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**BLAIR SAYS FBU CANNOT WIN THE STRIKE, WE SAY:**

# Firefighters

# must win!



● **ORGANISE FOR SOLIDARITY**

● **AGITATE FOR ACTION**

● **BREAK WITH BLAIR AND BROWN**

Turn to pages 2  
and 3 for more  
on the strike





# What's at stake and ho

The Labour government has declared all-out war on the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). It deliberately blocked the last minute peace deal on 22 November that would have led to the suspension of the first eight-day strike. Since then it has made it clear that it will not budge in the face of the FBU's pay claim.

Any confusion caused by John Prescott's incoherent ramblings or his difficulties in getting out of bed was quickly resolved by Tony Blair. He announced to every firefighter that "this is a strike they cannot win".

The sheer hatred of the New Labour leadership for the working class is now prettily clear. Dr Richard Simpson (former Scottish Deputy Justice minister) branded the firefighters as "fascists" and "bastards". Adam Ingram, the Armed Forces Minister, responded to a statement of fact by FBU General Secretary, Dave Patton, concerning the army's inability to provide the necessary level of support during strikes by saying:

"I will not have them [the troops] attacked and undermined by people like Mr Patton who is not fit to lace their boots."

In the run up to the strike Blair himself raved about the "Scargillite" character of the FBU leadership. To the Blairites this was probably the worst possible insult.

Warming to the idea of a spot of union bashing Nick Raynsford, the fire service minister, dusted down a military cliché to make clear it was now war:

"The Prime Minister has drawn a clear line in the sand. There is no going back." After a meeting between the employers and the government in the midst of the first eight day strike one of the bosses announced:

"The government now wants to smash the FBU."

The abuse has a purpose. The government knows that the firefighters are popular, that their strike is well-supported and that virtually every worker in the country thinks the firefighters deserve more money. They also know that many workers, espe-



Firefighters on strike at Euston Fire Station, London

cially in the public sector, are watching this dispute with an eye to future pay claims.

If a well-organised and determined trade union like the FBU can win a substantial pay rise, other public sector workers will be more up for a fight. They will have seen that militant trade unionism brings results and that strikes can win. They will be encouraged to take action in the battle to end low pay and privatisation across the public sector.

The government is thinking exactly the same thing. The FBU must not be allowed to win, must not be allowed to prove that strikers work, and must not be allowed to open the way to an all-out fight over public sector pay. That is why Blair cannot and will not move from the now official – but never publicly acknowledged – pay policy of a 4 per cent maximum rise for public sector workers with all other increases strictly funded by cuts in jobs and conditions – the reality of "modernisation". Blair spelt this out at a Labour Party dinner in

Wales:

"What we are never going to do as a government is to go back to the days we left behind us, that scarred us, that left us with 18 years of opposition."

Meeting the firefighters' claim in full, according to both Blair and Brown, will wreck the entire British economy, plunge all of us into a downward spiral of debt and self-destruction and cost thousands of jobs.

### Modernisation? Sounds more like the sort of piecemeal destruction of a service that Labour has been pushing through in local government, health and education via PFI and other privatisation schemes

Their final offer to firefighters is – no Bain, no gain.

This is a drive from start to finish, and the firefighters, not to mention the London teachers and local government work-

ers who struck alongside them for a day at the end of November, know it.

Blair and Brown are holding the line on public sector pay for the big bosses. They want the filthy rich to get even richer – at our expense. This is what they have been doing since they got elected. They are in office courtesy of millions of trade unionists voting for them in 1997 and 2001. But those workers have got little in return.

Between 1992 and 2001 the average salary of a top manager in a major firm rose by 110 per cent, taking their basic pay to £110,341 a year. Somewhat higher than the £30k firefighters are asking for.

Last year executive pay rose by 17 per cent. The really big bosses have seen their salaries rise by a staggering 89 per cent during Blair's rule. Compare this to the average rises for workers – in both the public and private sectors – of between three and five per cent.

And MPs like Adam Ingram – the very people now insolently branding firefighters, whose every working day is dedicated to saving peoples' lives, as scum – merrily awarded themselves a 42 per cent rise last year while telling the rest of us to accept four per cent.

Most sickening is Blair's claim – uttered in that creeping Jesus style that exposes him as a man bereft of sincerity – that we cannot afford to pay firefighters, or any other public sector worker, any more because there is no money available. No money for the firefighters – it would cost around £250 million to settle their claim in full – but billions ready and waiting to be poured into a brutal war on innocent Iraqi people. This shows where New Labour's priorities really lie – with a war on the world's poor in defence of the global overlords, the multinational corporations.

The only chance of an improved offer, according to Labour, is if the firefighters accept "modernisation". This is what the Bain report was all about. The government didn't give a toss about the fire service and its "reform" until firefighters asked for decent pay. Now the Blairites are falling over themselves to prove that they all know best how to improve the fire service:

- Through 11,000 job cuts (as Prescott has revealed).
- Through closing many stations at night and some altogether.
- Through ending the ban on overtime – meaning fewer firefighters would be recruited.
- Through introducing new flexible shifts that will mean fewer workers covering more watches.
- Through making firefighters double up

# Watch your leaders

Andy Gilchrist is widely respected throughout the FBU. His willingness to lead the firefighters into battle has convinced them that he is not like other union bureaucrats who sell out or sell short their members at the drop of a hat.

Blair's denunciation of Andy as a "scargillite" has bolstered his militant reputation. His war of words with the government has indeed proved that he is on the militant wing of trade union officialdom. Few of them would begin a strike declaring, as Andy Gilchrist did in the *Morning Star*, "With the support of the wider labour movement, we will defeat this further attack on trade union rights and the working class."

But it is not Andy Gilchrist's personal courage or militancy that will determine the outcome of the strike. The problem is his politics and his position. He is a paid, full-time trade union official – a bureaucrat in the proper sense of the word – who believes that the fundamental problems facing the working class are best solved around a negotiating table with the boss – and through reforms in parliament.

This means that he is under enormous pressure. His militancy comes

from the pressure of his members, angry at their shoddy treatment by New Labour and determined to do something about it. His willingness to compromise comes from the pressure of the Labour government, the bosses and the rest of the trade union bureaucracy, all of whom – once they get him around the table and away from his members – urge him to see sense, to consider "modernisation", to suspend strikes and to limit the action.

Which of these two contradictory pressures will win out?

The FBU executive suspended strikes three times in early November. This was when Andy Gilchrist was under pressure from the enemy. It showed the danger of him buckling under that pressure. Two bad consequences followed. First, the firefighters' claim was, informally and without the members' agreement, revised down from 40 per cent to 16 per cent with the whole argument shifting from pay to "modernisation". Second, valuable time was lost, momentum was slowed and the chance to capitalise on the pledges of solidarity, especially from the RMT, was reduced.

Much of this was forgotten once the eight-day strike began. The leaders again

became heroes to most members. But even here the effects of Andy Gilchrist's initial waverings made themselves felt – many strikers became unsure about the point of stop-start action.

This was not always because they favoured all-out action, but because they had become unsure about what they were now fighting for. If it was for a reduced claim, said some, wouldn't 48 hour strikes be better? Certainly the executive's apparent willingness to open discussions with the bosses over modernisation and a two-year pay deal totalling 16 per cent had contributed to the uncertainty.

The pressure from the other side will increase. The TUC has called for support for the FBU. So far, so good. They have backed the FBU's call for a national demonstration in support of the firefighters on 7 December, a call every worker must now take up to ensure there is a massive display of workers' solidarity on the streets of London.

But TUC support too often comes at a price – TUC control over negotiations. Andy Gilchrist has been far too willing to allow the bureaucrats' bureaucrat, John Monks, TUC leader, to have an important say over

the negotiations. At the last minute negotiations on 21/22 November both Monks and his deputy, Brendan Barber, were present. They helped draft an agreement that failed to oppose the threats of cuts that the government were demanding.

A TUC spokesperson recently told the press:

"We are doing everything we can to get people round the table and get negotiations going again."

This is not what the firefighters need from the TUC. They need it to do everything it can to build solidarity, spread support, prepare for action by other sections of workers, raise money, link the various struggles – like that of the firefighters to that of the London teachers and local government workers.

They are not doing this and Andy Gilchrist is letting them off the hook. He insisted, "In all of this the TUC general council – and John Monks personally – has given unstinting support."

Finally, the bureaucratic pressures on Andy Gilchrist are pushing him away from a rapid solution to the dispute – an all-out indefinite strike. He is reluctant to go for total war – yet the government has



Gilchrist: faces pressures from TUC

declared total war on the FBU.

The danger is that by limiting the strike, by allowing the TUC too much influence in the negotiations, the firefighters will find themselves either in a long series of sporadic strikes that will undoubtedly begin to crack the membership's resolve or they will be presented with a deal that gives some improvements on pay but opens the door to a station-by-station assault on conditions, jobs and shifts.

At the same time, stop-start action weak-

# w to win

as ambulance workers, enabling the government to cut both services back.

Modernisation? Sounds more like the sort of piecemeal destruction of a service that Labour has been pushing through in local government, health and education via PFI and other privatisation schemes. Yet without this "reform" – as the masters of New Labour doublespeak call it – there will be no more money for the firefighters.

These proposals are doubly astonishing when you consider that a little publicised government-commissioned report into the service (as opposed to the hastily assembled "independent" Bain enquiry), The Fire Service Review, revealed that 85 per cent of all fire stations were understaffed and that extra money could bring down the number of fire related deaths by at least 70 a year.

They ignored this report because it told the truth and truth was the first casualty in New Labour's war on the unions.

In the face of this war it is vital that the FBU stands firm, pursues its strike and scores a famous victory. This also means the whole trade union movement rallying to their support.

We all know that the government are saying that unless the firefighters accept massive cuts they will only be getting four per cent. Negotiations aren't going to change their mind. Determined action will. They cannot combine a build-up for war in the Persian Gulf with the allocation of 19,000 troops to firefighting. The FBU leadership needs to review its strike strategy and go all out for victory.

The union leadership has caused some confusion in the ranks by seeming to accept 16 per cent as the basis for negotiation. End the confusion – reinstate the demand for £30k as the basis for opening any new round of negotiations; make clear that the FBU will support all real improvements in the service but oppose all Blairite proposals for modernisation; alert all members to the reality that the FBU itself is now under attack by New Labour. On this basis the

executive of the FBU should draw up immediate plans to transform the strike into all out indefinite action.

Many firefighters will initially be wary of taking this course. But they can be won to it: if the executive makes clear that the battle on is for the full claim; if it re-convenes a conference of delegates from every watch and station to persuade them this is the right way forward; if it follows this through with regular bulletins – such as the excellent "Organiser" bulletins produced by London FBU – and propaganda explaining why such action is necessary; if it organises mass meetings at every station to win the argument; and if it lines up solidarity from the rest of the union movement, then the call for an all-out indefinite strike could be won.

If such a strike operates emergency cover under workers' control then we can stop any attempt by the army, police or unspecified civilians from breaking the picket lines in order to get access to the red engines.

If this happens the government will be faced with a choice: it can either give in or it will invoke the anti-union laws (as it very nearly did on the eve of the first eight day strike) in order to curb the action, limit solidarity and hit the union's funds. This would be an enormous risk for Blair because it will shake the Labour Party to its foundations. And it will open the way to mass strike action from every other union against the anti-union laws and in solidarity with the FBU.

Our side's determination will shape the outcome of the dispute. If we retreat to less frequent or shorter strikes the government will take that as a sign of weakness and press home the attack. If we prove to them, and to the whole class, that we are ready and determined to wage a fight to the finish then we can bring Blair to his knees – sooner, rather than later.

An all-out indefinite strike is now the best bet to turn the slogan – victory to the firefighters – into a reality.

ens the fight for solidarity action. Events on the London Underground have demonstrated this. During the first two-day strike workers on the underground managed to shut down most of the system on health and safety grounds. This was solidarity at its best. You could tell, because it had the Tories and Labour fuming about "secondary action".

By the time of the eight-day strike the underground bosses had bullied and threatened enough workers to undermine such solidarity. The stoppages stopped. The RMT leadership tried to regain lost ground by going for a strike ballot, but they found themselves up against legal threats under the anti-union laws. These threats have now delayed the ballot.

The danger is that without an all-out strike serious solidarity action cannot be won, or will be undermined. And the firefighters will find themselves isolated.

To avert all of these dangers we need to ensure that Andy Gilchrist is placed under, and remains under, the organised control of the rank and file. We need to agitate for the perspective of an all-out strike – if the government refuse to give in – via the strike committees, the rank and file and left networks.

We need to ensure that all negotiations are open to inspection by the strikers themselves. No secret deals. We need to put the day-to-day running of the dispute in the hands of elected rank and file representatives from every station and we need

to guarantee that the firefighters have the final say over any proposed settlement.

In short, we need to combine the fight to beat Labour with the fight to place the dispute – and the whole union – under the control of the rank and file. That way we can ensure that Andy's powerful fighting talk is matched by action until we win.

## Defend Steve Godward

Steve Godward, an FBU militant in Birmingham and Vice-Chair of the Socialist Alliance, has been victimised by the bosses – 45 minutes before the start of the first two-day strike.

He was suspended – pending a hearing designed to sack him – for the crime of passing on to other stations a risk assessment carried out by his watch and the station management while he was on sick leave.

The bosses said that this was tantamount to sabotage. We say it is a clear case of victimisation and call on all FBU members and other trade unionists to protest vigorously to ensure Steve's immediate reinstatement.

Messages of support for Steve can be sent via the Socialist Alliance national office on:

Office@socialistalliance.net

## Solidarity with the Firefighters

The TUC-backed demonstration on 7 December needs to be a display of solidarity with the firefighters that activists can build up to and beyond Christmas, if that's how long it takes to win.

In every town and district there should be a firefighters' support committee, drawing in delegates from trade union and community organisations, organising collections to keep the strike going, mobilising for local demos and publicity stunts, organising speakers' tours by striking firefighters to every workplace and working class estate and area.

In addition we need action alongside the firefighters. The RMT, together with other workers, such as those at the Peckham library, effectively staged joint strikes with the FBU during the initial two-day action. In every workplace activists need to see if this action can be

carried on, using health and safety rules to bring people out alongside the firefighters.

But as the court action against the RMT in London shows we can only get round the anti-union laws for so long. The truth is we all need to take a big breath and organise action in defiance of these laws – combined with a campaign to repeal them – if we are going to win.

In the first place activists should campaign in every union – locally, nationally and regionally – for pledges to take strike action alongside the firefighters if the government uses the anti-union laws against them or tries to ban their action by some other means.

If we cannot win the TUC to such a course then it is vital that the various left leaders – Mark Serwotka, Bob Crow, Billy Hayes, Derek Simpson and Paul Mackney –

organise an alliance of powerful unions that will issue a call to action in solidarity with the FBU and in defiance of the anti-union laws.

Even if we only won a commitment to issue such a threat New Labour would be hurled into panic. And if we turned this commitment into action it would be hurled into oblivion.

Last but not least, public sector workers should make the connection – the reason the government has dug in is because it wants to keep all public service workers on low wages. Why not bring forward the claims – even those who have only recently settled – and co-ordinate our action in pursuit of them alongside the FBU?

A movement that strikes together wins together! Victory to the firefighters when they win we win too!

## Break with Blair – We Need a New Workers' Party



Firefighters demonstrate against Blair at the recent CBI conference

Andy Gilchrist told a Labour left conference at the end of November, "I'm quite prepared to work to replace New Labour with what I'm prepared to call Real Labour."

He was echoing the comment that we have heard on picket lines up and down the country – "there are 55,000 firefighters, and thousands of their family members, who will never vote Labour again." FBU members are queuing up to opt out of the political levy that their union currently pays to New Labour.

With Blair and Brown declaring their undying loyalty to the bosses it is little wonder that workers – who pay the Labour Party millions – are beginning to question the value of the union/Labour link, the monopoly Labour enjoys over the political levy and the very idea that Labour is still "their party". Indeed even the Labour left's very own Tribune gave Robert Taylor the space to write:

"It is time people in Labour's ranks recognised that the movement formed more than a century ago to create a better world based on justice and liberty through the emancipation of working people no longer exists."

Too true. Their attack on the firefighters will soon be accompanied by a foul attack on the people of Iraq. Brown goes to the CBI conference and praises the doings of extreme right wingers in the Bush administration, hails the work of Britain's tax-dodging bosses and promises them lower taxes still – but berates public sector workers for being greedy.

Workers are waking up. It is high time some of our leaders did too. Last March the Socialist Alliance attracted over 1,000 trade unionists to a conference calling for the democratisation of the political fund. The FBU itself had voted to open up its fund to other working class parties – only for Andy Gilchrist to get that decision overturned at last May's annual conference. Unison is reviewing its political fund. The RMT is openly considering disaffiliation from Labour. The civil servants' union, PCS, has, under the leadership of Mark Serwotka, set up a political fund but made clear it will not go to Labour (except in the unlikely event that the members vote for that).

The question of breaking from Labour – over both the

war on Iraq and the war on the unions – is now concretely posed. If we do not give leadership and organisation to this the danger is that workers will simply make individual choices – not to vote for Labour, not to pay a political levy, to abolish political funds altogether.

Yet both the war and the attack on the unions show the need for a political voice for the working class. This voice needs to be one of uncompromising opposition to capitalism and imperialism. It needs to be a revolutionary voice that speaks out for – and organises the fight of – the workers, the oppressed, the victims of racism and sexism. It needs to be a revolutionary party.

But many workers don't yet agree with the need for revolution. They need to be convinced that is what is really required. We cannot do that in the confines of New Labour. But we can if we agree to a joint project to build a new workers' party. Such a party – sponsored in the best case scenario by the RMT, the PCS, the FBU, the MPs who oppose the war on Iraq (and will find themselves expelled from the Labour Party if they carry their opposition into parliament once the war starts), the Socialist Alliance and other left forces – could attract hundreds of thousands of working class supporters.

An army of activists, fired by the enthusiasm of being able to go into political battle against the New Labour enemies of the working class – could help turn such a party into a truly mass phenomenon. With the formation of such a party – on a democratic basis – the revolutionaries could put their case, as could those who still believed in reform. And even if the argument for a revolutionary programme was lost, the break from Labour would have enormously strengthened the revolutionary wing of such a movement.

That is why we say to all those engaged in struggle, those unions questioning New Labour – including those who remain in the Labour Party – break with Blair; don't shrink from a split if he decides he cannot tolerate you form a new workers' party – build the socialist alternative.

# France joins Blunkett in attacking asylum seekers

As the headlines came and mysteriously went of a sinister plot by Albanian and Romanian asylum seekers to abduct Victoria "Posh" Beckham, Home Secretary David Blunkett steamrollered his asylum and immigration bill through parliament in early November.

There was a very modest backbench "revolt" against New Labour's Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. It is the fourth major legislative assault on refugee rights in less than a decade and panders shamelessly to the racism and xenophobia of the same gutter press that spreads filth about the firefighters.

The new Act incorporates 311 amendments, more than 300 of which the Government itself promoted. In his unceasing dance to the tune of the *Daily Mail*, Blunkett announced in early October some major changes both to the legislation and the practices of the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND):

- Asylum applicants from Somalia, Liberia and Libya had generally received "Exceptional Leave to Remain" prior to 7 October, but this is no longer the case. According to New Labour minister, Beverley Hughes, Somalia is a "much safer place now".

- The notorious "white list", originally introduced by the Tories in 1996, is back. The Government maintains that any asylum applicant from any of 10 European Union "accession states" is manifestly "bogus". So Roma people fleeing vicious racism in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe will be deported as a matter of course.
- People who apply for refugee status in the UK at some point after their arrival will cease to have an entitlement to any support package, however miserly, while IND officers consider their asylum application.

These measures clearly reinforce New Labour's drive to deter refugees from coming to Britain in the first place. Blunkett had already committed the government to a doubling of those asylum applicants detained indefinitely without trial to some 4,000 in any given week and pledged a fourfold increase in the number of peo-

ple deported from the UK.

In order to expedite passage of the legislation, the Home Office hinted at token concessions around its "pilot programme" for so-called accommodation centres in isolated rural areas. But while it caved into a populist right-wing backlash against its proposed camp at a disused RAF base in Worcestershire, it remained absolutely committed to keeping asylum applicants, including children, in prison-like camps with wholly segregated medical and educational facilities.

In the same week that the Blunkett legislation gained Royal Assent, the French authorities began implementing their end of a cynical bargain struck between Blunkett and his French counterpart, Nicolas Sarkozy. From 5 November the Sangatte camp on the outskirts of the depressed Channel port of Calais stopped taking newly arrived refugees.

Needless to say, the French government had done nothing to provide food or shelter to men and women arriving in the cold and damp of Calais with little more than a smattering of English and the clothes on their backs.

The hopelessly overcrowded and inadequate camp, originally operated by the Red Cross, is now under the de facto management of the CRS riot police, who have barred the way to representatives of NGOs offering legal advice to Sangatte's residents. Some 3,500 of these robocops are now deployed in the region and are expected to remain until the final closure of the facility slated for March 2003.

Some of the first arrivals denied access to Sangatte wandered the streets of Calais in search of food and shelter. According to Tom McGowan, the secretary of the Kent Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, media reports that suggested that Iraqi Kurds and Afghans had mounted an occupation of the Saints Pierre et Paul Church were wide of the mark.

Tom, who has visited Calais twice recently, writes: "It was no occupation; the local priest took pity on the refugees and let them stay in the disused church, which had been closed at it had asbestos in the ceiling."



Asylum seeker at Sangatte

Whatever the reality, the church became a symbolic beacon of resistance amid the refugees' attempt to maintain their dignity. The French government was not prepared to tolerate their continuing presence in the church and launched an early morning raid on 14 November to evict them. This took place with the permission of Calais'

Communist Party mayor, Jacky Hélin, who had previously pledged assistance to those still dwelling at the Sangatte camp.

For the moment, the French interior ministry is appearing to take a more charitable line towards asylum applications from those turned away from Sangatte, though Tom McGowan has met refugees who have

been given a 48-hour deadline to leave France. Kent CDAS has joined with refugee rights groups in France to call for another demonstration in Calais on Sunday 15 December and has also launched a humanitarian appeal for blankets, winter clothing and tinned food to assist the destitute asylum seekers (see below for details of where to send donations).

Many of the Sangatte refugees do indeed want to get to Britain and are so desperate that they are prepared to huddle for hours in the back of a lorry or cling to the undercarriage of a Eurostar. Why?

The attraction is not "benefit shopping", contrary to the lies peddled by Blunkett and the press. Some of these men and women already have relatives in the UK, while English is the only European language they can speak, however haltingly. Crucially, though they would rather take their chances of surviving in the netherworld of the "black market" economy in London and the South East, where, unlike France, the police cannot yet constantly demand to see identity papers.

Of course, the ruthless "people traffickers" and the naked exploitation of immigrant workers – refugees or otherwise – must be stopped. But New Labour wants both to scapegoat asylum seekers for Britain's tattered social fabric at the same time as allowing a flow of vulnerable cheap labour into the country.

The answer ultimately lies in a fight across the labour and anti-capitalist movements, both in Britain and across Europe, for an end to immigration controls in general. These laws are inherently racist and undermine class-based unity, as well as inflicting terrible suffering on immigrant and refugees themselves.

To help the refugees in France send donations to: Kent CDAS C/o Marks and Spencer, Unit 12, Reeves Yard, Warwick Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1HX.

For more information contact: Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, BCM Box 4289, London WC1X 3XX. Email: info@defend-asylum.org

## Public meeting organised by CDAS and Barbed Wire Britain - "Asylum rights are human rights",

with John McDonnell, MP; Louise Christian, civil rights lawyer; Ladislav Balaz, Europe-Roma; Emma Ginn, Campaign for Justice in the Earl's Wood Trial, Tuesday 10 December, 7.30 pm, Room 3D, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

# Occupation rattles CBI bigwigs

In late November the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Britain's biggest bosses' organisations, held its conference in Manchester. There were a number of protests at this bosses' bean-feast – the manufacturing union Amicus staged one and so did striking firefighters. There was a big one of anti-war and anti-capitalist protesters too. One person who was there sent us an eyewitness report of the moment the bosses got a bit more than they had bargained for.

"It's normally the sort of thing you see on telly. The CBI conference. All suits and sales booths. Selling all sorts, guns and oil and roses too. And normally you never get to see it for yourself.

Unless you occupy it of course. So that's what we, in the Manchester Stop the War Committee did.

Around 300 protesters had gathered outside the G-MEX, Manchester's prestigious conference centre, where the CBI, the bosses' conference was holding its annual meeting.

Now you have to be ready for anything. And we had discussed the options, but fully expected it to be surrounded by armed cops and horses. But evidently, fearing the adverse publicity such security would create, there were five goons in suits and that was it. Nothing.

The cops were hidden away in their vans, out of sight and out of mind. Too far away to do anything anyway. So after a quick scout round, Workers Power, Revo, Globalise Resistance and the Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) agreed the plan of attack.

On the signal, SWSS would take the side and Workers Power and Revo and everyone else would take the front. Straight in the main entrance.

So the signal comes and up we go. And you're running, shouting, waving back "Come on now!" and everyone starts to move. And you're leaping up the stairs. And you see the goons in front of you. And it all goes slow motion replay. Through the first set of doors. Two of them on my back. In front they're punching another protester.

More and more people flood past. The TV cameras appear. Flashbulbs exploding. I think "I might not make it!" but I'm not stopping now. I shake them off. We're in!

The entrance filled with us, rushing forward. Them totally unprepared. An elderly woman protester trips in the door way. We stop to pick her up. And we're sealed in. Security on the door but about 30 of us inside. Incredibly.

This does not happen! We gather our forces and set off, tour the building, the BBC guy Ewan whatsisname, jabbering into the mike, like his pants are on fire. Surrounded by telly. Watched by more goons and suits.

"NO BLOOD FOR OIL!" we shout as we march round. Outside the police arrive, much too late and block the entrance. Truncheons out, beat a protester over the head. We find the

BP stand. They've got these groovy balls which flash when you bounce. Freebees for any delegate or visitor. We hold a press conference. We do not support this war of re-colonisation. We do not recognise the right of the US and Britain to bomb and destroy Iraq for profit. We condemn Tony Blair, a butcher with blood on his hands. Pay the Firefighters not the firestarters.

We stay for a while and gather our forces to meet the crowd outside. Tremendous cheers! Jubilation! Free! Free! Palestine!

The superintendent approaches me "Can I have a word?" "No".

We march through the streets, blocked and harassed by cop horses and finally rally. This is only the beginning. We are the future. They are the past. We will fight to stop their bloody war. Down with the warmongers!"

# The destruction of Nigeria

Keith Spencer reviews *This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria* by Karl Maier, Penguin Press

The aborted Miss World competition and the deaths of more than 200 people have reinforced in the West the idea that Nigeria is a land being ripped apart by religious and ethnic hatreds.

And yet it could be so different. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with 123 million people. Oil accounts for 95 per cent of foreign earnings.

Why Nigeria has failed is the subject of this updated book by Karl Maier. He is a journalist who spent some time in Nigeria in the mid-1990s and went back in 1998 to witness Nigeria's return to civilian rule in May 1999 when former general Olusegun Obasanjo became civilian president.

Maier charts life in the slums of Lagos; the role of the military in Nigerian politics; the struggle of the Ogoni people in the 1990s and the rise of Sharia law in the northern provinces.

Two people dominate this book: General Ibrahim Babangida and opposition leader Ken Saro Wiwa, who was tried and executed in 1995. They knew each other and personify much of what has happened to Nigeria.

Babangida has made and unmade presidents. He was born and raised in central Nigeria. He went to military academy and was commissioned into the army in 1963. In January 1966, army officers, mainly from the south east Igbo people, overthrew the civilian government. A second coup followed in July 1966, which unleashed terror against Igbos outside of their south-eastern homeland. Many thousands were killed and many more escaped back to the south east of the country. The violence culminated in civil war in July 1967 when the Igbos demanded secession from Nigeria.

The war ended in 1970 after more than a million Igbos had died. There followed a succession of military and civilian regimes until Babangida came to power in 1985. He gives Maier his insight into how coups work:

"In all the coups you find there has always been one frustration or the other. Any time there is a frustration we step in. And there is a demonstration welcoming the redeemers." (page 59)

In power, Babangida released political prisoners, recruited intellectuals and kept

the military's hands off the press. Yet his apparent support for democracy hid his corrupting influence on everyone he touched. He also opposed IMF structural adjustment programmes before introducing something similar himself – though popular demonstrations and strikes halted his programme. And he was a favourite of the West: Babangida tells Maier that Margaret Thatcher told him he should exchange his military uniform for a civilian suit and run for president.

By 1993, Babangida had put into place a framework for the transition to civilian rule. It was a transition with two parties – set up and vetted by the military. The winner of the July 1993 elections was Mashood Abiola, a rich Yoruba businessman who was supported by Babangida.

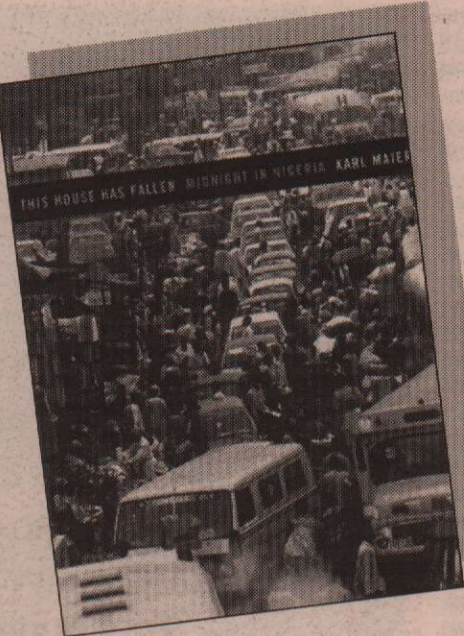
Abiola was a popular winner in a military-run election the international community claimed was fair. But Babangida annulled the elections. When Maier asks him why, Babangida says that Abiola had made promises to foreign interests in return for money – forgetting that it was Babangida himself who was Abiola's biggest source of funds. He even says that Abiola would have "made a lousy president and [General Sani] Abacha would have been in power in six months."

The last bit proved to be accurate. By August, strikes and demonstrations had forced Babangida out and his old friend Abacha took power in November. There ensued five years of repression by Abacha before he died in the arms of his mistress.

Abacha was replaced by General Abdulsalaami Abubakar, an old friend of both Abacha and Babangida. He oversaw the transition to democracy. Abubakar won much praise from the West for returning Nigeria to democracy. He earned less praise from the poor of Nigeria for the disappearance of \$3 billion of foreign exchange that occurred in his brief two-year reign.

Today, Babangida bides his time in Minna, the town where he was born. Asked by Maier whether he would rule out a return to politics, Babangida says: "Ruled out for the time being."

Ken Saro Wiwa was born an Ogoni in the Delta region of Nigeria. Since the second world war, it is estimated that \$30 billion



## Timeline

**October 1960 - Independence from Britain**

**January 1966 - Coup overthrows civilian government of Tafawa Balewa**

**July 1966 - Revenge coup ushers in pogroms against Igbos**

**1967-1970 - Civil or Biafran War**

**1975 - General Gowon overthrown by Murtala Mohammed**

**February 1976 - Mohammed assassinated, replaced by General Obasanjo.**

**1979 - Civilian government of President Shagari**

**1983 - Shagari deposed by military.**

**1985 - Babangida becomes head of state and president**

**July 1993 - Military-run elections annulled by Babangida when Abiola wins outright victory.**

**August 1993 - demonstrations and strikes force Babangida out.**

**November 1993 - Abacha takes power.**

**1998 - Abacha dies quickly followed by Abiola. Abubakar takes over reigns of state.**

**1999 - Obasanjo returns as president - this time as a civilian.**

**2000 - ethnic and religious strife.**

worth of oil has been pumped out of Ogoniland – mainly by Shell in cooperation with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. But though this tiny area of just over 400 square miles, inhabited by nearly 500,000 people, produces much of the country's wealth, Ogoniland is wracked by poverty and polluted by oil.

Saro Wiwa rose to power in Ogoniland during the civil war – the Ogonis were opposed to the secessionist Igbos. He developed a number of powerful friends including Abacha and Babangida. However, writing in March 1990 in his weekly news column he attacked the military, the make-up of the federal republic and the role of Shell.

In August, the Ogoni Bill of Rights was published, which called for autonomy for Ogoniland, their representation in all federal structures and the first use of oil revenues from the area. Along with this declaration the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, or Mosop, was formed. Within a year, Saro Wiwa started to make contact with international environmental and human rights organisations. Mosop grew attracting a large number of disaffected youth.

In January 1993 demonstrations of 300,000 in Ogoniland protested against Shell and the federal government. But beneath this surface of success a fissure had opened up in Mosop that was to widen with tragic consequences.

In April 1993, a protest against Shell ended with 11 Ogonis being shot. Mosop demanded compensation from Shell, which eventually offered one million naira (just £6,000). Saro Wiwa rejected it but two Ogoni elders, Garrick Leton and Edward Kobani, accepted Shell's offer. The two had to flee a furious crowd of Ogonis. The split widened over the boycotting of the 1993 elections with both Leton and Kobani calling for participation.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian army-backed by regular payments from Shell – killed hundreds of Ogonis in raids on their villages between July 1993 and April 1994. During this military occupation of Ogoniland, Saro

Wiwa was still able to meet his friend Saro Abacha in September 1993 to discuss the Ogoni situation.

The end came in May 1994. Saro Wiwa had been travelling to a meeting in Ogoniland but had been turned back by police. A mile from the roadblock, Leton, Kobani and several local chiefs were beaten to death by young people. The next day the police arrested Saro Wiwa, who always denied any part in the attack. But despite international pressure and Nigeria being suspended from the Commonwealth, Saro Wiwa was found guilty and was hanged with eight other Ogoni activists in November 1995.

The Ogoni leadership had been destroyed and both Mosop and the youth congress members were driven underground by military oppression, or were forced to flee abroad.

But as one people were repressed another, the Ijaws, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, took up the struggle against poverty, pollution and military repression.

The best part of the book is the descriptions of the military and the forces that tear Nigeria apart. It describes Britain's role as a colonial power and blames it for many Nigeria's ills. But more could have been done to explain the role of the oil companies and other multinationals and imperialism and its organisations such as the IMF and World Bank. It also focuses on the forces tearing Nigeria apart such as religion and ethnicity rather than forces that can unite the country. And without such a focus Maier ends up with a counsel of despair saying that the democratically elected President Obasanjo is Nigeria's last hope.

But there is another alternative. Maier's time in Nigeria saw some of the biggest strikes against both military and civilian governments. Yet the struggles of the workers, civil servants and teachers are not mentioned.

A revolutionary working class party would provide a lead to the hundreds of thousands of youth, workers and peasants and put to an end the cycle of misrule by military and civilian governments.

A socialist future for Nigeria and Africa can ensure that the house can be rebuilt by workers.

# Moore's message: racist white America is scared

Bill Jenkins reviews *Bowling for Columbine*, directed by Michael Moore, on general release

The Columbine massacre. After waking early and taking in a visit to the local bowling alley, two suburban white boys from Littleton, Colorado, a week from graduation, walk into their far too normal school and indiscriminately shoot and bomb their class mates and teachers.

Except it's not that indiscriminate. They kill the black boy in the library because he's black. Bowling has a lot to answer for, if it is capable of sparking such a murderous rampage.

Well it's either that or Marilyn Manson, for all the insight demonstrated by the countless television experts and religious evangelists shown in Michael Moore's new film, *Bowling for Columbine*.

Using his familiar melange of interview, exposure, vintage and contemporary film, Moore tries to give a better explanation. Contrasting the banal with the ridiculous, *Bowling* is funny, sad and often extremely powerful. Moore's interviews reveal why his work is so insightful and engaging. He simply asks people "Why?" Allowing them to explain their motivation and beliefs without feeding them a line.

So from the Michigan Militia, which gave us

the Oklahoma bomber Tim McVeigh, to the Canadian kids bunking off class, he gives a platform to the prejudices, fears and insights of ordinary people. But this is not any random collection of ideas. Moore is quite clear why the Columbine Massacre took place. For him it boils down to three connected facts.

First, the all-pervasive violence and hypocrisy which runs through corporate America. One irony the film reveals is that Lockheed Martin, the largest arms manufacturer in the world and the firm that runs the "welfare to work" scheme in Flint, Michigan, builds its missiles in Littleton. The USA and its allies in the Western Europe have bombed and killed their way through history using Lockheed's hardware.

Second, the endemic racism of the USA. Gun ownership only became commonplace in the late sixties with the rise of the civil rights movement, when a quarter of a billion guns were purchased by white America.

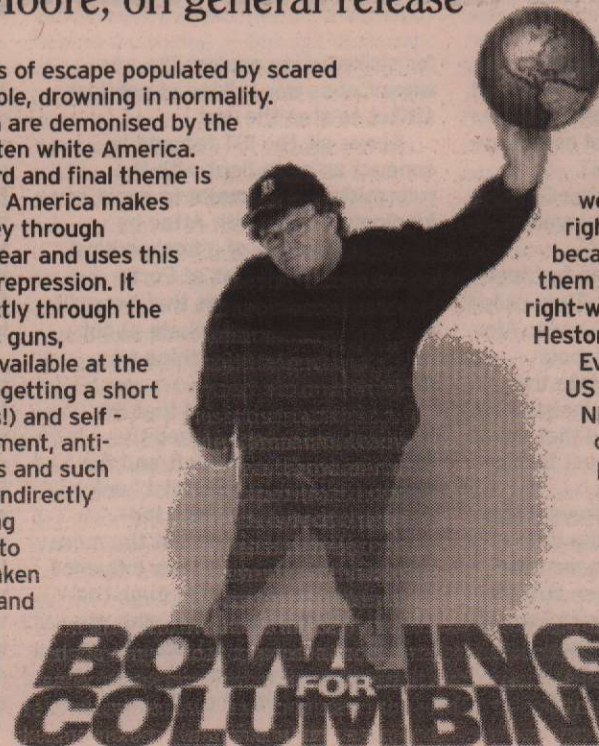
The film reveals that guns in schools are mainly a problem not in the black inner cities, as the various Hollywood urban gang themed films would have it, but in the white suburbs,

tranquil islands of escape populated by scared and scary people, drowning in normality.

Black youth are demonised by the media to frighten white America.

Moore's third and final theme is how corporate America makes heaps of money through perpetuating fear and uses this fear to justify repression. It does this directly through the sale of useless guns, ammunition (available at the barber's while getting a short back and sides!) and self-defence equipment, anti-nerve gas suits and such like. It does it indirectly by manipulating people's fears to divide and weaken working class and poor communities.

The film concludes by interviewing



Charlton Heston, faded film star and the leader of the National Rifle Association (NRA).

One major reason why we defend the democratic right of people to bear arms is because one day we may need them to defend ourselves against right-wing nutters who think like Heston.

Every school massacre in the US is followed soon after by an NRA rally, to defend the right of white citizens to shoot people. Moore a model of affable insouciance, allows Heston to voice the racist paranoia of the gun-toting self-defence lobby. Heston blames the USA's 11,000 annual gun deaths on the large number of "ethnics" in America.

Enough said.

# A great leap forward for th

For four days last month Florence was the site of a historic meeting of the anti-capitalist left and the biggest anti-war demo in decades. We report here on the significance of both events

The first European Social Forum (ESF) took place between 6 and 10 November. The estimated number of participants was 60,000 from 105 countries, 10,000 coming from outside of Italy. This was double the highest estimates of the organisers before the event.

Some 426 associations – trade unions, campaigns, movements – officially participated. In addition dozens of political organisations had stalls and organised more than 300 seminars and workshops. The ESF was considerably less bureaucratic than Porto Alegre, where “delegates” were hand-picked and sealed off from most of the people in the city.

Not since the 1920s has such a huge international event taken place for political discussion and the linking of struggles.

The ESF, and the million strong demonstration on the streets of Florence on the Saturday, were events of historic importance because they fused the militant struggles and organisations of the Italian working class with the movement against global capitalism and imperialist war which has grown up over the past three years.

It was historic because it represents a return to mass political consciousness and action by a whole new generation of workers and youth. The ESF signalled a definitive overcoming of the defeats of the 1980s, the collapse of Stalinism, the further rightward march of social democracy and the collapse of working class and popular mass political institutions.

It represented the beginning of a conscious response to the new period of wars

and revolutionary upheavals that began at the turn of the new century. This international movement holds the potential to mobilise millions in Europe against the upcoming US-led and UN-blessed war against Iraq.

But it holds an even more far-reaching historic potential. A new generation is entering radical, militant politics on a scale not seen in Europe since the 1960s and 1970s. The best opportunity since the Vietnam war now exists for a massive growth of revolu-

Politically, the movement is shifting to the left. Speakers who presented themselves as left wing, as anti-capitalist, as revolutionaries, who talked of the need for a “new (revolutionary or socialist) party” got the loudest applause

tionary forces.

Reformists, like Attac France, the major reformist unions and the NGOs dominated the speakers’ lists for the main sessions. In the run-up to the event they tried to diminish the centrality of the struggle against imperialism and war in the programme of the Forum. Thankfully, they did not succeed. And once faced with thousands of anti-capitalist young people in the main sessions many speakers felt compelled to make rhetorical denunciations of capital-

ism as well as globalisation.

The ideas promoted by these people in the big meetings were at their weakest whenever it came to spelling out what sort of “different world” the movement should be struggling for.

Radical NGO representatives like Barry Coates of the World Development Movement, Great Britain, called for “curbing the financial markets” and an “economy based on solidarity” but in which shareholding would be “democratised”. Attac pushed their

inate the forum. The right wing of ATTAC and many NGOs were politically weakened during the course of the forum. They were less visible and less able to pose as the movement’s main spokespersons than at Porto Alegre.

Politically, the movement is shifting to the left. Speakers who presented themselves as left wing, as anti-capitalist, as revolutionaries, who talked of the need for a “new (revolutionary or socialist) party” got the loudest applause. The leftward move was also expressed by the strike calls of COBAS against the impending war and in the public self-criticism by Rifondazione Comunista leader, Bertinotti, of his party’s former support for the reformist Olive Tree block in Italy.

To ensure that the right-wing of the movement remains on the defensive the left wing must embrace every one of the ESF’s positive proposals and take them up vigorously across the continent. We need to develop a fighting, effective democracy within this movement. We need to promote a revolutionary programme, introducing key immediate and transitional demands into every serious struggle and expose the major reformist, populist and anarchist shibboleths which remain prevalent. Clearly these demands need to centre on the war but also on the mass closures at Fiat, the wave of privatisations and the defence of immigrants’ rights.

We need to spread the example of workers’ control that the Argentine factory occupations have thrown up, and publicise the

Tobin Tax and anti-Tax Haven campaigns.

Walden Bello and Susan George were long on denunciation of neoliberalism and corporate capital but their practical solutions were totally rooted in a process of reform and a return to either neo-Keynesian re-regulation or the old UNCTAD development model (de-globalisation). In essence this is a bourgeois programme for the movement, dissolving the working class into a “citizens” movement.

But these ideas and leaders did not dom-

## Let’s learn to speak It Forums throughout th

The response of the Italian workers and anti-capitalist youth to the attacks on the demonstrations in Genoa 2001, to the murder of Carlo Giuliani and the brutal police repression, encouraged the spread of the social forums to many towns and cities.

Young metalworkers of Cgil-Fiom responded to the Berlusconi government’s attacks on their gains with militant action. Huge anti-war and anti-cuts demonstrations erupted. The ESF actually met against the background of a wave of demonstrations against the mass sackings at Fiat plants in the north and in Sicily.

The ESF’s organisational backbone was the Italian social forums. In Italy they are a real force, drawing in mass organisations. They are a form of united front which corresponds to the current state and needs of the movement, being a body to co-ordinate action and conduct debate on strategy and tactics. They are most vibrant in smaller towns where the bureaucrats of the labour movement cannot smother their local campaigning vitality.

We should call for the generalisation of the social forums throughout Europe because they can bring together all the forces to fight the war, the social attacks and racism. At a local level, when the class struggle reaches pre-revolutionary levels, they could even become workers’ council-type bodies.

That means that nationally, locally,

internationally, the social forums should be open to all those who want to fight the war, combat racism and beat back the capitalist offensive on the working class.

Everywhere we have to give particular emphasis to winning over mass workers’ organisations to such forums and to engage them in joint struggle wherever possible. They must draw in all the trade unions and the parties willing to fight, or actually fighting, local and global capitalism and imperialist war. Working class organisations must be at their centre if they are to be effective as a mass force. As a talking shop of propaganda societies they would be useless.

At the moment the action of the social forums is strongly hindered by the principle of decision making only by consensus, an effective veto in the hands of the more right-wing and more inactive and forces. We should oppose the right to veto inside the social forums, even if this may initially take the form of calling on those not willing to join in a specific action not to block the others. Consensus where possible, votes and majority decisions where necessary.

The ban on the open representation of parties within the movement imposed by the Porto Alegre “principles” must also be overturned. In practice the ban did not operate in Florence, largely because of the leftward shift that occurred. But the rule banning parties could be invoked at any



## The International Socialist Tendency and the Forum

The militancy of the youth and workers who attended the Forum and the demonstration has greatly strengthened the forces of centrism and left reformism. The IST, Rifondazione Comunista, the COBAS unions, the CGIL-Fiom all played a key role.

The IST were clearly the furthest left of the sizeable forces. They called openly for a revolutionary party. Alex Callinicos argued for the labour movement to be brought into the anti-capitalist movement, insisted on the centrality of class, and that the “other world” talked of must be one of socialism.

However, this did not prevent the IST from acting to delay the date of a European day of action against the war to mid-February – when both the Italian and Greek forces were keen to have an earlier date. It did not stop them from dragging their feet in making any call on the union leaders

for strike action against the war – when Cobas was talking of political strikes to stop the war.

Above all, the IST refused to conduct an open fight with the reformists. They sought to avoid any ideological clash with Attac by scuttling the idea of a final political declaration or call (as at Porto Alegre) on the grounds that “we will never agree” and “a debate about programme is the last thing we need”.

The ESF also showed that the leadership of the ESF need the footsoldiers of the far left and the more radical “rank and file” unions like Cobas to actually run the movement. At the moment the more reformist forces exert their influence and put the brakes on through the medium of the centrists – who use “realism”, the need for action, the united front as excuses for delaying a head-on fight with the reformists.

The SWP believes that a united front means suspending all public criticism of one’s partners in struggle, be they left reformists or even the Muslim Association of Britain (in the case of the Stop the War Coalition). Whatever its long-term revolutionary intentions, the IST’s method protects the reformists from revolutionary criticism in the here and now.

The SWP also acts as a real dampener on any attempt to broaden the overall aims and objectives of the movement or even to debate them openly. This is in part because the SWP will not embody its own overall strategy in a transitional action programme to which it seeks to win the workers and the anti-capitalist movement. Above all they did not say what had to be said, that a new International – a worldwide party – is needed now and must be an organisation committed to world

# The anti-capitalist movement



general strikes that have erupted across several continents. We need to point up the negative lessons of Lula's prescriptions for Brazil, which Attac espouses as a positive model – though attempts to boost it were greeted with only polite applause, clearly

indicating huge reservations about Lula's declarations of obedience to the IMF. Immediately the movement must take up the following:

● A co-ordinated campaign of mass demonstrations and direct action against the

war with a central orientation to winning the labour movement to strike action solidarity with any Iraqi resistance to invasion and with the Palestinian intifada.

● A Europe-wide campaign against all closures and redundancies stemming from

the economic recession, centering on the Fiat workers.

● A Europe-wide campaign against the neoliberal privatisation policies of the European Union and its member governments

● A campaign against state and far-right racism in the EU, in solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers, demanding their free entry and full civil rights.

● A co-ordinated campaign in solidarity with the peoples of Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia under attack from the IMF and groaning under the burden of debt to the western banks and with workers in struggle for jobs, trade union and democratic rights and a living wage.

Despite massive repression, despite suggestions of the need to purge the movement of its direct action wing by the respectable NGO right in the immediate aftermath of Gothenburg, Genoa and 9/11, despite the challenges of the "war against terrorism", the anti-capitalist movement has neither disappeared nor shrunk.

Already planning for the second ESF in Paris next year has begun. Other social forums will take place on all continents. The ESF is an enormous positive confirmation of our perspective that the building of a new mass international is a central task in the period ahead.

The ESF had an implicit dynamic towards fusion of the anti-capitalist movement with those emerging sections of the workers' movement which engage in international, rank and file action.

Fundamentally, globalisation itself is a

driving force pushing the workers' movement and the youth towards the creation of a new international. Strong processes of labour movement-anti-capitalist movement interaction have been taking place in Greece and Spain. Together the "southern European model" has become one to be copied by the rest of Europe. The presence of substantial delegations of public sector trade unionists from Britain, France and Germany indicated that Florence has taken forward a process that began in Genoa, and continued in Barcelona and Seville.

More than two years ago we in the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) raised the slogan of bringing the workers' organisations into the anti-capitalist movement and taking its militant and dynamic spirit into the labour movement. Florence shows that this was no utopia but a slogan in tune with objective developments. But it has yet to be realised in the whole of Europe and this is a task for the period ahead.

At some points the ESF even reminded us of an international – pointing to the potential it holds. But the ESF needs direction, perspective and strategy, in short a revolutionary organisation, based on a revolutionary programme to build and transform it into a weapon of international class struggle. We are part of the movement without any reservation. But we are the revolutionary wing, and we will seek, through democratic debate and joint struggle, to win it to our programme and tactics.

## Italian: build Social e whole of Europe

time. It was stitched together by Attac, the Brazilian PT and the "Italian representatives" behind the scenes after Porto Alegre. This ban privileges the middle class intellectuals who make up think tanks like Attac, and the NGOs, over the militant activists against war or global capitalism, amongst whom parties are important players. In Italy Rifondazione Comunista, in Britain the SWP and internationally the LRCI, have all been heavily involved in mobilising and extending the movement. In France, too, Attac would have got nowhere without the work of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire.

But the key question for the ESF, for national and local forums is can they become co-ordinating centres for struggle

in localities, rooted in the working class. Can they draw in the most militant trade union bodies, unemployed organisations, youth and women's groups, tenants' and community organisations, black, Asian, immigrant and anti-racist campaigns, socialists, communists, labour movement-rooted anarchists and so on? Can they organise effective action? Can they co-ordinate solidarity with workers at home and abroad – the Fiat workers, the Zanon occupation, the UK firefighters, the sweatshop workers building unions?

If we take up the call for social forums and build them with energy and enthusiasm they can. And they will take the class struggle forward by leaps and bounds.

## Why the movement needs a party

At a 5,000 strong, extremely enthusiastic meeting on the Friday night, devoted to "parties and the movement" there were many references from the platform to the repression in Genoa, to Carlo Giuliani, to the approaching war, to capitalism and imperialism as the enemy and to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Fausto Bertinotti of Rifondazione stigmatised the total failure of reformism, saying that it had tried to destroy any active participation in political life for millions. He praised the anti-capitalist movement for having led to a huge revival of activism and renounced the idea of any party hegemonising the movement.

Bernard Cassen from Attac went even further. He argued that "it is vital that the movement is not a political party or the tool of one or more parties. We have members from many parties – we would lose most if one party dominated our thinking." His conclusion, though he did not dare say it, is to ban parties from openly participating in the ESF and only have organisations that are "part of civil society".

The idea that anti-capitalist parties are not part of "civil society", whereas bourgeois charities (NGOs) and bureaucratic trade unions are, is a travesty of the truth. Of course, all mass organisations, all individual fighters should be welcomed with open arms.

A real open and living democracy within the movement will prevent any one party from imposing a Stalinist-like "leading role" or a bureaucratic stranglehold. But to achieve this all key decisions must be made in mass assemblies, opposing arguments must be put clearly and openly.

The approach of turning all meetings

into rallies prevents this. It means the big name speakers, whose place on the platform or on the lecturer's rostrum is arranged behind the scenes in cabals of the "big hitters", actually dominate, hegemonise and so on – but without any democratic mandate to do so.

This method also marred the meeting of the European Social Movements on the Sunday after the ESF. All the speakers were arranged in advance, no speakers from the floor were allowed, no open differences were aired, and the assembly made no change whatsoever in the resolutions.

The Porto Alegre principles favour the big reformist parties, like the PT of Brazil, which can manipulate the movement from behind the scenes, or through their associated trade unions and cultural organisations. This ban on parties also disenfranchises non-party activists since it does not allow them to judge parties – which are operating in the movement – according to what they argue is needed to take the movement forward.

To his credit Chris Nineham from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Globalise Resistance openly defended the role of political parties within the movement. He argued that the movement was fighting against a total system and that political parties can play a crucial role in this. "But not those who talk radical to get votes and then make peace with the powerful. The parties I want to see are revolutionary ones that try to unite the struggles in order to confront the whole system."

Yet the International Socialist Tendency (IST – of which the SWP is a part) wants to build a "revolutionary party" without openly fighting, criticising and displacing the reformists. The SWP sees itself as already the revolutionary party and it resists

any attempt to win the movement to revolutionary positions.

Olivier Besancenot, of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, (LCR – French section of the Fourth International), who won millions of votes as its presidential candidate, was cheered when he talked of the mistrust for parties which used the social movements and the trade unions to get into power and then attacked them in government.

He went on to say that it was an advance when these movements and unions began to struggle against "their own" parties in government. He called for parties which drew together the entire anti-capitalist left wing, to create a "left wing of the left wing", "one open to the ecological, revolutionary, Marxist, feminist and libertarian traditions."

The Fourth International, is clearly to the right of the IST in wanting to build a new party with both reformist and centrist wings – i.e., to recreate the pre-1914 Second International. This is because the Fourth International actually believes that what is needed is a party straddling the two opposed strategies of reform or revolution (i.e. a centrist party).

But the various conceptions of what kind of party the working class needs and how the party relates to the anti-capitalist movement will never be tested out while the reformists effectively exercise a ban on them.

This ban must be changed at the next ESF. It is not enough to quietly subvert the ban on parties as was, in effect, done in Florence by Rifondazione, the SWP/IST and the LCR. But they did not challenge it nor are they likely to do so at Porto Alegre in 2003. It must be challenged head-on and overthrown for the benefit of all party members and non-party members in the movement.



# Fiat workers move into top gear

Tens of thousands of striking Fiat workers marched through Rome last month to protest against the car firm's plans to axe some 8,000 of its workers. *Eddie McWilliams* reports on the fightback

Workers arrived in the Italian capital by train and bus from Fiat factories all over Italy on 26 November, including Sicily's Termini Imerese and the Arese factory near Milan – two of the hardest-hit plants.

Sales of Fiat cars in Italy have dropped sharply – nearly 20 per cent this year.

Italy's largest manufacturer posted a loss of 413 million euros in the third quarter of this year, its fourth straight quarterly deficit. The car-making unit has only had a profit once in the past eight years and is expected to have an operating loss this year of nearly 1.5bn euros.

Four months ago Fiat boss Umberto Agnelli announced the imminent collapse of the company under a mountain of debts owed to national and international creditors.

On 9 October Agnelli announced his "survival" plan. The group wanted 500 early retirements and 7,600 long-term lay-offs, including 5,600 from 25 November, to save 1bn euros next year. It amounts to the loss of half the workforce, with the other half laid off and relocated, and, "when things improve", re-employed.

Fiat's collapse is the culmination of a long and ignominious history of bad management, incompetence, waste, greed and corruption that has characterised this so-called "jewel in the crown" of Italian capitalism. Fiat's ability to survive and prosper in the Italian and world market has been due to three interrelated factors.

The first is the massive subsidies, hand-outs and credits lavishly dished out by every post-war Italian government, with the full support of the official (Stalinist) Communist Party opposition.

The second is the imposition in the Fiat plants of a regime of "terror" policed by the Stalinist-dominated trade unions to a rhythm of forced labour that was as exhausting as it was endless.

The third is the capacity of Fiat and other Italian monopolies to force "their" governments to repeatedly devalue the currency, thus maintaining a competitive edge against their international competitors.

Fiat's crisis has emerged precisely because the onset of neoliberalism, the single market and the euro has revealed the Italian economy to be more like a bazaar than a modern free market capitalist state.

When Fiat demanded the mass sackings, the leaders of the Italian trade union movement, organised in three federations, the CGIL, CISL and UIL – whose 9,000 or so members are involved in Fiat plants all over Italy from Turin to Sicily – effectively did nothing. Given their long history of complicity with Fiat in favouring every Agnelli manoeuvre and demand for more sacrifices from the workforce, this is not surprising.

The trade union chiefs were eventually forced into a half-hearted display of unity, announcing a series of four or eight-hour strikes in the plants affected, and a "general strike" on 26 November, one week before the closures and lay-offs were due to come into effect. Under pressure from this action Fiat agreed the day before the Rome demonstration to delay a decision on the cuts until 5 December.

The planned closures would mean the loss of something like 50,000 jobs, especially given the network of component sup-

pliers to Fiat. Towns like Termini Imerese in Sicily, with over 1,800 workers, are built around Fiat and will literally become a desert if the closure takes place. Unemployment in the region is triple the national average of 9 per cent. Per capita income in the Mezzogiorno, as the southern part of Italy from Naples downward is called, is about half that in the northern region of Lombardy, home of Italy's financial capital, Milan.

The workers in Termini Imerese decided to take resistance much further than their leaders had planned. They announced an all-out strike and set about mobilising the whole town in a permanent general assembly of workers and local committees of struggle, uniting all the social and political forces which want to defend the plant.

Every day mass meetings decide tactics to spread the fight across Sicily to Italy – occupation of airports, railways, main roads, the Straits of Messina, have very quickly broadened the base of support in Sicily. A spirit of incipient rebellion is spreading fast among the Sicilian workers and populace, as years of exploitation, oppression, frustration and betrayal fuel their mounting anger at the cynical deci-

sions of the Agnelli family and the cold calculations of Berlusconi and his government of corrupt cronies.

This spirit of resistance was further emboldened with the arrival of 1,000 anti-capitalist supporters who pledged the mobilisation of the movement on behalf of the Fiat workers.

The defiance and courage of the Sicilian workforce began to change the character of the dispute. The northern workforce, especially at Mirafiori, the central and largest plant in Turin, were more resigned to their fate, especially after years of sell-outs and compromises when faced with the speed-ups and flexibility drives imposed upon them by management and union leaders.

But the example of Sicily and the flying pickets began to change all that. Turin struck and 70,000 protesters marched on Friday 22 November demanding "No lay-offs, no division of the workforce, one job for all".

The Berlusconi government, neoliberal to its back teeth, is on the horns of a major dilemma. It knows that if the Fiat plan is not changed, it risks an ever deeper and wider social conflict, especially in the south and Sicily, where the coalition won every



seat in the regional elections nine months ago and all 67 parliamentary seats at the last general election on a promise to create 1.5 million jobs in Sicily! Hence Berlusconi is desperately trying to buy off the union leaders with promises of re-training packages for the sacked workforce.

But the government also knows that a default from its neo-liberal principles can bring down the wrath of its own supporters and the disapproval of Europe. Fur-

thermore, the already deep fissures opening up in the economic, political, social and constitutional fabric of Italy, not to mention the increasing solidarity between the anti-capitalist movement and the most militant section of metalworkers in the FIOM and CGIL, are rapidly bringing to the forefront the whole political question of the survival of the government and, with it, a serious crisis of Italian capitalism.

Notwithstanding the magnificent action of the Fiat workers and the anti-capitalist militants, the major response to the crisis has been shaped by the reformist politics, and their impotence before the dictates of neo-liberalism, that are a legacy of the strength and role of Stalinism in Italy.

The left reformist leaders of FIOM found themselves paralysed before the decision of Fiat, calling, like their moderate bosses, for a "new plan" and new private investment. None of them dared raise the demand for nationalisation and public ownership, despite the fact that the Agnelli family has milked the Italian working class of billions. It was left to Fausto Bertinotti, leader of Rifondazione Comunista, to raise the demand, and as the crisis had unfolded more and more sections of workers have taken up the cry.

Unfortunately, Bertinotti and his party, while in the forefront of the battle, have not been able to offer a cutting edge to the workers' struggle in such a way as to put them on a war footing against Agnelli's "plan" and the inevitable counter-attack of the Berlusconi government.

What is needed is an all-out indefinite strike, and the occupation of the plants – throughout the last month all the plants, with the exception of Termini Imerese, have continued to work normally.

Nationalisation under workers' control should have been, and must be still, the key demand to counter any attempt (once more) to unload the cost of the dispute onto the backs of the workers and bail out Agnelli and any other capitalists.

Occupation of the factories is the starting point for a mass solidarity campaign across Italy and Europe that can throw the Berlusconi government and the Ulivo "opposition" (the Olive Tree bloc – which tries at every turn to derail the mass character of the movement) into disarray and retreat. If this happens, the fall of the government and the arrival of the Italian masses onto the stage of political confrontation draw nearer.

●For more on Italy see: [www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/Italy-Collision.html](http://www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/Italy-Collision.html)

## Zanon workers' message to Fiat strikers: OCCUPY THE PLANTS!

Representatives of the vanguard of the Argentine working class met those of the Italian working class last month. Natalio Navarrete ("Chicho") was elected by his fellow workers in Neuquén last month to accompany Mariano Pedrero, the workers' lawyer, on a tour of Italy at the invitation of a group of activists linked to Cobas. The tour aimed to take in 20 towns and cities of Italy.

In the week following the European Social Forum in Florence they spoke to several meetings of workers in the north of Italy. In Udine a meeting organised by the CGIL trade union federation attracted more than 100 workers – including delegates from factory committees.

They collected 600 euros for the occupation and agreed to raise funds to help the unemployed workers of Neuquén to buy a machine to manufacture cardboard boxes as a way to create work for them.

The next day they spoke to another meeting of 100 in Milan at the invitation of Fronde factory workers, who make metal goods. Cobas activists were the bulk of the audience. The workers were in the midst of preparing a solidarity strike alongside the Fiat worker who are threatened with thousands of sackings at the moment.

In Turin a meeting of 35 included three workers from

the Fiat Alfa Romeo plant in Arese, under threat of closure. Much of the meeting centred on how the Fiat workers could undertake an occupation like that of Zanon and how to enlist the support of the local community for the struggle.

In a meeting of metal workers in the city of Mazza-Carrara a number of union leaders offered a series of platitudes about the gravity of the crisis but no practical answers on what to do.

When the Zanon workers spoke of the need to make the bosses pay and to occupy the factories the workers rose to their feet in applause. At the end of November they were due to take this message to the Fiat workers in Termini Imerese, Sicily.

Throughout the tour the key demands of the Zanon occupation – for nationalisation of the plant without compensation and under workers' control for a factory at the service of the community not profit – received widespread support.

Their struggle is proving not only an inspiration for Italian workers but a lesson in how they too can defend their jobs in the face of threatened factory closures and mass sackings: occupy under workers' control!

### The fight for workers' control in Argentina

After their tour of Italy the Zanon workers will be in London for their only UK visit. They will speak at a public meeting called by the Argentine Solidarity Committee and sponsored by Workers Power.

Speakers: Natalio Navarrete and Mariano Pedrero; plus FBU and RMT speakers invited. We urge other groups, unions and campaigns to sponsor this meeting.

Thursday, 12 December 7.30pm  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1



# Argentina: general strike to get rid of them all!

One year ago the masses on the streets got rid of three Presidents in two weeks. Now the working class must oust another if the present crisis is not to get worse

Argentina is going through its worst ever economic crisis – and the working class is bearing the brunt of it. The economy has shrunk by a fifth, while inflation is running at 40 per cent. The real value of wages has slumped 70 per cent this year and 450,000 jobs have been lost.

This has left one in every five people unemployed, one in two living in poverty, and one in four destitute. In the poorest regions – like Tucuman – children are dying daily from starvation. And this in the world's fourth largest food exporter!

The IMF precipitated this crisis last December when it halted a \$22 billion loan package to the country, citing non-compliance with its conditions.

A few weeks later, the country defaulted on its debt and the government has been negotiating with the IMF since, trying to renew aid to the country. But the IMF has refused further loans unless the government agrees to savage cuts in social programmes, deregulate energy prices and ease the tax burden on the rich.

It has demanded – and got – the Congress to repeal laws that discriminated against foreign creditors and it wants the courts to stop interfering with the freeze on savers' bank deposits.

Given the pressure on the government from below and the crisis within the ruling Peronist party it has been difficult for President Duhalde to get Congress and the provincial governors to agree to all these conditions. Last month the government refused the pay back money due on a World Bank loan in a bid to force the IMF to soften its stance.

Meanwhile, the situation for the masses gets worse. A renewed offensive of the working class and its allies is urgently needed to regain the political initiative. The tens of thousands of vanguard fighters in the occupied factories, piqueteros, popular assem-



Anti-IMF protests in Argentina

blies and co-ordinadoras must become an army of agitators directing themselves to the task of getting the millions of industrial workers to strike. They must rally the whole of the working class around a fighting programme:

- No to a new agreement with the IMF. For a general strike to block Congress ratifying the any agreement. For demonstrations and mass blockades of roads and occupation of town halls in protest. Return all the savings to the people at original value plus interest. Nationalise the banks under workers' control. Repudiate the debt!
- Strengthen and spread the occupations of the factories. Occupy all firms declaring redundancies or closure. Nationalise them under workers' control. Share available work among the workforce!
- Work for the unemployed not handouts. For a programme of socially useful public

works on a living wage. For the immediate restoration of the 25 per cent cut in real wages, and future increases indexed to inflation as judged by committees of workers and housewives/husbands!

- For action councils in all towns and cities uniting the workers, the unemployed and smaller savers. For a revolutionary constituent assembly to fulfil the popular demand – "get rid of them all!"

Of course, ruthless action against the banks and employers will bring down the wrath of the IMF and capital markets. An investment and loan strike by the international financiers will try to strangle and starve the country and bring the people to heel.

In the face of this only a workers' government can deal with the crisis, one based on workers' councils of elected and recallable deputies based in the enterprises, offices and barrios. This government will need to arm

itself to protect itself from the death squads and provocateurs, and army coup plotters.

The revolutionary workers' government will confiscate the assets and wealth of the big corporations and financial conglomerates. It will immediately prevent the movement abroad of capital and wealth and establish an emergency action plan for putting the country back to work, oversee food distribution and the provision of basic education and health needs.

Our key slogans in the coming period should be:

- Down with the Duhalde government of hunger and repression, lackey of the IMF!
- For a united campaign of action between the employed and unemployed workers – between the unions, the piqueteros organisations and the occupied factories and workplaces. For workers' control of hiring, firing and workplace conditions and a plan to provide work for all!
- For councils of action made up of employed and unemployed workers' delegates, delegates of the popular barrios and the popular assemblies!
- For an all-out indefinite general strike from 20 December to tear up all agreements with the IMF and sweep away the entire corrupt ruling class!
- For elections to a sovereign, revolutionary constituent assembly – not for the presidency or Congress!
- For an independent mass workers' party won to a programme of social revolution!
- For a national assembly of occupied workers, piqueteros and popular assemblies!
- For workers' power in Argentina. For a workers' government based on workers' councils and a workers' and popular militia!
- Spread the revolution throughout the continent and throughout the world!
- Build a new revolutionary workers' international!

## A workers' party must be built



President Duhalde: workers must break from him and the Peronist Party

Argentina's president, Eduardo Duhalde, last month postponed the presidential election scheduled for 30 March next year due to the deepening struggle for control of the Peronist party, PJ. Elections are now planned for April.

Duhalde fears that ex-President Carlos Menem might win the Peronist nomination. Duhalde himself lacks a candidate he could anoint as his successor.

Meanwhile, trade union bureaucrats of the CGT federations are manoeuvring to promote a PJ (Peronist) candidate that the feel would be amenable to them.

The fact that the ruling class is considering the use of elections to gain a mandate for more hunger and repression shows up one of the biggest weaknesses of the Argentine working class: the absence of its own, independent class party.

The field of policy and the elections must not be left to the ruling class and to the educated middle class. Revolutionaries should say to the CGT members; do not let your leaders pledge your support behind a Peronist crook or another! Make Moyano, Daer and Barrionuevo break with the PJ!

Convene mass assemblies to discuss the standing of an independent workers' candidate and what platform s/he should stand on. This process needs to be open to all workers' organisations be they political or trade union. It should be addressed to those in occupation of their workplaces, the militant piqueteros' organisations, the public sector workers, teachers, shipyard workers. It is a struggle for class independence.

It conveys a simple message – you need your own party if you want "to get rid of them". Either in the election process or even during new jornadas revolucionarias (revolutionary days) – if the government and the IMF try to impose yet more savage austerity on the country – the workers of Argentina are facing this question: what is the weapon we need to get rid of the old gang of corrupt politicians?

The false answer, which many are giving is a rebirth of populism, a new version of 1940s Peronism in all but name, or a new popular front such as the leaders of the CGT trade union federation prefer.

We call on the unions (including their leaders) to break from the bosses and struggle for a workers' party. This tactic would not "create" illusions, because the illusions already exist – they are and unfortunately remain a mass phenomenon. Of course on the streets the fighting layer of the people curse the bureaucrats' name. But if there were no illusions in the leaders among union members and in the blue-collar workplaces, they would not be able to keep the masses out of the struggle.

On the contrary, the failure to call on the leaders to break with Duhalde and convene a workers' party plays into their hands. It is absolutely necessary to fight for such a workers' party to be a revolutionary one from the very start. A sharp struggle over the shape and content of such a party is inevitable between reformists and revolutionaries.

But this should not prevent all those inside the trade unions and the socialist left from turning their back resolutely on the endless, corrupt manoeuvres of the bosses' parties and striking out to build a combative workers' party that can co-ordinate and relaunch the mass struggles and strikes needed to get rid of this government.

## How trade union leaders saved the day for Duhalde

On 19/20 December last year Argentina erupted after two years of economic, social and political crisis. Deepening recession after 1998 saw the country gradually engulfed by road blockades by the unemployed (piqueteros), eight general strikes, local uprisings, plus significant gains for the left in the November elections.

When the IMF refused President De La Rúa's requests for more loans De La Rúa decided to freeze withdrawals of bank savings. The middle classes and better off workers were furious. Their anger spilled onto the streets.

A 36-hour general strike closed down the country for two days, December 13-14. The poor of the barrios, the unemployed, often led by women with their children, organised the distribution of food and began emptying the supermarkets and hypermarkets. The demonstrators rapidly raised the call with regard to the ruling elite that, "they ALL had to go".

De La Rúa attempted to form a national unity government with the Peronists, but was repulsed and gambled with a state of siege.

Without support from the army on the streets this simply ignited the "revolutionary days" of massive militant street demonstrations in which 31 people were killed. De La



Workers have been misled by their leaders

Rúa was obliged to flee the presidential palace, the Casa Rosada, in a helicopter after the police were unable to win the battle of the Plaza de Mayo.

This was a tremendous victory of the people which forced the resignation of the government by revolutionary means. As the demonstrations continued the Peronists tried to find a president – Ramon Puerto and Rodriguez Saá came and went. The question of power was posed.

But the masses on the streets were unable to discover or create a

positive alternative to the old gang. Presidents and governments were overthrown, but no organs of nation-wide alternative power were established. This reflected the political weakness of the working class, the lack of an organised expression of its own independent political class interests on a national level.

Generally speaking, the working class joined in the actions of 19 and

20 December mainly as individuals, or specific workplaces but not as an organised force. The working class did not enter the stage as a leading force, because of its own misleaders – the leaders of the union federations, two CGTs and the CTA, and the leadership of the piqueteros too.

It was the political responsibility of the TU leaderships and the leaderships of the piqueteros that no general strike took place. They actually called off a general strike and aided the ruling class in the moment of its most severe crisis.

The conservative and corrupt

bureaucrats of the official CGT were of one mind with the more militant and even radical leaders of the CGT Dissidente (Moyano) and the CTA (Genaro), the CCC and the national Piqueteros' leadership: demobilise the working class, and cancel the general strike.

This treachery allowed the ruling class a breathing space and in early January the bourgeois parties united behind a new president – the Peronist Duhalde. His government – unlike De la Rúa's and Saá's – was backed by all sectors of the ruling class. Furthermore, it had the support of the trade union leaders.

Duhalde's government represents the attempt to derail and defeat the revolution, by incorporating the labour aristocracy (via the trade union bureaucrats), and the Peronist worker and popular base in the suburbs of the large cities via the party apparatus.

As the Economist said last month: "Its grip on the lower orders of the Buenos Aires rustbelt has helped to ensure social peace."

Breaking the political influence of the union bureaucracy and of Peronism in the working class and creating a revolutionary workers' party remain the crucial strategic problems of the Argentine revolution.

The defenders of capitalism say that their system spreads wealth and offers opportunities for all. The reality is that it causes poverty, disease and famine as the world's poor knows all too well

## Bush and the war on sexual health

There is a scene in the film *And The Band Played On* where an expert at the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta edits the word 'homosexual' out of the title of the first ever report on the disease we now know as AIDS. Jim Curran points to his junior colleague that if she printed this published the word had died. Ronald Reagan had just been elected president.

Twenty years later and things have not changed. Since George W. Bush came to power the CDC has become all coy about, of all things, condoms. The CDC website has a special World AIDS Day section, but you will search in vain for mention of the word.

The statement "studies have shown that latex condoms are highly effective in preventing HIV transmission" has been removed from the CDC website!

This is no accident - public health specialists working to reduce disease and unplanned pregnancy in young people have complained that "there seems to be a concerted effort to censor science and research that

### International Aids Day

Every December we are reminded of the disaster that HIV/Aids has inflicted on the world. International Aids Day provides a brief opportunity for discussion of what is going on and why, then the issue gets forgotten for another year by most politicians.

Forty-two million people have HIV. Last year three million people died, most in sub-Saharan Africa, with appalling economic consequences for society as well as the personal tragedy for the people involved. Seven million agricultural workers have died of Aids in 25 African countries, contributing to the massive famine that is now threatening the lives of a further 14 million people.

Despite the advances that have been made in prevention and treatment, the genocide that HIV has wreaked on Africa is now set to be repeated in Asia. There are already six million people infected with HIV in East and South East Asia, but this is set to rise rapidly. In India alone there are likely to be 20 million people infected by 2010, with a further 15 million in China. Why?

Because the epidemic is driven by poverty, sexual inequality and exploitation, all of which are increasing. Peter Piot, head of UNAids, politely explains, "the sober reality is that in most countries the response to Aids is not commensurate with the scale of the problem." We could say the same about international institutions like his. While he is calling for £6.7 billion by 2005 to launch effective prevention and treatment programmes, his sponsors, the World Bank and the US government among them, are intensifying the underlying problems.

Trade liberalisation is forcing millions of workers off the land and out of state industries. In the ruthless marketplace hundreds of thousands find sex work to be their best or only option, and with the work comes the risk of HIV. The disaster of HIV will not be solved by just increasing investment in drugs and condoms, important as these are. The virus, just like the bacteria that causes TB, thrives on inequality and exploitation. Anti-capitalism is the drug of choice for this epidemic.



supports contraception in favour of 'abstinence-only until marriage' programmes".

Claude Allen, deputy secretary of health and human services, said "We believe young people across the board should abstain until marriage," and if that fails, "fidelity is the next-safest protection against contraction of disease."

Gay men's health projects report that the administration is hostile to HIV prevention and sex education that is not based on "abstinence-only." The hostility is being backed up by a witch-hunt of these groups - many programmes are suddenly facing detailed audits, and the government Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is investigating at least eight AIDS programmes to see if their content is too sexually explicit or promotes sexual activity.

Bush has been pushing family values and abstinence while opposing abortion and contraception. On his first working day in office Bush banned the use of federal funds for groups that advocated or performed

abortion, saying "It is my conviction that taxpayer funds should not be used to pay for abortions or advocate or actively promote abortion, either here or abroad".

Scientists and activists are clear on the benefits of condom use and safer sex in the preventing the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. There is considerable evidence that the best way to reduce unwanted pregnancies in young women is to provide information and advice on sex and contraception at the same time as developing skills, assertiveness and promoting self confidence.

Telling young people not to have sex not only doesn't work, in almost all studies it has been found to increase problems since it promotes guilt and denies people knowledge.

But since when has George Bush been listening to the evidence? It is not only the people of Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan who suffer at his hands - we will see a renewed AIDS epidemic in the USA if he succeeds in closing down all the progressive health campaigns.

## How the IMF caused famine in Malawi

Famine is stalking Africa. Fourteen million people face starvation if food does not reach them within the next few months.

In Zambia, more than two million people need emergency food aid. A combination of crop destruction by white farmers and President Mugabe's political terror have left five million people in Zimbabwe desperately needing food. The people of Ethiopia are in the midst of a famine far worse than the one in the mid-1980s that Bob Geldof to launch Live Aid.

One thing that unites most observers and commentators is that this disaster isn't caused by bad weather. With the right preparations a country should emerge from a period of poor harvests relatively unscathed.

The spokespeople of the World Bank and IMF put the blame solely onto African governments. Addressing a House of Commons select committee in July, Horst Koehler, managing director of the IMF, called for more trade liberalisation and urged African countries for failing to open their countries to each other. Apart from the stepping the \$350 billion a year agriculture subsidies to Europe, the USA and Japan, which prevent African farmers selling their food on the world market Koehler ignored the role of the IMF and World Bank in destroying the African countries' ability to deal with famine through the vicious austerity programmes they impose in return for loans.

One such country is Malawi where ten million people are facing starvation. In 1991-2, Malawi faced a far worse crop

failure and survived it without facing a national disaster. Why? In the early 1990s, maize reserves (the staple crop) were held throughout the country by the state-owned Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (Admarc). It was able to sell grain at an affordable price and so avert the worst effects of the drought.

### DEREGULATION

But since 1996, the IMF and World Bank have put pressure on Malawi to privatise industry, deregulate prices and end subsidies for small farmers and the poor. On IMF orders, government provision of crop seed, fertiliser and light machinery was also ended or charged for at 50 per cent interest. All this took place under yet another "reform programme" of the IMF, which damaged Malawi's chances of escaping the drought and lost the government millions of dollars because of failed privatisation schemes.

Yet worse was to come. In 1999, the IMF and EU pressurised the Malawi government into setting up the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA), an independent body that replaced Admarc. NFRA then had to buy the 167,000 metric tonnes (MT) of maize reserve from Admarc. But in order for its friends to benefit, the IMF ensured that NFRA borrowed the money from a South African bank at 56 per cent interest! This is the sort of interest rate normally reserved for loan sharks on an inner-city estate.

Even worse was to come. The crops were already beginning to fail when the IMF told the government to sell 100,000

MT of grain reserve in order to meet its debt repayments incurred in setting up NFRA. The grain was to be sold outside of the country - to prevent the price of grain falling in Malawi even though there was an impending food crisis in the country.

Corruption saw some grain reach hoarders in the country, who held onto it until the price rose high enough. Because of corruption, profiteering and accident, the government actually sold 130,000 MT of NFRA's stock. By early 2002 when it was clear to everyone that a famine was occurring and the government had already declared a state of emergency, there was only 37,000 MT of maize in reserve - nowhere near enough to feed the population.

The IMF's response was to blame the World Bank for the grain sale. Horst Koehler told the House of Commons: "That advice [the sell-off] was given by the World Bank and EU and I would argue that you should ask the World Bank and EU what they did." He even went on to say that he had written to the Malawian President and told him that it was all the World Bank and EU's fault, not the IMF. But, an IMF paper on Malawi was produced in the House of Commons proving it was Koehler's employer that ordered the sale. Dunstan Wei, World Bank director for Malawi, claimed that it didn't matter anyway because a lot of the grain was "rotten". Which raises the question of why international trade organisations are ordering the sale of sub-standard products?

The government has now been buy-

ing grain from outside of Malawi at higher prices. And as any AS-level economics student knows when demand outstrips supply the price rises. The maize price had risen by 400 per cent by early 2002 (a rise three times larger than in other periods of drought when there has been a grain reserve) while production has fallen by 40 per cent. This basic economic fact has, though, been lost on the great minds of the IMF and World Bank.

But this capitalist-imposed calamity does not end with destroying the grain reserve. Malawi has unfortunately been the recipient of several loans by donor countries and the IMF, which has recently loaned \$37 million for food. And along with loans come debt repayments.

### REPAYMENTS

Currently, Malawi pays \$70 million a year in debt repayments or 29 per cent of government spending - a figure higher than its agriculture, education and health budgets put together. And in the midst of famine, instead of trying to avert a humanitarian disaster, the major donors all talk tough about repaying debts or about the corruption, which they fostered in the first place. George Finlayson, the British High Commissioner to Malawi, stated: "We are not going to do anything until you tell us where the grain reserve has gone." Ask the IMF, George - it was their idea. The UK, EU and US have all suspended aid programmes. The IMF also delayed giving Malawi \$47 million because it had overspent its budget by 2 per cent of GDP. The country was also suspended from inter-

im debt relief that added another \$4 million to its annual repayments.

In total Malawi's debt stands at \$2.5 billion of which 72.5 per cent is owed to the International Development Association - part of the World Bank.

Malawi is typical of many African countries. Its people are poor and about 20 per cent are infected with HIV/Aids. This hits agriculture especially hard as women, who in Malawi are 87 per cent of the rural workforce, are ignored and offered little help. Families in the countryside often consist of grandparents and children who are not strong or healthy enough to work full-time in the fields. Health services are patchy if they reach into the countryside at all. Malnutrition through disease and famine is rife.

The country is also enslaved to global capitalism. Institutions like the IMF and World Bank ruin its economy and agriculture, destroy its ability to feed its population and then offer more loans and add on more charges. In effect the financial institutions of world capitalism are global gangsters: offering loans that they know can't be repaid, bleeding countries dry, starving nations into submission and finally killing hundreds of thousands of people.

For Malawi, and other African countries, a revolution of the oppressed workers and peasants is the only way to renounce the debt, put the big farms in the hands of the poor peasants and agricultural workers and break with the capitalist system. It is the only way to end the cycle of misery and death meted out by the global gangsters.

# Iraq: inspectors blaze trail for US-led invasion

The US and UK have been given a green light by the UN Security Council to go to war against Iraq. Here we outline the possible development of an attack and the problems military action will cause for imperialism

Ever since the UN Security Council passed its unanimous resolution on weapons inspectors on 8 November, the US and UK have stepped up their preparations for war. More than 50,000 American troops are already in the region. Two additional aircraft carrier groups are on their way and chartered freighters are shipping in heavy equipment.

At the Nato summit in Prague on 21-22 November, Downing Street sources admitted that the main business was about the planned military action against Iraq. At the same time Washington formally asked Blair to mobilise British troops, mainly special forces. Both countries have stepped up their unprovoked air-attacks on Iraqi air defences.

On 18 November the UN weapons inspection team (Unmovic) arrived in Iraq – stuffed no doubt with CIA and M16 agents, just as it was admitted by the USA that the last team was. The inspection team, made up of scientists from 45 countries and using intelligence provided by the US and Britain, carried out their first inspection ten days later.

Iraq has until 8 December to provide a full audit of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes. Iraq must submit a document that details all its programmes to develop or deliver weapons of mass destruction.

Of course this is a “have you stopped beating your wife” provision. If he were to declare any the US would say “we told you so: he denied having them before” and then demand action to forcibly disarm Iraq. If Saddam says there are none the Pentagon will claim that Saddam has had plenty of time to hide them. If any are then “discovered” by inspectors this too will trigger US demands for an immediate attack.

If the inspectors suffer the slightest obstruction or discover evidence of weapons which had not been disclosed by the Iraqis they will report this and America will then declare that Iraq is in “further material breach” of its obligations and launch an attack.

By 21 February, at the latest, chief weapons inspector Hans Blix must submit a report to the Security Council detailing the inspection team findings. Blix now says he expects to do so by the end of January.

We can thus expect the war to start anytime between mid-December and mid-February.

Of course, the super-unilateralist wing in Washington – Rumsfeld, Cheney and Wolfowitz – are worried about even this UN scenario. What if the weapons inspectors find nothing because there is nothing? What if Saddam is not provoked by wholesale violations of Iraqi sovereignty? It is clear however that even if Saddam “provides” them with no obvious pretext for war then one will be manufactured.

General Tommy Franks, the head of US Central Command, and the army top brass have triumphed over the amateur generals in the administration who believed that a bold “inside out” war, which struck the regime at its heart at the outset, would do the job with smaller forces.

Now it will involve up to 250,000 – 300,000 US and British troops attempting a blitzkrieg, aimed at bringing about the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime



Hans Blix

with as few US/UK casualties as possible.

It will start with the inevitable devastating aerial bombardment aimed at “regime targets”, concentrating on Baghdad and the central parts of the country. Next American troops from the 101st Air Force Division and comparable British units would move into northern Iraq.

They will prevent the Kurdish forces from liberating cities in Iraqi-held territory lest this trigger an invasion from the north, which Turkey has been overtly threatening. Thus, from the outset any dreams of Kurdish self-determination or independence have been ruled out by the imperialist crusaders for democracy.

At the same time US marines and equivalent British forces will attempt to seize airstrips around the port of Basra in the south. They will also occupy the west of the country to prevent any Scud missile attacks on Israel.

Pentagon planners hope that that once the north, south and west are in their hands Saddam will be toppled by a military coup. Clearly it would be more convenient if an Iraqi general were to act as the US puppet ruler. If not he will face a multi-pronged armoured attack from the north, south and west towards Baghdad.

The Bush administration’s nightmare scenario is street-by-street fighting for the Iraqi capital, in which heavy Iraqi civilian as well as US-UK casualties would be inevitable. The Pentagon admits that it has undertaken little training for such a scenario and is banking on an Iraqi army collapse before such a possibility emerges.

Also if the Iraqi army were to be destroyed in the war it will then need a huge military garrison and a US general in Baghdad as a proconsul. Various US estimates suggests that a force of between 75,000 and 100,000 troops would be required to initially stabilise the country, with many remaining in Iraq indefinitely. U.S. troops will have to police cities, oil fields and port installations.

Professor William Nordhaus of Yale, estimates the costs of the coming war at between \$75bn to \$500bn (£47bn to £316bn). In 1991, the cost of defeating Iraq and “liberating” the Kuwaiti oil fields was underwritten by US allies, leaving Washington with only \$2bn to pay. This time, unless there is a swift victory and regime change that allows for a rapid US withdrawal, the costs could sink the US “recovery”.

A prolonged American military colonisation of an Arab state in the heart of the Middle East is a high-risk strategy. It will inflame the people of the Arab/Muslim world, already deeply hostile to the United States. The open collusion of their own rulers with this project could set in train a series of revolutions across the Middle East in the years to come. In the short term it will greatly increase the number of terrorist attacks on US and Allied forces and even on their homelands.

As the wiser and cooler heads of the world’s capitalist classes know, an American-imposed “peace”, based on the defeat of Saddam, on re-colonisation, on boosting the power of Israel, will in the medium to longer term prove to be “a peace to end all peace”.

But imperialism does not bring the wiser and cooler heads to the fore in its dominant nations. It brings to power those who best express its boundless rapacity and cruelty.

And the hatred they will arouse amongst the peoples of the planet will cost the rulers of the world dear in the years and decades to come. Why?

Firstly, this war will not “defeat terrorism”. Indeed it will make the continuation of “terrorism” – whether by al-Qaeda or other home grown groups – completely inevitable. Terrorism is the desperate resistance of the weak – those without a state to defend them.

It will find continued sustenance amongst the populations oppressed and super-exploited by US and EU corporate power, amongst the populations which have arrogant US and British garrisons jack-booting around their countries, amongst people subject to invasion by the US Nato rapid reaction force agreed in Prague last month.

Of course, this way of fighting back against the US Empire is not the way to win. In fact just like 9/11 it plays right into the hands of the enemy. On September 10 George Bush was a mocked and discredited figure, not even elected by the majority of his people. Today he has more power than any US president in history.

Besides any methods that take as their target ordinary people in Kenya, New York, Bali will only weaken the very opposition to imperialism that will eventually bring it crashing down.

Finally, and in the end decisively, Bush’s war will promote a worldwide mass movement of revolt against this empire – in its imperialist heartlands just as much as in its bullied humiliated and super-exploited outer provinces. This movement is moving through a hardening as well as growing process: anti-globalisation to anti-capitalist; antiwar to anti-imperialist.

The brutal policy of the imperialists will inevitably undermine and expose the USA’s lackeys in imperialist and semi-colonial countries alike. It will break the social shock absorbers of the system that the reformist and bourgeois nationalist labour movements have provided for many decades. In short it will open the gates to revolutionary mass forces.

● For more on the war against Iraq go to [www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/USagg-DefendIraq1.html](http://www.workerspower.com/wpglobal/USagg-DefendIraq1.html)

## UN: fig leaf for imperialism



Early last month the UN Security Council voted 15-0 for a resolution which gave Iraq an ultimatum on weapons inspectors. The chief vassals of the US president, Russia, Britain, France and China, plus a few hapless representatives of his subject peoples, after eight weeks of grumbling and pleading, finally did the bidding of their master.

The reasons for compliance were clear enough. Bribery bought off the permanent members and bullying intimidated the weaker countries. The permanent members of the Security Council – besides the US and UK – Russia, China, and France were given enough stick and carrot to make them go along with Bush and his poodle Blair, since he would obviously attack Iraq, whether they approved or not. Russia, for example, was assured it will receive the money it is owed by Iraq and have some role in a post-Saddam Iraq oil industry.

The votes of the non-permanent members were assured when it was made clear that defying the US has very severe consequences for semi-colonial countries. In 1990 when Yemen – one of the poorest countries in the world – voted against the resolution authorising force to oust Iraq’s forces from Kuwait, the US ambassador to the UN snapped at him, “That was the most expensive vote you will ever cast”.

And so it proved. The US immediately cut a \$70m (£44m) aid package to Yemen, and Saudi Arabia ejected thousands of Yemeni workers from its territory. So this time when the Mauritian envoy on the Security Council had been

insufficiently slavish to Washington his government recalled him to make clear just what was at stake.

The exposure of the impotence and fraud of the UN charade is a good thing. Revolutionary Marxists had always known that the UN – like its predecessors the pre-1914 Hague Peace Conferences or the post 1918 League of Nations – was fundamentally a “thieves kitchen”.

But left reformists like Tony Benn always told us that that the presence of Russia or the Third World Countries make it a force for peace, for restraining the warmongering USA or UK governments. Benn and the Old Labour and post-Stalinist Left are now revealed as the “very fond foolish old men” we always said they were.

The UN is just a fig leaf for US imperialism, giving it a legal cover for its war to plunder the oil reserves of Iraq and erect a strategic occupation of key points in the Middle East and central Asia. Victory for the USA will mean triumph for the arch-terrorist state Israel, and an attempt to “solve” the Palestinian question along the lines suggested by Sharon and Netanyahu – effectively destroying the Palestinians as a people, denying them statehood or independence, even expelling most of them from their land.

The only Arab state on the Security Council, Syria, did not dare to vote against resolution 1441. The grovelling impotence of all the Arab regimes in the face of all this will expose them yet more to the hatred and ultimately the revenge of their peoples.

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# Wage war on the warmongers!

**The UN has backed the US ultimatum to Iraq and the inspectors are looking for the pretext to launch the war. But a million on the streets of Florence shows the growing strength of the anti-war movement**

The United Nations has its inspection team looking for a pretext for war against Iraq. The United States is building up its forces in the region to launch one.

Meanwhile in Florence last month, a million workers and youth from all over Italy and the rest of Europe took to the streets to condemn the imperialist warmongers – chief among them Bush, Blair and Berlusconi.

It was fantastic – probably the biggest anti-war demo ever since the second world war. This comes on top of the huge success of the 28 September demonstration in London where 400,000 issued the same blunt warning to our rulers.

At the meeting of the Social Movements in Florence a limited proposal for a Europe-wide campaign against the war was agreed:

“We call on the movements and citizens of Europe: (1) To start organising now against war. (2) If war starts, to protest immediately and to organise demonstrations in every country the next Saturday after the war starts. (3) To start organising now for anti-war demonstrations in every capital in Europe on 15 February.”

This declaration is obviously weak, even in terms of what the Italian unions were discussing in Florence. Cobas has called for a political strike against the war and has called on the Cgil to support it.

A further ESF anti-war coordination has been called to coincide with the mobilisation in Copenhagen on 15 December.

At that meeting a call should go out for a series of regular days of action against the war, strikes with direct action to disrupt the war effort. Our aim should be for millions to take to the streets should a



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**STOP THE WAR!**  
**21 January: mass lobby of Parliament in London**  
**15 February: national demonstration in London**

war against Iraq be launched.

In Florence LRCI and REVO youth carried the anti-imperialist, defend Iraq message onto the march. The lively contingent kept up anti-war and pro-Palestinian slogans for the whole of the demonstration and was cheered by the many Florentine workers, who lined the route of the march and hung anti-war banners from the balconies of their flats.

Hundreds of thousands, millions even, already understand that the war aims are imperialist: that is, the US and UK, on behalf of the whole club of capitalist predators, aim to capture cheap oil supplies and to remove all opponents of Israel's brutal oppression of the Palestinian people.

In Florence the leaders of the ESF should have done more to commit the leaders of the trade unions and left parties to specific action inside and outside parliament if Iraq is attacked. We must do it now in the coming weeks and months. Specifically, we must get them to oppose the war drive by means of mass demonstrations, civil disobedience and obstruction of the “war effort”. We need to boycott the state and corporate institutions of the perpetrators and supporters of this war.

And we need to be campaigning for strikes in workplaces, schools and colleges against the war.

Our aim must be to mobilise such widespread and militant opposition to this war that will, if possible, prevent it being launched and do all we can to help Iraq defeat the US/UK led coalition.

Such a defeat for our rulers would be a huge blow against oppression the world over and massively strengthen the struggle of all those, like the Palestinians, fighting for social justice and national rights.

[www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com)

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