, the stock market faltered, and inflation began to erode their salaries, Labour's new friends couldn't be seen for dust.

To rebuild this cross-class alliance as an election winner is not possible. Brown cannot find the policies that will win back the middle class and, at the same time, restore his base among the workers. Why? Because the two classes have different interests. The upper middle class and rich want cuts in business tax, but workers want pay rises above inflation. Brown's attempt to double tax for the poorest workers may have backfired, but he remains 100 per cent determined to hold down pay for public sector workers – and the Tories are right behind him on this.

Brown's own instincts are to swing to the right, because that is where the Tory threat is coming from. So he has touted tougher controls on skilled immigrants, scrapping fuel tax rises and "green" taxes, help for first time home buyers. But these are piffing and the Tories are offering more.

Ironically, this all puts the union leaders in

a position of unusual strength. But they will only use it effectively if they are forced to do so from below. The tremendous one day strike on 24 April showed that hundreds of thousands are furious at the pay cuts and are ready to take militant action. So why won't the union leaders step up the action and call an all-out strike?

The fact is that not one of the big three union chiefs has the bottle to do anything that would harm Brown's electability. Thus they will swallow the nasty medicine of his economic strategy of making the workers pay for it.

Hence the real wage cuts and lack of money for council housing and public services. If the union leaders continue to hold back struggles during the crisis and coming recession, then not only will we be in a worse position to resist the next government, but Labour will still not win the next election.

Not for the first time in the past decade, the working class is faced with the urgent need to break its unions from Labour and form its own party. At every meeting convened to discuss resistance to Labour's public sector wage cuts, members should demand their unions stop funding the party. We need emergency motions at each union conference to disaffiliate from Labour and use our funds to campaign for, and convene a conference to found a new party.

We need a party that will give a lead to today's struggles on the streets, in the workplaces, in the schools and colleges. A workers party would stand in elections on policies for working class people and to end capitalist exploitation altogether. But it would be about more than votes. A new workers party could be a mass fighting force in the workplaces and on the streets to take on the bosses' government – whichever party forms it.

Workers' action to beat inflation

Inflation is hitting more and more people week in, week out. Look at these annual price leaps, for example:

- A kilo of Tesco garden peas from £1.10 to £1.79
- A dozen Sainsbury's eggs from £1.75 to £2.58
- A bag of Asda pasta up from 37p to 67p.

Food price inflation is running at 15 per cent, according to mySupermarket.com, adding £800 a year to family bills – with, as we show on pages 12-13, worse to come.

And it's not just food. Household energy bills have risen by 20 per cent, with another 20-25 per cent increase scheduled for next year. Petrol cost £1.10 a litre, up from 95p less than a year ago, while the Opec oil cartel predicts that crude oil will continue rise from \$120 a barrel to \$200. House prices may be falling, but cheap mortgages have been withdrawn from the market, leaving millions with rising repayments but falling equity, a recipe for repossession. The era

of cheap clothes and electrical goods from Asia is also closing, as inflation goes global.

Inflation is way above the government's 2.5 per cent claim, or the retail price index of 3.8 per cent. Unions should stop using these bent figures and set up their own price watch committees, run by rank and file members, who have to live on our wages, to monitor the cost of living on a monthly basis. We could then use these findings to demand a 1 per cent wage increase for every 1 per cent price rise – not at the end of next year but every single month, and made compulsory nationwide. An immediate catch-up for money already lost is also necessary, with a £9 an hour minimum wage.

Across local authorities and the NHS, in schools, colleges and government offices, members can start by flooding union HQs with demands for immediate ballots for escalating action up to and including a united all-out strike

to smash the pay freeze.

The money is there – last year Tesco made 2.8 billion profit, HSBC £12 billion, and Barclays £7.2, while BP and Shell together made £7.2 billion profits in the last three months alone. Yet one third of Britain's top 100 companies paid no tax at all in 2007. We say: tax the mega-corporations and the rich to pay decent wages for all.

Since our union leaders claim they can use their influence inside the Labour Party to deliver reforms, then they should be demanding massive taxes on the rich and the return of the 10p tax band for the poor, a new generation of council homes and a living minimum wage.

But, given their ties to Brown, and left to their own devices, there is no way they will do this. That's why rank and file union members needs to organise independently of these cowards – for united, all-out strike action for real wage rises, and for a new working class party.

WORKERS POWER SUMMER SCHOOL 2008

Five days of debate and discussion on a host of topics

This year, the Workers Power summer camp will focus on

- The world political situation today
- Marxist political economy: a tool for understanding capitalism
- The 70th anniversary of the Fourth International
- 1968: the year the world caught fire

In addition, there will be special sessions on topics ranging from *Women and Islam* and *Palestine's Catastrophe of 1948 to Cuba on the Capitalist Road?* and *The Rise of Ecosocialism*

11 – 15 July

In a campsite near south London

Call 020 7708 0224 for more information

Music and films ★ Dormitory beds available, or bring your own tents ★ Food and bar

NEWS IN BRIEF

BREAK THE SIEGE OF SADR CITY

The US army and Iraqi government onslaught against those Shia areas that support Moqtada al-Sadr has been going on relentlessly since 25 March. The siege is comparable to that laid against Fallujah in 2004. *Azzaman* news reports 800 (mainly civilians) killed, and 1,800 wounded in just a three-week period.

US troops have built a wall to divide Sadr City in two, and have opened fire on women and children. They have reportedly used "fis-sile" weapons that are banned because their plutonium and enriched uranium shells cause leukemia and foetal deformities.

Iraqi MP Dr Maha al-Dori told *al-Jazeera*: "The hospitals are jammed with dead bodies... The occupation forces completely ban and open fire at any convoy trying to deliver humanitarian aid."

Irin news agency reports: "Garbage lies piled up in the streets, sewage channels are clogged, and drinking water is contaminated with sewage, producing an overpowering stench." The bombing of the Jamilia market has, according to the Red Cross, caused food shortages and a humanitarian crisis.

The antiwar and trade union movements should follow the example of the US dockers' union ILWU, which took strike action on 1 May to demand the immediate withdrawal of all US troops. Youth and students should call for British army recruiters to be banned from classrooms and campuses. Socialists and democrats worldwide should declare our unconditional support for all those fighting US and British troops in Iraq.

CHÁVEZ NATIONALISES STEEL

Last month, President Hugo Chávez announced that Venezuela's largest steel plant, Sidor, would be nationalised. This is a historic victory for the working class, after a hard 15-month struggle over pay and conditions.

Sidor's 15,000 employees were up against an intransigent management and violent state repression. The dispute was part of a wave of strikes in key industrial sectors.

At a May Day rally in Caracas, Chávez also told a cheering crowd of 300,000 workers that the minimum wage would be raised by 30 per cent to compensate for inflation.

Instead of praising Chávez, our union leaders and "left" MPs should demand Gordon Brown uses his state power to similar effect here.

IN THIS ISSUE

4 The local elections marked huge gains for the Tories and some successes for the fascist BNP. *Keith Spencer* examines the threat of a resurgent right – and how to deal with it

5 After the split in Respect, the SWP staked its political credibility on running as the Left List for London Mayor. *Luke Cooper* draws up a dismal balance sheet

6 The fight for public sector pay rises is at a crucial stage, says *Andy Yorke*. *Bernie McAdam* reports on the situation facing teachers and Birmingham council workers

8 Local residents and environmental campaigners have greeted Labour's plans to expand Heathrow with outrage. *Luke Cooper* calls on activists to demonstrate on 31 May

9 The Counter-Terrorism Bill would give the state wide-ranging powers to criminalise those who voice disagreement with British imperialist policy, argues *Natasha Silverstein*

10 Iraqi exile and activist *Sami Ramadani* explodes the argument of the AWL that the occupying forces provide a breathing space for the Iraqi trade unions

11 The US and Israel instant rejected Palestinian offers of a ceasefire. *Marcus Chamoun* looks at the Zionist atrocities and ways to break the siege of Gaza

12 *Kam Kumar* and *Simon Hardy* report on the global food crisis, which is pricing some of the world's poorest people into starvation

14 The LCR has launched a campaign for a new anticapitalist party in France. *Martin Suchanek* welcomes the initiative

16 In May '68, France was rocked by the biggest general strike in European history, *Emile Gallet* recalls the events and examines the actions of the left

20 The victory of the Maoists in elections in Nepal took many by surprise. *Simon Hardy* asks if they can make the break with capitalism

21 With Zimbabwe's election still undecided, *Keith Spencer* says the workers should rely on their own strength to resolve the crisis

22 Rifondazione Comunista have been voted out of the Italian parliament. *Dave Stockton* asks who is to blame

24 Spotlight on Fighting pollution, defending the environment

MAY ELECTIONS

The local elections marked huge gains for the Tories and some successes for the fascist BNP. *Keith Spencer* looks at the threat of a resurgent right – and how to deal with it

The return of the Tories

The Tories obtained 44 per cent of the national vote, won the race for London Mayor and are confident they are on the road to victory at the next general election.

But David Cameron has already indicated that he won't be throwing off the Mr Nice Guy image just yet. "I want us to really prove to people that we can make the changes that they want to see and that's what I'm going to devote myself and my party to doing over the next few months," he oozed.

Caroline Spelman, the Conservative Party chair, was eager to express her new-found "concern" with the low paid: "There's no question that the mistakes that Gordon Brown has made, including the 10p tax rate, has had an impact on Labour's poll ratings." For those who remember Margaret



David Cameron (foreground) and Boris Johnson at Oxford



Thatcher and Norman Tebbit this is all a bit unnerving.

The Tories know that they have to shed the Thatcherite image – the widespread view outside the shire and suburban heartlands that they are a nasty party in whose hands our hospitals and schools are simply not

safe. Hence Cameron's imitation of Blairism and the tight leash put on Boris Johnson during his campaign for London Mayor.

Occasionally, however, the mask slips. Citing the public sector and Grangemouth strikes, shadow chancellor George Osborne said

that he wants to restrict workers "going out [on strike] at a drop of a hat". *The Guardian* quoted one shadow minister likening the victory on 1 May to the "fascist march on Rome in 1922".

Of course Tony Blair preserved all the fundamentals of Margaret Thatcher's revolution: promotion of home ownership, "choice" in schools and healthcare for the middle classes, anti-union laws to keep the workers down. He just wrapped it up in touchy-feely language. Now David Cameron is doing the same.

A return of the Tories to government would be down to Labour's offensive against the working class, its attacks on civil liberties and its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The best way to get into shape to fight the Tories, therefore, is to strengthen our organisations in the fight against Labour's policies now.

How to smash the BNP

On 1 May the British National Party gained its first London Assembly member, Richard Barnbrook, getting 69,710 first preference votes (2.84 per cent) and 128,609 second preference votes (5.23 per cent). This was 10,000 more first votes than its candidate got in 2004, but nearly double the number of second votes, probably due to Tories switching.

Nationally in the council elections, the BNP gained 10 councillors: no major breakthrough and far from the 40 it was expecting.

However, levels of racist abuse and violence invariably rise wherever the BNP gains a foothold. Furthermore, the oncoming economic recession, along with rising inflation, will undermine the mainstream parties, offering the BNP chances of further gains, just like the National Front grew in the 1970s.

What should be done to halt the BNP? There is talk of relaunching Rock against Racism, after last month's carnival in east London. The Socialist Workers Party may

decide, after its humiliation at the polls (see page 5), that the Anti-Nazi League should be given a higher profile, rather than Unite Against Fascism, an alliance of celebrities, Liberal and even Conservative MPs.

We do not need another popular front, based on Tories, bishops and actresses. Leon Trotsky realised that such bodies use the fascists as

the real causes of these evils. How can you do this in an alliance with the politicians and the businessmen responsible for these ills?

To beat the BNP we need socialist answers to concerns over housing, local services and jobs. Labour has failed to improve the plight of most people. Instead, it has joined in the targeting of migrants as the

To beat the BNP we need socialist answers to concerns over housing, local services and jobs. Instead, Labour has joined in the targeting of migrants as the source of all woes

"scarecrows in the garden of bourgeois democracy" to frighten the electors into voting for the "respectable" bosses' parties.

Yet it is these very parties, which, by their attacks on, or neglect of workers' vital needs, have allowed the fascists to peddle their foul ideology, blaming bad housing, waiting lists, sink schools and lack of jobs on immigrants. To fight fascism it is necessary to point to

source of all woes. We urgently need a campaign on these issues that demands new council homes for cheap rent, well-paid jobs to renovate our run-down cities and rural areas, and good local services – along with arguing against racism.

Labour isn't doing this. That is another reason why we need a new working class party that fights at a local level for these things.

Of course, we need to continue

to expose the BNP as the Nazis they really are. Antifascist rock festivals and interventions to drive racism out of sport can help. But these were not the central reason the fascists were stopped in the 1970s.

We need a workers' united front against the fascists to physically confront their attempts to spread their poison or harass immigrants, wherever possible preventing them from speaking, holding meetings or electioneering. We should support council workers, who boycott BNP councillors, and postal workers, who refuse to distribute their electoral hate mail.

If the economic crisis leads to a serious growth in the fascists; if they try to take to the streets in marches through immigrant areas, as they did in the 1970s; if they create street gangs to smash picket lines and socialist meetings, as they also tried then; trade unionists, youth and students must build massive counter-mobilisations, drawing in black and migrant organisations, and drive them off the streets, as we did in Lewisham in 1977.

Left List humiliated in local elections

After the split in Respect, the Socialist Workers Party staked its political credibility on running Lindsey German for London Mayor. *Luke Cooper* draws up a balance sheet of the Left List

In its post-election analysis, the Socialist Workers Party and the Left List focused heavily on Labour's meltdown, saying this represented a rejection of the party's policies on privatisation, war, and anti-working class taxation. Indeed, laughably, they are trying to blame Labour's collapse for their own meltdown.

"All the left from Livingstone to the Left List were overwhelmed by the massive rejection of New Labour that benefited the Tories and, even more worryingly, the BNP."

Why a party of war, privatisation and the super-rich – let alone a party of vicious racism – should have squeezed the Left List's vote is hard to fathom.

The Left List results were indeed abysmal. Lindsey German, in the London mayoral contest, scored 16,796 votes – just 0.68 per cent of the vote. In the London Assembly elections, they fared little better, with 22,583 votes – still less than 1 per cent. Even *Socialist Worker* was forced to concede that the results in London were "disappointing" but took heart from better scores in Preston and Sheffield. Nevertheless, they have not added to their tiny number of council seats.

To add insult to injury, George Galloway's Respect Renewal fared noticeably better. In the London Assembly, its list won nearly 60,000 votes – two and a half times the Left List tally. It also picked up another council seat in Birmingham Sparkbrook.

To put the Left List results in perspective, let's compare them with the London Socialist Alliance's performance in 2000. Back then – before another Labour landslide general election victory – the LSA averaged 3.1 per cent in the London constituency elections.

The SWP, however, was not satisfied with such paltry results. After the great antiwar movement, believing Muslim communities that

Lindsey German urging workers to vote Left List

mobilised *en masse* on 15 February could be turned into an electoral base, they dropped the Socialist Alliance for being "too explicitly socialist". They formed Respect on the simple opportunist calculation that a left populist platform and an alliance with community leaders would bring huge electoral gains. George Galloway's results show his part of the split retains these links. The SWP's – except in one or two council wards in Preston, Sheffield and Manchester – do not.

Should we laugh or cry?

Thus, the SWP in its election work dropped socialism and anticapitalism, called defence of abortion and lesbian and gay rights a disposable "shibboleth", along with working class politics as such, all in the hope of winning more votes. But it has ended up with less than a third of the votes it had won on the Socialist Alliance platform.

The SWP leadership is struggling to explain this disaster. It staked much on the campaign winning a credible result – in fact, it even seemed to expect it. Three days before the election, Lindsey German said: "Unless there's a big change in the next three days, I don't suppose I will be mayor of

London – but I am hoping I will get a good vote for mayor... I do hope that we can get on the assembly – that's the vote for the smaller parties," adding, "I nearly got that last time, I nearly got 5 per cent."

But the real crime was how the SWP used the election campaign. Despite the split, the Left List manifesto remained indistinguishable from Respect – albeit with a more "old Labour" emphasis on social inequality and the odd reference to the need for working people to have their own party. However, the words "socialism", "capitalism" and "class" did not figure. Even the war was mentioned less – and much less militantly – than in 2004.

It did not use its platform to agitate for "extra-parliamentary" struggles: the fight against public sector pay cuts, resistance to anti-immigrant racism, the campaign to get the troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq. German, John Rees and co. could have clearly identified the source of all these ills in the capitalist system and imperialism.

Instead they just pushed out *ersatz* reformist vote-for-me material. Naturally most working class voters preferred a real reformist like Ken Livingstone and his party, which, if elected, could carry out

some of those reforms.

It should be elementary for Marxists to use elections both to popularise an anticapitalist action programme, and to agitate among a huge audience for a fighting organisation, a new working class party. Not so for the SWP leaders. Only now, after the election, do they talk about resistance on the streets.

Where now for the SWP?

Those most closely associated with the Left List disaster might point to credible results in one or two wards, and argue that they are the seeds of a future mass workers party. Indeed, the Socialist Party and Respect Renewal might do the same.

But this would be worse than useless; it would be a crime to prolong a tactic, which is not a route to a new party, but a roadblock.

The Left List did so badly, however, that it is sure to prompt a renewed debate within the SWP. One result could be that they make one of their famous "turns": this time away from elections and towards trade union or antifascist work, for example.

But this, like the SWP's four-year diversion with Respect and the Left List, ignores the burning issue for workers – the necessity of a new working class party. At a time when vanguard workers, like those in the RMT, the FBU and other unions, are looking for a working class alternative to New Labour, the SWP's populist vote catching was an obstacle. And it failed miserably.

Now the economic crisis poses point blank the question of what demands and actions socialists need to propose for working class resistance. These need to be codified into a programme that revolutionaries take to the class, one that links the immediate economic and social concerns to the goal of the working class seizure of power. But without an organisation – a party – this resistance will be far weaker.

UNIONS

On 24 April teachers, lecturers, civil servants and Birmingham council workers took strike action. *Bernie McAdam* reports on Birmingham's big walk-out and the teachers' dispute, while *Andy Yorke*, below, puts the case for making it a summer of discontent

Birmingham ground to a standstill on Thursday 24 April, as 20,000 council workers, as well as thousands of teachers, civil servants and lecturers, took strike action. Council workers from five different unions had already started their strike on Wednesday against attempts to re-grade their jobs and cut the pay of 5,000 workers – in some cases by thousands of pounds.

The council had waged a scurrilous campaign to crack the strike with red scare stories, videos and demands for another ballot.

The "video nasty" stars council chief Stephen Hughes oozing crocodile tears for the workers, while he slashes men's pay in order to "equalise" it to women's pay. What a scandal that 38 years after the Equal Pay Act and 11 years after the Single Status Agreement, women workers' fight for equality with men could now end in a reverse for the whole working class.

Indeed, if Birmingham council, the biggest local authority in Britain wins, it could lead to a rout against working men and women across the country.

Not surprisingly Hughes has not had his contract rewritten or his £175,000 a year salary docked.

On Wednesday it seemed their tactics had paid off, as three out of

four refuse depots were open. But Thursday was different – binmen and women in three of the four depots came back out on strike.

Across Birmingham, libraries, schools, leisure centres, job centres and other services were hit as teach-

ers, civil servants and lecturers joined the fray. Up to 250 schools were closed, plus numerous colleges and neighbourhood centres. Picket lines in the morning were followed by a march and rally in the city centre by 2,000 strikers.

Speakers from all the major unions in struggle spoke. Caroline Johnson, assistant secretary of Birmingham City Council Unison, drew applause, as she berated the council and the government for failing workers and supporting big business and the banks. She warned that, if talks the next week didn't get anywhere, "We'll be back here again."

Unfortunately, neither Johnson nor PCS President Janice Godrich – supporters of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party respectively – set out a strategy to win. The action must be escalated immediately if the Council continues to play its silly negotiating games with workers' livelihoods.

Whenever action is halted, the council goes on the offensive. But an all-out indefinite strike could swiftly break the council's resolve.

Most strikers on the demo acknowledged the political nature of the dispute, with both the Labour government and the local Tory-Liberal Democrat council ultimately responsible for the cuts.

Many told us that they would be voting for none of the three main parties. What is needed is for the major unions to break with Labour and form a new mass workers party – committed to making the bosses and the rich pay for the oncoming crisis, not the workers.

Birmingham



Make 24 April the start of a

The one day strike on 24 April of more than 350,000 teachers, college lecturers, civil servants and Birmingham council workers was a great success. Reports from up and down the country show the first national teachers' strike in 21 years shut nearly 10,000 schools. Birmingham, Britain's second biggest city, ground to a halt as 25,000 public sector workers walked off the job.

More than 50 local rallies and marches, organised by the National Union of Teachers, Universities and Colleges Union and public and Commercial Services union gathered many young workers striking for the first time. Activists and officials in the NUT and UCU reported

thousands joining the union in the run up to the strike.

There are 1.4 million local government workers and 500,000 NHS workers moving towards ballots over pay in the early summer. Six unions, which organise 250,000 workers in local colleges, have rejected the government's pay offer of 2.5 per cent, while the Communication Workers Union is moving towards a ballot over cuts to post workers' pensions.

If all the ballots led to action and public sector unions struck on the same day, up to 3 million workers could be out, making it the biggest strike in British history.

What we need are ballots for "discontinuous" action. This sounds

like it's against all-out strikes, but it's not. It means we have the remit to strike, then strike again, quickly escalating the action up to an all-out strike. This militant, mass action could swiftly smash through Brown's 2 per cent pay limit.

But last autumn a united public sector strike never materialised despite speeches and even a TUC motion about unity. The union tops sabotaged it. So how can public sector workers turn words into deeds and force their leaders to act?

Rank and file control

In our unions, we need to fight for rank and file members' control of our disputes. To win, we need to:

- Organise *strike committees* in

our workplaces, based on directly elected and recallable delegates, to begin the build-up and draw the younger, enthusiastic members into actively organising the action. This way, we can defend and extend our action locally and regionally, just like the Birmingham refuse collectors did, when they picketed out depots that gone back to work. A national strike committee, elected from regions, localities and workplace delegations, could control all negotiations and set the pace of the strike.

- Build *action committees* in every town and city to bring together activists and officials, who want to take the struggle forward, from

The National Union of Teachers' strike on 24 April against Gordon Browns pay freeze was a resounding success. Over 200,000 teachers heeded the call. Many of the most enthusiastic were young teachers striking for the first time. Strikes electrified workplaces as picket lines were organised and membership figures shot up.

Pay is now so low that many teachers are leaving, and there are problems recruiting new ones. But low national rates are crucial to the government's privatisation plans, so that academies can attract the "best" teachers by paying more, while "sink" schools are only able to pay the bare minimum.

School meetings have since been organised around the country and, if reports from Sandwell and Birmingham are anything to go by, teachers want an immediate ballot for more strikes. The next executive meeting must heed these calls and co-ordinate action across the public sector.

Rank and file members of the NUT must assume control of this dispute. But how? Every school can elect its own strike committee and link up at association level. This way the whole membership can be consulted at every turn of the struggle for better pay. All of the striking teachers knew that one day was not going to be sufficient to beat Brown. It was a good

launching pad for more action but the original ballot should never have been restricted to one day.

Some on the National Executive are pushing for "rolling" strikes, taking teachers out, region by region, with some strike pay.

Any escalation would be welcome, of course, but long campaign of intermittent or divided strikes would leave most members

passive in their own fight, and could leave the government

space to go on the offensive. An all-out indefinite strike – with all areas out at the same time, and no region isolated to be picked off – is the quickest and surest way to win. It would provoke an enormous political crisis, and act as a beacon for the rest of the public sector.

We should also remember our demand is for a 10 per cent pay rise or £3,000, whichever is greater. So why NUT leader Christine Blower urging the government to "make sure that they're paid at least at the level of inflation – which we take to be... 4.1 per cent".

This ignores three things. First, the rate of inflation is very higher than 4.1 per cent. Second, we have already suffered at least 3 years of below inflation pay deals and need to catch up. Third, is she really serious about gathering support for more action, when she would settle for only another 1.5 per cent?

Let's get the ballot rolled out now. Resume the strike!

Teachers

strike wave

all the unions in dispute. Here we could organise rallies, demonstrations, supporting each other's picket lines – even joint strikes. Public services users could also join – they, too, have a stake in winning.

- Argue for the maximum action possible – up to and including an *all-out united public sector strike* as the quickest and surest way to win.

Labour-loyal union officials would be hesitant to unleash a strike involving millions of workers, because it would give Gordon Brown's government another battering. But why should we be made to pay for the failure of New Labour's neoliberal politics: privatisation

schemes, wage cuts, doubling the tax rate for the poorest workers?

There should be no holding back on the struggle for workers' interests just to preserve this rotten Labour government. In fact, our unions should stop funding Labour so long as the party is attacking us.

The TUC has called a lobby of parliament on 9 June over public sector pay. Instead of a polite, mid-afternoon rally, we should turn it into a mass lobby, march on Westminster and besiege MPs. There is still time to turn this into another, even bigger 24 April, with mass strikes. Let's demand our leaders do so – and organise from below to make it happen, even without them, wherever we can.

Grangemouth oil refinery strikers remind bosses of workers' power

By Andy Yorke

Grangemouth oil refinery workers in Scotland went on strike last month to defend their pensions from billionaire private equity vulture Jim Ratcliffe. They shut down the entire plant, costing the oil industry £50 million a day.

The workers voted by 97 per cent to strike on an 86 per cent turn-out; their action received support from other unions, and from the National Pensioners Convention Scotland.

Grangemouth is owned by Ineos, the world's third largest petrochemicals company, which is controlled by Ratcliffe, who has a personal net fortune of a cool £3 billion. Ineos made pre-tax profits last year of £370 million, but it has spent billions on aggressive takeovers, most recently the \$9 billion purchase of Innovene in 2005, which brought the Grangemouth refinery under its ownership. Laden with debt, the private equity firm is asset-stripping to fund further expansion and modernisation.

Attacks

The workers are to pay for this by having their retirement age raised from 60 to 65, paying more in pensions contributions, and creating a far worse pension scheme for new starters. The media has painted a picture of the workers living the high life, but in fact they work 12 hour shifts to keep the refinery running 365 days a year.

Grangemouth is an outrageous story of workers taking pay and pension cuts, while their workload increases, so their billionaire owners can become even richer.

But the Grangemouth workers have power to hit their bosses where it hurts – in their pockets. The workers know how to stop the plant – by withdrawing their labour, the plant ground to a halt, effectively cutting off the flow of 20 per cent of Britain's oil production.

The workers have now gone back to work and the plant is slowly

being switched on again. The Unite union has stated they are willing to call a strike again, if Ineos does not listen, but has entered into negotiations with Ratcliffe over new proposals.

The danger is that the heat is off Ratcliffe so long as the workers are back at the plant: far better to have continued the strike until he has signed an acceptable deal.

Nevertheless, by demanding regular updates, and holding mass meetings in worktime to discuss the company's bargaining positions, workers can keep the pressure up and prepare for further strike action, should it be necessary.

Beware

Workers in Unite must beware of their own leaders – after all the trade union leaders in Unite, along with Unison, have already agreed to worsen the local government pension scheme.

It was also T&G-Unite's leader Tony Woodley, who told the baggage handlers at Heathrow to go back to work after they came out in strike in support of the Gate Gourmet workers three years ago. This cowardly action led to the defeat of the Gate Gourmet workers and the sacking of two key militants at the airport.

The Grangemouth oil workers must guard against any such attempts of the union leaders to sell them out by taking control of the dispute. They have already shown they have the power to win, and could do so easily with an all-out indefinite strike.

Labour Party strategists, media pundits and neoliberal academics have long proclaimed we are living in a post-industrial era, where the working class has disappeared. Well, the Grangemouth strike proved that nothing in the capitalist world turns without workers' labour. As the strike threatened to bring all of Scotland and the north of England to a grinding halt after just two days, I wonder what these middle class intellectuals were saying...

ENVIRONMENT

Heathrow expansion is about profit not need

Local residents and environmental campaigners have greeted Labour's and BAA's plans to expand Heathrow with outrage. *Luke Cooper* calls on activists to demonstrate on 31 May

Anyone who has ever been to Heathrow will struggle to comprehend how it could get any bigger. It is already a huge, sprawling mass, the world's third busiest airport, taking 68 million passengers each year. But this is nothing in comparison to the proposed expansion.

If the Labour government and British Airports Authority get their way, Heathrow will nearly double in size. Not only is a new runway planned but also a sixth terminal, while current restrictions on flight numbers (like overnight flights) are due to be relaxed. If it all gets approved, Heathrow will be able to take up to 122 million passengers a year - the equivalent to building an airport the size of Gatwick right next door.

What is wrong with this? Aviation contributes significantly to global warming through the emission of CO2 into the atmosphere. Scientists agree that we have to reduce this pollution by up to 90 per cent in the coming years and decades if we are to avoid a climate catastrophe. The doubling of air traffic at Heathrow, however, will make floods, heatwaves, hurricanes and rising sea levels, which destroy homes and even lives, worse and more frequent.

LABOUR: SERVING CAPITALISM

Big business is behind the expansion. Heathrow is facing growing international competition, as the leading European hub, from other airports, like Schiphol (Amsterdam) and Charles de Gaulle (Paris). The London Chamber of Commerce and a coalition of business organisations called "Future Heathrow" (which is shamefully backed by the TUC, Amicus, TGWU, and GMB trade unions) have been aggressively lobbying the government for the expansion.

Greenpeace researchers exposed the so-called "public consultation", which ended in January, as a farce. The government set up a joint



committee with BAA - appropriately titled the Heathrow Delivery Group - tasked with engineering positive findings. BAA not only contributed the data on noise and pollution levels for the report, they were also even allowed to write whole sections of it. To top it off, the final document contains not one mention of climate change.

Gordon Brown's government had long ago made clear its commitment to the new runway. Even as the consultation started, Brown, addressing the Confederation of British Industry, said:

"We have to respond to a clear business imperative and increase capacity at our airports - and you have rightly called for action at Heathrow. Our prosperity depends on it; Britain as a world financial centre must be readily accessible from around the world... We demonstrated our determination... to press ahead with a third runway."

A wave of opposition mounted when the "findings" were published, forcing the government to suppress the submissions until they make a final decision in the summer. A poll on the Virgin website was, likewise, hurriedly taken down, when 94 per cent of respondents said they were opposed to the third runway! But there's no disguising the fact: the public is overwhelmingly against it.

So how exactly can the government square their supposed com-

mitment to fighting climate change with building a new runway at Heathrow? The straight answer is: with great difficulty.

CLIMATE HYPOCRISY

They propose that carbon trading - the neoliberal solution to climate change, pushed by Britain and the European Union - is the answer. Basically, for all the fossil fuels emissions spewed into the atmosphere by the aviation industry, BAA and the airlines would have to buy up "carbon credits" from other businesses that have reduced emissions.

There is big money in carbon trading but no sign that it is reducing emissions. Rather than cutting emissions at the source of production, carbon trading just makes up for cuts in one industry or business by allowing others to go on polluting in the old way. The government claims this allows aviation to "pay back" the costs of its pollution to society at large - except that the industry benefits from massive tax subsidies anyway!

At one point BAA even tried to claim that a third runway would reduce carbon emissions. The truth is that adding a third runway will lead to an increase them by 9.8 million tonnes - the same as the annual CO2 output of Kenya.

Aviation already contributes 36 million tonnes of CO2 annually, some 5.5 per cent of Britain's total, and these figures only take into

account flights that leave the UK, not those that arrive here. In addition, these emissions are between two and three times more damaging to the environment than those made at ground level, because they are released directly into the upper atmosphere.

BUILD THE MOVEMENT!

On 31 May thousands of campaigners, workers and environmentalists will protest against the third runway, just before the government announces its decision. It is shameful, however, that the major unions - including the TUC - have all joined the chorus of calls for Heathrow expansion.

Trade unionists and socialists must join the movement against climate change. We need to explain how you have to get rid of capitalism and replace it with a system of sustainable and democratic planning that is responsive to human and environmental needs.

But we have much to say on the immediate questions as well. The fight against Heathrow expansion will fail, unless it can draw in the trade unions - particularly at Heathrow itself - and encourage them to take militant action.

The direct action of the anti-capitalist and environmental movement tradition is excellent - but it will be more powerful and effective if the organised working class is brought into it. Winning this argument must also mean relating to the immediate concerns of workers - taking up the fight for a living wage at Heathrow, supporting trade unions in dispute, and demanding relocation of jobs with no loss of pay on cancelling the expansion - could really bring the two movements together and make us stronger.

**NO THIRD RUNWAY
NO HEATHROW EXPANSION
GET REAL ON CLIMATE
Demo at Heathrow 31 May
Assemble at Hatton Cross at 12 noon**

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Thought becomes a crime

The government's Counter-Terrorism Bill would give the state wide-ranging powers to criminalise those who voice disagreement with British imperialist policy, argues *Natasha Silverstein*

Labour's Counter-Terrorism Bill will be voted on this month. Introducing the proposed legislation, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith said: "The threat we face from terrorism today is very different in scale and nature from any that we have faced in the past... The new threats we face demand new responses from us."

These "new responses" include, most famously, detention without charge of up to 42 days. At 28 days, Britain already has longest pre-charge detention period in the western world – compared with seven and a half days in Turkey, and only 48 hours in the US.

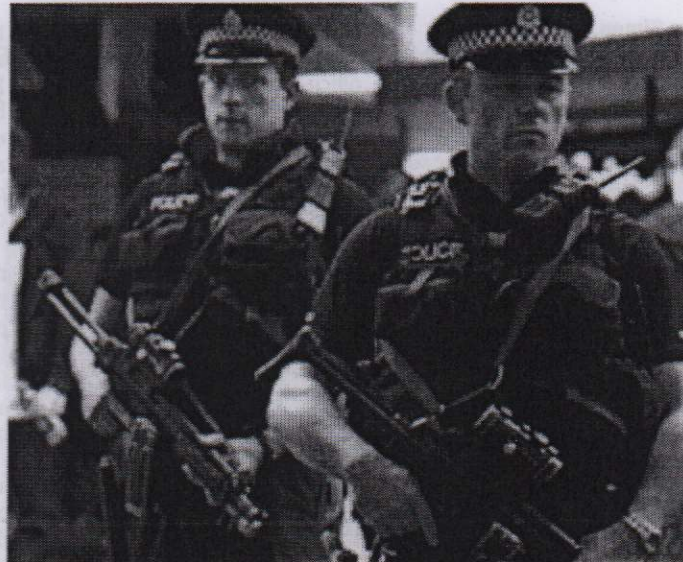
Smith continued: "In order to ensure we prosecute people who want to cause murder and mayhem on our streets, we may well need to hold them longer to do that." Or as critics of the extension point out, to give more time for the police to justify their actions after the event, or to find a reason to charge someone with in the first place.

What you can do under intensive questioning is find out if someone has any sympathies or shares similar ideas with those who have committed terrorist offences or are engaged in fighting back against British imperialist policy. The real aim of the new bill is to give the state the power to convict people on the basis of their ideas, not their actions. Thought becomes the crime.

Thought crime

Samina Malik, a 23-year-old Heathrow airport worker, came to the attention of the police from her postings on a social networking site. She was convicted of possessing records likely to be useful in terrorism. These records consisted of nothing more than poetry in praise of jihadists, and some publicly available material from the internet, including the ramblings of Osama bin Laden. The police were unable to prove that she actually planned or wanted to take part in terrorism. The fact she shared some of the same mistaken ideas was enough.

On this basis, half the Irish com-



Counter-Terrorism Bill – the lowlights

- **Detention without charge of up to 42 days**
- **Bans on foreign travel and lifetime requirements to report to police stations when away from home, even after sentence is served**
- **Ban on practical support for those opposing Britain's foreign policy**

munity could have been locked up, when the IRA was conducting a struggle against British occupation, for possessing some recording of folk songs lamenting the partition of Ireland.

Abu Izzadeen, found guilty this month of fundraising for terrorists and inciting terrorism, has been a hate figure since he heckled John Reid during a speech to Muslim parents in 2006. Later that year, police raided the home of another radical cleric, Omar Bakri. They found a video of Izzadeen speaking to a crowd in 2004, appealing for money and volunteers to join the insurgency in Iraq during the siege of Fallujah.

This speech – the basis of his conviction – was condemned as "emotive and inflammatory". But such language is hardly surprising in response to a massacre in which over 1,000 were murdered by US troops and white phosphorous was used on civilian populations.

There is no doubt that Abu Izzadeen is a reactionary, who opposes democracy and supports the 9/11 and 7/7 atrocities. But there is no suggestion that he planned or contemplated taking part in anything similar; rather, his conviction is directly about support for the resistance in Iraq.

As the prosecution said, while it was not illegal to oppose action in Fallujah, "Freedom of expression has however its limits and what is not permitted is speeches which are in fact appeals for monies to assist with the insurgency." In other words, it is illegal to give any kind of practical support to opposition to British imperialism abroad.

The new bill would give the state even more powers to criminalise opposition to British foreign policy.

It would introduce a new offence of collecting information, ranging from the names and addresses of MPs, businessmen or organisations, to details of where to buy tools that

could be used to damage property (which, as the charity Cageprisoners point out, could include the address of the local hardware store). The idea that anyone possessing such material has a legal burden to show a reasonable excuse – rather than the prosecution having to prove the person has it for terrorist purposes – reverses the fundamental principle that a suspect is innocent until proven guilty.

Secrecy

Coroner's inquests relating to deaths in police custody or prison have, until now, been held in public, with a jury. Now the limited accountability this provides is threatened, because inquests involving material that "should not" be made public (e.g. evidence from phone-tapping) would be held without a jury, in secret, in front of a security-cleared coroner.

This is a disaster for people, like Susan Alexander, whose son Azelle Rodney was shot dead by police in 2005. Having been told that no inquest could be held because police evidence stemmed from covert surveillance, she hoped a change in the law would prevent such restrictions and bring some long-awaited justice. But the new provisions would mean that an inquest could indeed be held – but only in secrecy.

The bill also bans those who are convicted from travelling abroad, and provides for a lifetime requirement to report to police stations when away from home. Having served your sentence you can still be denied basic freedoms and democratic rights.

The criminal justice system has never been "fair". It is always used to repress the poor, ethnic minorities and political protesters. Nevertheless, basic principles, like the right to be brought promptly before a judge in public and to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, must be defended. These principles are, today more than ever, under threat as a result of the "war on terror."

Once such powers become the norm, they will be used by the capitalist state to criminalise all those who challenge the logic of the system in thoughts and in action.

MIDDLE EAST

The Iraqi trade unions and the resistance

The leaders of the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) argue socialists should not fight for the withdrawal of US and UK troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. It claims that, were the occupation to end immediately, the Iraqi labour movement would be annihilated by reactionary Islamic forces.

At a recent AWL day school, one of its leading members, Mark Osborne, specifically claimed that Moqtada al-Sadr had a policy of "killing trade unionists".

Curious to know whether there was any truth in this claim, Simon Hardy contacted Iraqi exile and activist Sami Ramadani for his thoughts. Sami replied quickly, exploding the argument of the AWL that the occupying forces provide any cover for the Iraqi labour movement. With thanks to Sami, we publish his reply here.

Dear Simon,

Strikes were always crushed under Saddam. But in a fascist-style move, Saddam Hussein in 1987 introduced a new law (known as decree 150) declaring all public sector workers, i.e. the overwhelming majority of Iraq's several million workers, "civil servants". And guess what? Civil servants were banned from joining a trade union. Overnight, most of Iraq's workers were not allowed to join even Saddam's own yellow unions.

After the occupation, [US Administrator of Iraq] Paul Bremer decreed that Saddam's decree 150 was still in force. It is the only Saddam law that was ever specifically declared valid by the occupation regime. Furthermore, no trade unions, yellow or red, are legal in Iraq today, until such time that the government "enacts a law which will govern the status of all associations".

That some unions are operating is due to the determination of the workers to defend the most basic of their rights. The Federation of Iraqi Oil Unions, headquartered in Basra, is the shining example of such a union.

It is despicable of the Alliance for Workers Liberty to absolve the occupation and accuse the Sadr movement of assassinating trade unionists. It is the occupation tanks, jets and police-state tactics, which are trying to crush the struggle of Iraq's working class and its trade unions. Like you, I don't have any illusions about Sadr, but one has to base one's analysis of Iraq on the facts and not on a pack of lies.

It was no accident that the province, which was least controlled by the US-led occupation and the puppet regime, developed into the hub of independent trade unionism. Not a single trade unionist was killed by the Sadr movement in Basra, a city that they mainly controlled.

It was the British forces, which opened fire last year on a well-known union office in Basra. And it was the occupation, which was accused by the unions of the assassination of an oil engineer last year.

During the past several months, occupation forces have encircled

and threatened striking workers, and the oil and port workers' union officials have been threatened with arrest and physical liquidation by the regime and its agents. I do know that these unions have members and officials, who support the Sadr movement, though they certainly do not have a majority or control these unions.

While these unions were threatened by pro-regime militias (such as those of the pro-occupation Islamic Supreme Council), they have never reported being threatened by the Sadr supporters. With the occupation and the regime tightening their grip on Basra, trade unionists are fearing the worst and are calling on workers across the world to stand by Iraq's workers in their struggle.

The main aspect of the Sadr movement's activities, which did attract a lot of hostility from people in Basra and Baghdad, was their attempts to make women wear the hijab. But countless thousands of women in Baghdad and Basra con-

tinued to assert and exercise their right to wear or not wear the hijab. Reports in the media that they barred girls from going to school or women to university are false, and form part of a propaganda onslaught to justify the killing and crushing of the Sadr supporters.

Currently, among the Sadr movement's most outspoken cadres are their several women members of parliament. Yesterday [27 April] they led 50 members of parliament into the besieged Sadr City in an attempt to stop the US planes from bombarding the city.

Last but not least, the US, British and regime forces besieging and bombarding Basra and Sadr City in Baghdad, have killed or injured thousands of people in the past weeks alone. Aren't some of these workers or trade unionists? Or, as far as the AWL is concerned, they don't count because they are being killed or maimed by the occupation?

Best wishes,
Sami

Iraqi workers strike on May Day

Since Sami's letter, Iraqi trade unions have responded magnificently to the US dockworkers' call for an international "No Peace No Work Holiday" on May Day. At the same time that our American brothers and sisters shut down the US West Coast ports for a day, the General Union of Port Workers in Iraq took one hour's strike action at Umm Qasr and Khor Al Zubair dockyards.

Both sets of workers were united in their demand for the immediate withdrawal of all occupation forces.

The Iraqi workers' action is even more courageous in that it came when the US is laying a murderous siege on Sadr City, Basra and Nasiriyah, killing over 1,000.

The broader Iraqi trade union movement also responded to the US union's appeal. Over 20 unions, headed by the oil workers, signed a statement, appealing for "support for our struggle for freedom from occupation – both military and economic" – and demanding "self-determination free of all foreign interference".

Just in case Mark Osborne or any other apologist for imperialism mistook their intention, the workers' leaders spelt it out: "We demand an immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from our country".

The statement can be read at: www.uslaboragainstawar.org/article.php?id=15826

Gaza siege: Hamas truce offer met with murder

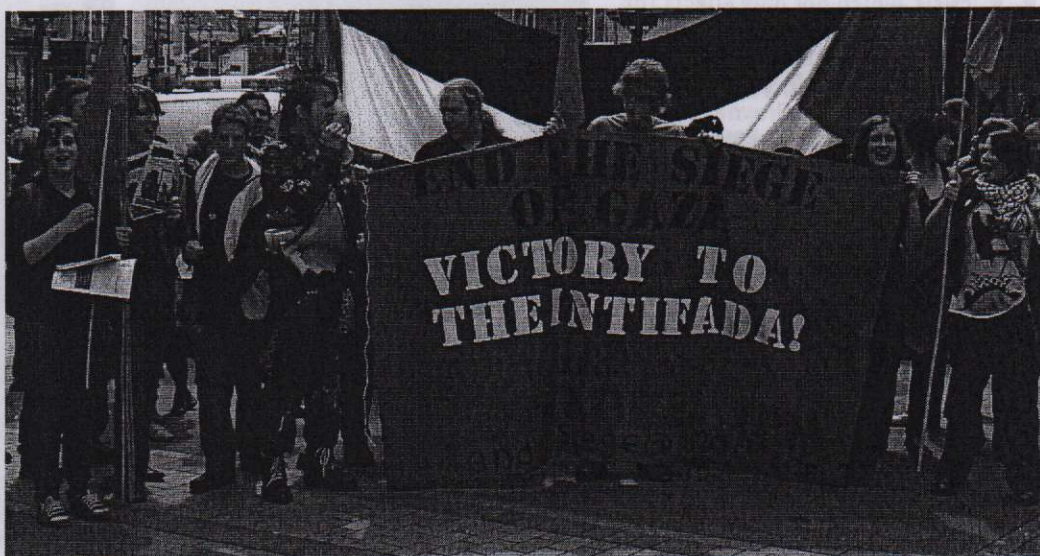
Offers by Hamas of a ceasefire met with US rejection and a renewed Israeli assault on Palestine. *Marcus Chamoun* looks at mounting Zionist atrocities and ways to break the siege of Gaza

Talks between former US President Jimmy Carter and the exiled Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, which led to offers by the latter of a six-months truce. Meshaal indicated that Hamas would be willing to cease firing rocket at Israel from Gaza, and begin negotiations for the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, without requiring a simultaneous Israeli ceasefire in the West Bank in return, insisting only on one in Gaza, and that Gaza's border with the outside world should be re-opened.

Israel's response was rocket firing aircraft to hit Beit Hanoun, killing a woman and her four young children, a 74-year old man and a 17-year old student. It is clear that the expansionist settler state will not reciprocate any halt to armed actions, and sees no need to pay any political or military "price" for Shalit's return, despite using his capture as a pretext for imposing a humanitarian crisis on Gaza's 1.5 million Palestinian residents. In Meshaal's words, Israel is not interested in a mutual truce, preferring instead to dictate the terms of a Palestinian surrender.

Meanwhile, the US and European Union continue to back Israel in refusing any direct contact with Hamas' elected administration in Gaza, in favour of its unelected Fatah counterpart in Ramallah. And this is despite a growing recognition from the Israeli commentators that only Hamas can reliably enforce a truce on the smaller Palestinian factions currently fighting alongside it.

Socialists across the world should denounce the Israel for its refusal to end the war crime that is the siege of Gaza, for its continued criminal attacks on the civilian population, and expose the outrageous lie that its actions are "defensive" one's dictated by Palestinian intransigence. Israel's siege was designed to scupper any negotiations that might place pres-



On Saturday 26 April 100 people marched through the streets of Leeds against the brutal siege of Gaza. The demonstration was initiated by Revolution, the socialist youth organisation, and supported by the Palestinian Solidarity Group, the Socialist Worker Party and others. Demonstrators carried, a gigantic Palestinian flag and a huge red

banner stating "END THE SIEGE OF GAZA. VICTORY TO THE INTIFADA" made our message clear to all the shoppers and passers by. Their response was very positive.

After the rally a networking meeting discussed what to do next. There was the upcoming protest at Leeds University against an Israeli diplomat who was speaking to celebrate the sixtieth

anniversary of the foundation of Israel and how to build for the May 10th national Free Palestine demonstration in London. Called under the slogans - End the Siege of Gaza, End Israeli Occupation, For the Right to Return of Refugees, it assembles at 1.00 pm at Temple tube station on the embankment, ending in a rally in Trafalgar Square.

sure on it to withdraw fully from the occupied territories, by turning Palestinians against Hamas and promoting Mahmoud Abbas' aid-dependent "government" as a party to a deal that would accept a tiny and dismembered Palestinian "state".

Far from achieving this, however, the siege has boosted Hamas' prestige in the eyes of all Palestinians, especially after the turn to mass and political methods following the breach of the blockade at the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. Ahmed Yousef, an advisor to Hamas premier Ismail Haniyeh, has said that: "The next time there is a crisis... Israel will have to face half a million Palestinians who will march toward Erez [on the border with Israel]... This is not an imag-

inary scenario and many Palestinians would be prepared to sacrifice their lives."

The risk that mass actions like this could make public opinion in Arab countries to force their governments to take action, or break the pro-Israeli consensus in Europe and the US, must weigh heavily on Israeli politicians used to dealing with people demonized as "terrorists" through the methods of unrestrained force.

The latest turn of the screw on Gaza is the suspension of UN food handouts due to a desperate shortage of petrol. It is to prevent the escalation of this humanitarian crisis that Hamas has been forced to reduce its demands for the Israeli concessions necessary for a ceasefire.

At the same time, we should

point to the dangers that any negotiations truce will bring. The reports of Carter's negotiators stress that Hamas is not really serious about its charter's non-recognition of Israel. It is likely that a truce might be the start of a process of political concessions which could open the way to a Palestinian Bantustan, in return for recognition of its rule in Gaza and a blind eye turned to its imposition of a theocratic government. At present US-Israeli intransigence makes this an unlikely scenario. But to prevent this in the longer term it is a burning necessity that a workers movement should arise to give leadership to the emerging mass struggle. And for this, a political party for the Palestinian workers will need to be built.

FAMINE

The first global crisis

Kam Kumar and Simon Hardy report on the growing food disaster, as some of the world's poorest people are priced into starvation as a result of the latest stage of the capitalist crisis

What started as a credit crunch in 2007 has rapidly escalated into a major crisis, which not only affects the world's banks, but is now emptying the rice bowls of poor people around the world. Capitalist globalisation, once heralded by George Bush, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown as the solution to Third World poverty, is now revealed as quite the opposite - its major cause.

Wolfgang Münchau, associate editor of the *Financial Times* wrote on 29 April: "It is no accident that our multiple crises - property, credit, banking, food and commodities - have been happening at the same time. The simple reason is that they are all part of the same overriding narrative."

This narrative centres on what Marxists call the contradictions of capitalism.

For instance, China, which, thanks to its cheap labour, has been able to produce low priced commodities for export to the USA and Europe. Up until last year, this proved a deflationary factor in the Western economies. But China's massive intake of raw materials, like steel and oil, and increasing demand for meat and wheat at home means its effect is now ever more inflationary.

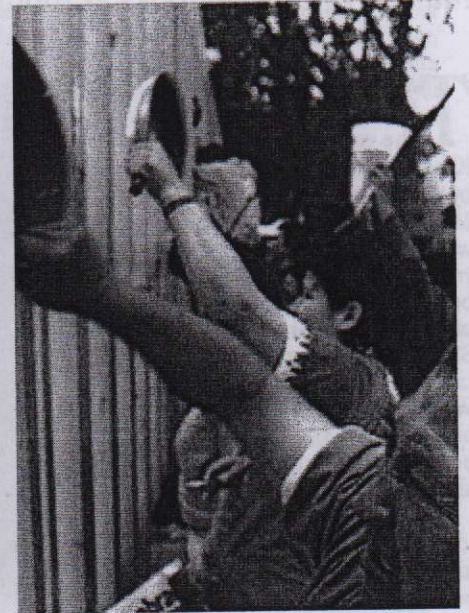
The commodity most basic to life - food - is now at the centre of this crisis. The 2.6 billion of the world's 6.6 billion people, who live on less than \$2 a day, spend from 60 to 80 per cent of their incomes on food. Inflation in food prices is driving huge numbers of them to hunger, and even starvation. According to The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in the twelve months from March 2007 to March 2008, prices of cereals increased by 88 per cent, oils and fats by 106 per cent, and dairy products by 48 per cent. The FAO general food price index rose 57 per cent in one year.

In Thailand - one of the world's main exporters - rice sold for \$198 a tonne five years ago, and \$323 a tonne a year ago. On 24 April, the price hit \$1,000. In Haiti, the market price of a 50 kilo sack of rice doubled in one week at the end of March.

Nor is this crisis limited to the "developing" world. The US Food Research and Action Centre calculates that 35 million Americans - 10.9 per cent of all households - are already struggling to put enough food on the table. There are now 200 regional food banks distributing food to 30,000 soup kitchens in the US.

Food Riots

While George Bush offers the helpful advice that genetically modified seeds are the solution - a measure that would put third world countries



Food riots in Egypt (left) and Mexico

even further into the clutches of biotech giant Monsanto, the world's poor have been taking to the streets. Haiti, Egypt, Indonesia and Zimbabwe have seen some of the worst riots. People, whose standard of living has improved marginally, or even declined after a decade of globalisation, have now become more and more desperate as their most basic needs are threatened.

Protesters all over the world have met with violence from the state. In Haiti, demonstrations that the BBC described as a "hungry mob" tried to storm the presidential palace in the capital city, Port-au-Prince. Five protesters were shot dead and many others injured. In Cameroon in February this year, forty were killed. President René Préval, who first claimed there were no actions he could take, hastily announced a 16 per cent cut in the wholesale price of rice.

"Hunger riots" have taken place in Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Hon-

duras, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mexico, Niger, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Zambia.

These uprisings of the poor have struck fear into the meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, whose directors and their political masters fear more instability, in addition to the damage the credit crisis has already done to big business interests around the world.

So why has this food crisis happened? Droughts - such as the serious one in Australia, which has halved the yield of wheat crops in New South Wales for the past two years - help drive up prices. But these are not the prime cause. Capitalism's crises, even its agrarian ones are not caused, as was the case in previous modes of production, by crop failures.

Food shortage?

In fact, there is not a physical shortage of food worldwide - agriculture produces enough to provide every person in the world with at least 3,500 calories a day, significantly more than the average person needs. Of course this food is not evenly distributed. In Europe and North America food is still destroyed; farmers are subsidised to take land out of cultivation to keep prices high. In the rest of the world people are starving, not because there is no food, but because consumers cannot afford to buy it and small farmers cannot afford the investment needed to produce it.

**The Economist
commodity price
index: food: 69 per
cent increase in last
year, oil, 84.4 per cent**

of the 21st century

According to the Financial Times, on 17 April the cost of rice hit \$1,000 a tonne in Hong Kong, \$1,200 per tonne in Manila

Economists who have broken from neoliberal orthodoxy like Jeffery Sachs point out that third world countries, especially in Africa, have been banned by the World Bank and the IMF from subsidising inputs, such as fertilizer, improved seeds, infrastructure (storage facilities, access roads, transport networks, etc), for small farmers. Meanwhile in North America and Europe such investment remains heavily subsidised.

In Haiti, up until 1995, farmers produced 95 per cent of domestic rice consumption without subsidies, though their access to local markets was protected by import tariffs. In that year, as a condition for a desperately needed loan, the International Monetary Fund forced the country to cut its tariff on rice imports from 35 per cent to 3 per cent.

Rice imported from the US flooded in, at half the Haitian price. The country's rice farmers were bankrupted, and the country now takes 75 per cent of its rice from the USA, whose own rice farmers are subsidised to the tune of one billion dollars a year, and are themselves protected by high tariffs on imports, that is, the very same state measure that the IMF demanded Haiti abolish.

The growth in India and China's industrial production has not been matched by agriculture. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, worried by peasant discontent, the Indian government, with the help of foreign aid, undertook massive investment in agriculture in particular regions, like Punjab. New seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and agricultural machinery were deployed. The result was a great expansion of agricultural production - the so-called Green Revolution.

But since the triumph of neoliberalism, few such projects have been undertaken. The Economist reports that "spending on farming as a share of total public spending in developing countries fell by half between 1980 and 2004."

Speculation

The present price rises have many causes, including the conversion of land from food crops to harvests for biofuels. Climate change has also led to an increase in drought and flooding, both

of which ruin land for food production.

But the dramatic increase in prices seen in the last year also relates directly to the credit crunch. As complicated derivative investments become increasingly unreliable, the vultures of Wall Street and the City of London have turned to what they see as the safer option - making their money from buying up "commodity futures".

In effect, hedge funds have been buying up next year's harvests. This drives up prices, encouraging more speculation and more price rises. Traders also hold on to food, so that they can sell it later at a higher price.

A growing number of countries are being forced to take measures to protect their dwindling food stocks. Vietnam and Egypt, normally major exporters, have restricted exports of basic foodstuffs; while necessary for their own populations, this further drives up prices on the world market, and is leading to near starvation in, for example, Afghanistan, which depends on Pakistan wheat imports. India is considering imposing a blanket ban on trading in food futures as part of neoliberal policies to develop India as a world financial centre.

Revolution

Each day the global capitalist system is exposed more clearly for its incompatibility with the needs of humanity, as markets fail to ensure any kind of fair distribution of essential commodities. Food, oil and other essential commodities need to be taken out of the speculative markets, so that parasites in the financial sector cannot profit from others' starvation.

Aid is not enough; the workers and peasants of the world need to regain control of the resources they produce. Third World countries have the right to protect their farmers' produce from the imperialist countries dumping (selling surplus foodstuffs at below the cost of production) on their markets.

The workers and the urban and rural poor should demand the confiscation of the big farms, owned by the multinational agribusiness companies and local landed bourgeoisie, and ensure that they are turned over for production, according to a democratically agreed plan, to meet people's needs first, not for cash crops.

But a return to the old 1960s and 70's third

Within the EU, in the last year milk and cheese increased by 33 per cent, eggs by 17 per cent

The World Food Programme: The Silent Tsunami: every 20 per cent increase in food increases the number of people on equivalent of one dollar per day by 100 million

world development model will not help either. These countries cannot just pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. If they remain capitalist they will fall into the clutches of a crippling foreign debt as they did then. They do indeed need the resources that have been robbed by two centuries of capitalism and imperialism. The question is how to do this in a way that does not mean soaring foreign debt and unequal trading relations all over again.

In the imperialist heartlands the workers movement must demand the complete cancellation of the foreign debt of these states. We must fight for massive reparations to be paid the countries that have been plundered for so long, with no IMF-style conditions. We must expose the super-exploitation of the food multinationals and the biotech giants like Monsanto. We must struggle for workers power so that the vast resources, gambled on the stock exchanges and futures markets, or wasted in wars and occupations, are deployed to abolish end the state of affairs whereby a few feast and billions go hungry

But the fightback will be fiercest where the effects of the crisis are felt most sharply. Revolutions are born out of crises like this and can shake the rule of the capitalists to its very foundations. The workers and peasants of the countries facing hunger are not just victims of global capitalism but potentially its gravediggers. Once in power they can:

- Launch a development plan of to increase production on the farms and improve rural infrastructure
- Create a state monopoly of foreign trade, under workers and poor peasants control, to ensure food at home and its despatch to other countries that need it
- Develop cooperative production and a democratic plan to meet human needs and eliminate the madness of the market for good.

For more on the global economic crisis at www.fifthinternational.org

FRANCE

The LCR and the new anticapitalist party

With Nicolas Sarkozy completing his first year in office and more attacks coming, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) has launched a campaign for a new anticapitalist party. *Martin Suchanek* looks at how revolutionaries should respond to this

In the 2007 presidential elections Olivier Besancenot, candidate of the LCR, received 4.08 per cent of the votes. While this is not the highest vote ever for a far left candidate, it was far better than the rest of the “left”. Besancenot’s percentage was not far short of all the other left candidates put altogether. Anne Marie Buffet, general secretary of the once mighty Parti Communiste Française (PCF) obtained 1.93 per cent, Arlette Laguillier, veteran candidate of Lutte Ouvrière (LO), 1.33 per cent and the self-styled “unitary candidate” José Bové received 1.32 per cent.

This year in the 2008 municipal elections the LCR was able to put up 200 lists. In 114 cases, they received more than 5 per cent, and in 34 more than 10 per cent.

The LCR has shown itself to be the major force on the radical left with its election results and also a significant growth in its membership. Meanwhile, the mobilisations of recent years have repeatedly expressed the anger of the people with the French government, the timidity of the Socialist Party, and the search of vanguard elements for a political alternative.

So there was widespread interest when the LCR declared a year ago that a new anticapitalist party was necessary. Finally, the LCR’s 17th Congress, meeting from 24 to 27 January this year, decided by an 82 per cent majority to launch an initiative for the creation of a “new anti-capitalist party” to the left of the SP-Left and the CP. This would involve a process of local and national meetings (plus an international meeting), culminating in “the founding of a new party by late 2008 or early 2009. This would entail a congress beforehand to dissolve the LCR.”

The statement announcing this says: “There is a desperate need for an instrument promoting convergence among struggles that is able to put the powers that be on



Olivier Besancenot

the retreat and change the balance of power. Imagining that another world is possible is also essential to raise hopes. There are many among us who want such an instrument: a party meeting the needs of contemporary mobilisations. A party to prepare a radical, revolutionary change in society, in other words, the end of capitalism, private property of the means of production, the pillage of our planet and destruction of nature.”

It continues: “The LCR national congress issues a call to everyone: individuals, activist groups, political currents, wanting to join together in an activist, national and democratic organised political framework, a party building international links with forces defending such a perspective. “ (Call for a new anti-party, Congress of the LCR, January 2008)

Since then a number of local and national “initiative meetings” have taken place. Reports of these show that the proposal has attracted trade unionists and workers, disappointed by their reformist leaders; left activists; and also young people.

New party?

The LCR has not only grown and played a major role in the struggles of the past few years, but also shown a leftward development, albeit a contradictory one.

The LCR’s idea for a “new party” is in fact not new at all. From the mid-1990s, they pursued this goal. One concept of this is that it should be a “broad” party, i.e. it should also contain the CP and the Greens and even the “left,” “anti-neoliberal” wing of the SP. Parties such as Die Linke in Germany or Rifondazione Comunista in Italy were considered the model for this Perspective.

Clearly such a party would be a fairly unambiguously reformist party, not an anti-capitalist one. The “No of the Left” Campaign against the neoliberal Constitution, with its local committees was seen by the LCR as the basis for building such a broad, left reformist party.

The development of class struggle, particularly the movement against the CPE and the conflicts with the CP over the presidential candidacy in 2006, led the LCR to a change of position on what the orientation of a

future party should be. The LCR had proposed a “common candidate of the left” to begin the broad party formation process, but with the precondition that this list be democratically determined and that there should be no post-election formation of a government with the SP. The CP rejected this precondition, arguing that participation in government could not be excluded and which wanted to bureaucratically push through Marie Georges Buffet as the presidential candidature, posing as a “rank and file activist.”

Thus the LCR faced a dilemma. Climb down completely, accept Buffet, maybe even face the prospect of a post-election coalition deal between the CP and the SP, or stand of an independent LCR candidate. Much to the dismay of the right wing in the movement, the LCR leadership chose the latter course and, even worse, met with success.

Reformist revolution

This “left development” should not lead us to ignore the LCR majority’s opportunist definition of the character of the “new anti-capitalist party”.

In an interview Olivier Besancenot gave at the time of the LCR conference, he replied to the question of whether a new party should be revolutionary: “Probably not,” he replied, because otherwise it would only become a larger LCR. Even if much is left unclear, on this much the LCR is perfectly clear: the new party will not be “Leninist” nor “Trotskyist”, even though it will be “ecological”, “feminist” and even “Guevarist.”

International Viewpoint the English Language publication of the Fourth International asks and answers the question as to the new party’s character.

“Will it be a “revolutionary party” according to the traditional meaning of this word? What we intend to build is a party for class struggle, an independent party of the working class, a party mainly focused on mobilization rather than elec-



November 2007 demonstrations against Sarkozy's reforms

tions, a party for radical and/or revolutionary changes in society and for new politics committed to satisfy social needs rather than private profits, an anti-capitalist party. Most probably many issues related to strategy will remain open."

The LCR refuses to propose any specific programme for the Party, as this should come "from below". The party should rather be confined to a few limited "principles" such as those cited above. What the LCR has in mind is clearly a party of both revolutionaries and reformists, a party that rejects "either-or" in favour of "and/or" on this basic strategic issue: that tries to be both reformist and revolutionary.

But these two strategies are incompatible because they represent opposing class positions - the peaceful, gradual improvement of the existing system, which might sometime end in "socialism" is, as Rosa Luxemburg said, in Reform or Revolution, not just a slower more peaceable way of getting to the same goal but one leading to a different goal, the preservation of capitalism indefinitely.

The other strategy is based on class struggle leading to the revolutionary overthrow of the rule of the capitalist class, the smashing of the bourgeois state apparatus and its replacement by the rule of councils of the working class, in short the dictatorship of the proletariat. The fact that the LCR wishes to liquidate itself and build another party built on blurring reform and revolution is yet another and perhaps a final step

in its political degeneration. In this sense - in terms of its professed ideology it is a turn to the right not to the left.

Class struggle

In our view, an organisation built to bridge such a contradiction would not be viable and the demands of the class struggle, of any major upheaval caused by the onslaught of Sarkozy, would quickly face it to decide either in favour of reform or revolution.

Why? Because behind these two concepts stand mutually exclusive strategies. The very idea that both strategies and programmes can permanently co-exist within a united party, reflects once again distance between the LCR and the Fourth International on the one hand and the Trotskyism of Trotsky.

Also the LCR makes much fuss about how vital it is that the new party and its programme emerges "from below," etc. This is, on the one hand, merely a demagogic excuse for the LCR avoiding presenting its own political passport. On the other, it is a radically false view of how revolutionary programmes are developed. Competing programmatic, strategic, tactical and organisational proposals are openly discussed and then decided according to the majority decision and tested by implementation.

This last point - disciplined application within the living class struggle of the programme's overall strategy and specific tactics, according to the principle of democratic centralism - is not some sort of sectarian shibboleth, but a necessity for any

effective fight against the ruling class.

One urgent conclusion can be drawn from the debacle of the Left in France and indeed in other countries like Italy and Britain; that the working class needs a "new type of party", i.e. a combat party working in all the various sectors, in the trade unions, social movements and so on, the basis of party decisions and guidance. Only then can a party, not only be active in various movements, but also fight for a class struggle revolutionary leadership in these movements.

Here lies another of the fatal weaknesses of the LCR. Many of its militants do good work in the oppositional trade unions and student coordinations, or are active in the antiracist movement, or also hold leading positions in unions and campaigns. But the LCR itself had and has no strategy and tactics of its own for their members in these areas to implement and, on that basis, fight for a revolutionary leadership.

The policy of the LCR assumes, rather, that the task of its members is to more or less reproduce the spontaneous ideas of each movement. This leads involuntarily to their activists adjusting to this environment and the LCR members of the leadership bodies to the ethos of its apparatus. With this method, it is impossible to break the dominance of SP and CP dominated trade union leaders. This is naturally not possible for a party, which itself wavers back and forth between reform and revolution, i.e. having a centrist character.

Welcome opportunity

Today the leadership of LCR has taken an initiative in France, one which has the potential to attract tens of thousands of militants in the working class, in the banlieues, in the schools and universities, which could play a vital role in mounting a powerful resistance to Sarkozy and overthrowing him.

To the extent this provides for uniting action and providing a forum for debating a new revolutionary programme and party structure we welcome it and our supporters in France will participate in it. Unfortunately the strategy the LCR advocates for such a party, the idea of the hybrid party, represents the main obstacle to realising this potential.

That is also why our supporters will be arguing for our own revolutionary action programme and for a debate on the full implications of reform and revolution. Certainly we want to draw in the largest possible number of working class militants, those from a reformist tradition, those with syndicalist views, or who are just not convinced that a revolutionary programme is the only answer.

We believe that in the context of a united struggle against Sarkozy's attacks in the coming years they can be convinced, on one condition: that the revolutionaries remain true to their ideas and try relentlessly to convince them.

More on France in the latest issue of *Fifth International*, www.fifthinternational.org

MAY '68 – 'EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE'

FRANCE, MAY '68 – 'Everything was possible'

Forty years ago France was rocked by the biggest general strike in European history, *Emile Gallet* recalls the great events and examines the actions of the left

At the start of 1968 France had 550,000 students, well over a third of them located in Paris. Their numbers had nearly tripled since 1960. This spectacular growth was a reflection of the changing needs of French capitalism, which had undergone a feverish technological renewal in the 10 years following de Gaulle's seizure of power in 1958.

But campus facilities had barely expanded to accommodate this rapid growth. The lecture theatres were crammed to bursting and even the new universities built in the early 1960's were already in a dreadful state. There was mass discontent with this as well as the petty restrictions imposed on the youth by the university authorities.

Nanterre in the western Paris suburbs was the centre of this disaffection. The campus was built to house 7,000 students. Yet during 1967-8 there were 12,000 students, while the university cafeteria could only accommodate 100 people!

This explosion in student numbers occurred at the same time as unemployment began to take off. The long boom of the 1950s and 1960s was coming to an end. There were 450,000 registered unemployed at the beginning of 1968. There was a sudden loss of confidence in the future and young people felt society to be closed and unresponsive to their needs.

Youth under 21 did not have the right to vote and there was stifling government control over the media – especially the TV and radio. This led to a dull, old-fashioned conformity at a time when in imperialist countries – notably Britain and the USA – there was an explosion of youth culture. France seemed embodied in its ageing president, Charles De Gaulle: anachronistic, authoritarian and austere.

De Gaulle's prime minister Georges Pompidou had proposed an educational "reform" designed to get rid of "bad" students. A system of degrees by credits was to be replaced all at once by one based on years of study. This was partly the cause of the student rebellion. However, the most important factor responsible for the politicisation of this new layer of youth was the Vietnam war.

US imperialism's murderous attempt to regain control over South-East Asia, and the courageous struggle led by the Vietnamese people, radicalised hundreds of thousands of youth all over the world. In the month of February 1968 alone, there was a major Paris demonstration every week.

Just as the student movement had clear and definite roots, so too the general strike of May-June did not come from nowhere either. From the spring of 1967 onwards, a series of strikes, occupations and violent confrontations with the

police showed that the working class was becoming increasingly combative.

Origins

In 1966, wages and conditions of French workers were low compared with those of other EEC countries. Their wages were the lowest, their hours the longest (up to 52 hours a week in some industries) and their tax levels the highest. As the post-war boom began to fizzle out, the Pompidou government prepared a wave of austerity attacks.

Probably the most significant of the pre-May strikes took place in Caen, in January. There, 4,800 workers in the Saviem industrial vehicles plant went on strike over a long-running wage dispute. The workforce was predominantly young (average age 25), was largely rural in origin and had a very low level of unionisation (6%). And yet these workers, who the bosses no doubt thought would be easy meat, turned out to be extremely combative.

The unions' reaction to Pompidou's attacks was to try and channel workers' anger into easily controllable campaigns. On the 13 December 1967, millions of workers participated in a day of action against the attacks on the social security and health system. Yet despite the obvious willingness of the workers to fight, the unions merely set the date for another demonstration. The date was May 1968!

The final sign of what was to come can be found in the declining influence of the PCF, especially among the young. The PCF had no real voice among school and college students. It quaintly insisted on maintaining separate youth organisations for each sex! They did have a joint newspaper, with the exciting title "Nous les garçons et les filles" – "We boys and girls". But the prudish Stalinist bureaucrats were utterly unable to attract a generation that was beginning to experience the pleasures of the "sexual revolution".

But even if we can trace the origins of May to the growing international radicalisation of workers and the youth, no one at the time foresaw the momentous, joyous, explosion of rebellion that was to come. In March, Georges Pompidou addressing the Gaullist youth remarked: "Today, it is difficult to revolt, because there is nothing to revolt against."

Indeed, up until May, the French antiwar movement was nowhere near as radical as the German or the Italian movement. The anti-war demonstrations in Paris were not as militant as those in Berlin, Berkeley or London.

Paris was to be the centre of the May maelstrom: it had the largest concentration of students in the country. On the Nanterre campus, the Trotsky-

ists of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire (JCR- Revolutionary Communist Youth), with around 400 members, linked to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, and various semi-anarchist tendencies had organised protests against the university reforms (10,000 students had gone on strike in December 1967), against the Vietnam war and for the freedom to display political posters on the campus. These campaigns had regularly led to confrontation with the University authorities and to several pitched battles with the police.

On 20 March, a few hundred students protesting against the war attacked the American Express office in Paris. A JCR member was arrested, and two days later 142 students founded the "Mouvement 22 mars" (22 March Movement) to fight to get him out of prison.

This group was to rapidly become the focus of the student struggles.

Day of Action

The University authorities had forbidden students in the halls of residence to have overnight visitors of the opposite sex. The students rightly demanded to be treated like adults – although according to the law most of them were not! Focusing their mobilisation on the repressive nature of the University authorities, the "22 mars" began to organise hundreds of students in regular discussion circles.

An anti-imperialist day of action, planned by the "22 mars" for Friday 3 May was threatened by fascists. Fearing a large-scale confrontation, the Vice-Chancellor of Nanterre declared that the University would be closed until the exams, at the end of June. Faced with this arbitrary and anti-democratic decision, the "22 mars" called a protest demonstration in the Sorbonne University, in the heart of the Latin Quarter.

As the demonstration assembled, the atmosphere was extremely tense. The police were everywhere. Expecting an attack by fascists some 400 stewards controlled access to the Sorbonne and the university authorities threatened to close the University if the students did not leave.

The students had no time to consider their reply, because almost straight away the riot police drew their batons and waded in. In the streets outside, groups of students started lifting cobblestones and hurling them at the police. In a short space of time running battles broke between students and the police.

But at the end of the battle the Sorbonne was occupied by the police, the night air was heavy the acrid smell of tear gas and more than 600 students had been arrested.

1968 – THE YEAR THE WORLD CAUGHT FIRE



One of the lecturers' unions called for a solidarity strike on Monday 6 May, while the main student union at last roused itself from its stupor to call on workers to join a solidarity demonstration in Paris on Monday 6 May.

About 100,000 leaflets were given out at factory gates by mainly by Trotskyists and Maoists. Later, 30,000 demonstrators – still largely students, but now drawing in working class youth – marched through Paris beating off two police charges.

Every day of the week, 6-10 May, witnessed a major demonstration. On most nights there were fierce confrontations with the police. The number regularly involved grew to 50-60,000.

Night of the barricades

The 10-11 May – the “night of the barricades” – proved to be the turning point. Provoked by the refusal of the minister of education to reopen the Sorbonne and Nanterre, 30,000 students decided to take back the Sorbonne. They surrounded the university and faced repeated baton charges, tear gas grenades and brutal beatings. The students fought back with everything to hand. The streets were denuded of cobblestones, trees were cut down and cars were pushed into the road to form barricades.

Shocked by the police violence, the pub-

lic was repeatedly showed its sympathy with the students, and as more and more youth flooded into the Latin Quarter, the old university area around the Sorbonne, it was certain that the police would eventually be beaten.

Pompidou, who had been aboard on an official visit, returned to Paris on Saturday 11 May. He immediately took stock of the situation and caved in. All the Universities would be reopened and the reform would be shelved. But it was too little, too late.

On Monday 13 May a massive victory celebration took place with between 600,000 and one million demonstrators thronging the streets. All over the country, millions of workers went on strike to express their solidarity with the students and to protest against police violence.

Working class movement

The government and the union leaders hoped that was the end of the matter. But the movement, which until then had been limited to students and individual young workers, became transformed into a national working class movement. At the Sud-Aviation aero plant in Nantes, the workers had been fighting for higher wages for some time. Inspired by the students' victory, on 14 May they occupied the factory, locked the manager in his office

and called for solidarity from other workers in the town.

The next day, the Renault plant at Cléon went on strike. Finally, on Thursday 16 May, the Renault Billancourt plant, the symbol of the French industrial working class, and a fortress of the PCF and the CGT trade union, went on strike. Significantly, it was young workers who began the movement, against the advice of the local union leaders.

Within a few days, and without a call from any union, 10 million French workers were out on strike: around two-thirds of the workforce. More than four million of them remained on strike for more than two weeks. Two million were on strike for more than a month. The demands raised by the strikers were many and varied: pay increases, the removal of authoritarian managers, ending the attacks on the social security system.

Every sector of French society was affected. The industrial working class took action on a scale never before seen. Companies like Peugeot, which had never known a major strike, were paralysed. The mines, the docks and public transport were all on strike. The media workers – especially the state-controlled ORTF radio and TV station – fought for workers' control over what was said and shown. Opera singers, actors, footballers, taxi drivers, all

MAY '68 – 'EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE'

took action. The movement, without being called for or co-ordinated by any political party or union federation, had become the largest and longest general strike in European history.

And like every general strike, May 1968 posed point blank the question: "Who rules?"

But if spontaneous actions by young workers, inspired by the students and then drawing in older workers, was enough to unleash this historic event its development, its goals, its organisational expression depended on some thing the anarchists never understand – leadership. The workers had a leadership – even if at first it did not lead. Unfortunately it was a leadership that detested the very thought of a struggle for power. As the general strike grew, the trade unions – and especially the PCF-controlled CGT – did all they could to turn this revolutionary force into ephemeral or petty reforms. The Stalinists' desperately struggled to limit the influence of the revolutionary groups on the workers.

L'Humanité, the PCF's daily paper, originally attacked the youth who had participated in the "Night of the Barricades" as "provocateurs" and "scum".

Following the occupation of Billancourt, demonstrations went from Paris to the Renault plant virtually every night. Yet the CGT kept the factory gates firm-

**May 1968
posed
point
blank the
question:
'Who
rules?'**

ly shut and put up posters warning the workers against "people from outside the labour movement" who "serve the ruling class".

Where occupations had been launched, the unions systematically tried to weaken the independent organisation of the workers, wherever they could send them home and preventing the occupation becoming a living centre of political education. Where strike committees existed they were generally composed of local union leaders.

The CGT also did its best to keep the labour movement separate from the students. On 24 May, two enormous but separate demonstrations took place in Paris, one called by the CGT, the other by UNEF. In the provincial towns, this kind of tactic was more difficult, to impose and the two movements tended to mix together, threatening the bureaucrats' influence and showing the possibility of forging a united attack on the government.

Miserable deal

Deeply shaken by the demonstrations and by the abject failure of De Gaulle to restore order, Pompidou began a marathon set of negotiations with the union leaders who were nearly as frightened of the movement as he was. The agreement they reached – 7 per cent increase in wages, shelving of certain attacks on social security, increase in the minimum wage – were a few stale

crumbs from the capitalists' table.

As soon as they tried to sell this miserable deal to the workers, it became obvious that it was not enough. When Georges Seguy, leader of the CGT went to Billancourt to explain the agreement on 27 May, he was booed and shouted down in the PCF's industrial stronghold! Throughout the country, it was the same story. The strikers would not go back to work; they would not accept the agreement. The sense of expectation of the need for some fundamental change had taken hold of the entire working class. Reeling from the shock of rejection, the PCF and the CGT tried had to raise their sights, to turn the movement into pressure for a change of government.

They called another demonstration, on 29 May. Again 600,000 people marched, this time under the slogan "for a people's government". The smell of 1936 and the Popular Front was in the air. De Gaulle flew to Germany to a cabal of his closest military aides, while ministers began to burn their secret archives.

And yet, the next day, the tide began to turn. De Gaulle returned from Germany, having decided against the "last and fatal arbitration" of using the army against the strikers. Instead, judging well the electoral cretinism of those who led the workers, he called a general election and mobilised his supporters in a massive reactionary

The Trotskyists in May 68

During May, there were three major Trotskyist groups.

- *Organisation Communiste Internationaliste* (OCI), the French Section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.
- The *Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaire* (JCR), a youth organization linked to the French section of the Fourth International (United Secretariat), the *Parti Communiste Internationaliste* (PCI).
- *Voix Ouvrière* (VO, Workers Voice) group, today *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO, Workers Struggle).

OCI

Although claiming to be the representative of "Orthodox Trotskyism", the OCI was most conservative of the Trotskyist groups in May 68. During the "Night of the Barricades" 1,000 students of the OCI marched to the barricades. Then they marched away again. The reason for this extraordinary act of political cowardice was revealed by Charles Berg, a leader of the OCI: "20 or 30,000 students could not beat the thousands of riot police. I have no hesitation in saying that we were correct, having gone in orderly ranks to the barricades, to call on the students to break up their demonstration which was necessarily going to be transformed into a bloodbath." (Combat, 17.5.68)

When it came to the workers struggle, the OCI saw it as a glorified trade union struggle. For the OCI the key questions were those of the attacks on social security, the 40-hour week, guaranteed jobs, a generalised wage increase and for the abrogation of the university reform and the government's economic plan. (*Informations Ouvrières* 387, May 1968)

The OCI failed to raise the key question of workers' control in the occupied factories. By putting its main emphasis on the fight for "the weapon of victory: a national strike committee" without focusing on the key question of rank and file control of the strike, the OCI showed it was obsessed with maintaining its links with the trade union leaders, even where these bureaucrats were sabotaging the movement by negotiating with the government.

JCR

The JCR was right at the centre of events in the first half of May. They played a key role in setting up the "22 mars". Daniel Bensaid, today a central leader of the Fourth International, was one of the founders of the movement.

The JCR's militancy marked an important radicalisation compared with its parent organisation, the PCI, which had been carrying out "deep entry" into the PCF since 1953. At its foundation,

in 1966, the JCR too accepted this perspective: "The revolutionary party will only be created through the building of a left tendency in the PCF." (JCR leaflet, Caen 1966)

But by 1968 the JCR youth, headed by Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaid, had broken with this schema but had failed to adopt any serious tactics aimed at breaking the PCF and the CGT's organisational stranglehold on the workers. In practice, they often followed the initiatives of the leader of the "22 mars" movement, Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Although they pointed out the necessity of links between workers and students, this remained a position on paper: the real battles, according to the JCR, were to be fought on the streets of the Latin Quarter.

VO

In a similar way, the third "Trotskyist" organisation, Voix Ouvrière, also eventually made a "turn" towards students. When the first protests against the University reform took place in autumn 1967, VO explained that the students had no chance of winning and called on "the best of the university youth to break with their social milieu and put themselves at the service of the workers and of socialism." (*Voix Ouvrière*, 29.11.67, p4).

After the foundation of the "22 mars" howev-

1968 – THE YEAR THE WORLD CAUGHT FIRE

demonstration on the Champs-Élysées.

The PCF was only too willing to channel the revolutionary flood into the parliamentary watermill. It called on workers to return to work and to settle matters at the ballot-box. Pointing to the electoral victory of the Popular Front in 1936, the Stalinists assured the masses that the “people’s government” demanded on 29 May could be produced without bloodshed and suffering by the upcoming elections.

At first there was considerable resistance from workers and students. But without any alternative objective, disappointed but not defeated, the workers slowly returned to work. In a number of factories the police had to evict the strikers and on 16 June they recaptured the Sorbonne.

Failure of leadership

But woe to those who abort a revolution. When the elections took place at on 23 June, the PCF’s hopes were dashed. To their astonishment the Stalinists lost over half their seats, falling from 73 to 34 deputies. Even more staggering was the vote in the constituencies around the major factories. For example, around Flins, the PCF lost 25 per cent of its votes as compared to a year before. The Gaullists won 55 per cent of the vote and were swept back into office.

How could it end like this? First, it must be remembered that the electoral system was profoundly undemocratic. Youth

under 21 did not have the right to vote, and an estimated 300,000 youth of voting age were not on the electoral roll because of the government’s refusal to update it. Second, the PCF had just dramatically betrayed the May general strike. Young workers and students were hardly inclined to vote for it – or even to vote at all. “Elections, piège à cons” (roughly translated “Only fools vote”) was a popular slogan in June and afterwards.

Most importantly the general strike and the factory occupation movement had not generated committees or councils of delegates elected by the strikers who could have provided a check to the betrayal of the union leaders and a forum for the workers to select an alternative leadership.

The real task in those weeks was to bridge the gap between the workers’ struggle for immediate improvements in wages and against dictatorial management, for more democracy, and the desire for a different class power.

This bridge could have been built through a fight for transitional demands to establish workers’ control in the factories and through calls for a workers’ government, exposing time and again the reformist leaders refusal to fight for power. These demands should have been linked to defence of the workplace occupations from the CRS, another critical issue. The hold of the reformist union leaders

could have been weakened and broken by such methods. It could not be done simply by denunciations.

Unfortunately the young Trotskyists of the JCR (direct predecessor of today’s LCR and Voix Ouvrière (direct predecessor of today’s Lutte Ouvrière) had little or no roots in the factories. The lesson that many young revolutionaries in France and across Europe learned from this outcome was that a revolutionary Leninist party, rooted in the factories, was essential if mass historic struggles by workers and youth were not to end in betrayal and defeat.

Despite its sad finalé, May 68 played a fundamental role in shaping today’s French class struggle. De Gaulle lost the mystique of invincibility. In little more than a year he lost a referendum and resigned, The Gaullist “strong state” was scaled down and reformed by Pompidou. The PCF began the decline, which has continued unabated ever since. And May ‘68 continues to reverberate in today’s class struggle. Even more importantly, it contains a series of lessons, which are of fundamental importance to a new generation of workers youth. For us the task is not to repeat May 68, but to surpass it.

This article was originally published in Trotskyist International No. 11, May-August 1993 www.fifthinternational.org

The Stalinists lost over half their seats, falling from 73 to 34 deputies

er, VO woke up to the fact that one such important “service” was to get involved in the battles around the Sorbonne.

Political power

Thus while all three Trotskyist organisations called on the students to orient to the working class, they were all short on concrete proposals for how this could be done. There was no consistent campaign for links with particular factories or for speakers from them to come and speak to the students. Above all they were unable to give to the young revolutionary workers or the students clear tactics to defeat the reformist leadership of the labour movement.

Voix Ouvrière, although more militant, was also heavily affected by economism. At the height of the strike it declared, “Long live the general strike! Down with the reactionary Gaullist police state!” But for VO, the real objectives of the strike were very different:

“The occupiers will not go home, work will not begin again until the workers have at least obtained full satisfaction on the following demands:

1. No salary below 1,000f
2. Return to the 40-hour week (or less, where possible) without loss of pay, with the work divided up between all workers
3. Payment of all strike days, without which the right to strike means nothing.
4. Full union and political rights in the enterprises: for the right to circulate newspapers and ideas, for the right to assembly in the enterpris-



es.” (*Voix Ouvrière* 20.5.68, p1) These demands, repeated over and again by VO, were nothing more than what the workers were already raising, with a sliver of a transitional demand thrown in (i.e the sliding scale of hours in demand no 2). The incredible experience gained by workers through occupying their plants was ignored. No attempts were made to make the fight for workers’ control central. Nor was the need to overthrow De Gaulle and the Fifth republic placed at the forefront of their agitation.

The JCR understood better than the other two organisations the importance of raising slogans that went beyond the current consciousness of the workers and students. They called for the nationalisation of occupied factories under workers’ control based on factory committees. They also called for the opening of the books and warned workers against

the trap of “co-management”. i.e participation by the unions in the management of the plants. (*Avant-garde jeunesse* 14, 27.5.68, p5)

There are, however, two yawning gaps in the programme of all three organisations. First, none of them warned clearly that the reformists – and especially the trade union leaders – would try to sell out the strike. The key question of fighting for elected strike committees and local co-ordinations uniting students and workers as a way of preventing the union leaders and the PCF from signing deals with the bosses and was never raised.

Second, the question of overthrowing the Fifth Republic and all its anti-democratic structures and installing a workers government based on workers councils was not raised as a real alternative to PCF’s parliamentary cretinism and the antiparliamentary cretinism of the anarchists.

ASIA

Maoists take power in Nepal

The victory of the Maoists in elections to the constituent assembly in Nepal took many by surprise. *Simon Hardy* asks if the Maoists can make the break with capitalism

The victory of the Nepalese Maoists in the constituent assembly elections in April poses the fundamental question: reform or revolution? The country has been in a revolutionary situation since the overthrow of the monarchy in spring 2006. Now the Maoists can either go forward to socialism or end the revolutionary situation with a capitalist republic.

The Maoist party, the Communist Party of Nepal, fought a rural guerrilla war for more than 10 years against the royal family. When the king abolished the parliament in 2005 there was an uprising, called the Loktantra _ndolan (democracy movement), which saw a general strike and massive demonstrations in the capital, Kathmandu in 2006. The King was forced to climb down and reinstate parliament, opening the way to last month's elections to the constituent assembly.

Capitalism first?

The Maoists success caused stock market alarm bells to ring in Washington and New Delhi. The US had already designated the CPN(M) a terrorist organisation in 2003 and given the Nepalese government funds in order to try and crush the uprising. The Indian government is fighting the growing Indian Maoist organisations in the north and east of the country.

However, the Maoists have declared they would not introduce any socialist measures in the country. They believed, following in the tradition of Maoism and Stalinism, that a stage of capitalist development and democracy is necessary before going onto socialism. Central committee member CP Gajurel summed up by saying: "Without making some development...some capitalist achievement, you cannot go to socialism."

Deputy leader Baburam Bhattarai announced after the election results that "our party has no plans to confiscate private property...we promise full security to private ownership, property and investment." Instead of looking to the working class as the main force for social change, he said: "The government will bring together labourers and owners and the tripartite negotiations will come up with a new labour act."

They have even called for more private investment and boosting the tourism industry. Prachanda even explained in March that he wanted to model Nepal on Switzerland.

At the time of the overthrow of the Nepalese monarchy in 2006, the League for a Fifth International praised the bravery of the masses and said their three-week general strike and marches on the Royal Palace were like the February revolution in Russia in 1917. Since then we have had a long drawn out revolutionary situation that has culminated in the elections to the constituent assembly. While

many will see the abolition of the hated monarchy and the ending of the guerrilla war as a positive step forwards, much more must be done.

Authority

The Maoists now have all the legitimate bourgeois democratic authority they could ask for. Will they go forward and seize real power, smashing the remaining capitalist apparatus of repression and carry out the socialist revolution like the Bolsheviks did in October 1917; or will they act like the Mensheviks and preserve Nepal for capitalism and indeed imperialism? They may wish to make Nepal like Switzerland but this is a pipe dream. It will not be like Switzerland; rather without challenging capitalism it will be a land of sweatshops, exploitation and continuing misery.

The government has already given the answer to these questions and taken the Menshevik, i.e. the capitalist road. It has already signalled its reluctance to tackle the most serious social issues facing the country and Prachanda has even offered to meet the king and persuade him to give up his throne and enter politics by forming a monarchist party!

A revolutionary government would have to carry out:

- Massive land redistribution to the peasants including confiscations from the landlords and feudal barons.
- There must be a big investment in public works and building decent housing: 46 per cent of the country does not have basic sanitation.
- The caste system and all vestiges of feudalism must be abolished. In rural areas, peasant

councils must be set up to organise agriculture and production and administer justice. Full equality must be given to ethnic minorities with the right to self-determination if they so wish.

- The big capitalists must be expropriated and industry and the economy placed in the hands of the working class, organised into committees on a factory and regional basis. A democratic plan to develop the country can then be drawn up.
- A workers and peasants militia must be formed winning over both the Maoists guerrillas and rank and file soldiers with defence guards from the factories and the villages.

The Maoist-Stalinist theory which dictates first capitalist development and then socialism abandons the working class struggle for power, instead propping up a bourgeois republic and a weak capitalist class. Leon Trotsky explained in his theory of Permanent Revolution that the only way to consolidate democratic rights and development was to fight for a workers and poor peasants' republic, overthrow capitalism, make the first steps towards socialism and spread the revolution internationally.

Workers and peasants cannot rely on Prachanda and his party to deliver the economic or political reforms that they need. Instead a new party must be built through the south Asia region, one fighting for socialism and a revolutionary struggle against the landlords and the bosses – linked firmly together in a Fifth International.

For more on Nepal go to www.fifthinternational.org

Sri Lanka Trade Union solidarity campaign

Over the past 12 months the LFI has been working with a group of socialists in Sri Lanka who are organised in the Socialist party of Sri Lanka.

They are in the leadership of a strong health workers union, the Jhangara Joint Health Workers Union which organises over 2000 workers even in the northern areas of the country affected by the war. They are also establishing a plantation workers union that is organising Tamil workers in the central areas of the country, super exploited people. These trade unions are two of only five in the whole country that has a policy of opposing the war against the Tamils.

We are launching a campaign, the Sri Lanka Trade Union solidarity campaign, which aims to raise money for the trade union work of the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka to build a strong union movement which campaigns not only for workers rights but also against the war that is destroying the country.

Please send any money
Sri Lanka Trade Union solidarity
BCM 7750
London WC1N 3XX
United Kingdom

Make cheques payable to
Sri Lanka Trade Union solidarity

ZIMBABWE

Force Mugabe from power

With Zimbabwe's presidential election still undecided, and Robert Mugabe unleashing terror on the streets, *Keith Spencer* says the workers should rely on their own strength to resolve the crisis

Robert Mugabe lost, but is still President of Zimbabwe. Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change apparently received 47 per cent, with Mugabe of Zanu-PF on 43 per cent, which means that a run-off will have to decide who wins outright. The MDC has called the result "daylight robbery", claiming Tsvangirai achieved more than half the votes and may not enter a run-off.

The delay served to keep Mugabe in control and intimidate the opposition. Police and army have killed about 20 people, beaten and tortured hundreds more. Several hundred people have been arrested. Neighbouring countries have reported more fleeing political violence.

Mugabe has also used the media to warn against "sell-outs", such as Tsvangirai. Police chief Augustine Chihuri has even had the gall to accuse the opposition of violence and electoral rigging. Zanu-PF spokesperson Bright Matonga claimed that allegations of fraud are "the voice of Gordon Brown and the British government" and that the MDC's campaign was funded by foreign money, echoing Mugabe's fake anti-imperialist rhetoric.

MDC reaction

In the face of this onslaught, the MDC leadership has abandoned any attempt to build a movement against Zanu-PF, following a failed two-day strike. Former MDC MP and International Socialist leader Munyaaradzi Gwisai rightly blamed the strike's failure on the delay in calling it: "The opposition lost a very powerful moment immediately after the elections, when clearly there was a very excited mood amongst working people and other sections of society... It's only now, when they see that Mugabe is digging in, that they talk about mobilising for mass action. But in many ways the enthusiasm and excitement and anger has diminished, so it's much more difficult now."

Tsvangirai clearly does not want to frighten the imperialist and big capitalist farmers, who are backing him, by mobilising the workers and the peasants. Keeping them on board is, for the MDC, more important than ousting Mugabe.

Despite being formed by the trade unions in 1999, the MDC was quickly co-opted and taken over by bosses and white farmers. Its practical opposition to land redistribution and its support for IMF policies of privatisation and deregulation laid it wide open to charges of being a "western stooge".

So instead of leading resistance, Tsvangirai has been touring Africa, including meeting former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, who helped steal the election last year, and Kenyan prime minister Raila Odinga.

Kenya offers a possible model for solving Zimbabwe's impasse. Earlier this year, Odinga



South African protest against the offloading of arms from China destined for Zimbabwe

accepted the role of prime minister in a government where President Mwai Kibaki kept his post, despite electoral cheating.

Power-sharing is attractive in Zimbabwe because Zanu-PF would maintain the hold of the military and police over the country, while granting the MDC ministers. It would allow the normalisation of international relations, e.g. suspending sanctions and halting the exodus of refugees.

The US and Britain want the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to force through a power-sharing government in Zimbabwe. US envoy Jendayi Frazer called on it to use "maximum leverage" to prevent more violence, saying Tsvangirai had won, "perhaps outright". Gordon Brown expressed outrage at the delay and Britain has raised Zimbabwe twice recently in the United Nations.

Zimbabweans should have no faith in the SADC, whose only interest is to preserve the power of established African leaders. South African President Thabo Mbeki even claimed, "There is no crisis in Zimbabwe." Likewise, the UN, US and UK want a return to the sort of

neoliberalism implemented by Mugabe in the 1990s – the same policies that led to the workers' revolt against Zanu-PF in the first place!

Workers' solidarity

Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy" contrasts with the militancy of South African dockers, who last month refused to unload a Chinese ship, laden with arms for Zimbabwe. Randall Howard, leader of the Satawu transport union said: "Satawu does not agree with the position of the South African government not to intervene with this shipment of weapons. Our members employed at Durban container terminal will not unload this cargo neither will any of our members in the truck-driving sector move this cargo by road."

The Cosatu union federation called for similar action throughout Southern Africa, forcing the ship to turn back after it was refused entry into several neighbouring countries. Workers across the region must continue to block all trade that strengthens Zanu-PF and demand that their own governments offer aid without strings to the Zimbabwean workers and peasants, and cut all ties to Mugabe's regime.

This kind of internationalism could play a key role in reviving the Zimbabwean workers' movement. The migrant workers, who have fled Zanu-PF terror, could help form a conduit for getting political and material solidarity to the Zimbabwean unions.

Key tasks include forming action committees in the popular neighbourhoods and rural areas to organise protests, strikes, occupations and demonstrations against Mugabe – as well as defence from army and police oppression. They should demand the MDC and the unions organise mass opposition to Zimbabwe, instead of diplomatic manoeuvres. They could also organise the distribution of food, fuel and water, taking it from the bosses or Zanu-PF.

Finally, committees should act as forums to set up a political alternative to both Zanu-PF and the neoliberal MDC – a workers' party with a revolutionary socialist programme, addressing the economic catastrophe in Zimbabwe and challenging the rule of white farmers, black bosses or Zanu-PF bureaucrats, as well as the solutions offered by imperialism.

If the MDC does enter a re-run for presidency – as we go to press, it is undecided – it would take place in a climate of intimidation and fraud. But even an MDC victory would result in an anti-working class government, determined to return the country to profitability at the expense of workers' and poor peasants' livelihoods. Instead, the masses must rely on their own power to oust Mugabe and Zanu-PF, and fight for a workers' and peasants' government.

For more on Zimbabwe go to www.fifthinternational.org

ITALIAN ELECTIONS

Berlusconi is back

Rifondazione Comunista have been voted out of the Italian parliament. *Dave Stockton* points the finger of blame at the Stalinists for propping up the government of Romano Prodi

The richest man in Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, won a resounding victory in the Italian elections last month – a mere two years after having been swept from power.

Now he is back with a vengeance. Il Popolo Della Libertà, Berlusconi's bloc with Gianfranco Fini's "post-fascist" Alleanza Nazionale, and the racist populist Lega Nord of Umberto Bossi, will have a 101 seat majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Italian parliament, and a 38 seat majority in the Senate.

After his electoral victory, Berlusconi said: "We are now the new falange [the Spanish fascists in the 1930s]", while Bossi said that if the left opposes the reforms then "I have 300,000 men always on hand."

He has a solid majority to force through parliament the neoliberal reforms the Italian and European bourgeoisie have been baying for. In addition he can hope for support for many of these reforms from the main opposition party, Partito Democratico (PD) of Walter Veltroni.

The PD, founded in October 2007, is a fusion of the social democratic DS, the former right-wing of the Eurocommunist party (PCI), and Romano Prodi's rump of the former Christian Democrats. The fused party marks a final historic rupture of the former Stalinists with the workers' movement, and the emergence of a new bourgeois party.

According to the Italian media, Berlusconi promised Veltroni one of the two highest constitutional judges and the presidency of one of the two chambers of parliament in return for support in the neoliberal reforms and the constitutional changes needed to entrench a two-party system and exclude the left. After the election Berlusconi stated: "We are ready to work on reforms together with the opposition," adding, "We have difficult months before us which call for great efforts."

His words also hint at the biggest obstacle facing Berlusconi and Vel-



Berlusconi: all smiles for now

troni – resistance from the militant working class and the anticapitalist youth. Italian workers now face heavy attacks in the coming years.

Their trade union leadership, including that of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Cgil), the largest and more militant of the major union confederations, is still totally wedded to supporting Veltroni and thus putting the brakes on workers' resistance. The reformist and anti-globalisation left, has also had its strength sapped by the past two years of collusion with Prodi and of being swept out of parliament.

Betrayal

The capitalist media is crowing that, "for the first time since the fall of Mussolini, there is not a single Communist deputy in parliament".

Both *Rifondazione Comunista* (RC) and *Partito dei Comunisti Italiani* (PdCI) lost every one of their seats in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. In 2006 *Rifondazione* had 27 senators and 41 deputies, and the PdCI 11 senators and 16 deputies. *Rifondazione* leader Fausto Bertinotti has admitted this was a historic defeat and tendered his resignation.

This is electoral revenge for the RC's propping up of Romano Prodi's government. In 2006, *Rifondazione* obtained 5.8 per cent

and 2,229,604 votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 7.4 per cent or 2,518,624 votes in the Senate. With Bertinotti speaker of the lower house, Prodi tried to force through neoliberal reforms and send Italian troops to join the occupation of Afghanistan and "peace-keeping" in Lebanon.

Once again the rottenness of the Stalinist policy of the popular front – a coalition of proletarian and bourgeois parties – has been proven. The strategy was justified by the need to "keep out the right", but has handed power back to Berlusconi.

The wheel has come full circle for Bertinotti, but not for the first time. In November 2002, at the first European Social Forum in Florence, he addressed a huge meeting of Italian workers, as well as anticapitalist youth. Reviewing his two-year extra-governmental support for Prodi in the late 1990s – which handed Berlusconi another election victory – he promised never to do it again.

Yet, despite the massive workers' struggles, the huge antiwar and anticapitalist mobilisations, which effectively paralysed Berlusconi's government and could have brought him down, Bertinotti looked for yet another bloc with Prodi – by then the author of the European Union's Lisbon Agenda of neoliberal reforms – to oust

Berlusconi. RC, which had been an important component of the anticapitalist and antiwar movements, became an instrument for sabotaging these movements. Now it has paid the full price for Bertinotti's treachery.

Tasks of Italian left

The militant trade unionists in the Cobas federation, parts of the Cgil, and the anticapitalist youth might think that this all proves that the libertarian strategy of pursuing "social" struggles in the spaces that can be found free from state repression is the way forward.

But this would also merely repeat a terrible mistake. After all, Cobas and the *Disobediente* movement failed to hold the left reformists of *Rifondazione* to account, to demand they break with the neoliberal bourgeoisie. On the contrary, the lack of a political alternative to Bertinotti, a revolutionary alternative, meant that he was free to negotiate his own compromise with Prodi.

As Vladimir Lenin said: "Anarchism is always a form of punishment for the crimes of opportunism in the workers' movement and these things supplement one another."

Those left-wing groups who are staying in *Rifondazione* and relying on it reviving itself in opposition again, such as the group linked to the International Marxist Tendency, are pursuing a useless tactic with which to address those workers who have so recently lost their illusions in left reformism.

Instead, the rank and file of RC must break from the reformist and class collaborationist policies of the RC leadership and build a new revolutionary workers' party, based on programme of mass direct action, in resistance to Berlusconi's reforms and the bosses' offloading of the economic crisis onto the working class. Labour and anticapitalist organisations must convene open conferences to debate out the lessons of the past five years and plan for the hard class battles ahead.

Read the full version of this article at www.fifthinternational.org

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.

CONTACT

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International

Workers Power
BCM 7750
London
WC1N 3XX

020 7708 0224

workerspower@
btopenworld.com

ON THE WEB

www.workerspower.com
www.fifthinternational.com

FIGHTING FUND

Make cheques or postal orders out to 'Workers Power' and send to
BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX
or donate online at
www.workerspower.com
using the 'Make a donation' button

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
- Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Tel no: _____

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month for the next 12 issues.

I enclose:

- £13.50 UK
- £19.50 Europe
- £26.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel no: _____

www.workerspower.com

Fifth International Volume 2 issue 5 available now!
£2.50



- The science of climate change
- Getting the measure of China
- Palestine: obituary of George Habash
- Progress versus nature? Marxism and the environment
- France: can workers and youth forge a new, revolutionary party in the struggle against Sarkozy?
- Venezuela: exchange between the League and the Comité impulsor del Partido de la Revolución Socialista

Buy online from:
shop.fifthinternational.org

You can also purchase this issue by sending a cheque or postal order for £3.20 (£4.00 Europe, £5 rest of world, all prices p&p included) to: Fifth International, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Also available is our new pamphlet *A World In Crisis*. This contains the political perspectives, which were passed by the League's International Executive Committee when it met at Easter 2008. As well as explaining the nature of the economic crisis and its likely effects as it turns into recession, the pamphlet also looks at the key conflicts in the world today. You can order it from the above address for £1.50 (£2.00 Europe, £2.50 rest of world, all p&p)

Fighting pollution, defending our environment

By Luke Cooper

No one can ignore the fact that in the post-war period socialism – in its Stalinist, social democratic and even Trotskyist forms – has a poor record of engagement with environmental concerns. Yet in the classical Marxist tradition, activists and writers like Marx, Engels and Lenin showed a deep concern for environmental degradation. One of the early acts of the Communist government in Russia, for example, was to create expansive conservation reserves, called “zapovedniki”, to protect the natural environment from destruction caused by modern industry. The purpose of the protected zones was specifically to control erosion, protect water basins and the “preservation of monuments of nature”.

But this whole tradition was lost with the strengthening of social democracy in the west and the Stalinism in the east.

The reformism of the social democratic governments, and their base in the trade union movement, meant that they worked within the capitalist framework, fighting for reforms that made capitalism slightly nicer to workers but did not challenge the system of exploitation. This reformism led to accepting the “jobs versus the environment” argument pushed by the capitalist class. The GMB’s Mick Rix is an example of this political trend today – arguing in favour of the Heathrow expansion because of the thousands of jobs it will create, instead of fighting for jobs to be created in non-polluting sectors.

Under Stalinism, the Soviet Union embarked on enormous industrial programmes – Five Year Plans – that completely ignored the environmental impact of industrialisation. This led to massive degradation of the environment and workers living and working conditions. Because the plans were developed undemocratically and without any consultation, they also did not relate to human need. In contrast, our starting point must be sustainability – both in terms of human need and the environment. With an intensifying climate crisis there has never been a more urgent time for us to rediscover the classical Marxist tradition and show how it can address the harsh environmental realities of today.

Capitalism – a destructive system

To understand how to fight against wholesale environmental devastation brought on by the capitalist mode of production, we must first come to grips with how the capitalist system works. One feature of capitalism is its enormous levels of capital concentration – as big corporations come to dominate global markets, systematically driving out and taking over smaller producers. The great finan-

cial centres – London, New York and Tokyo – develop whole transport infrastructures that service the functional needs of capital accumulation. The imperialist states developed as great capitalist powers first – with all the advantages this gives them over others – and are historically responsible for the great bulk of CO₂ emissions. Meanwhile, whole swathes of the world remain undeveloped and in terrible poverty.

The drive to profit is essential. Under capitalism, production and consumption are detached from one another and mediated by the market: production is organised for profitable sale on the market, where goods are purchased for consumption. So instead of producing for need and with a consideration of the limits placed on industrialisation by the natural environment, production under capitalism is always production for profitable sale. Global corporations create intricate global production networks to take advantage of the

Communists stress the democratic control of production as the only way to make global industry ecologically sustainable. As long as profit rules, nature will be under threat

lowest possible labour costs to realise more profits – goods that could be sourced locally, are shipped and flown across the globe at great ecological cost. Use-values – for instance, raw materials – are appropriated from nature as if they were a limitless “free gift” to capital. When, in truth, there are naturally imposed limits because these resources will at some point be exhausted.

Capitalism is an integrated, universal economic system. But it also intrinsically “uneven”. The world is divided between the militarily, politically and economically dominated imperialist states, and the semi-colonial states that are subordinate to them. But this division is not static but creates an unstable and dynamic disequilibrium. For instance, imperial powers, like the United States, fight wars for the control of territory rich in oil reserves. Or profitable accumulation in the rich states can become dependent on cheap manufacturing goods sourced in the non-

imperialist work, but by spurring industrial output semi-colonial states, like China, may demand a place at the imperialist top table.

Marxist Strategy

Our answers to the climate crisis flow from this critical perspective on the intrinsically ecologically destructive system of capital accumulation. Firstly we have duty to fight for drastic cuts in CO₂ emissions and for a massive shift to renewable energy production in order to combat climate change. State funded research and development – undistorted by market dictates – is needed to harness science to develop sustainable systems of production and consumption. We know that in the developed imperial heartlands transport infrastructures like Heathrow are overwhelmingly used for business and commercial purposes. We take a principled stand against ecologically destructive developments like Heathrow in imperialist countries. We are for a moratorium on airport expansion and road building across the imperialist counties and massive investment in affordable, state run railway systems. We need to build a movement that takes direct action against the climate criminals – the mega corporations and the governments that serve them.

But this movement will fail unless it’s linked to the class struggle of workers and poor across the world fighting against capitalist imperialism. Trade unions must be broken from the “more jobs” argument that puts them on the side of the corporate polluters. Jobs can be created by massive investment in the renewable energy sector and social services. How do we fund it? By taxing the rich, of course. Because communists see environmental destruction as linked to the capitalist class system, we reject entirely the argument that workers need to take cuts in living conditions to protect the environment. We say make the rich pay! We are not only for the expropriation of the rich, but also in the here and now demand governments ban the most ecologically destructive aspects of their conspicuous consumption – like private jets.

The backwardness of the semi-colonial world leads to stultifying pollution in the urban centres, creating terrible conditions for workers. We fight for stringent measures to tackle air pollution at the source of production. Communists stress the democratic control of production as the only way to make global industry ecologically sustainable. For as long as “profit rules” nature will be under threat. We must be against all business secrecy, and for workers control in the factories. Most of all we fight for a socialist revolution to develop a global system of democratic planning.