

workers power

March 2009 ★ Price £1.50 Issue 333

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

AS WORLD LEADERS GATHER FOR G20 SUMMIT

STOP JOBS MASSACRE



**Demonstrate on
the *Put People*
First march
against job losses**

**London
28th March
11:30am
Assemble
Embankment**

- **WE WON'T PAY
FOR THEIR CRISIS**
- **BLAME THE BOSSES –
NOT FOREIGN WORKERS**



**League for the
Fifth International**

NEWS IN BRIEF

“Summer of rage” ahead, warn police

“Intent on coming on to the streets to create public disorder”. These were the words of Superintendent Hartshorn of the Met’s public order branch to describe activists in the wake of the credit crunch. The economic crisis, which is causing unemployment, repossessions and poverty will provide “footsoldiers” for known activists and give rise to “mass protest”. According to Hartshorn, banks and financial institutions that have taken public money will become “legitimate targets” in the eyes of protesters this summer. The Met’s warning has been made to put people off coming to the G20 demonstrations which will protest against job cuts, inequality, the bailout, climate change and imperialist war. They know that on the demonstrations many organisations, including *Workers Power*, will be drawing links between all these related issues and pointing out that capitalism is to blame. So let’s show our “rage” at the greedy bankers with pride and demonstrate for a socialist alternative on March 28, April 1 and 2, all through 2009, and beyond!

Reinstate Yunus Bakhsh

Racist activists infiltrating Unison have played a role in getting a key activist expelled from the union. Yunus Bakhsh, a mental health nurse was given just two days notice by his employers on 19 February of their intention to restart disciplinary proceedings against him. Evidence against him was provided by Unison member Kerry Cafferty who belongs to a number of racist groups on social networking site Facebook. She is also “friends” with members of the fascist BNP. Unison has decided that it will not provide Yunus with legal representation for the case. He has been forced to enlist a solicitor at his own expense. As an effective workplace rep, joint branch secretary and national figure in his union, Yunus has defended hundreds of fellow workers from management victimisation. It is vital that trade unionists rally around Yunus at this time, raising the issue wherever possible and taking collections at work. **Send messages of support to yunusbakhsh@yahoo.co.uk**

Super-rich lobby for tax breaks

The popping of champagne corks will fill the air in the Dorchester this week. The Park Lane hotel is host to 100 billionaires intent on hijacking Britain’s foreign aid budget in the name of charity. The Fortune Forum is lobbying the government for tax breaks for the super-wealthy who donate to the UN’s millennium development goals, with the government matching the amount raised from its aid budget, which currently stands at £4.9bn. Founder of this humanitarian Davos, heiress Renu Mehta, suggested the, notional, sum of £5bn could be raised amongst her co-conspirators by rattling a gilded pot in front of them - at a swoop swallowing the Treasury’s aid budget and transferring control to a consortium of faux-philanthropic parasites. The redistribution of wealth can only be achieved by progressive taxation of the rich, in order to shift the burden of funding social programmes from the poor to the rich.

For more revolutionary news, analysis, history and theory go to...

LATEST NEWS INCLUDES:

- Occupy Cowley BMW factory to stop the job cuts!
- Download Workers Power's leaflet for the Cowley BMW workers
- Drive the BNP off Merseyside!
- The People's Charter: empty words or class struggle?
- Narrow trade unionism: cover for British chauvinism
- Mark Serwojka condemns "British jobs for British workers"

LATEST NEWS INCLUDES:

- Dublin mass protest against pension levy
- What is happening at the Waterford occupation?
- 2009 Israeli election: Moving to the right... or the far right
- Statement on the LOR dispute, the nationalist strikes and the British left
- Guadeloupe: general strike against French colonial exploitation

EDITORIAL

IN THIS ISSUE

Stop the jobs massacre - it's time for action

The banking crisis has turned into a worldwide slump. All over the world the ruling class - the banks and the corporations - are trying to make the workers pay for the crisis.

600,000 joined the dole queue in America in January, making another one and a half million in three months alone. A staggering 20 million Chinese were laid off last year.

And Britain is no exception. The last two months have seen a terrifying series of job cuts and closures. Unemployment is pushing two million and everyone - employers and unions alike - agree that there will be three million on the dole by the end of the year.

The mounting toll of job losses reads like a list of British industry and services - a map of the economy as it was and as it will be: 300 jobs gone at Indesit, 1000 at Zavvi, 2500 at Corus, 4200 at Barclays, 1300 at M&S, 450 at Jaguar, 300 at South East Trains, 850 at Adams, 850 at Mini (see page 6), 820 at Vion, 750 at Ulster-bank, 300 at Bombardier, 1150 at Shopdirect, 1200 at Nissan, 700 at GKN, 600 at JCB and on and on and on it goes...

In France, Italy, Greece and Ireland there have been huge marches of workers saying: 'We Won't Pay for their Crisis'. Quite right! Why should workers pay with our jobs for a crisis caused by corporate finance and bankers?

Bosses will try and make us bear the brunt of the crisis in other ways too. Look at LDV vans in Birmingham. There, workers have given up 10 per cent of their wages to save 850 jobs. But why should we have to cut our pay when the banks have had literally hundreds of billions poured into them from taxpayers money by the government?

It isn't fair and it isn't meant to be fair. The bosses are making the workers pay the cost of their crisis.

It's time to say no. After months of inaction, the trade union leaders and the TUC have at long last woken up to how angry workers are. They have backed the call for a massive demonstration on 15th March. It's time to say no to the bosses' demands for more cuts and more layoffs.

mination. Every factory, every shop, every office faced with the threat of job losses, short time working or pay cuts should be there. Let's talk to all our workmates, put up posters for the march on every noticeboard, push for support in every union branch, tell all our friends and family to get down to London and give the biggest show of strength we can.

Let's raise the simple call: no more job losses! Bail out the workers, not the billionaires!

And let's push the TUC to call a one-day general strike as a protest against job losses. If we bring the country to a standstill, we will show who has the real power.

WELL DONE WATERFORD

Workers at Waterford Crystal have shown how to deal with bosses who close down factories - take them over.

The workers didn't walk home when their greedy employers announced the plant would be shut on January 30. They occupied the workplace.

On pages 10-11, Waterford worker Tom Hogan tells our readers how it felt to stand up for workers' rights.

The best way we can support them is follow their lead.

LABOUR'S HYPOCRISY ON PENSIONS

The news that bust bank RBS will pay former boss Fred Goodwin more than £700,000 a year pension sparked outrage and disbelief across the country.

The Labour government has already bailed RBS out to the tune of billions, and topped it up again last month with another £13 billion injection.

The government now owns 70 percent of RBS - and whatever Gordon Brown says now, he must have known about Goodwin's pension and waved it though.

All right for some. But what about the pensions of the workers Labour claims to stand for?

If you are made redundant, under 25s get the £47.95 per week job seekers allowance, over 25s get £60.50.

Then there's the redundancy pay. If you've worked for 25 years you get £4,250 for every year you've worked for.

But if she or he has scrimped and saved up more than £6,000, this is reduced until it reaches nothing if £16,000 or more is in the bank.

A pensioner gets £90.70 per week on retirement at 60 (female) or 65 (male). In Britain, 2.5 million pensioners live below the official breadline of £151 per week.

It could not be clearer who Gordon Brown's Labour really represents: not the workers, but the bosses.

WHICH SIDE ARE THEY ON?

The total cash given to the British banks in the bailout now stands at a cool £1.3 trillion: the equivalent of £36,000 for every man, woman and child in the country.

This huge government spending on banks will be paid for by cuts in spending on the NHS, schools and services over the years ahead.

In the boom the capitalists 'privatised' the profits. Now we're in a slump they 'socialise' the losses.

The working class needs a government that does the opposite. We need to take every company that declares redundancies into state ownership and guarantee jobs, wages and pensions. We need to use tax money to create real jobs for useful things like transport, healthcare, teaching, cleaning up our cities and creating safer energy.

The banks have failed and don't deserve to be run for private profit ever again. They should all be taken over and merged into a single state bank. Under democratic control, a new state bank could be used to organise useful production, not just profits for a few greedy bankers.

That's called socialism. Unlike the old USSR, this time round it could be under the democratic control of the working class. It's the alternative to this crisis and this system.

To get it we need a new party. It needs to be a mass party of the workers, not just a small group. That's why the call needs to go up for our unions - with their six million members - to stop paying for Brown's Labour Party and set up a new party of the workers.

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STUDENTS

For a radical coordination of student struggles in Britain

During the university occupations held all around the country over the brutal massacre of Gaza, students involved in the occupation networks were asking what the next steps were for their movement. Members of REVOLUTION, the socialist youth group, along with many other student activists, put forward this proposal to take the struggle to the next level.

The past few weeks have seen an explosion of student organisation most notably in occupations against Israel's war on the Gaza Strip. Much of the organisation has taken place outside of and alongside existing student union structures. Many of the occupations saw new networks formed among students which even took on something of a national and international character as blogs, social networking groups and email lists were set up to aid cross campus coordination. Some of the occupied spaces used international links to publicise the actions to students and other youth activists across Europe, the Middle East, Palestine and beyond.

As students from different societies, departments and political groups worked together, some of the occupied spaces starting inviting speakers and holding meetings on a whole range of different subject issues from anti-racism to

trade unionism, to education.

Throughout the occupations students have often experienced harsh repression as a response on the part of the university administrations. Denied freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, many students have felt that universities are no longer public educational spaces. From this, many students saw the need to go beyond Gaza and reclaim their rights to voice political concerns about their own conditions.

With the recession deepening in Britain we are likely to see increases in education cuts, student unemployment and poverty, even racism and war. Education is no longer free in the UK and at a time when we need it most. In addition the NUS governance review has now passed destroying all the remaining democracy in an institution dominated by bureaucrats and careerists which has sold out all genuine campaigning and the fight for free education.

All these things point to the need

for the networks of activists formed around the Gaza movement to form a national coordination to bring all our struggles to the next level.

Such a coordination could bring together the networks formed around the Gaza occupations from over 20 universities including SOAS, KCL, Sussex, Birmingham, Newcastle etc. It could bring together existing student and youth organisations such as Education Not for Sale, Another Education is Possible, ISR, YCL, SWSS, Revolution, Communist Students, Socialist Students, Antiwar groups and many other student societies interested in this coordination initiative, and seek to draw in further a host of other student organisations and individual students.

It could allow us to better coordinate with students internationally in struggle against other forms of injustices, particularly those fighting the "Bologna process" in

Europe. It could be open and accessible and draw in school and college students who face many of the same problems as students at the universities. It could encourage coordinations at a local level, drawing in all these students and allow cross-campus organisation in cities and towns. It could provide an alternative avenue for campaigning both alongside existing student union executive where possible but without them where necessary. It could provide a space to assess and debate what our education should look like and challenge the increasing corporatisation and privatisation of our education system.

Student activists met up on 7 February to discuss issues in this statement. We called for a national meeting for the provisional date of 18 April. We ask all student activists to attend and to add their contact details to this statement by emailing: studentcoordination@gmail.com

Students demand free education

By Simon Hardy, Westminster Uni

February 26 saw around 700 students marching in London demanding an end to the disgraceful increases in top up fees but also for the return of grants instead of loans. The National Union of Students, which has recently passed a governance review effectively dismantling most of its democratic structures, did not officially back the protest but the ability of the organised Left and progressive students to organise so many students is a healthy sign for the future.

The demonstration was

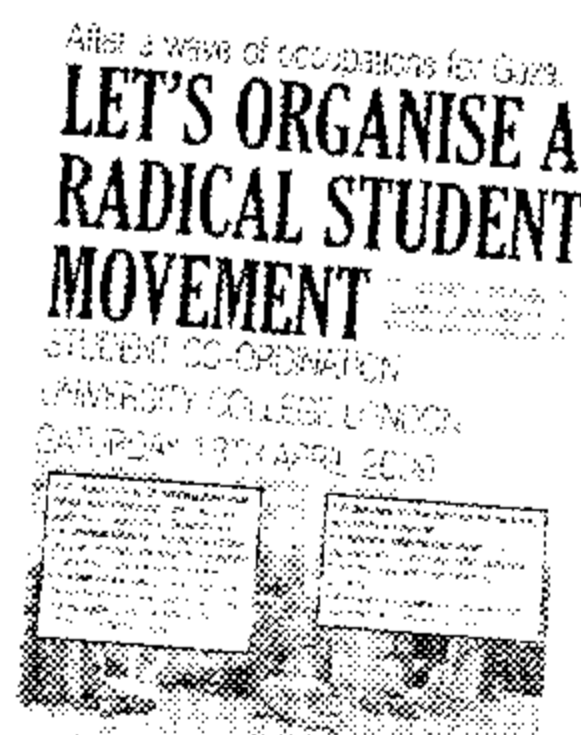
down protest at one point. Workers Power members, alongside Revolution, the socialist youth group, called on people to sign up to the important 18 April student coordination conference.

After the demonstration, Education Not for Sale organised a meeting to discuss the way forward after the protest. Around 30 students from across the country debated what steps the movement needs to take next. Rob Owen, a SWP member, proposed that the scale of job losses at London Metropolitan University (over 300 staff face redundancy) requires active solidarity

think tank meeting on 7 March to debate a strategy for the student movement now that the left in the NUS has suffered a democratic setback in the form of the governance review.

The perspective before students now is to organise action where possible against the effects of the recession and to maintain the important links of solidarity with people fighting against Zionism and imperialism in the Middle East and Asia. While it is important not to fritter away the energies of the resurgent militant student movement focussing students' energies and political time on key battles in

results, as the recent occupations of over 25 universities against the attacks on Gaza showed.



Student Coordination 18th April 2009

WORKPLACE

Yorkshire Post strikers can deliver victory

By Rebecca Anderson

The biggest strike in regional press for 18 years is taking place in Yorkshire. About 140 journalists at the *Yorkshire Post* and *Evening Post* are out on strike against 18 compulsory job cuts. In the last two weeks of February, National Union of Journalists members took eight days of action against their employer, Johnston Press.

The strikers have enthusiastically taken up the struggle – rejecting official union advice for two sets of two-day strikes – and organised lively pickets everyday at the *Yorkshire Evening Post* building in Leeds.

There have also been rallies each Thursday and Friday, with three picket lines around the building, banners and placards declaring “save our papers” and “honk your support”, and even a samba band. The mood has remained positive and militant.

Johnston Press is one of the largest regional newspaper owners. The company is massively in debt as it paid out millions to shareholders and, of course, left nothing for the workers.

On the picket lines, many workers talked about the incompetency of the bosses, the importance of local press and wanting to know why the bankers get their bailouts and bonuses while working people are thrown on the scrap heap in the recession.

The strikes ended on Sunday 1 March. So far management haven't given into the demands of the strikers. The ballot for action was 97.8 per cent in favour and it has won a public support with 612,000 signatures. Local news is a vital part of our lives and we must demand that it is not destroyed.

HOW TO WIN

The journalists have already shown their militancy by taking eight days of strike action. *Workers Power* believes that the next step should be an indefinite strike. However, we recognise that the striking workers at *Yorkshire Post* and *Evening Post* are only a small part of a multinational. There is a danger that the company can ride out one dispute, no matter how courageous and enthusiastic the strikers.

That is why the strike needs the support of other workers in the area and across Johnston Press.

Recently 150 workers were made redundant at Blackburns Print Division in Leeds and thousands of call centre and retail workers face the same fate. Action such as that of the NUJ members needs to be spread across the city to other workers. A support committee needs to be set up immediately with other workers in dispute, trade unionists and other campaigning groups. The aim of this committee should be to financially support the strikers, demonstrate and protest in their favour, offer solidarity to boycott Johnston Press management (e.g. refuse to deliver mail) and finally come out in support of the workers with a city-wide strike.

The NUJ should bring forward all disputes at other Johnston Press newspapers to coordinate action in a national offensive against the employer. A concerted national strike would force Johnston back both in Leeds and in other places. If this breaks the anti-union laws, so be it. NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear said in a statement: “The NUJ is committed to the fight for the survival of the industry and the jobs of our members.”

NUJ
NATIONAL UNION
OF
JOURNALISTS

should use this commitment to offer solidarity action, including strikes in support of the Yorkshire journalists.

Finally, the way in which Johnston Press has run its newspapers into debt in order to boost shareholders' dividends and boardroom bonuses is no exception. The same strategy has been pursued by other regional newspaper owners Trinity and Newsquest and national newspapers, such as the *Financial Times* and *Independent*, where workers are currently balloting for action.

This profit-grabbing is destroying the media. Recently a debate has started within the NUJ about ownership of the media (see <http://www.nujleft.org/2009/02/who-controls-the-medium/>): whether it should be part-owned by communities, subsidised by government or nationalised under workers' control. If a newspaper or media is failing, and the bosses have shown us the books, then we should demand nationalisation under workers' control. Some workers may fear state-run media outlets but independence can be guaranteed by workers' control and by codes of practice. If the government can bail out failed banks and pay the shareholders, then we should demand nationalisation under workers' control.

Rail workers update

WORKERS FIGHT FOR HOLIDAY PAY

- More than 130 members of Britain's two biggest rail unions, RMT and TESSA, working in retail grades for train operator c2c are to strike for 24 hours on March 2 after talks failed to resolve a dispute over holiday entitlement.
- The company holiday policy includes paying staff only for bank holidays they work.
- National Express is refusing bank holiday pay after announcing profits of £194m last year.

JOBS UNDER IMMEDIATE THREAT

- National Express Group is seeking to cut 750 jobs across its East Anglia and East Coast franchises.
- At least 800 jobs at risk as a result of Network Rail deferring 28 per cent of rail renewals, such as laying new track, installing new signals – a decision not related directly to the recession.
- The UK's main railfreight operator DB Schenker (formally EWS) has announced over 500 jobs losses and that further significant numbers are at risk as a result of Network Rail's deferral of renewals.
- South West Trains has announced plans to cut at least 660 jobs, including ticket-office and platform staff, despite the partial rejection by the Department for Transport of its plans to reduce ticket-office opening times.
- 300 as yet unspecified jobs at Southeastern.
- 40 jobs at First Scotrail.
- Proposed cuts to ticket office opening times at First Capital Connect leaving over 20 posts at risk.

WORKERS BALLOTTED ON LONDON OVERGROUND

- Nearly 300 members of the RMT working for London Overground are to be balloted for strike action over a breakdown of industrial relations.
- The dispute involves a complex of issues, including failure to negotiate seriously on restructuring proposals, failure to improve facilities, progress other welfare issues, and failure to confirm verbal assurances that new trains would be staffed by guards with a full operational safety role and control of doors.
- The ballot, which will open on 3 March, will be held on 10th and 11th March. It will be held on 10th and 11th March. It will be held on 10th and 11th March.

WORKPLACE

Car industry in crisis: Jaguar, Nissan, Ford slash thousands of UK jobs

By Andy Yorke

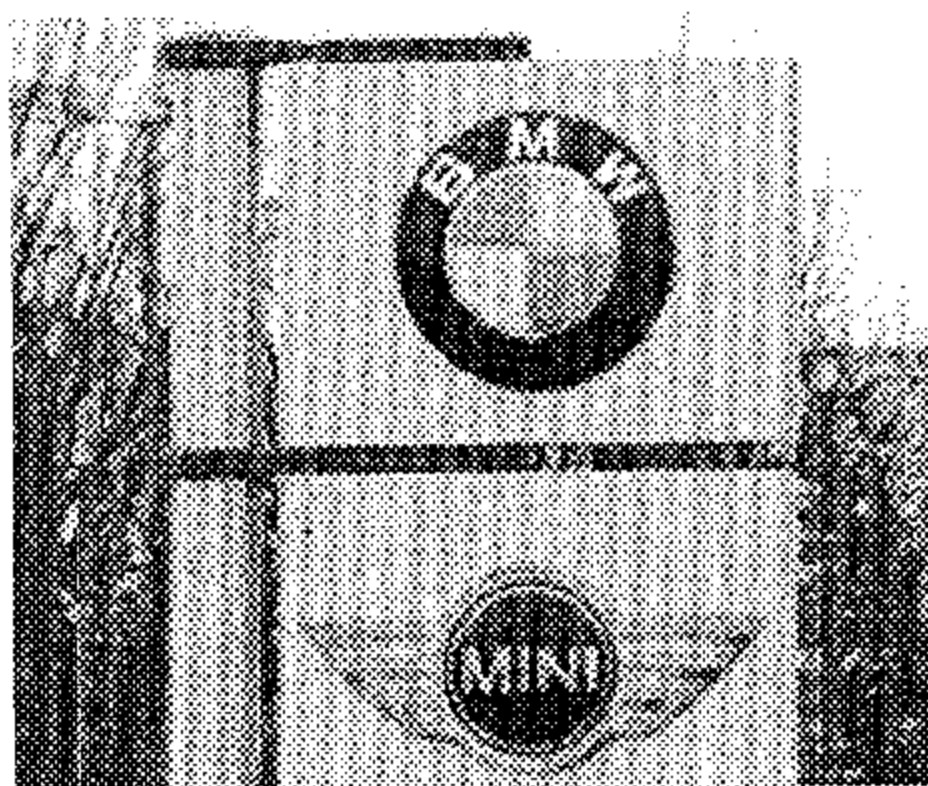
Ford, Honda, Nissan, Jaguar, Toyota, GM...all the global car giants have announced job cuts and halts to production, along with huge wage cuts. The global economic downturn has seen car sales crash in the last year, unleashing a worldwide offensive by automotive bosses to make their workers pay for the collapse in profits.

In November 2008, UK car production fell off the cliff. The number of cars produced dropped to 97,604, representing one-third of UK output lost in a month and the lowest level since 1987; in January that dropped to 61,404. Commercial vehicle makers were even harder hit, with output dropping more than 50 per cent to less than 11,000 vehicles; January saw a 59.9 per cent drop.

Even before November's dramatic slump, the job losses were piling up. In September, Ford sacked 120 workers at its Southampton plant; in October, Jaguar cut 198 jobs, while Volkswagen-owned Bentley announced 300 job losses and that it would close its Crewe plant for a month in December-January. BMW announced it would do the same for its Oxford plant producing the Mini and two other UK plants.

In November, car workers at Coventry components manufacturer Federal Mogul struck for a week against demands that staff work three more hours every week, an extra 132 hours each year, without any more pay in order to "to help bridge the gap between higher costs in their local (labour) market and low-cost (labour) markets".

After closing two assembly lines for Christmas, Nissan cut its Sunderland workforce by 1,200 people. Honda extended a two-month closure to its Swindon plant to four months, and leaving the plant's 4,800 workers receiving only half pay for the last two months. Earlier in the week Tata-owned Jaguar Land Rover announced 450 jobs will be cut.



CUTS WILL RIPPLE THROUGH THE ECONOMY

According to the Department of Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), 194,000 people work in UK car manufacturing, while 2,500 companies employ 115,000 staff in the components industry. Many agency workers and temporary contract workers have already lost their jobs, and now suppliers are also cutting jobs.

For example, two days before Nissan announced cuts in January, its supplier Unipres car components announced 96 full-time and 200 short-contract jobs were to go. Jaguar Land Rover employs 15,000 workers but its CEO claims that the company supports up to 75,000 jobs if suppliers and dealers are added in.

UNITE CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO BAILOUT THE BILLIONAIRES

Unite, the union that organises in the majority of the car plants, has called for the government to prop up UK car producers with a £13bn strategic assistance fund – in line with subsidies other EU countries such as Germany, Sweden, and France as well as the US. This is a dead-end strategy.

Business secretary Peter Mandelson has already outlined a package of government support for the UK car industry worth up to £2.3bn. The package includes a scheme to unlock £1.3bn of loans from Europe for car manufacturers and major suppli-

ers, plus the government would also guarantee up to £1bn of further loans. But these loans and other market-based "help" will come with strings attached, namely restructuring to make UK plants more competitive – with lower wages, increased hours and workload, and job losses.

The unions should be rejecting this rotten choice. Yet instead they have accepted wage and production cuts in Ford, Honda and other plants without a fight – all in the name of saving jobs. To quote Unite joint secretary Tony Woodley: "Aid for our car industry is now a matter of urgency, including money to support workers who must take a dramatic cut in wages to hang onto their jobs."

Car workers need more than that – they need a strategy to fight back:

- Share out the work with no loss of pay – make the bosses pay for their crisis.
- A policy of struggle is the only thing that will defend jobs, not conciliation and givebacks: strikes, and occupations to stop closures.
- Strike committees to ensure the members control the strike not union bureaucrats committed to partnership and loyalty to the Labour government in "difficult times".
- Strong picket-lines to block scabs coming in and stealing work, squads to defend them from police attack.
- Solidarity movement against cuts – link up with other workers facing job cuts.
- Open the books when the bosses plead bankruptcy – if a factory is genuinely operating in the red, nationalise it with no compensation. Nationalised plants can be reorganised into an industry producing under workers control.

Such a movement of struggle could provide an alternative to capitalist nationalisation and the state running the car industry as a subsidy to other businesses and according to the market – points to workers control of industry and the socialist planning of the economy, just as struggles and picket line defence point to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Occupy Cowley BMW factory to stop the job cuts!

Absolutely everything about the sacking of 850 agency workers at the BMW Mini plant in Cowley stank.

- The workers were told the news one hour before the start of their shift.
- They were told to hand back their overalls and ID cards or have up to £35 deducted from their final pay.
- Most disgracefully of all, their own shop stewards told them that they had to keep the news secret or they would also lose their jobs.

Temporary and permanent workers at the plant have been organising a

turn the tables on BMW and its tame union go-betweens. They should take inspiration from workers at the Calcast car components plant in Derry, Northern Ireland who occupied their factory and organised a sit-in strike. They need to seize back the initiative and show the bosses what it feels like not to know what's going on.

The sacked workers should demand the union calls an immediate mass meeting for all workers to discuss a fightback. The union should demand the

and official who knew about the cuts with someone who is prepared to fight.

This dispute shows how important it is for rank and file workers to organise themselves, independently of union leaders who have shown themselves untrustworthy. Workers should elect a strike committee to run the occupation – organising rotas, speaking tours to other plants and unions, setting up hardship funds.

See www.workerspower.com for details of the fightback.

Postal privatisation revolt

The campaign to block Peter Mandelson's part-privatisation of Royal Mail has split the Labour Party down the middle. A *CWU postal rep* unpicks the government's arguments for the sell-off

The Labour government's plans to sell a 30 per cent stake in Royal Mail have stoked a burning revolt inside and outside the Labour Party, thanks to the campaigning efforts of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) and backed by its threat to disaffiliate from the party. Over 150 MPs have signed Early Day Motion 428 against any privatisation of Royal Mail, with over 130 Labour MPs (out of 350) in support. A poll for The Guardian revealed that two-thirds of Labour Party members oppose the sell-off, with less than a quarter in support, illustrating the depth of the split in the party.

With a majority of only 63 MPs in the House of Commons, business secretary Peter Mandelson and prime minister Gordon Brown may have to rely on the Tories to push through the proposed partial sell-off. This would not only be humiliating but, with the vote due in June, could hurt Labour's already miserable chances in the European elections. Yet Brown and Mandelson are desperate to clinch postal privatisation on behalf of their big business supporters and the bankers.

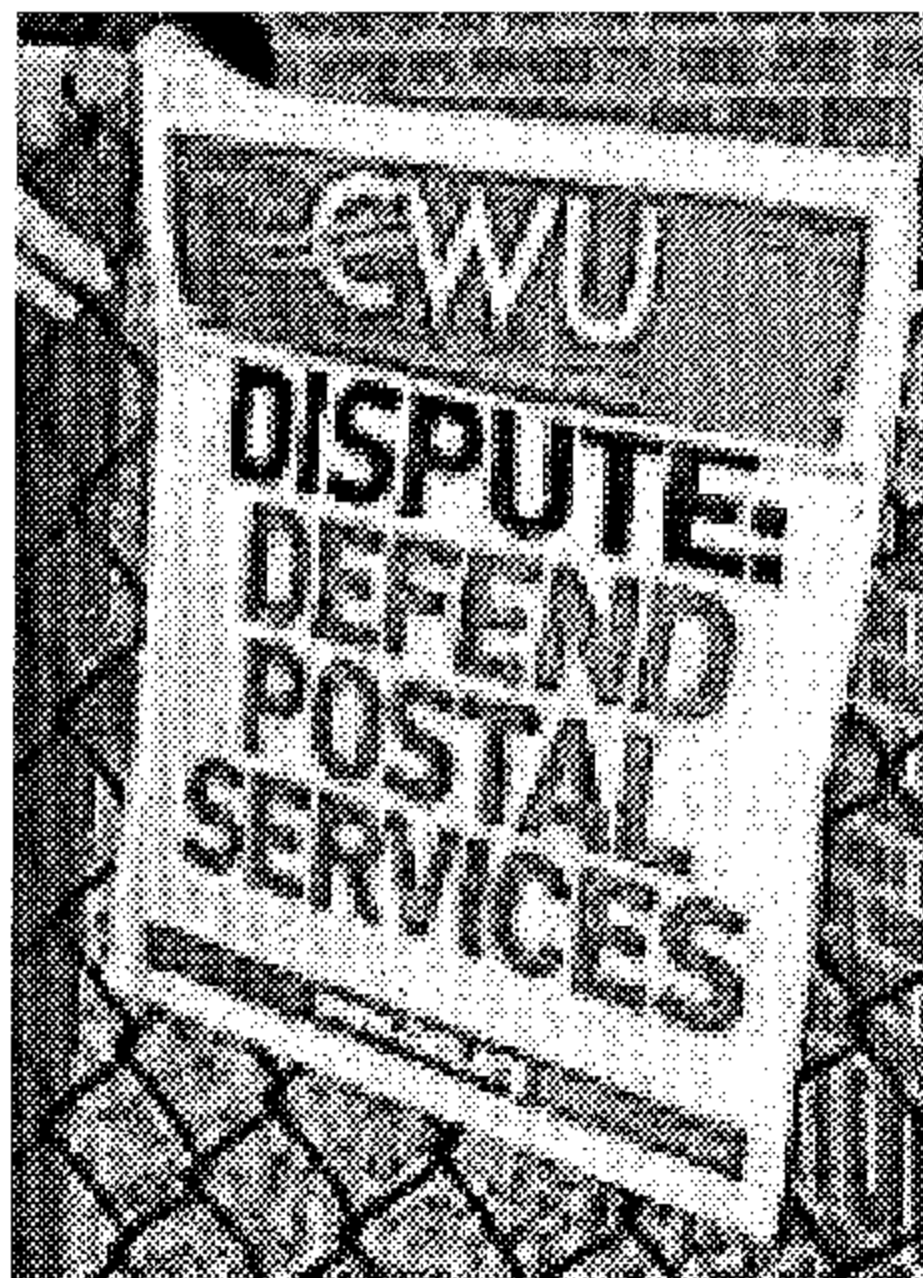
As a result they have offered a few concessions, such as promising to switch regulation from the hated neoliberal Postcomm to Ofcom and also to relax rules allowing Royal Mail to compete. They have even floated the idea of forcing competitors, like the giant multinationals TNT and Deutsche Post, to help subsidise the Universal Service Obligation, the law requiring Royal Mail to deliver to every address for the same stamp price six days a week.

PLAYING WITH OUR PENSIONS

Mandelson has taken up the proposal in Richard Hooper's review into Royal Mail that the government take over the postal workers' pension scheme. He is cynically trying to spin this as helping the posties. In reality the government has refused this demand by the CWU for years - the postal pension is the only public sector pension not underwritten by the government. Its deficit is largely due to a 13-year pensions holiday from 1990 to 2003 and the fact that it was invested on the now collapsed stock market.

Of course this architect of New Labour is not promising to reverse last year's cuts to members' benefits nor to safeguard the scheme from future deductions. In fact it has just been leaked that Labour is looking into the legality of defaulting on some of its public sector pension obligations, which now stand at £750bn.

The government is only offering to take on the pension scheme now in order to make Royal Mail a cash cow. It is not offering to reverse the cuts to the pension scheme. The government is only offering to take on the pension scheme now in order to make Royal Mail a cash cow. It is not offering to reverse the cuts to the pension scheme.



CWU National March and rally Keep the Post Public 14 March 2009 Wolverhampton

Assemble 11.30am at the Guru Nonak Sikh Temple, corner of Greencroft and Arthur Street

it is privatisation by the back door.

Because freed from this debt, Royal Mail would be a cash cow having made a £255m profit in the last year alone. Like Labour's bailout of the banks, this is another blatant example of the government privatising profit while nationalising losses, with the taxpayer footing the bill.

In fact, far from a company reeling under an economic downturn and a vanishing postal market as everyone switches to email and text messaging, Royal Mail's revenue increased by three per cent to over £7bn - hardly the company in crisis that Hooper paints.

STRIKE AGAINST CUTS

However, this points to a danger for postal workers in the current climate. The CWU has called for a national strike against the government's plans to privatise Royal Mail. The strike would be held on 14 March 2009, the day of the national march and rally in Wolverhampton.

mass office closures and 16,000 job losses - with or without privatisation. But why should we make any cuts if the company is making a profit?

There is an answer. The best response to the twin dangers of privatisation and massive cuts is for a national strike. This would keep the pressure on the parliamentary rebels, while making a pact with the Tories unworkable. At the same time, it would defend our jobs, conditions and the service, should a deal - cuts for continued public ownership - be done behind our backs.

The union should use the current anger to campaign for closing the postal market - the real source of deteriorating service, later delivery times and rising prices. The likes of TNT have cherry-picked the lucrative business-to-business market, while using Royal Mail on the cheap to deliver the final mile. The postal service should be nationalised, with no compensation, and their resources used to improve the public service and workers' conditions.

CONTROL OUR LEADERS

Yet CWU leaders Billy Hayes and Dave Ward say we cannot argue against the market. They have signed up to "modernisation", just like they agreed to "efficiency savings" in 2006 and "flexibility" in 2007-08. And despite leading postal workers to an unnecessary defeat in the 2007 strike, they reserve the right to call (and call off) any industrial action.

Similarly, regardless of conference policy to review Labour Party affiliation this month, they will say we need to keep the Labour rebels on board, even though those who are in charge of the party, Brown, Darling and Mandelson, are steering privatisation through.

That's why we need our own network of rank and file activists and reps to control the campaign and fight for a national strike against cuts, closures and privatisation. We cannot afford to rely on Labour MPs to save Royal Mail but must go to working class users, who rely on our public service, for solidarity.

Most important of all, we need to learn the lessons of the 2007 strike, when wildcat strikes organised from below spread from Edinburgh to Bristol. Control our leaders - keep the momentum up until we win!

- No sell-off - keep Royal Mail and post offices fully public!
- No closures, no job cuts: cut the hours, not the jobs with no loss of pay!
- For a national strike to defend jobs and public ownership!
- Nationalise the private carriers with no compensation - for a 100 per cent publicly-owned postal service up and running in 2010!

• For more on the Communications Workers Union: www.cwu.org.uk

UNIONS

Unite election: Vote Jerry Hicks

By Kam Kumar and Jeremy Dewar

Ballot papers have gone out for the election for general secretary of Unite-Amicus, part of Britain's largest union with over 2.1 million members. There are four candidates, but the real contest is between the current leader Derek Simpson and left challenger Jerry Hicks. *Workers Power* is calling for a vote for Hicks.

Simpson is sometimes mislabelled a left winger himself, largely because he is a former Communist Party member and came from nowhere to unseat Sir Ken Jackson to lead Amicus-AEEU in 2002.

Jackson was one of the vilest characters ever to disgrace the trade union movement, scabbing on the year-long strike by printers at News International in the 1980s. Jackson's union, EETPU, was finally expelled from the TUC. No wonder Tony Blair knighted him in 1999!

Several mergers later, after beating Jackson, Simpson described himself as a "lieutenant of the left" and was dubbed by the media as one of the "Awkward Squad" of union leaders prepared to criticise New Labour. But before long, Simpson, like several other squad members, proved to be more awkward for the union's members than the bosses.

WHO IS DEREK SIMPSON?

Despite the hammering manufacturing workers have taken over the past seven years, Simpson has been almost invisible. Despite pledging to reform the union and make all officials stand for election, he attempted to defer his own re-election until Hicks forced him to submit himself to a ballot with a legal challenge.

Indeed Simpson has continued many of the traditions laid down by Jackson:

- Preferring to build the union not by defending jobs or recruiting new members but by merging with other unions.

Gordon Brown's pre-budget report last November, which cut taxes for multinationals, signalled £37bn of cuts to public services.

- Feathering his own nest: receiving salary and benefits worth £200,000, while his lavish £800,000 home is heavily subsidised by union members.

Recently, however, Simpson has uncharacteristically visited picket lines, being a regular figure at Lindsay, Staythorpe and Isle of Grain, but he went there to promote the reactionary slogan of "British jobs for British workers", even posing between two Daily Star models to promote the racist rag's campaign against foreign workers.

When Hicks noisily interrupted Simpson at a rally of Staythorpe workers on 24 February, he turned on Hicks with disgraceful chauvinist demagoguery:

"Let's get the workers, the decent workers, who are not on about foreign workers, the ones who want British workers for British jobs to shut the hecklers up!"

<http://tinyurl.com/brslxb>

TGWU-AMICUS FRICTION

If Simpson cared about the working class, he would remind union members that the British workforce is multi-ethnic and many workers in the public services, such as the NHS where Unite-Amicus has 100,000 members, are from immigrant backgrounds. He would not try to divide them.

But Simpson is deliberately playing the nationalist card. This could be effective in the short term because the Amicus wing of Unite represents the more skilled, better paid workers, who tend to be on more secure contracts. It is the result of the merger of unions representing electricians, engineers, technicians, draughtsmen, white-collar workers, foremen and managers. There is a tendency among skilled workers to try and secure their jobs or improve their conditions. This is not a bad thing. But it is a narrow view of the world. The union must represent all workers, not just the skilled ones. It must be a force for the defence of jobs and the improvement of conditions for all workers, not just the skilled ones. It must be a force for the defence of jobs and the improvement of conditions for all workers, not just the skilled ones.



Jerry Hicks

hand, tends to organise among blue-collar workers, many of them semi-skilled and on temporary or agency contracts. With more black and ethnic minority members – for many years the only union with a black general secretary, Bill Morris – the T&G has been more actively antiracist.

This is not to say the TGWU and Tony Woodley are more militant. They aren't – just ask Mini workers at Cowley. But there is friction between the two wings, with TGWU officials and activists favouring an organising approach, for example the "Justice 4 Cleaners" campaign. That's why Woodley signed the SWP's petition against nationalist slogans and Derek Simpson didn't.

NEW LEFT GROUPING

This partly explains why the Amicus Gazette withdrew its own candidate, Laurence Faircloth, from the contest and lined up behind Jerry Hicks. It is a sign of the union's internal divisions. The union must be a force for the defence of jobs and the improvement of conditions for all workers, not just the skilled ones. It must be a force for the defence of jobs and the improvement of conditions for all workers, not just the skilled ones.

ingham reflected this position.

This gathering of over 200 Unite members agreed to merge the Amicus Gazette and the TGWU Broad Left. But despite Jerry Hicks being there in person, the United Left said nothing about the coming election.

This is a serious shortcoming. There needs to be a debate, an argument about where the union is going. Simpson's election leads in one direction, Hicks' in another.

Of course there are problems with Hicks' positions; he used the state's certification officer to challenge Simpson's refusal to call an election, rather than the union's own democratic structures; he also supports the construction workers' campaign, although, unlike Simpson, not the "British jobs for British workers" slogan.

Unlike Simpson, Hicks has a record of struggle, working in Rolls Royce Bristol for 30 years, and for 20 of those serving as a union rep. In 2005 he led a 48-hour occupation of the test area, saving two fitters' jobs. Six weeks later Rolls Royce sacked him, using the anti-union laws. Amicus officials fatally delayed action to defend him.

He stands for the repeal of all the anti-union laws, supporting only those Labour MPs that support the union, rank and file control over officials. He will take only the average wage of a skilled worker. He also supports council home building, a programme of public works to employ 100,000 workers and investment in renewable energy. He says he will lead re-nationalisation campaigns.

WE WOULD ADD:

- Occupy to stop all closures, strike to defend every job.
- Cut the hours, not the jobs with no loss of pay.
- Full employment and citizenship rights for all migrant workers.
- For a rank and file movement that fights – with the officials where possible, against them where necessary.
- Defend the right to strike and picket.

Internationalism – not nationalist slogans – can save jobs

Construction workers are stepping up their campaign for jobs in the UK to be reserved for British workers. *Jeremy Dewar* warns of the divisive nature of their demands and argues for workers' unity

Unite and GMB unions are holding weekly protests at power stations at the Isle of Grain in Kent and Staythorpe, in Nottinghamshire. Their formal demand is that a quota of jobs on construction contracts be advertised locally. This is a thinly disguised way of saying that a quota should be reserved for British workers.

The sites belong to German energy giants E.On and RWE but the work is contracted out to French power generation company Alstom, which in turn subcontracts to Portuguese, Italian and Polish firms. Workers claim that subcontracting leads to a "race to the bottom" and they are being undercut by workers flown in from abroad. As we go to press, shop stewards are meeting to name the day for a national strike to spread the action that started at French company Total's Lindsey oil refinery last month.

A Youtube video shows that some picketers chanted "Foreigners out!" and carried placards demanding "British Workers First". Some carried union jack flags daubed with "British jobs for British workers".

Neither Unite general secretary Derek Simpson nor the unofficial strike committees have condemned this goal for the disputes. On the contrary, Simpson even posed for a campaign photo with Daily Star models parading the vile "British jobs for British workers" slogan.

As a result, British chauvinism is on the increase. At Lindsey, for example, 40 Portuguese workers were flown home because their safety could not be guaranteed, while some Italian workers are now too scared to venture into town.

Such slogans could divide every workplace in Britain if they are not challenged and defeated. Yet the Socialist Party, which had a member on the Lindsey strike committee, claims that chauvinism is not a major cause for concern. On the



Picket at Staythorpe power station

LINDSEY: WHAT WAS WON?

Shop stewards, union officials and rank and file workers at Lindsey repeatedly said British workers were being discriminated against because of the employment of a projected 200-300 Italian and Portuguese permanent employees of an Italian subcontractor, IREM.

Keith Gibson, the SP member on the strike committee, explained the cause of the strike: "On Wednesday 28 January 2009, Shaws' workforce were told by the stewards that IREM had stated they would not be employing British labour. The entire LOR workforce, from all subcontracting companies, met and voted unanimously to take immediate unofficial strike action."

On the third day of the strike, he successfully won a mass meeting to endorse seven demands that included foreign workers being on union pay and conditions, and building links with continental unions. However, since this did not include any renunciation of the demand for British jobs for British workers, or of a quota for them, it was a smokescreen.

This is verified by the outcome of the strike. In Gibson's words they would be employed on a "one-to-one basis" with the foreign workers, i.e. one British worker for each of the foreign workers. The agreement means that the 100 Italian workers already on site will keep their jobs, and the 100 British workers who were the first to be employed will also keep their jobs. The agreement also means that

Neither Unite officials nor the strike committee have ever denied that they had successfully negotiated back in January for IREM workers to be employed on union terms and pay rates. The deal changed nothing in this regard. Nor were any of the seven demands from the strike committee won.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt the strike started in protest against the employment of foreign labour and ended when some of those jobs were transferred to British workers. This was not a progressive outcome and the SP's intervention in supporting it and minimising the danger of chauvinism was an act of disgraceful opportunism.

No wonder it caused consternation in Europe. "What's going on in Lincolnshire is one of the ugliest pages in the history of the trade union movement... English workers against Italian workers," stated Sabrina Petrucci of FIOM-CGIL, the Italian engineering union.

WHERE NOW?

Workers in the power and construction industries do indeed face the giant corporations, like Total, RWE and E.On, and the labyrinth of subcontractors dividing workers and driving down wages and conditions. But we need international unity and solidarity if we are to defeat them.

Certainly a national strike is needed. The militancy of the LOR and Shaws' workers is the only way to force the employers to agree to a national strike. But we need international unity and solidarity if we are to defeat them.

demand that not a single job be lost and that all workers, British and "foreign", receive the rates and conditions agreed with the unions, that all contract work be brought "in house", i.e. workers given permanent jobs, unless otherwise agreed by the union.

For construction workers in power generation there should be plenty of jobs to renovate and transform all stations to ensure a planned move away from fossil fuel burning, massively cutting carbon emissions.

Under today's crisis conditions, we have to go further and fight to renationalise all the power utilities, without compensation, and under workers' control. But in a world of multinational companies this has to be accomplished hand-in-hand with workforces in other countries. British workers cannot assume they are the most militant or the ones most likely to be undercut.

An action programme like this represents a working class policy. It is necessarily an international programme that saves the jobs of workers in the UK whatever their country of origin, but also those of the two million or so workers from the UK working abroad.

As the slump continues, our rulers will turn in desperation to protectionism, wrapping themselves in their respective national flags. Workers across Europe – around the world – must reject all appeals to nationalism. Instead, we need to fight for international flag – the workers' flag – the flag of the workers' movement.

IRELAND

Turn workers' anger

As the Irish government piles on the agony for workers, **Bernie McAdam** argues the need for a general strike to stop the attacks of Brian Cowen's Fianna Fail government

The 120,000 demonstration in Dublin organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) was a massive display of working class anger at Brian Cowen's Fianna Fail government. Hard on the heels of swinging budget cuts, the government is imposing a further €2bn cut that will see a pension levy on public sector wages, in effect a dramatic wage cut, and a deferral of pay rises. The ICTU was compelled to organise this day of action as furious trade unionists flooded their unions with complaints.

Trade union leaders are being faced with demands to take more action against the pension levy. Civil servants struck on 26 February with 13,000 CPSU members closing social welfare and passport offices for the day. Several other unions are conducting ballots for one day action as well. Even 2,000 Gardai had their own demonstration against the levy and the armed forces representative has asked the government for assurances that they won't be used to break strikes!

In the wake of the massive Dublin demonstration and the rising chorus for a one day stoppage,

the ICTU has announced that unions will hold ballots on action against employers not abiding by the terms of the national wage agreement. This would affect all public sector unions and many in the private sector. The ICTU warns it could see a national stoppage at the end of March.

David Begg, general secretary of the ICTU, wants the government to resume talks and consider ICTU's three-year stabilisation plan, or otherwise by 30 March "we are in a doomsday situation". While the Congress recognises that workers "are not responsible for the crisis", any agreement has to be "fair" with "everybody contributing to the necessary economic adjustment according with their means".

But if workers didn't cause the crisis, why do they have to pay for it? This concept of social solidarity means workers will be forced to pay, which is why Begg had entered talks with the government on how to implement the cuts!

FOR A GENERAL STRIKE

Workers should spell out to Congress leaders that "social partnership" is dead and the time for talk has passed. All unions should bal-

lot for action now. This should be indefinite strike action against all the cuts, not just the deferred pay rises and pension levy. A one day stoppage is a good start but by itself will prove inadequate to roll back all the cuts, as the government can easily weather it and hope it will serve to let off steam. The Irish government is under massive pressure from Europe to make massive cutbacks and must be stopped in its tracks now.

The best way this can be done is an indefinite general strike against all the cuts and all job losses. It is imperative that private sector workers strike alongside their brothers and sisters in the public sector because the cuts will cause deterioration in all workers' standard of living. Private sector workers also suffer from worse public services. Hundreds of their pension schemes are facing collapse. A strike must address the need for a state-backed pension guarantee scheme.

The job losses in the educational sector with more than 1,000 teaching jobs in peril is matched by the horrendous loss of jobs in the private sector. Dublin bus workers have voted for strike action against job losses. We have seen

Waterford workers fighting for their jobs with their inspirational occupation of the plant (see below). Major plants like SR Technics are closing with thousands facing the dole queue – they should be occupied as well. Dell workers forced their management to double their redundancy payout.

A major crisis faces the Irish economy and workers are being made to pay for the ills of capitalism. A class-wide assault on Irish workers is being waged by the government and its business backers in IBEC. Workers need a class-wide response and that demands a general strike to stop the cuts and job losses.

ACTION COUNCILS

Action councils should be built in every area of Ireland to co-ordinate such a strike and all resistance to the government. These should draw in trade unionists, students, pensioners, migrant workers and the unemployed. These councils need to tap into the vast well of anger and organise action such as occupations of factories declaring redundancies right down to protests like the 4,000 people that marched in Nenagh recently against cuts to their local

Waterford occupation: 'We have had

The Waterford occupation has entered its fourth week. Workers at Waterford Crystals are fighting for their jobs after the Waterford Wedgwood Group went into receivership. Negotiations are still in progress as two rival companies Clarion Investments and KPS Capital Partners talk to the receiver and union officials about a possible purchase.

As our leaflet on the march in Dublin pointed out, either bidder will immediately move to cut jobs – that's why we need nationalisation under workers control.

Here we interview with Tom Hogan, Unite, President of Waterford Trades Council and former employee at the plant from the Waterford occupation.

L5I: What's been the biggest disappointment?

TH: The fact that the government is not

going to succeed in buying the factory. Obviously we're trying to put pressure on the government to take it into public ownership but we haven't had any response.

L5I: Whoever buys, it will involve job losses, which is why public ownership is so important to stop that.

TH: No doubt that if either of the two bidders took over it would involve job losses. People see that the government has written this off and is not going to move in to take it over. If this crowd [one of bidders] take it over, the majority of workers will lose their jobs and they want to be compensated. In addition, you have the question of pensions – people have made calls that after 40 or even 45 years, pensioners should not have to pay for their pensions. It's a very

not entirely gone off the agenda because some government spokespersons have indicated taking some of the factory into public ownership, such as the tourist trade, with the other crowd buying the brand.

L5I: Is your trade union calling for public ownership?

TH: Yes they are.

L5I: As socialists we would argue it is done under workers control with no business secrecy and democratic control of the board. What do you think?

TH: This point has been made by dozens of workers on TV and radio, although no

into general strike



120,000 demonstrate in Dublin against government's austerity measures

general hospital.

Strike committees democratically run and controlled by mass meetings should lead the strike and hold their union officials to account. Rank and file movements in the unions need to be built urgently to address the need for a new fighting leadership.

If the government won't rescue

workers' jobs, then we demand nationalisation under workers control and with no compensation to the bosses. We call for an end to business secrecy and demand workers' control over the boardroom. We demand taxes that hit the rich not the workers and jobs for the unemployed with a public works programme that can build hospi-

tals, schools, and provide public services.

A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

A general strike would pose the question of who holds the power in society – the workers or the bosses. Workers need to fight for a genuine workers' government accountable to mass democratic

organisations, such as action councils, based in the workplace and the community. It would be a government that sides with the working class and strikes out against capitalism.

Capitalism has proven itself to be a sick, unequal, unjust, crisis and war-racked system that cannot deliver a decent life to workers. Socialism is the only alternative and a workers' government would expropriate the rich, their industry, banks, property and finance companies and put it all under workers control.

The task of developing such a programme of action in transition to socialism must be taken up by a new working class party in Ireland. A party, dedicated to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and imperialism in Ireland, needs to be urgently built. The social and economic crisis now affecting Irish society springs from a synchronised global recession of a decaying world capitalist system. The development of a new socialist alternative in Ireland will be inextricably bound up with the building of a new socialist alternative in Ireland will be inextricably bound up with the building of a new international party that can rally the workers of the world against imperialism. The League for a Fifth International sets itself that goal!

very little from the Celtic Tiger'

L5I: What support have you received from local workers in Waterford?

TH: In Waterford, we have had two rallies, the first of which had 2,000 people in atrocious conditions. A week later, the trades council, of which I am president, organised a march of 10,000 people and we had workers from every workplace in the city. This was a great morale boost for everybody. We have had messages of support from the Liverpool dockers, from Jack Jones and Michael Moore the film maker, and many more. We have sent speakers to London and been asked to send speakers to Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. There is huge interest everywhere.

L5I: What you've done is a beacon to the

TH: In Ennis, we've heard of a sit-in at a company that makes diamond products, formerly de Beers. They were introducing short-time work and then moved to sack 150 people and we heard about a sit-in at the canteen. If we're an inspiration to workers then fantastic!

L5I: I've been disturbed to hear about trade union leaders talking about social solidarity when it's only workers making sacrifices. They shouldn't have to – that's another reason why your occupation is an inspiration.

TH: People by and large feel they got very little out of the Celtic Tiger and certainly didn't cause the problems that are happening. They should be as active as

cliff and someone better do something about it. There is a mixture of feeling about what should happen. I was asked a question by a TV crew as what happens if the government doesn't listen to these protests - I replied they should be swept from power and the next crew that come in should know what the workers' agenda is.

L5I: Do you think we need a socialist alternative?

TH: We do indeed!

Send messages of support and donations to Unite Hall, Keyzer St, Waterford, Co. Waterford, Republic of Ireland.

Phone 01353 5187 5438 or e-mail
waterford@unitehall.com

RACISM

Migrant workers: myths and realities

Migrant workers have been attacked by sections of the media, government ministers and even by trade unionists. *Marcus Halaby* exposes the main myths

Q1: How many migrant workers are there in the UK?

There are 3.8 million non UK-born workers in the UK, according to the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) February release on employment. This is an increase of 214,000 in the year to December 2008. The number of UK-born workers fell by 278,000 to 25.6 million, while unemployment was at a 10-year high at 1.97 million.

This sparked tabloid outrage. The *Daily Express* headline ran "Foreigners flock in as British jobless hits 10-year high". While *The Sun* announced, "Foreigners grab 200,000 Brit jobs". All this added fuel to the chauvinist fire started over the recent Lindsey Oil Refinery strike for "British Jobs for British Workers".

The *Daily Telegraph* focused on news that the proportion of jobs held by "foreign workers" had almost doubled to 13 per cent since Labour came to power with two-thirds of the increase coming from outside the European Union (EU).

But the figures are misleading. The ONS count as foreign-born workers those who have been here for decades (and who now hold British citizenship) and those coming back into the workforce after a period of unemployment. A south Asian woman who came here 30 years ago, is raising a family and who now holds a British passport would be considered non-UK if she took a job; someone born in the UK but who has worked overseas for 30 years would, if returning to a job, would be considered UK born.

Migrant workers in the UK are outnumbered by the 5.5 million Brits living abroad permanently. Also the percentage of migrants in the UK workforce varies between eight and 12 per cent (depending on the source).

cent of workforce, Italy 6.4 per cent, and France 8.5 per cent. (The Times, 12 February.)

Q2: Do migrant workers take "British" jobs?

During this decade the numbers of people in employment in the UK grew to record heights with more than 30 million people in employment (including non-UK labour) or just over 75 per cent of the eligible population for work (ONS figures). The figure for UK born labour was over 26 million – still a record percentage amount. This record number of people in work also coincided with a big growth in the use of migrant labour.

Latest evidence from the Home Office and Department for Works and Pensions show how migrant labour declines along with the increase in UK unemployment as the recession deepens:

- There were 165,000 initial applicants to the Approved Worker Registration Scheme in 2008 compared to 218,000 in 2007.
- National Insurance numbers given to adult overseas nationals entering the UK was 167,000 in the third quarter of 2008 down from 190,000 in the third quarter of 2007.

A boom pulls in more workers irrespective of nationality and a recession throws workers onto the dole. Replacing one set of workers by another set will not increase employment. Restricting migrant labour would lead to a reduction in demand in the economy and aggravate the recession for all workers irrespective of their nationality.

Q3: Does migrant workers' pay undercut UK wages?

It is undoubtedly true that the bosses will try to use migrant labour to hold down workers' wages. Some

be paid less than UK workers. In the recent Lindsey oil refinery strike, there was no evidence that the migrant workers were being paid any less. In the case of Staythorpe, the BBC reported that Unite spokesperson David Smeeton argued foreign workers were earning too much: "Workers who are brought in are paid £12,000 to £15,000 more for their accommodation and flights home. It is economic madness not to use as many local workers as you can."

The Institute for Public Policy Research last month published research that looked at the effect of migrant labour on UK wages. It found: "One percentage point increase in migrants working in the UK would only reduce wages by around 0.3 per cent."

In fact the biggest factor in determining wages is not migrants but working in a unionised workplace – where wages are consistently higher than non-unionised workplaces. Unions should be organising migrant workers as well as UK born workers, to make sure that wages and conditions are levelled up instead of down, and to prevent the bosses from creating a layer of insecure, casual and unorganised workers that can be used to divide the workforce.

Q4 Why are migrant workers being targeted?

The government has joined the press campaign against migrant workers of *The Sun* and *Daily Mail*. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith has announced that she will be tightening up visa rules to bar "tens of thousands" of non-EU migrants from working in the UK. The aim is simple. Divide the working class along national lines to divert any fightback into scapegoating foreign workers. Sadly the antics of

and non-UK workers.

We in Workers Power believe that there should be a free movement of labour throughout the world. Attempts to "control" immigration do nothing to protect workers from the effects of capitalist crisis, while undermining the unity and solidarity workers need to resist the bosses' attacks.

The migration of labour is as old as capitalism itself. Millions of Irish workers came to English cities in search of work in the 19th Century, the US was built on migration, and the First International of Marx and Engels was set up initially to build solidarity between London building workers and Belgium workers brought in to undercut their wages.

Today, the biggest group of "migrants" to London and the south east come not from abroad but from other parts of the UK. No one seriously suggests putting "native Londoners" ahead of Geordies, Scousers or Mancunians in the queue for jobs despite the worrying calls for "local jobs for local people".

Immigration controls, or discriminatory hiring practices favouring one group of workers over another, may provide a short-term advantage to a small group of workers, but actually do the bosses' work for them in the long run. By criminalising foreign-born workers and leaving them outside of the protection of the organised labour movement, they turn migrant workers into exactly what the advocates of immigration controls claim to fear most – a tool for undermining jobs, wages and conditions.

Karl Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* that "workers have no country". Instead the working class must strive to become an

Global slump has begun – now let's fight for socialism

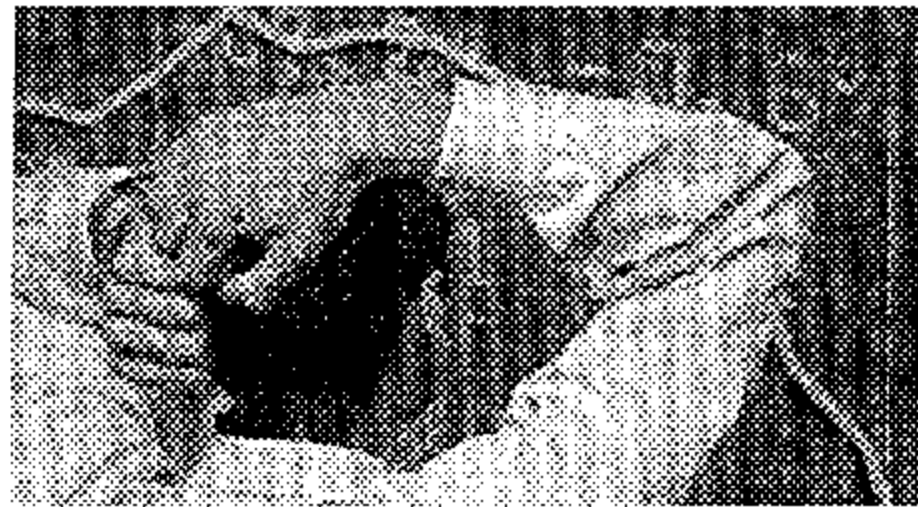
The last quarter of 2008 saw a sharp contraction in economic output for the world's major economies. It signals that the process of destroying excess capital is well underway, writes *Luke Cooper*

The synchronised world recession has begun, with the last quarter of 2008 seeing a sharp contraction in global economic output. The global banking insolvency crisis is compounding the downturn in industrial production as businesses face shrinking markets while also being starved of the credit needed to keep them operating – a process we have called a “vicious circle-like contagion” and the IMF calls a “pernicious negative feedback loop”.

The last quarter of 2008 showed there was a global slump in industrial production. A raft of recent figures was released that reveal the scale of the problem unfolding before us. IMF figures for global industrial production and exports published in January expose a dramatic falling off. World exports fell by 26 per cent in October and by an astonishing 42.6 per cent in November. Industrial output contracted by 8.9 per cent in October, then a further 13.1 per cent in November.

Every one of the world's major economies has been hit. In the US, revised fourth quarter GDP figures showed a contraction of 6.8 per cent, meaning that overall in 2008 the economy grew by just 1.1 per cent – a far worse showing than the expected 3.8 per cent. US exports – which had been boosting the economy earlier in the year as the declining dollar made them cheaper – took a pounding in the last quarter too, falling by some 23.6 per cent (the sharpest fall since 1970). US consumer spending – that accounts for some two thirds of US GDP – also fell by 4.3 per cent (the biggest fall since 1980).

Even worse news was recorded in the export dependent economies of Japan and Germany. In Japan industrial output fell by 10 per cent in January – the biggest fall since records began half a century ago. While exports collapsed by 45.7 per cent compared to a year ago. In Germany fourth quarter GDP plunged by 2.1 per cent – the fastest decline since 1987 with exports down 70 per cent. Other European economies, such as France, Italy and the UK, also saw a sharp decline in output in the last quarter.



news from the “emerging markets” was sorely disappointed. A sharp slowdown is underway in the Indian economy, with growth dropping off to 5.3 per cent GDP for the last quarter – down from 8.9 per cent in the same period a year earlier. While in China, where GDP figures are historically – in the words of Albert Edwards of Société Générale – “appallingly manipulated”, the official figures showed that growth slumped to 6.8 per cent in the last quarter. But perhaps more telling is the collapse of Japanese exports to China, which has now fallen at a 35 per cent year-on-year rate – suggesting the downturn in China is far worse than the official figures maintain. As Edwards concluded: “I would eat my hat if the Chinese economy was doing anything other than contracting right now.”

We can see that a major recession in every sector of the global economy is now underway and signals the beginning of a real slump in industrial production. A group of economists at the World Economic Forum recently calculated that some 40 per cent of global wealth (e.g. share values, credit assets, real estate values, etc) had been destroyed since the crisis began in 2007. This process is what Marxists call the devaluation of capital, when excess capital, which cannot realise sufficient surplus value (profits) in production, is destroyed. This is a necessary process for capital to go through as it aims to create conditions permitting a new period of expansion and profitability (the boom after the slump, or the business cycle as it is known).

The main effect of this process is that the value of capital is destroyed. This is a necessary process for capital to go through as it aims to create conditions permitting a new period of expansion and profitability (the boom after the slump, or the business cycle as it is known).

ing, expanding public debt and resorting to “quantitative easing” (printing money) – the packages will disrupt the endogenous process of capital destruction but they will not ameliorate the crisis. While making the slump shallower than it would otherwise be, it will only succeed in prolonging the crisis and storing up further economic contradictions by augmenting the problem of over-accumulation.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

Why is this analysis important? Because socialists need to prepare the working class for the attacks by the bosses that have now begun: as working people are made to pay for the crisis of the bosses' system.

Initially, this will come through massive redundancies. We can already see that job losses and unemployment are escalating across the world. A report by the International Labour Organisation predicted that global unemployment would rise to 210 million – up from 190 million at the end of 2007. The same report said: “The number of working poor living on less than US\$1 a day could rise by some 40 million – and those at US\$2 a day by more than 100 million”. Others are even less optimistic – Oxfam warned that one in six of the global population could face a hunger crisis.

A moment's thought about these staggering facts is surely all that it takes to realise we need to get rid of this whole rotten system and make way for an alternative. Socialist ideas can gain a hearing from millions in these conditions. When confronted with a world tragedy this immense, socialism goes from being a “nice idea” to an essential struggle for survival. Socialists need to a strategy that starts with the resistance – with the fight to defend every job and organise the unemployed – and outlines the steps to working class power. Our goal is to end the anarchy of the market and the cruel regime of profits, and build a world of equality where everyone can benefit.

For more information on the current crisis and the struggle for socialism, visit our website at www.fifthinternational.org

WOMEN

Women bear the brunt of economic downturn

As the UK's recession deepens, women are suffering disproportionately because of their double burden as low-paid, insecure workers and as unpaid carers in the home. *Joy Macready* challenges the myth of an "equal opportunities recession".

As the recession really begins to bite, Britain's bosses are sacking workers by the tens of thousands. Close to 40,000 jobs were lost in January alone. Unemployment has hit a 12-year high of just under 1.97 million, the worst figure since new Labour came to power in 1997. It is widely expected to reach 3.3 million by 2010.

Britain's unemployment rate is rising at twice the European average. Speaking at a Trade Union Congress Equality Reps Conference on 9 February, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber coined the phrase that this is an "equal opportunities recession." He was pointing to two current phenomena. Firstly there are more women in the workforce than ever before; in 1979 59.5 per cent of women were in work, now that figure stands at 70 per cent. Therefore larger numbers than ever are likely to lose their jobs. Secondly, unlike the recessions in the 1980s and '90s which predominantly hit the mainly male-dominated manufacturing industries, this crisis is affecting all sectors of the economy from banking and finance, through retail and service sectors, through to industry and construction. Barber was saying that women are going to be hit just as hard as men.

But there he is wrong; he underestimates the attack which women face. They are disproportionately affected by economic downturns. Recent official employment statistics show that the number of women in full-time work fell by 53,000 in the last quarter of 2008, compared with a fall of 36,000 for men. The female redundancy rate has risen by 2.3 percentage points since the start of 2008, almost double the rate of the increase for men of 1.2 percentage points, according to research by



differences in the type of work the majority of women do, the still enormous pay gap, but also the role that women play within the family as the main carers. A recession thus contributes to their double burden of worker – slashing their incomes while increasing their work as carers.

WOMEN'S WORK: PRECARIOUS AND PART-TIME

Of the 12 million women in work, 40 per cent are working part-time and 29 per cent are in low-paid jobs. One-fifth of women are in administrative or secretarial work compared to four per cent of men, and there are far more men in skilled trades and working as managers. This has left women more vulnerable to recession as low-paid, flexible jobs are being squeezed particularly hard by the downturn. Many of the job losses have come in retail, where two-thirds of the workforce are women – 42 per cent of them working part-time.

More than 10 million women are

manufacturing industries have seen but it is only a matter of time. With Brown throwing £250 billion at saving the banks, talking up stimulus packages of £90bn, and increasing state borrowing to close to another £200bn, it is certain that he, or his successor in Number 10, will have to inflict savage rounds of cuts in public services in order to balance the books. Already councils and regional authorities are looking for major cuts – the Welsh government has already announced that it will cut public services budgets by an "unprecedented" £500m in 2010.

Unions expect that tens of thousands of Britain's six million public sector workers will lose their jobs as the recession deepens.

This affects women in two ways: obviously with a high concentration of women in the public sector, they will be the ones getting the sack in order to cut costs; but it is also predominantly women that rely on public services, such as health care and child care. When these services are cut, women are

shoulder the responsibility in the home. Also if many of their husbands, or sons and daughters who have not left home, lose their jobs too, the burden on the family will be enormously increased.

Even the government's rescue packages are weighted in favour of male-dominated industries. Brown has pledged to create 100,000 jobs by bringing forward £10bn of spending planned for public works, such as school repairs and rail links. Then there's the help for the car industry, which includes a scheme to unlock £1.3bn of loans from Europe for car manufacturers and major suppliers. No one is talking about rushing in to save jobs at call centres or retail chains like Woolworths – which lost 27,000 jobs.

WOMEN'S LOW PAY POVERTY TRAP

Women still dominate the five "C"s – cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical work. There is a 17 per cent gap between men and women's pay for full-time work in the UK. This is a stark reality for

earning on average 62p per hour for every £1 a man earns. Jobs held by women were almost twice as likely to fall below the minimum wage as jobs held by men (1.4 per cent compared with 0.8 per cent).

As women generally earn less than men, they often have less savings to fall back on if they lose their job. In a recent poll, Equifax revealed that 44 per cent of women think that they would struggle financially within a month of losing their jobs – due in part to their high debts and low savings.

Unemployed women are also less likely than men to qualify for Jobseekers Allowance. In addition, it is often more difficult for women to find a new job because of their other responsibilities, notably childcare. For example, lone parents – 90 per cent of whom are women – now make up a quarter of all families.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 legislated equal wages for women – and yet they have had to fight tooth and nail to make this right a reality. Local councils, such as West Midlands, Warwickshire County, Blackpool, Bolton, Bury and Manchester, are in the spotlight for systematically underpaying women workers – council workers, cleaners, cooks, care staff and dinner ladies – compared to their male counterparts. Shockingly Birmingham Council used the single status legislation to level pay down – effectively attempting to pay all employees less. This brought thousands of women and men out onto the streets on 24 April last year.

Labour's Minister for Equalities Harriet Harman has paid lip service to women's rights for equal pay: on the one hand, she has pledged that the equality agenda will not take a backseat during the recession, and yet directly afterwards she was praised by employers' organi-

sation the Institute of Directors after the government announced that companies applying for public sector contracts would not have to provide details about gender pay gaps. Yet 22 per cent of companies have secrecy clauses effectively banning staff from talking about their pay.

DOUBLE BURDEN IN THE HOME

A report by TUC on women and the recession claims that more households are depending on a woman's wage. And yet it is still the case the 85 per cent of the caring responsibilities in the home fall to the woman.

The result of this is that working class women are often more oppressed, having to carry out a "double shift" – paid work in factories, shops or offices and then unpaid domestic work at home. Caring for children and performing the bulk of household work leads to women being unable to play a full and equal role outside in the workforce. But lower paid women are either excluded from social labour and life, or they are often directed into areas of work closely allied to the domestic economy and its skills, such as retail distribution, clothing, catering, social and health services, cleaning, etc. Where women work alongside men in factories and offices, they tend to be restricted to the unskilled, semi-skilled and lowest paid sectors. Better paid professional women – MPs, managers, lawyers, school heads, and consultants – can employ nannies to escape this problem, so the gender issue and the class issue are integrally linked.

Above all, the media, politicians, and the church all present the family as a woman's central role and responsibility to which waged work

should be subordinated. The family is vital to the existence of capitalism itself – it is where the cost of raising the next generation of workers is offloaded onto the working class. It is a social structure within which the oppression of women and youth is perpetuated and because of which those deemed not to fit into it, lesbians and gay men, suffer discrimination and oppression.

Women with children certainly need work that can be organised to fit in with home responsibilities as long as these are not socialised – and indeed they will never be completely so under capitalism. Thus the shifts women work, such as evenings, nights, and school hours, should allow women to combine their two roles. So it is laughable when the Department for Work and Pensions says men suffer more in a recession through redundancies because many women "choose" to work part time.

Also there is little doubt that domestic violence will increase as a direct consequence of the credit crunch. For men, unemployment robs them of self-esteem and a sense of purpose, triggering insecurity and fear, especially if they feel robbed of a duty to provide for their family. Combined with money troubles and being cooped up at home, some men are more likely to become violent.

UNION (IN)ACTION

For all Brendan Barber's expressed concern for women in the recession, the trade unions are taking little specific action to help women. Not only should Barber be demanding that the government adopts a plan to protect women against sackings, but the trade unions should be actively organising women in the workplace, defending their right

to work, and organising those already in the dole queue, fighting for their right to work and also against the decimation of their communities.

The TUC needs to learn the lessons of the Great Miners' Strike in 1984-85 where the miners' wives not only participated in the struggle but also took a lead in the fight-back. The women weren't content to do as the National Union of Miners wanted them to do, which was limited to running soup kitchens and writing petitions; they organised demonstrations and speaking tours to rally the nation to support their communities. During the struggle, they also challenged the sexism within the trade union movement and within their homes.

Wives of the Hatfield Main miners explained: "We're trying to get the women together from the community and involved in the strike. It's so they don't have to ask their husbands what's going on. It's so they know what's going on for themselves... It's the first time working class women have been organised like this since the fight for the vote." Through militant self-organisation, women can challenge oppression in the home, in the workplace and in society at large.

On the 25th anniversary of the Great Miners Strike and on International Women's Day 2009, we should commemorate the legacy of the miners' wives movement. The role of women in the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism is essential. As part of the working class, women must be involved in the struggle for power and see their own liberation as a critical part of the struggle for socialism.

See page 22 for more about women and the Miners' Strike.

International Women's Day

Born at a time of great social turbulence and crisis when the imperialist nations were gearing up for the World War I, International Women's Day inherited a tradition of radicalism and revolutionary spirit. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women in industrially developing countries were entering paid work, out of the confines of private family life and into the public sphere.

as the German Social Democrat Clara Zetkin, had argued since the 1890s for that special organisation and publications were needed so that working class women could be brought into the workers' movement in huge numbers. In the Second International (1889) and then the Third Communist International (founded in 1919) Zetkin and the Russian revolutionaries, Alexandra Kollontai, Nadiazhda Krupskaya

and laid the foundations of a working class, communist women's movement.

But it was in the US in 1908, on the last Sunday in February, that socialist women initiated the first International Women's Day when large demonstrations took place calling for the vote and the political and economic rights for women. The following year, 2,000 people attended a Women's Day rally in Manhattan and women garment workers staged a

shirtwaist makers; they struck for 13 winter weeks for better pay and working conditions.

In 1910, Clara Zetkin came to the Second International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen with the proposal that Women's Day become an international event. The next year more than one million women and men attended rallies in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Sweden under the slogan "The vote for women will unite our struggle in the world."

WAR ON TERROR

Obama executes Afghan “surge”

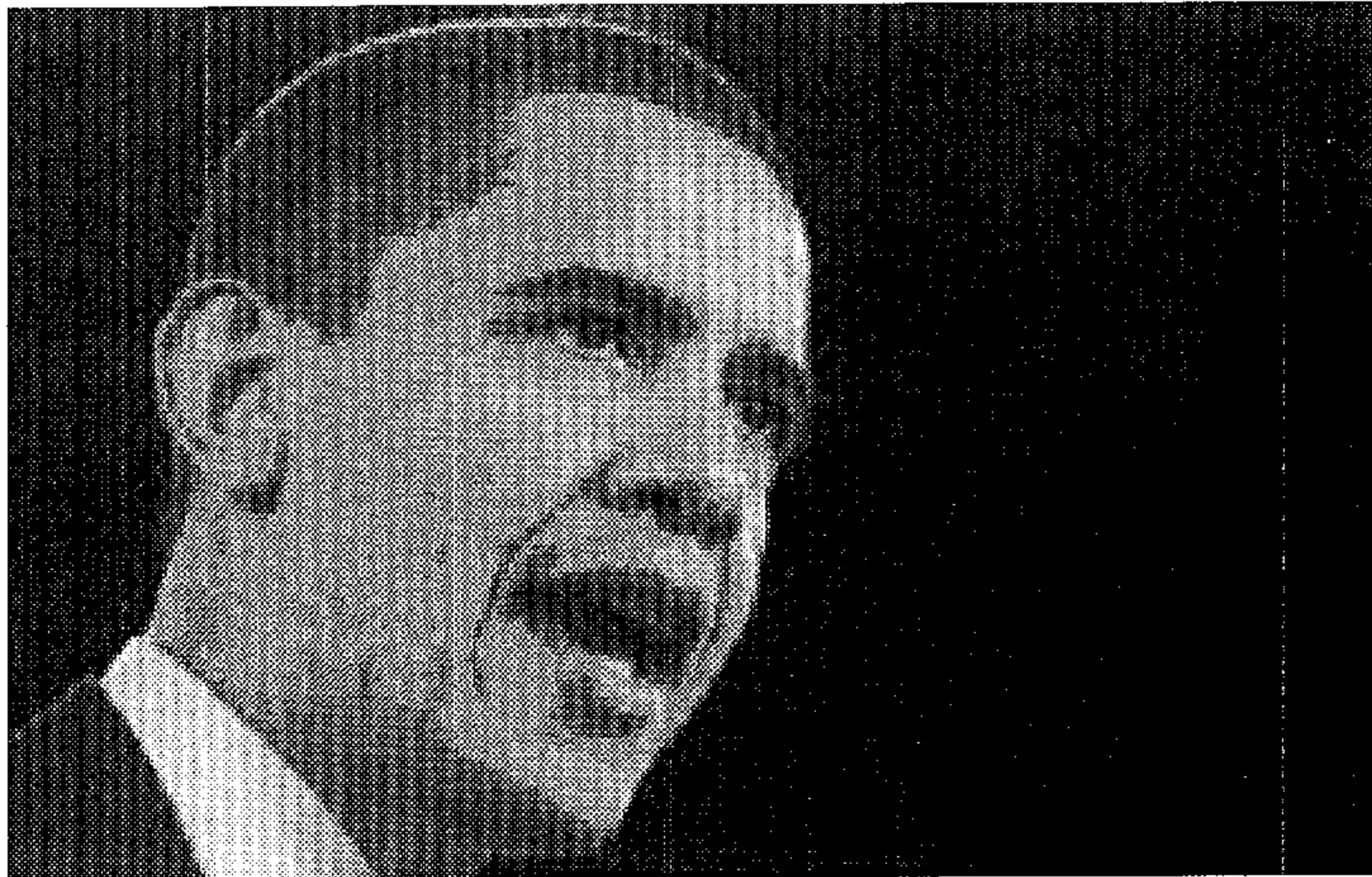
Staying true to his election pledge, President Obama has announced plans to send another 17,000 troops into Afghanistan. This was not a new or novel idea, however, for Bush had already planned to boost the size of the US occupation forces in the country.

Obama claims that the surge is needed to stabilise a fast deteriorating situation for the occupying forces. In February a leaked Nato report showed just how bad the situation was. Attacks on the faltering Afghan government doubled in 2008 and there was a 50 per cent increase in kidnappings and assassinations. The death rate of soldiers went up by 35 per cent, while the civilian death toll climbed by 46 per cent.

The scale of collapse in support for the occupation can be seen from a recent poll by ABC news: “The number who say the US has performed well in Afghanistan has been more than halved, from 68 per cent in 2005 to 32 per cent now. Ratings of Nato/ISAF forces are no better. Just 37 per cent of Afghans now say most people in their area support Western forces; it was 67 per cent in 2006. And 25 per cent now say attacks on US or Nato/ISAF forces can be justified, double the level, 13 per cent, in 2006.”

One of the main reasons for this drop in popular support for the occupation is the very high number of civilian deaths caused by the conflict. The preferred method of using air strikes has led to terrible casualty rates – notably the bombing of a wedding party in 2008 that killed 47 civilians, most of them women and children.

So Obama's solution to all this is to... send more troops. They will be deployed to the capital, Kabul, and in the regions which are the most volatile – the north and west of the country, and the south.



lobbying hard to get more Nato countries to commit troops. At this year's G20 and Nato meetings, happening back to back in Europe, the question of Afghanistan will be “near the top of the list” according to one official.

Nato has around 50,000 military personnel in Afghanistan, including 17,000 from the US, alongside 8,300 British and forces from nearly 40 other countries. On top of this, there are many other troops, for instance around 25,000 US troops outside of the Nato command structure. The US military alone spends over \$100m a day on the occupation of the country.

The model they are using is the surge in Iraq, which the imperialists claim has restored peace. But this is far from the truth. While the number of violent attacks has gone down, there is no guarantee that once the combat troops leave Iraq the various sectarian militias, which made up a large part of the resistance, will disappear. In fact, they have not.

to the occupation remains high in Iraq and, for now, the plans for withdrawal have ameliorated the resistance, but it could quickly develop again given Obama plans to maintain some 30-40,000 troops in Iraq stationed at permanent US military bases.

The US also has contingency plans in place if there is a renewal of sectarian fighting. The new US vice president, Joe Biden, was one of the architects of the break up of Yugoslavia, a process so devastating to the region that new terms entered into common language like “ethnic cleansing” and “Balkanisation”. Iraq would be prime material to break up into three weak parts that would be easy for the S to dominate. But in Afghanistan, this will not be so easy to achieve.

The surge in Afghanistan will struggle to achieve its objectives. The Soviet invasion force in the 1970s was defeated and the US has never been able to control the country.

number of Nato troops is not nearly as large. Still, Obama and Brown are intent on further consolidating this conflict as a Nato war – the first real war of its kind involving over 50,000 military personnel and the long-term occupation of a country, all mandated by the UN.

Obama is giving the US military and intelligence services a clear signal that they can do whatever they deem necessary to win. That is why, relatively under the cloak of announcing the closure of Guantanamo Bay, he has allowed Bagram airforce base to be classified as “outside of the remit” of international law.

The war in Afghanistan has been called the “winnable war” or, alternately, the “war that must be won”. This war is part of the US imperialist plans for the world – where they will fight tooth and nail to preserve their hegemony. Obama has a slight advantage over his predecessor in that he has a better understanding of the situation in Afghanistan.

Binyam Mohamed and the barbarism of the US Empire

If ever a story exposed the lies and hypocrisy of the war on terror protagonists, argues *Luke Cooper*, it is the case of Binyam Mohamed: incarcerated for seven years without trial and tortured by US intelligence agencies

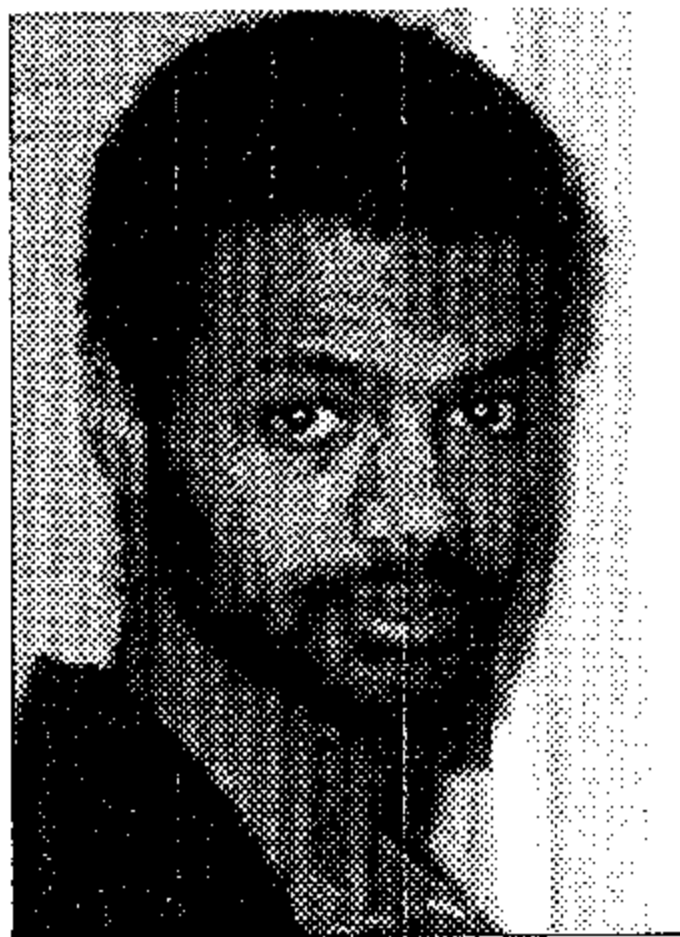
Guantanamo Bay prisoner, Binyam Mohamed, has finally been released after seven years held without trial by the US authorities. The Pakistani authorities first arrested him in 2002 when he attempted to board a Karachi flight in order to return to Britain. He had travelled to Pakistan from Afghanistan to escape the fallout from the 11 September attacks and upon arrest he entered the American “ghost prison system” before being moved to Guantanamo Bay in September 2004. Denied anything resembling a trial – fair or otherwise – and submitted to the most appalling acts of torture during his interrogation, his experience testifies to the moral bankruptcy of the American Empire.

“EXTRAORDINARY RENDITION”

The “ghost prison system” is the network of secret prisons run by the CIA in American client states across the world. Binyam was taken to prisons in Pakistan, Morocco and Afghanistan as part of its so-called “extraordinary rendition” policy. This term is a repulsive euphemism used by the US administration for the abduction and illegal imprisonment of foreign nationals without any of the rights that they would be granted if they were arrested and detained in the US. While much has – quite rightly – been made of the British government’s attempt to introduce 42-day detention without charge, Binyam suffered a fate that was much worse: detained for three years without any charges being brought against him, then for a further four years without a trial before the charges were dropped.

TORTURED

And what evidence did the US authorities have against Binyam? None that is capable of standing up to serious scrutiny. They claimed he was involved in the 9/11 attacks, but this was based on a confession extracted from him under torture. The US authorities also claimed he was involved in the 2002 bombings in London, but this was based on a confession extracted from him under torture. The US authorities also claimed he was involved in the 2005 bombings in London, but this was based on a confession extracted from him under torture.



Binyam Mohamed

In 2005, this was the basis for the bringing of the conspiracy charge against him. But the “evidence” for this was either circumstantial – i.e. he was in Afghanistan while it was ruled by the Taliban – or extracted during interrogations when Binyam was submitted to acts of torture.

In the ghost prison in Morocco, Binyam has told of how interrogators used razor blades and scalpels to repeatedly cut his penis and chest. At Guantanamo Bay he has exposed a regime that carries out savage beatings of inmates, where guards taunted detainees by desecrating the Qur’an, and where female interrogators carried out acts of sexual humiliation against the prisoners. In Kabul at the “Dark Prison”, a regime that has been exposed by Human Rights Watch, detainees are permanently chained to the wall, kept in darkness, deprived of food and water for weeks at a time, and forced to listen to western music played at high decibel levels. When Binyam was held in the “Dark Prison”, he says he was injected with heroin against his will so that his drug addiction could be used against him in interrogation.

IN DEFENCE OF BASIC FREEDOMS AND RIGHTS

The winning of democratic rights and freedoms was one of the great accomplishments of the bourgeois revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was the result of the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

commitments to prisoners of war) have pointed to the “evidence” against Binyam: they attack as a “flimsy excuse” his claim to have gone to Afghanistan to kick a drugs habit because it is the “heroine capital of the world”, and pointed to the admissions of guilt he has made during his incarceration. It is quite something when going to a country becomes a crime in and of itself, and semi-confessions (he admitted to going to a training camp but not to planning to carry out terrorist attacks on western targets) extracted in conditions analogous to a medieval torture chamber can be used legitimately as evidence.

No doubt part of the reason Binyam’s case has attracted popular outcry and discontent against the US is not only the harrowing stories of the conditions in their “ghost prisons” but also that it is plain there is no serious or credible evidence for any of the charges. The danger in this is that it could become “fair enough” to deny “real terrorists” their most basic democratic rights, while the US is asked to exercise greater care over who it decides to abduct and torture. We need to make clear the whole system from Guantanamo to the Kabul “Dark Prison” is reactionary to the core.

Binyam had no access to independent legal representation, was charged under Bush’s military commissions with none of the protection of a normal court of law and subject to torture. The right to a fair trial, the treatment of the accused as innocent until proven guilty, and checks against unlawful imprisonment are all basic democratic rights and have been ripped to pieces by the war on terror.

THE BARBARISM OF THE US EMPIRE

The winning of democratic rights and freedoms was one of the great accomplishments of the bourgeois revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was the result of the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

ror. But the capitalists were never consistent democrats. It took workers’ and social movements, like the Chartists and Suffragettes in Britain and the civil rights movement in the US, which struggled hard to win democratic rights for all.

The undermining of democratic rights has always been a feature of great colonial empires, from the British in India to the French in Algeria. Today’s US empire, with its mobilisation of huge resources and the most advanced technology to create a vast global military apparatus with a web of secret torture chambers, sits well with this colonial tradition. It also testifies to the tendency to social decay and barbarism of the capitalist system in the age of imperialism.

Many now hope that the Obama regime will change all this. And it is certainly to be welcomed that Obama is taking steps to shut down Guantanamo Bay. But he has not promised to shut down the global ghost prison network or ensure that the CIA will cease to use torture. On the contrary, he plans a US\$60m expansion of Bagram Airbase Detention Centre in Afghanistan, as part of his “Afghan surge”, which will allow it to hold up to five times as many prisoners.

We need to fight this all the way but we also should have no illusions in our own government either. Not only were British intelligence services complicit with Binyam’s torture, not only did the foreign secretary David Milliband refuse to release the details on ‘national security grounds’, but similar attacks on democratic rights and freedoms have been carried through in every one of the Labour government’s (nearly annual) pieces of anti-terrorist legislation.

As the capitalist crisis deepens and workers are asked to pay for the crisis, the fight for democratic rights must be a cornerstone of our resistance – not just to the capitalist system but to the imperialist system that has been built up over the last century.

FRANCE

New Anticapitalist Party launched in France

A new anticapitalist party has been founded in France. This is one step forward but others are needed to meet the demands of the struggles ahead, argues *Marc Lassalle* in Paris

The French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA, New Anticapitalist Party) had its founding congress 6-8 February in St. Denis (Paris), the day after the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) held its dissolution congress. The LCR, for 40 years the French section of the Fourth International (USFI), will clearly retain some sort of existence in this role at least.

Held in the midst of a first wave of resistance against the effects of the capitalist crisis and the attacks of Nicolas Sarkozy, which had culminated in the general strike of 29 January, this congress marks an important step for the radical left and could open up new perspectives for the class struggle in France.

An appeal to form a new anticapitalist party was launched by LCR leader Olivier Besancenot right after the 2007 elections, in which Sarkozy was elected by promising to be the French Margaret Thatcher, but also where the LCR got a historically high score of 1.5 million votes (4.1 per cent). Over the following year, more than 400 local committees were formed across the country around an LCR core and substantial numbers of trade unionists, youth, members of ATTAC, and supporters of José Bové, but with a majority for whom this is their first experience of political organisation. The numbers clearly show this: while the number of LCR members was under 3000, the newly formed NPA has more than 9000 active members.

Certainly Olivier Besancenot himself is a major factor since he has tremendous support among the youth and the working class. But this is far from being the sole or even the primary reason for the NPA's success. Indeed, as Besancenot has put it in his opening address to the congress, we live in a new historical period marked by mass resistance against capitalist attacks. The wave of struggles and strike of November 1995 was just a first episode in a long list. Everybody still remembers the banlieues uprising in 2005 and the mighty struggles against the CPE (a cheap expendable work contract for youth) in 2006.

The recent general strike of 29 January 2009 was the latest in a series of



LCR leader Olivier Besancenot

dency. Indeed, the very fact that Sarkozy, a hard line neoliberal was elected despite heightened class struggle, shows one of the main contradictions of the period. While the rank and file are ready to fight, their leadership – be it in the historic parties of the French left the Socialist Party (PS) or the Communist Party (PCF) or in the trade unions – repeatedly tried to avoid the fight. Of course, this is because in the final analysis they have accepted capitalism and are therefore willing to sacrifice even the most immediate interests of the workers in order to maintain its stability.

“New period, new programme, new party.” This, in short, is the analysis made by the LCR leadership. And it contains an important element of truth – one that applies in many countries in Europe and beyond. The various waves of struggles – not just the workers and youth movements but the anticapitalist mobilisations of the first half of the decade – have created a new layer of activists that have identified capitalism as their enemy. The previous layer of activists, however, has been unable to

sans-papiers, or the international anticapitalist movement, they have learned their first lessons on the nature of the system and the state. However, no party has so far been able to relate to them and to draw them into its ranks. Also, an increasing number of these activists have experienced the limits of spontaneity and amorphous libertarian movements and are now convinced that they cannot go further without an organised party. To organise and unite these fighters coming from widely different backgrounds is the first task of the NPA.

Preceded by a whole series of local conferences of the committees, the founding congress, attended by 600 delegates, had the important political task to define the organisational framework of the new party, its name, its statutes and its programme. While several hundred names had been proposed, many of them completely off the wall like the Parti Humaniste Français, it is telling of the debate that the final choice was between NPA and Parti Anticapitaliste Révolutionnaire. As for the goal of the party, the statement was that the party should be a party of the working class and the oppressed, and that it should be a party of the

finally adopted.

This in itself indicates that the NPA is a not yet a revolutionary force with a clear consciousness of the task of the new period. While indeed many of the new members lack a revolutionary perspective, and are effectively still reformists, the weaknesses of the NPA are in the first place due to the political weaknesses of LCR. During its almost 40 years of existence, the LCR's politics has been marked by the hesitations, vacillations and sometimes betrayals, typical of centrism. We can see this clearly in the way they proposed the NPA project. According to opinions expressed by LCR leaders during the launching of the NPA, the new party should be "Guevarist", "ecologist" and "feminist", but certainly not Trotskyist or Leninist. Or according to the document proposed to the congress: "We want that the NPA carries forward the best of the heritage of those that struggled against the system over two centuries, of the class struggle, of the socialist, communist, libertarian, revolutionary traditions."

We do not believe that the petty bourgeois ideologies the LCR welcomes are "the best traditions". Rather they have led to major errors and defeats. Indeed we believe the best traditions are precisely the ones the LCR has excluded – Leninism and Trotskyism.

However in the end the decisive question is not what names you stick on the party but what programme it adopts and what sort of fighting organisation it seeks to build in the working class. The programme of the NPA, reflecting the LCR's ideological confusion, is a minimum/maximum programme. An anti-capitalist goal is openly stated: "The democracy of the associated producers freely and sovereignly deciding what to produce, how and to what end". But when it comes to the means, there is a mish-mash of revolutionary, syndicalist and reformist ideas:

"It is by the development and generalisation of the struggles, generalised and prolonged strikes that we can stop the attacks and realise our demands. It is the balance of forces due to the mobilisations that can allow us to set in power a government that will impose radical measures breaking with the system and that will start a revolutionary transformation of society."

At no point is there any mention of what should crown any set of transitional demands, the slogan of workers' councils taking power and replacing the bourgeois state with a workers' state. Ditto for workers' militias, which alone would enable the revolutionary forces to break up the armed forces, winning over rank and file. In fact, the only mention of a revolutionary goal is in the programme of the NPA, which is to be adopted at the congress in June 2009.

What is the difference between this and a left wing reformist government? This ambiguity reflects the basic ambiguity of the LCR project as a whole. To assemble and permanently keep both revolutionaries and reformists in the same party, to unite a core of cadres committed, at least subjectively, to a revolutionary objective, with broader layers much closer to reformist ideas – i.e. winning power through elections – is a project doomed to breakdown at the critical moment, if not before.

The high point of the congress was the debate on the electoral strategy for the coming European parliamentary elections. Should the LCR participate in a left front with PCF and Parti de Gauche (Left Party- a recent split from PS), which consciously sees itself as copying the tactic of Die Linke in Germany – i.e. creating a new reformist party. The problem is of course that these parties are completely reformist and that their anti-neoliberalism would not last longer than the electoral campaign if they had the opportunity to join a block with their right wing reformist elder brothers. The LCR and now NPA majority (76 per cent of the votes) was correct to reject this perspective but they remained deeply ambiguous as to their ultimate intentions: they refused to simply make an electoral "coup" (according to polls a left front coalition could attain a score of 14 per cent) and instead gave priority to a longer term front in "total independence" from the PS.

This is a far cry from a rejection of any form of electoral bloc with reformism or a renunciation of joining a government with such forces. Of course, the PS is not the only reformist force on the French left. The PCF, were it to come to power alone, with the Parti de Gauche or with NPA, would do nothing other than manage the system in the interest of the bourgeoisie. Consistent revolutionaries reject totally (and on principle) any entry into bourgeois governments – including governments of reformist workers parties, Stalinist or social democratic. Such governments are bourgeois because, whatever reforms they may or may not enact, they run the capitalists' state for them rather than breaking it up and helping the workers to seize power.

This debate shows the possible line of future divisions and maybe of a future split for the NPA. The European Union elections, which do not have the prospect of forming a government, are relatively easy to maintain this ambiguous unity: they are largely a platform for propaganda. But what tactic will be adopted for the presidential elections in 2012 when a Left candidate could gain a majority if the NPA were to join the left front? The LCR has not yet decided on this. It is clear that the LCR is not a revolutionary party. It is a reformist party. It is a party that is doomed to breakdown at the critical moment, if not before.

Olivier Besancenot – do then?

There can be little doubt that unless this whole centrist method – vacillating between reform and revolution – is defeated then a major crisis within the party is inevitable. The ex-LCR comrades are not a reliable leadership in a period pregnant with revolutionary possibilities. It is, of course, true that many of the forces attracted to the NPA are left reformist in their present outlook. Even more will this be the case for workers drawn to vote for the NPA in the coming years. Is the answer then simply to deliver a revolutionary ultimatum to them? No. The only progressive solution to this dilemma is to put forward a programme capable of mobilising workers and the youth around immediate and transitional demands against the capitalist crisis and its dire effects. Such a programme should show how the mobilised working class can block and sabotage every capitalist solution aimed at making the workers pay for the crisis:

- Occupations to stop the closure of factories and other workplaces.
- Organising the unemployed in a powerful and militant movement to force the state to provide the funds for a massive programme of public works, run under workers control.
- Taking up the defence of the public services and raising the wages in the private sector.
- Defending the rights and securing a decent livelihood for women, migrants and sans papiers, the banlieues youth, the students in schools and universities.
- Bringing all these struggles together in coordinations of recallable delegates, so that the union bureaucrats will be unable to sell out these struggles as they have done so many times in the past.

Fighting for such a programme, creating such organs of struggle, revealing the nature of the bourgeois state, exposing the cowardice of the reformist and bureaucratic leaders will create a bridge over which millions of workers, at present trapped within a reformist worldview, will become conscious of the need for revolution. But an indispensable factor in this is that the revolutionaries of today do not hide their programme or its revolutionary goal.

The members of the League for the Fifth International have supported the creation of the NPA as a step forward in the French class struggle. Today, they struggle to rearm the NPA with such a transitional action programme, so that it can become a new revolutionary leadership for the next round of struggle and not a weak electoral coalition of centrists and reformists, which will fragment at the first serious test. One step forward? One step back? The answer is clear. The only way to win is to fight for a programme that is revolutionary in its aims and tactics. The only way to win is to fight for a programme that is revolutionary in its aims and tactics.

WORKERS' HISTORY

How the clerics crushed

In February 1979 a mass popular revolution overthrew a brutal royal autocracy – headed by the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Yet by 1982 another equally harsh dictatorship, headed by the autocratic cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, had restored a dictatorship. All independent working class organisations were brutally crushed. Was this outcome inevitable? No, argues *Rebecca Anderson*, it was because of the disastrous mistakes and betrayals of the various left-wing parties.

How was it that despite the vanguard role the Iranian working class and the left played in events leading up to the revolution, and in the insurrection itself, the organisations of the working class were in the following three years first purged and co-opted then smashed by the caste of reactionary clerics led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini? We will argue that if a party had existed armed with the right strategy and tactics during the revolutionary upheaval, it could have transformed the struggle against the Shah, his US masters and the clerics into one against capitalism and for socialism. This would have meant defending from day one vital democratic demands, the rights of women, the minority nationalities in the Iranian state, and those of the workers, the peasants and the urban poor, resisting every step towards that of a clerical dictatorship.

IRANIAN POLITICS BEFORE 1979

The Shah's regime up to 1978 played a similar role in the Middle East to that of Israel to which it was closely allied. It kept the other regional states in check with its huge American equipped army and opened up its economy to the US and European multinationals. The basis of the regime was its huge oil wealth and the Shah allowed the country's oil consortium "nationalised" under the nationalist government of Mohammed Mossadegh in 1952, to be run by British and American companies. This was why the British and the Americans had engineered the coup that ousted Mossadegh in 1953 and restored the Shah as an absolute monarch. At this time, Iran supplied 13 per cent of Britain's oil and 17 per cent of the US's. The imperialist countries financed his enormous army, trained his murderous secret police force, Savak, and his vast bureaucracy, which constituted a third of the urban workforce.

Foreign direct investment in the 1960s and 70s meant the expansion of the oil industry, creation of large modern factories in Iran and massively expanded the working class, which stood at 2.5 million in 1977 and was concentrated in the north-west and south-west. The large industrial



Iranian protesters carry away a comrade shot dead on a demonstration

sional force were the country's oppressed national minorities: the several million Kurdish speaking people in the north-west and the Arab speaking population of Khuzestan in the south west, the area of the main oil fields.

The Shah tried to repress these forces in the 1970s as the economy moved from the boom of the early 1970s (the oil price hike led by Opec oil producers' cartel) to the bust of the economic crisis of the later 1970s. All political parties were banned, except the Shah's Rastakhiz party. Savage repression was visited on the Tudeh Party, the country's Stalinist communist party, whose history stretched back to the early 1940s and the Fedayeen-e Khalq, a guerrilla force strong in the universities.

Iranian workers and intellectuals had a long tradition of social-ism. Founded in 1913, the Iranian Social Democratic Party was a

leading figures corresponded with Karl Kautsky and Georgii Plekhanov, two of the leaders of the Second International (1889-1914). An Iranian Communist Party was founded in June 1920 – before the British Communist Party. After the CP was crushed and its leaders exiled in the mid 1920s, the Tudeh Party was founded in 1941.

The economic crisis of the mid-1970s led to mass unemployment and runaway inflation. Iran was dependent on the imports of food and when prices started to rise the working class began to strike. There were 60 major strikes or other major workers' protests from 1975-77 despite the heavy repression. This repression gave the strikes and protests a more consciously political character that was soon directed at the Shah himself. He attempted to pacify the masses through a limited capitulation to the demands of the

For more on the Iranian revolution, including articles on the working class organisations, revolution and counter-revolution and critique of the left, go to www.fifthinternational.org and click on "Thirty years since the Iranian revolution".

the Iranian revolution

GENERAL STRIKE

In 1978 a rolling general strike was launched – it began with the oil workers in Abadan and rapidly spread throughout the Iranian working class. By November-December some 1.5 million workers (industrial, rural and white collar) were on strike. As the strike movement grew, the workers began to elect strike committees. These were strongest among the most powerful section of workers, the oil workers of the south. These committees organised campaigns against hated managers and against imperialist control of the oil industry. Increasingly they called openly for the downfall of the Shah.

Other sections of workers followed the oil workers' lead. Soon the strike committees combined to form shoras, councils of workers, and these led and co-ordinated the strike movement. The rail workers' shora blacked all military transport as the repression grew. There was some Islamist influence in the shoras from the start but the predominant force among workers was the Tudeh party. In the universities, the students were influenced both by the Marxist Fedayeen and an Islamist-populist force, the Iranian Peoples Mujahedeen (Mujahedeen-e-Khalq) led by Massoud Rajavi. The latter had an ideology that combined Islamism with Marxist influences.

The Shah's "land reform" of the 1960s had pauperised hundreds of thousands of peasants and they flooded into the cities in search of work. There they remained unemployed and were badly affected by price rises. Their hatred of the Shah was intensified by the repeated attacks on their shantytowns by the police and army. Rather than looking forward to democracy and an expansion of the modern economy without poverty, this layer of people looked back nostalgically to a time without industry and to the Mosque. As the organisers of welfare and as the defenders of the Mostazajin (the disinherited), the more radical Shia mullahs were able to cultivate widespread support among this layer.

The merchants, moneylenders and small scale industrial capitalists of the bazaar (the traditional market areas in Iranian cities) had been the targets of the Shah's anti-profiteering campaign, and foreign direct investment in large-scale production and banking left them out of pocket. The Shah's encouragement of department stores and state control of banks threatened these capitalists.

The Shah's anti-profiteering campaign, and foreign direct investment in large-scale production and banking left them out of pocket. The Shah's encouragement of department stores and state control of banks threatened these capitalists.

more traditional but wealthy and numerous section of the capitalist class in Iran. Some prominent big capitalists also wanted an end to the dominance of the multinationals. One of their leaders was Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who was briefly President after the revolution. Leaders of the ethnic minorities – the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Azerbaijani leader Ayatollah Shariatmadari – were also part of the anti-Shah alliance.

KHOMEINI'S RISE

Ayatollah Khomeini had been opposed to the modernising reforms of the Shah in the 1960s, on a reactionary basis. On 22 March 1963, in Qom, theological students protesting the opening of liquor stores were fired on by paratroopers and Savak agents. Disturbance erupted in Tabriz too, with hundreds being killed. Khomeini publicly denounced the Shah as a tyrant. He was exiled, first to Iraq and in the year before the revolution to Paris.

In exile he developed his concept of an Islamic republic where there would be rule by Islamic jurists (velayat-i faqih). The monarchy must be abolished and replaced with a presidency and a government answerable to parliament. But the Shia clergy through a council of guardians would decide on whether laws passed by parliament or acts of the president and government, were consistent with Islam. If they judged they were not they could quite simply be abrogated. This system Khomeini insisted would end the corruption of the monarchy and its subservience to American imperialism. He also emphasised that it would raise up the poor and dispossessed masses of the shantytowns, ending social inequality and exploitation.

Thus a grand coalition of forces came together in 1978 to overthrow the Shah. It was in the final stages of this process that the principal forces of the left emerged. The Mojahedin and the Fedayeen were both secret guerrilla organisations with little contact with the mass movement. They stepped into the open and garnered widespread support by organising and conducting the popular rising that overthrew Bahktiar in February 1979.

ARMED FORCES REBEL

On 10 February 1979, at Farah Abad army base in east Tehran, there was a clash between the the Fedayeen-e Khalq group's supporters and the Shah's army. The Fedayeen, who had been active in the south, were the first to rebel against the Shah.

army bases and police stations in Tehran. At 2.00 pm on 11 February 1979, the army commanders declared it would not fight the people any longer. The revolution was victorious. Vastly important as the figure of Khomeini was, powerful as were the mullahs in mobilising the vast demonstrations, the overthrow of the regime had been accomplished by the workers strikes, led in important measures by the Tudeh, whilst the insurrection that split and disarmed the military was in large measure the work of the Fedayeen.

Khomeini, who had tried to call off the general strike, was horrified by the Fedayeen's actions and terrified that the left would now seize power. Through the mosques, he instructed his supporters to seize all the weapons the Fedayeen had taken. The latter all too meekly allowed this to be done. Why? Because they insisted Khomeini was an anti-imperialist, who in this stage was the leader of the revolution. Nevertheless in the coming weeks and months, Khomeini moved decisively to Islamise the revolution. On 1 April, following a national referendum, more than 98 per cent of the population voted in favour of the establishment of an Islamic Republic. Khomeini decreed that all women were to wear the hijab and his Hezbollah set out to enforce it. All demonstrations that were called to defend democratic rights, swiftly came under attack and were broken up by large gangs of knife and club wielding Islamist thugs.

Despite their historic achievement, and personal heroism in the revolutionary overthrow of the regime, the left parties, along with the Tudeh, were decisive in allowing Khomeini to achieve dominance over the mass movement. The Mujahedeen too as were an Islamist organisation despite the elements of populism and socialism, fell in behind the forces led by Khomeini because of his anti-imperialist rhetoric.

STALINISM IN IRAN

The Stalinist Fedayeen and Tudeh at first supported Khomeini because they believed a country like Iran could not go straight from a royalist dictatorship and imperialist domination straight to socialism. Instead it would have to first have a revolution to put the patriotic capitalists in power, who would create a capitalist democracy. This would give the workers' movement the legal rights with which to wage the class struggle. Then at a certain stage the struggle for a socialist revolution would begin. Meanwhile the Tudeh and the Fedayeen, who had been active in the south, were the first to rebel against the Shah.

Khomeini, who had tried to call off the general strike, was horrified by the Fedayeen's actions and terrified that the left would now seize power

HOW THE CLERICS CRUSHED THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Although Khomeini represented the more anti-imperialist sector of the bourgeoisie – neither he nor it had any intention of giving the workers a democratic space or stage to build up their forces for a socialist revolution. On the contrary, they would, despite using the Tudeh and Fedayeen for a limited period and under strict control, crush them as soon as they felt able to dispense with their assistance.

The workers fought on with local strikes but their organisations repeatedly urged them to compromise or surrender to the regime. Thus the Tudeh and the Fedayeen undermined their own base and presented their throats to the knife of the butcher Khomeini.

These organisations failed to warn about the dangers of Islamic reaction and its threat to the revolution or argue for working class independence from Khomeini and his followers while working alongside them against the Shah and imperialism, and so opened themselves and the working class up to attack once they had been used by Khomeini. They failed to intervene into and lead the shoras and develop them to the extent that they would be able to challenge Khomeini's claim to power. They just dissolved themselves into the mass movement and this meant that many forces of the revolution looked to Khomeini for leadership and attributed their victory to this leadership.

The Tudeh, Mujahedeen and Fedayeen did not oppose the establishment of an Islamic Republic and simply abstained in the March 1979 referendum. This referendum was used by Khomeini to renege on his earlier promises of democracy, arguing that they were in contradiction to Islam. Rather than establishing a constituent assembly, he instead called the election of a council of experts who created a constitution that recognised Khomeini's god-given right to rule and gave him and the council the ability to veto any law in the name of Islam. They used this veto to claw back the victories the workers and peasants had gained through the revolution – the nationalisations, land reform and expropriation of exiles property.

THE CLERIC'S OFFENSIVE

State officials with their government...



Ayatollah Khomeini

...began to smash the organisations that helped him win power. He ordered the raiding of the Fedayeen's offices and shut down media critical of him. A subsequent demonstration of 60,000 against the media clampdown was attacked by counter-revolutionary gangs (the hezbollah) loyal to Khomeini. He had to use these fascistic gangs because there were shoras in the barracks and some soldiers were refusing to attack the Iranian workers. This demonstrated that it was still not too late for the Iranian revolution to be won back from Khomeini as the loyalty of the army is key to a government, but the left still failed to organise against the Islamic reaction.

Khomeini launched a fierce attack on the Kurds who had risen up and established a de facto autonomy in their region. Fortunately many in the army also refused to take part in this invasion, which weakened the attack and forced Khomeini to pit his ill-disciplined and inexperienced gangs against the well-organised Kurds. Khomeini was forced to retreat.

Part of the reason that Khomeini was able to begin to attack the left and wage war on the Kurds was because he was at the same time demobilising the shoras. This began even during the revolution itself when he argued that the shoras were un-Islamic as they challenged private property. The labour minister made clear that the councils should be trade unionised: "I do not believe in shoras. At most we can accept trade unions."

This was not enough to defeat the...

...minister of justice to "prevent the interference of unauthorised individuals or institutions in workplaces."

At the same time a United Centre of Islamic Shoras was set up. This body began the process of purging the left from the shoras, however it failed to completely islamise them. In 1980 it sped up its attack on the workers' organisations by establishing a special body to purge them – the Heyat-e-Paksazi. Finally even the Union of Islamic Shoras itself was declared illegal in the spring of 1980 and everywhere Anjoman-e-Eslami (pro-Khomeini Islamic Societies) were established.

There continued to be strikes but without shoras and with much of the left backing Khomeini, the strikes, even when they won concessions, did not halt Khomeini's counter-revolution. This demobilisation was not inevitable and could have been fought against but this could only have been done through a rejection of the islamisation of the shoras and a commitment to turning them into workers councils capable of organising against the government and fighting for socialism. This would have required the intervention of a revolutionary party with these aims and none of the Iranian left took up this task.

The other reason Khomeini was able to enact a counter-revolution was his use of anti-imperialist rhetoric and largely symbolic actions. The Left were completely fooled by this. He supported the occupation of the US embassy and used Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980 to appeal once again to the anti-imperialism of the workers and the left. The Mujahedeen fell into step and so did most of the Fedayeen, with only a minority heroically opposing him. The Tudeh continued to believe that Khomeini was a progressive force and went as far as to say that he was progressive against Iran's liberal capitalists who he was now struggling against.

The new President, Bani Sadr, was much closer the liberal bourgeoisie but the IRP and Khomeini dominated the parliament and forced Bani Sadr to accept their candidate, Mohammad Ali Rajai, as prime minister. After this consolidation of power, the IRP and Khomeini intensified the counter-revolution and it became an all-out war against the Mujahedeen, the Left and the Kurds. About 2,000 were murdered by the new...

By mid-1982, Khomeini had succeeded in smashing the left and the Mujahedeen and defeating the Kurdish struggle for independence. He also understood the need for Iran's economy to be allowed to recover and so moved the focus of the state to increasing oil production. He was also successful in this and 1983 Iran began trading with the US, although there were still stringent economic sanctions in place that continued to strangle the economy.

The last political organisation that Khomeini needed to decisively smash was the Tudeh – who had supported him so loyally since 1979. This he finally did in 1983 when he arrested 1,500 of their members and executed many, forcing its leaders to appear on television to confess their "crimes" and renounce Marxism.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

The Iranian revolution demonstrates both the potential for revolution in the Middle East and also the dangers of accommodation either to religious leaders or the national capitalist class. While it is important to defend the Middle Eastern states whenever they are obliged to defend themselves against imperialism, both its wars and its exploitation of the natural resources and people of these countries, socialists must understand that these leaders may rely for a period on the force of the working class but only for their own objectives. As the Iranian revolution shows, the workers will be forcibly excluded from power and their organs of struggle smashed so that they cannot be used against the new regime in the way they were used against the old.

The working class is the strongest force in society because it is able to shut down the oil fields, factories, and the railways. Yet the Iranian Left conceded leadership and state power to those who exploit the workers and break their strikes. Yes, there needed to be a de facto combination of mass forces in action to overthrow the Shah, but this made totally independent organisation and the development of the shoras all the more important. It made the creation of mass working class party even more important. Rather than allow the capitalists and clerics to consolidate their power, the left should have fought for the workers to take control of the shoras and create a revolutionary organisation that could...

GLOBAL RECESSION

Chinese economy spirals downwards

China's exports in January were down 17.5 per cent on last year and imports were down by 43.1 per cent. *Peter Main*, just returned from China, looks at Beijing's response to the world recession

There is wave of factory closures across coastal China. Danny Lau, chair of the Hong Kong Small and Medium Enterprises Association, said more than 5,000 Hong Kong-owned factories had closed since July and about another 3,000, of the remaining 60,000, were under threat of imminent closure.

The direct cause is the loss of exports.

- Trade with Japan is down nine per cent.
- US trade decreased 10 per cent.
- Trade with the EU shrank by 17 per cent.

Even more dramatic are the results for China's Asian trade:

- 25 per cent down overall.
- South Korea trade down 29 per cent.
- 35 per cent drop in exports to Hong Kong – still a key conduit for the export industries of Guangdong province.

In February, Beijing doubled its figure for how many migrant workers are now out of work – from 10 to 20 million. Even that is only an estimate because many firms have prolonged the Lunar New Year holiday into March.

The colossal impact of the recession can be seen from figures released by Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (Smic), the mainland's biggest chipmaker. Smic has posted its seventh straight quarterly loss as orders slowed amid the global recession. The fourth-quarter net loss widened to US\$24.5m from US\$622,000 a year earlier as sales fell 28 per cent to \$272m. The company said it would cut capital spending this year by 72 per cent and lower payroll costs by 15 per cent.

As more and more firms follow this pattern, heavy industry has been hit hard. In January, steel production fell 1.5 per cent on last year. In February, it fell 1.2 per cent. In March, it fell 1.1 per cent. In April, it fell 1.0 per cent. In May, it fell 0.9 per cent. In June, it fell 0.8 per cent. In July, it fell 0.7 per cent. In August, it fell 0.6 per cent. In September, it fell 0.5 per cent. In October, it fell 0.4 per cent. In November, it fell 0.3 per cent. In December, it fell 0.2 per cent.



Chinese workers wait to hear who has been laid-off at a Dongguan factory, Guangdong province, December 2008

about 500 million tonnes. As a result, Baosteel, the biggest producer saw earnings fall 32 per cent compared with 2007, while the second-largest producer, Angang, said profits dropped 55 per cent.

Nonetheless, it is the import statistics that are really ominous because they point to a continued decline. A huge part of the export trade is of goods assembled in China from components shipped in from elsewhere in Asia. A downturn in imports, therefore, means that China's factories have shrinking order books.

Beijing's answer to the crisis, a "stimulus package" of 4 trillion yuan (some £400bn), was announced in the autumn. The emphasis was to be on infrastructural development, aiding industry and boosting consumer demand, particularly in the rural provinces. Much of the railway and road building appeared to be an acceleration of existing plans, but provincial

not necessarily what Beijing gets. Although many of the biggest firms are still state-owned, they are no longer co-ordinated by any plan and many will pursue their own priorities. For example, on 3 February, Premier Wen Jiabao revealed that bank lending surged 900bn yuan in the first 20 days of January and presented this as a response to the government's efforts to spur economic growth and liquidity. But analysts said that only 780bn yuan, about 65 per cent of the month's total, were estimated to be "real" loans that would affect recovery. Figures from Industrial and Commercial Bank of China show what happened: more than half their loans, 135 bn yuan, as against 117 bn yuan of other loans, were simply "discounting" of commercial bills.

Nonetheless, where the government is itself the agent for major projects, it can be sure that money will be spent on its priorities. Certainly building roads and railways will be a priority. The government is also likely to invest in infrastructure projects that will create jobs and stimulate demand. However, the government's response to the recession is not only a matter of intervening in the national economy. The government also intends to advance China's status and profile internationally. Chinalco, a state-owned aluminium company, is planning to invest US\$12.3bn in Rio Tinto, the world's second biggest mining company, raising its stake to 18 per cent. This confirms the strategic policy of securing future sources of raw materials.

the US, this spending can be financed out of existing reserves.

Boosting consumer demand is the principal support for light industry. Beijing plans to lower consumption taxes and give rural consumers a 13 per cent rebate on domestic appliances. The intention is to offset the loss of foreign markets but it is difficult to see how a rural population on very limited incomes, tens of millions on less than US\$2 a day, could possibly take the place of the credit-fuelled consumer booms in the US and EU. And, after all, what is 13 per cent off washing machines in comparison to the loss of 20 million migrant workers' weekly remittances to their families?

Beijing's response to the world recession is not only a matter of intervening in the national economy. The government also intends to advance China's status and profile internationally. Chinalco, a state-owned aluminium company, is planning to invest US\$12.3bn in Rio Tinto, the world's second biggest mining company, raising its stake to 18 per cent. This confirms the strategic policy of securing future sources of raw materials.

At the same time, Beijing is also strengthening its financial sector. By insisting that loans for the building of a 29 kilometre bridge across the Pearl River estuary be denominated in yuan, Beijing has effectively excluded foreign banks from taking a lead in this major project. In addition, some restrictions on the international circulation of the yuan have been lifted. Trade between Hong Kong, Macau, Guangdong and Shanghai can now be conducted in yuan and ASEAN countries will also be allowed to trade with the provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan using yuan. These moves are seen as a way of strengthening China's financial position and its ability to withstand the global recession.

ISRAELI ELECTIONS

No respite for Palestinians

Last month's Israeli elections saw a draw between Likud and Kadima. Whoever forms the next government, the outcome will be a negative one for the Palestinians, argues *Marcus Halaby*

Israeli elections have a habit of bringing out into the open those unsavoury aspects of Israel's politics that its apologists in the West generally wish could be kept hidden from view. This election on 10 February has been no different. It should, of course, hardly come as a surprise that an election campaign that involved the bombardment of Gaza and the destruction of much of its social and economic infrastructure should have seen a huge swing to the right.

However, it is definitely a sign of the times that Israel's Labor party, traditionally seen as the founder of the state and the party of the Zionist establishment, and which the Israeli "peace camp" have consistently promoted illusions in, should have finished in fourth place, behind the ultra-right Yisrael Beiteinu party of anti-Arab racist Avigdor Lieberman, and only just ahead of Shas, a religious party supported by the marginalised "Oriental" Jewish community. Another irony is that all three main parties belong to the same right-wing Revisionist Zionist political tradition, and are led by people who made their political careers in the Likud or its predecessors.

RIGHT WING VICTORY

The provisional results of the elections leave no clear victor, and the next two or three weeks may see a complicated game being played as Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of Likud, and Tzipi Livni, currently foreign minister and leader of Kadima, each try to construct a viable ruling coalition. Kadima, with 28 seats in the Knesset, has claimed a victory over Likud with only 27; Netanyahu, on the other hand, argues that the overall increase in the vote for "right-wing" parties (giving them 70 seats out of 120, compared to 55 after the last elections in 2006) entitles him, as the leader of the main right-wing party, to become prime minister.

It is theoretically possible that there could be a Kadima-led government including both Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu, but this is highly unlikely. Netanyahu is



Netanyahu and Livni prepare for coalition

perennial partner in coalition governments), and one or another of the small religious parties could just about hold a majority.

A factor in favour of this outcome is the strong enmity between Shas and Lieberman's party, which draws most of its vote from recent immigrants from the former Soviet republics. Shas leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef even said that voting for Lieberman would be "helping Satan" on account of Yisrael Beiteinu's support for civil marriage, a measure supported by the largely secular (and often only tenuously Jewish) "Russians". However, this coalition would be subject to the same centrifugal forces as similar Labor-led coalitions in the past, like that of Labor leader Ehud Barak when he was prime minister between 1999 and 2001.

In any case, both Kadima and Likud are courting Lieberman and other parties to their right. This, therefore, leaves three likely outcomes: a Netanyahu-Lieberman coalition, a Livni-Lieberman coalition, or a Kadima-Likud government of national unity designed to keep Yisrael Beiteinu out.

For those for whom Kadima, Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu equate simply to the "centre", "right" and "extreme right", the first of these three outcomes might seem the most likely. However, Lieberman's party is a coalition of all parties, including the ultra-right, and



who warns that this Arab one-fifth of Israel's citizens pose a danger to Israel's existence, also advocates handing over some Arab-majority districts in pre-1967 Israel to Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority in return for annexing Jewish settlements in the West Bank, in order to reduce this existential threat.

He has, therefore, gone further than Kadima has on the principal issue that separates it from Likud: namely, the idea that some form of "disengagement" from the Palestinians, unilateral or otherwise, will be necessary to preserve Israel's Zionist and majority-Jewish character. It was, after all, then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's "unilateral disengagement" from Gaza that led him to split Likud and found Kadima in the first place.

Netanyahu, by contrast, is likely to suspend all negotiations and try to put off any future cosmetic withdrawals in the West Bank for as long as possible. For his supporters, the rise of Hamas and the war on Gaza are signs that Sharon's disengagement plan was a mistake, one that they do not intend to repeat. He has also pledged to "finish the job" in Gaza and hinted at a military strike on Iran.

MISERY FOR PALESTINIANS

It goes without saying that, whoever forms the next Israeli government, the interests of the Palestinian people will be sacrificed to the interests of the Jewish state.

becomes more strategically dependent on Israel's unique position as its enforcer in the region following President Obama's planned troop withdrawal from Iraq. Israel's "unfinished business" with Hezbollah may well lead it to a new aggression on Lebanon, as part of a proxy war against the "Syrian-Iranian axis" that Israeli politicians hold responsible for Hamas' continued defiance.

What is new, however, is the specific threat posed to the future of Israel's Arab citizens. Persecuted and discriminated against since the founding of the state in 1948, and subjected to military rule until 1966, they have of late become much more vocal in their support of their Palestinian co-nationals in the territories occupied in 1967. The attempt to ban their two most prominent parties – Balad and the United Arab List – from standing in these elections, and the hysteria raised about the threat posed by their "disloyalty", in which racists like Lieberman merely vocalise obsessions held by the whole of Israel's political class, should be seen as a foretaste of things to come.

ONE STATE IS ONLY SOLUTION

Notably, while the '48 Palestinians (as they prefer to be called) have supported the demand for an end to the occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state in the 1967 territories, they have never demanded their own inclusion in it, preferring to fight for the idea that Israel should become a state "of its citizens" and not an ethnic-Jewish state. This in itself is a backhanded admission that a two-state solution, even one based on the 1967 borders, would merely create a ghetto for the Palestinians. And while they can sympathise with the demand of Palestinians under occupation that if they are to live in a ghetto then at least it should be self-governing, they have no intention of joining them there.

● For more of the struggle of the Palestinians and Middle East politics go to: www.fifthinternational.org and click on Gaza, news and anti-occupation.

ANTI ZIONISM

Why anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism

By Nat Silverstein

Israel's supporters, or Zionists, are increasingly pushed onto the defensive as the horrible reality of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians hits the headlines. Breaking the ceasefire in December, Israel brutally attacked the almost defenceless population of Gaza, killing 1,330 Palestinians and injuring 5,450 in 25 days.

Zionists have all but run out of justifications for Israeli war crimes, and as a result they wrongly argue that opposition to Israel means that you are anti-Semitic, i.e. racist against Jews.

Unfortunately this view is not confined to the openly right wing Zionist lobby but is also adopted in mainstream politics, including the EU Monitoring Committee's working definition which says that examples of anti-Semitism could include "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour".

More worryingly, it also extends to the ostensibly socialist organisation, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who state in a letter to the *Guardian* on 12 February 2009 that "the core and root of modern anti-Semitism is the denial of Israel's right to exist and to defend itself. That inexorably leads on to a radical political hostility to most Jews alive."

It cannot be denied that a minority of those protesting against Israel and its war crimes are indeed hostile to Jews. But this error is based precisely on the same conflation that the Zionists and their sympathisers make: that Israel equals Judaism and that it is in the interests of Jews for Israel to continue existing.

In fact, Israel is today by far the most dangerous place in the world for Jews to live and its aggressive policies are a constant threat to the Jewish people. The Jewish people are not a nation and have no right to a state of their own. The Jewish people are a religious community and should be free to live wherever they wish.

around the world.

From the beginning, Zionism represented a capitulation to the view that Jews were somehow a burden on "host" nations - for example, the president of the World Zionist Organisation Chaim Weizmann said in 1912: "Each country can only absorb a limited number of Jews if she doesn't want disorders in her stomach."

The "father" of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, decided after the anti-Semitic Dreyfuss affair in France that he "recognised the

the Zionist movement of the time put its political motives before the actual wellbeing of the Jewish community.

The early Zionists recognised that the creation of a state based on such massive ethnic cleansing would require the backing of a colonial power. Herzl's ally, Vladimir Jabotinsky, wrote in 1923: "If you wish to colonise a land in which people are already living, you must provide a garrison on your behalf... Zionism is a colonising adventure and therefore it stands or falls by

more than ever, with Israel increasingly making threats to Iran, a state that is openly hostile to the imperialist powers.

Israel's political role allows the Zionist lobby to strongly influence the Western discourse, in which any criticism of Israel is labelled anti-Semitic. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid the question - how can descendants of those that survived the horrors of Nazi Germany justify inflicting the same kind of brutality and ethnic cleansing on another people?

The pro-Israel lobby continues to rely on the lie that was used to sell Zionism to Jews in the 1940s - that they would be moving to "a land without a people, for a people without a land". Just as this was untrue then - 1948 alone saw 750,000 Palestinians forcefully driven away from their land - it is untrue now. Israel's very existence depends on aggressive expansion into Palestinian territories and a continued denial of rights, let alone the possibility of a viable independent state, to Palestinians.

Today an increasing number of prominent Jews publicly condemned the recent attacks on Gaza. We must encourage more Jews to take this view and to recognise that Israel is fundamentally a racist state.

Revolutionaries must unreservedly oppose anti-Semitism while also opposing Israel and must fight for the right for Palestinians to return to their land.

This does not mean that Jews living in what is now Israel must leave that area, but that they must allow all Palestinians forced out during the Nakba to return, and live together in a state that does not give any privilege based on ethnicity or religion.

Revolutionaries should not be afraid of "offending" those Israelis that actively defend their privileges over Palestinians. It is a moral duty to stand up to the Zionists and their supporters who are the main obstacle to the liberation of the Jewish people.

"Revolutionaries must unreservedly oppose anti-Semitism while also opposing Israel and must fight for the right for Palestinians to return to their land"

emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism." For this reason, Jews would have to have a separate state. Yet these views went against the grain of majority Jewish opinion at that time, which favoured fighting for integration and assimilation.

Even in the 1930s, when the growth of fascism meant a huge increase in the oppression of Jews, only 8.5 per cent of Jewish migrants went to Palestine. Those who did need to leave Germany, Austria, etc, for the most part left for the US and, to a lesser extent, Britain. The Zionist movement actually opposed a relaxation of immigration controls for Jews to enter these countries, in order that more would be forced to move to Israel.

Incredibly, Ben Gurion (later to become the first Israeli prime minister) stated in 1938: "If I knew that it would be possible to save all the children in Germany by bringing them over to England, and only half of them would be Jewish, I would have done so immediately." The Zionists were not interested in the wellbeing of the Jewish people, but only in their own political interests.

the question of armed force."

This garrison was provided by the British government, whose Balfour declaration in 1917 recognised the Zionist settlements springing up in Palestine for the first time. This support helped Britain in two ways. Firstly, it helped to rid them of the subversive internationalist Jews that they saw as a "worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of ... impossible equality."

Secondly, Israel was in return to play the role of advancing and protecting imperialist interests in the Middle East.

This was clearly spelt out in an article in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* in 1951 which stated that "strengthening Israel helps the Western powers maintain equilibrium in the Middle East. Israel is to become the watchdog... Israel could be relied upon to punish one or several neighbouring states if they did not play their part in the maintenance of the balance of power in the Middle East."

THE 1984-85 MINERS STRIKE

“We are the women of the working class”

Reprinted from
Workers Power #284

When the Great Miners Strike of 1984-85 began, Workers Power immediately produced an emergency “Pit Special”. One article was headlined “Women must back the strike”.

The Sun and other anti-strike rags had given star treatment to the story of a tiny group of women who had gathered to shout abuse at Yorkshire NUM pickets at the Nottinghamshire colliery, Ollerton. “Pit wives smash picket invasion” was the *Sun*’s headline.

Many young women today won’t remember, but such stories of “petticoat power” were common in the press in the 1970s and early 1980s. Usually the press would find a handful of scabs and then approach their wives with the promise of pictures and interviews in the national press if they “stood up” to the “bully boy militants”.

To counter this sort of sexist rubbish working class women have, time and again, organised themselves and their families into support movements for men on strike. In the mining communities, *the Sun* sponsored a demo at Ollerton – and provoked an immediate response from striking miners’ wives around the country.

Already wives had begun to organise networks to ensure that the welfare of the strikers – food supplies, communal kitchens and so on – was maintained. But within a very short time the wives began to organise more than just collective cooking. Women from Kent and from Doncaster organised their own demo in Leicestershire to show support for the striking minority there and boost the campaign to spread the strike.

From the beginning these women were clear that they wanted to be involved in the strike in their own right and not just be regarded as providing welfare support in the background. Wives of

involved in the strike. It’s so they don’t have to ask their husbands what’s going on. It’s so they know what’s going on for themselves... It’s the first time working class women have been organised like this since the fight for the vote.”

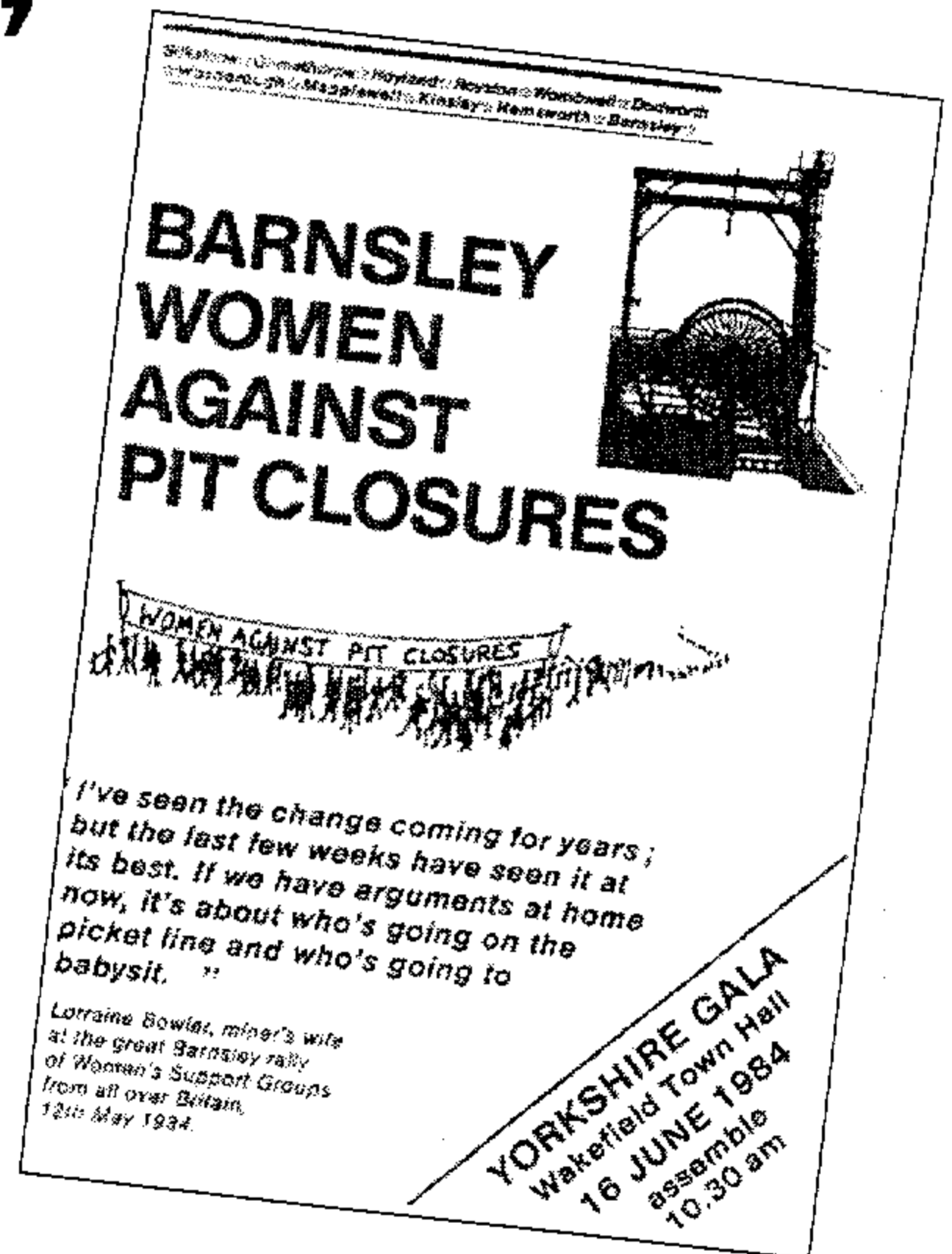
The actions of the Kent and Doncaster women inspired thousands of others across the country. Networks began to take shape. More women’s demos followed, women’s support groups were formed in every mining village and a working class women’s movement was forged.

The achievement of the women in building a fighting movement so quickly from scratch was even more remarkable when you consider that despite the generally progressive politics of the NUM its record on women’s issues was poor. Attitudes amongst many miners, including key leaders like Scargill, were backward at the start of the strike.

The paper, the *Yorkshire Miner*, was one of the best and most militant union journals around at the time. It played a vital role in organising and campaigning for the strike from the outset. This same paper had, for years, also run its own “Page Three Stunner”. Every month a miners’ wife or girlfriend would be pictured in a bikini or scanty underwear, accompanied by suggestive captions.

Following a campaign by socialists, inside and outside the NUM, to get this sexist rubbish out of the paper, Scargill went on television to defend the Page Three slot. He claimed it was a way of getting miners to read the rest of the paper and dismissed the campaign against it as “a storm in a B cup”.

At a mass demonstration of miners’ wives a few months into the strike, the very same Scargill announced to rapturous applause that he had been wrong, that the women of the mining communities were not eye candy for his members but working class fighters in their own right and that the Page Three slot in the *Yorkshire Miner* would be abolished forth-



The whole movement answered, in one fell swoop, all of the complicated theoretical arguments that had gone on among socialists and feminists about self-organisation and whether or not men were the enemy. The women organised themselves, as allies of the striking men. Their organisation gave them the means to participate in a common struggle with the men – a class struggle against their class enemies, whether female (Thatcher) or male (MacGregor). The working class women’s movement organised women as a detachment of the class struggle not as a means of separating from that struggle.

The movement became national with conferences and an elected leadership. There were political battles between rank and file women committed to militant tactics and reformist women leaders, like Betty Heathfield and Anne Scargill, who wanted to channel the movement into useless activities like petitioning the Queen.

The impact of the militant women was felt, however, when the

ing, and when a campaign was launched to give women associate membership of the NUM itself.

The legacy of the miners’ wives movement is a precious one. It proves that real working class unity can only be created when the outdated and reactionary prejudices that persist amongst all too many male workers are transcended. It proves that it is working class women who can achieve that unity through their own militant self-organisation.

And it proves that the goal of self organisation need not be the prosecution of a separate women’s struggle against men, as many feminists at the time had argued, but a common class struggle against sexism, against women’s oppression and against capitalism itself.

On the 25th anniversary of the Great Strike and on International Women’s Day 2009 we should commemorate that legacy, best summarised by a miner’s wife, Eileen, from South Wales: “That year was hard, but I wouldn’t have missed it for the world... It’s shown me the

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 organisation.

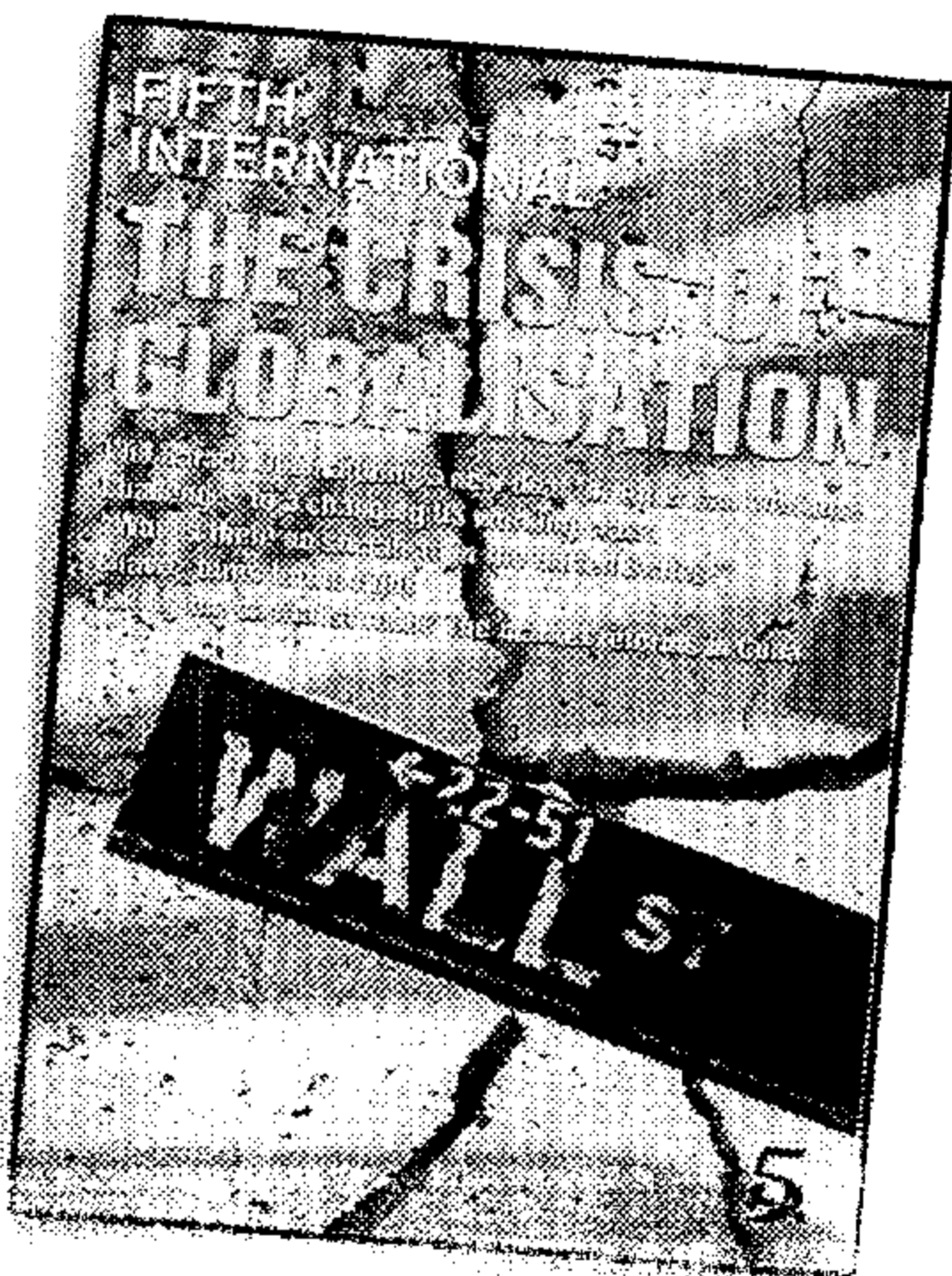
We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a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

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

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

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

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Cut the hours not the jobs

By Mark Booth

World capitalism now faces a full-scale slump. The US economy, the motor of world growth, has not only stalled, it contracted at an annualised rate of 6.2 per cent in the last quarter of 2008. The British economy is expected to contract by 3.5 per cent. In the US there are already 12 million unemployed and in Britain the figure is likely to rise from two to over three million. Faced with an economic catastrophe not of their own making workers are asking what can be done? The bosses are, as always in such times, claiming millions of workers must lose their jobs so that the rest can be saved.

This is a lie and must be fought. These same companies, which are now shedding jobs, made millions of pounds of profit during the boom years. Even now the company executives that say these are new lean times pocket colossal annual salaries and options. When times were good, the capitalist profited from our labour – now that times are bad they insist we have to pay so that they can exploit us profitably once again. Workers want answers. That's why communists demand that the billionaire bankrupts who are holding out their begging bowls for the taxpayers' money open up their books to workers' inspection.

As long as they can afford millions of pounds in bonuses and salaries for the company directors, they can pay workers' wages. Every attempt at pushing through job cuts, every closure must be fought with militant action. In response to the capitalist's claim there is no alternative but to push through job losses – we say hand over the industries and services to be run by the workers' themselves. If the government can nationalise the banks to save them from collapse, they can nationalise our factories, offices and shops to preserve their plant and machinery from destruction or lying idle and use the invaluable skills of workers to run the services and build the facilities and industries we need.

In reply the bosses or government may say that there is no demand for their prod-

ucts and services have suddenly dried up? If this is the case then we demand that they share out the available work among the workers with no loss of pay. We still need the same wages to keep going and to support our families.

Not only in Britain but also worldwide there is an enormous amount of unfulfilled social needs: for basics like food and clothing, for housing and transport, for health-care and education. It is only the anarchic nature of production for profit that creates immense wealth alongside mass impoverishment. It is only this system that fails to provide elementary services and social support. It is only this system whose crisis and break down threatens to throw millions into poverty and destitution.

Look at what happened recently at BMW Mini factory where 850 agency workers were sacked in February as BMW claimed there is not enough demand for the Mini car. Unlike many of the car manufacturers BMW is still making a profit, £47.6 billion in the last year alone, so the argument that there is not the money to pay the wages is a lie. BMW are just trying to keep up their profit rates by reducing production and shedding jobs – the factory is still running at full speed during the week, it has just been closed at the weekends. This is a clear example of workers being sacrificed purely to maintain profits.

In response workers must demand that instead of cutting jobs the available hours should be shared among all the workers. The working week at the factory should be divided up among all the workers and shifts allocated equally so there is work for all. A sliding scale of hours should be implemented so any further reduction in work leads to a reduction in working hours and not jobs.

This demand can be applied across the whole economy. In Britain workers work the longest hours in Europe, an average of 43.6 per week and the TUC estimates over four million workers regularly do more than 48 hours a week. These long hours mean the bosses benefit from not having to hire more workers and we pay the price with stress, tiredness and damage to our health from overwork.

The work created by doing this could be shared out amongst the two million unemployed. When the French government implemented the 35-hour week, even though it had many exceptions and concessions to the bosses, it created over 500,000 jobs at a stroke. In long hours Britain it would create 2.3 million new jobs!

And think of the time freed from unnecessary toil. It will help abolish want and poverty, allow for a mighty development of the creativity of working class people, increase the enjoyment and fulfilment of millions, and thus reduce and eliminate the social evils of capitalism.

The bosses will claim that they cannot afford these reforms, that it would bankrupt companies, that workers should not receive full pay for working less. Since it is our collective labour which creates all the massive profits of the corporations, we should decide how it is spent, not the bosses. Maintaining the jobs and living standards for the millions of workers rather than the already obscene wealth of the capitalists is the only just answer to this crisis.

As communists we believe the economy could easily be planned to meet the needs of social life, not the other way around. The workers that already run the system can plan it – but they would be running it democratically for themselves, not for private profiteers.

Without the constraints of business secrecy and the waste of competition – where companies mobilise enormous resources to compete against one another – it will be possible to eliminate real waste, and the blind and destructive dynamism of the market will be replaced by the dynamism of consciously meeting needs and reducing working time.

Private ownership of property means that in a crisis millions of workers sit idle while our public services crumble, housing stock rots and millions are deprived of the basic necessities for a full life. A 35-hour week and a sliding scale of hours to reduce the working week and absorb the millions of unemployed into the ranks of the workforce, and point the way to a planned economy and the end of capitalism.