

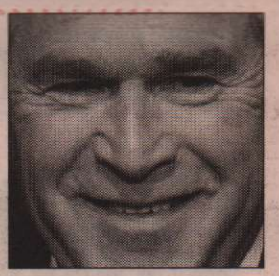
Report from
the European
Social Forum
– pages 7-9



What next
for Iraq –
pages
10-11



After US
elections
– page
14



workers power 5

November 2004 ★ Price 50p / €1 www.workerspower.com Issue 291

British section of the League for the Fifth International

Stop the attacks on Iraqi cities!

Troops out now!



Antiwar activists spray paint their message outside the Foreign Office

As we go to press, the US and British armies, along with a handful of Iraqi forces, have just launched a full-scale invasion of Fallujah, an attack that will kill thousands of people.

After a month of daily bombing raids and the cynical destruction of the city's hospital, the puppet regime of Iyad Allawi has consented to the US taking out one of the main centres of resistance to the occupation.

The attack on Fallujah ushers in a new phase of the war in which the US/UK will summon all of their firepower in an attempt to crush the growing resistance movement ahead of elections, timetabled for January 2005.

And it will be repeated in other towns and cities. In the *Los Angeles Times*, a Bush aide admitted that an attack had been delayed until after the election in case it had adverse effects on the results. "When this election's over, you'll see us move very vigorously."

Tony Blair has signalled his backing for the crushing of the resistance in Fallujah by approving the deployment of 850 British troops from the Black Watch Regiment to be stationed just outside Baghdad.

The proposed elections in January

will be a decisive moment for the antiwar movement. If the attacks on Fallujah, Ramadi and other threatened cities are not stopped, "democracy" could be imposed over the broken bones of thousands more Iraqis.

On the other hand, a victory for the resistance could open up the road to an Iraqi revolution and a socialist federation of the whole Middle East. Iraqis have the right to resist an illegal occupation by the use of arms. The defeat of our "own" troops, forcing them to withdraw, is the only way to avoid more crimes against humanity and slaughter.

If we pull together we can stop this slaughter and stop this illegal war. Every local campaign, every estate, every workplace and school, every antiwar, union or campaigning group should come together and plan local action for the withdrawal of the troops now.

Throughout the new offensive, show your revulsion at "democratic" imperialism's outrage. Mark each and every atrocity with protest.

- **Out onto the streets, demonstrate and block the roads!**
- **Walk out of schools, colleges and workplaces!**
- **Civil disobedience and industrial action to hamper the war effort!**

Soldiers say: stop this war!

Thousands of serving British soldiers believe the Army should get out of Iraq now.

Craig Lowe, a private in the Black Watch and brother of Private Paul Lowe, killed south of Baghdad, told the world just what his brother thought of George Bush's war:

"He thought he was an arsehole for starting a war over nothing, trying to get money and oil. That's what we thought ourselves, that's what Paul thought as well, we all thought that."

Some messages from relatives on the Black Watch website called for immediate withdrawal of the troops. One said: "Let Bush sort out his own mess."

The troops and their families are

not alone. Tens of millions – a majority of the population – opposed Blair backing Bush's war. Most wanted Bush to lose the US election. Millions share Craig Lowe's view – that the war is being fought for money and oil in the interests of American billionaires.

Paul Lowe was 19. Hundreds more young soldiers will die like him if this war continues. And that is just a fraction of the overall misery this occupation is causing.

According to the UK medical journal *The Lancet* 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed already. This is like 33 World Trade Centres. Most died in aerial bombing – the majority were women and children.

Cold-blooded ministers like Geoff

Hoon and right-wing papers like *The Sun* say we should "support our boys". They don't mean 19-year old soldiers like Craig Lowe. They mean the billionaires that get the profits from "rebuilding" Iraq, the arms traders, the politicians and the profiteers that always benefit from bloodshed and death.

If they really "supported" Craig Lowe, they'd join his call for the troops to come home.

They'd back the right of soldiers to decide if they want to take part in Bush and Blair's illegal war. They'd call for democratic rights for soldiers:

- To elect their officers
- To form councils of delegates

• To refuse to obey illegal orders to massacre Iraqis who are fighting for the right to run their own country.

Young privates in the British Army have no quarrel with the people of Fallujah. They have more in common with the working men and women of other countries than they do with the presidents and profiteers that send them off to die for the New American Empire.

If they refuse to obey illegal orders, if they fight for their right to come home, then all across Britain people should take to the streets in their support.

- End the occupation!
- For the soldiers' right to refuse this war!



Private Paul Lowe

Childcare workers need solidarity

On the Friday striking social workers from the childcare services joined civil servants fighting against job losses on a march through Liverpool's city centre. On the Saturday civil servants, along with many other workers from Unison and other unions from around the country, marched in solidarity with the 150 Liverpool social workers.

These two displays of working class solidarity were a far better spectacle than any of the firework shows put on over the same Guy Fawkes weekend by Liverpool's Liberal Democratic council.

The social workers have now been on all out indefinite strike for almost three months. And their determination to fight on was evident at both demonstrations.

In early October even the *Liverpool Echo* came out in support of the strike exposing the enormous risks to vulnerable children that the Liberal council was taking through its attacks on the childcare service workers. These

By Mark Hoskisson

attacks did not merely comprise cuts. The management conducted a systematic campaign against the social workers – bullying, intimidation, threats, endless refusals to accept workers' recommendations on whether vulnerable children should be placed in care. All of this was combined with the constant erosion of working conditions for the Unison members.

It was clear that this was not just penny-pinching. The real agenda for the Liberals – and a warning to every person who thinks they are a "left alternative" to Blair – is to smash union organisation in social services in preparation for a wave of privatisation.

After all, this is the council that has turned many of the city centre streets we walk on into "private property" by selling them off to the Duke of Westminster's property corporation.

Mike Storey, the council leader, is addicted to privatisation. And he will happily mug any workers who try to stop him getting his fix.

The workers are striking in defence of their working conditions, but the strike is also essential if a vital public service is to be protected.

Tony Hunter, city council executive director for supported living, said recently: "My message to all staff now is – 'Come back to work and put the interests of Liverpool children first'. That's the way we will show the real care and commitment that the children and families of Liverpool deserve – and need. Not through pointless industrial action."

The cynicism of this bureaucrat was revealed, however, when talks to resolve the dispute broke down at Acas at the end of October. In a document put forward by the workforce on caseloads and supervision, the management refused to accept the word "qualifications". In other words they want to run a cheap labour service staffed by unqualified

social workers. So much for putting the children's interests first!

Moreover, the management refused to sign a return to work agreement because it contained a "No victimisation" clause. Why? Because they have plans to victimise the strike leadership as part of their anti-union strategy.

It is vital that workers throughout Unison and beyond do all they can to help them. In Unison itself it is important to spread the action across other sections of the council. Naming a council-wide day of strike action could start this. On the back of this other sectors could be balloted for action. It is clear that such solidarity action could prevent the strikers from becoming isolated and inflict maximum pressure on Storey and his Liberal gang in the town hall.

The problem is that despite Dave Prentis' left talk at the ESF about Unison taking a lead in campaigns for strike action against attacks on the public sector, the Unison leadership is hell bent on keeping industrial struggle to a min-

imum in the run up to the general election.

That is why both the strike committee and organisations like Unison United Left should take up the campaign for action among the rank and file. We should demand Unison call official action, but we should campaign for solidarity strikes whether the bureaucrats meet this demand or, as is more likely, spurn it.

• Victory to the Liverpool Unison strikers!

If you would like a speaker for your trade union branch, or if you want to send a message of support, contact: **Liverpool City Branch, Unison G.01, Cotton Exchange, Bixteth Street Liverpool L3 9LQ**
Tel: 0151 236 1944
Fax: 0151 258 1247
E-Mail: liverpoolunison@btconnect.com
Make cheques payable to "Unison Strike Account"

Clarke plans shake up of teachers' pay

The Government is preparing a massive attack on teachers' pay and pensions. The Department for Education and Science plans to slash costs by £4.3 billion by cutting contributions to teachers' pensions by 12.5 per cent by 2013.

Price Waterhouse Cooper estimate that teachers will have to save an extra £100,000 during their working lives if they want to retire at 60 on a pension of £20,000. And that is while their pay is being cut.

Following this year's pay freeze, Education Secretary Charles Clarke is planning a wholesale shake-up of the pay structure in education.

Safeguarding of salaries will be abandoned and 15,000 teachers could have their pay cut through losing allowances. Fewer teachers at the top of the pay scale will be able to apply for higher pay. All teachers who are currently paid more for taking on extra responsibilities will effectively have to reapply for their jobs.

This comes as no surprise from a government that has consistently

By Kate Foster

attacked teachers' pay and conditions. What may be more of a surprise to some teachers is that every teaching union, except the National Union of Teachers (NUT), actually helped to draw up these proposals and is supporting them! The other unions are playing their part in supporting the government's remodelling agenda for schools.

Whilst the NUT has, so far, opposed the government's plans, there has been little action from the union. Even the superbly supported London Allowance pay campaign ground to a halt after all we had won was an increase for headteachers, senior managers and the highest, not the lowest, paid teachers! Clearly Clarke has gained confidence from the weakness of the opposition.

The rot began to set in some years ago when performance related pay was introduced. At the time Workers Power argued that, unless this attack was resisted, the union would be fundamentally wounded. Unfortunately the

organised left within the union, including the SWP and the Socialist Teachers Alliance, despite a solid boycott of PRP, ultimately accepted it and even advised all teachers to apply. Now teachers are being asked to pay the price.

The lessons are clear. Only a militant, strong and decisive response will stop the attack. We have to take national strike action to defeat this attack on our pay and to win decent pay for those who most need it: those in their first few years of teaching and those without allowances.

Ordinary union members cannot rely on the union leadership to deliver such action. It may have maintained a principled opposition to workforce remodelling, but its weak strategy and lack of action has been appalling. Rank and file teachers will have to force our leaders to take action. And, if we are to be successful, we must ensure that it is classroom teachers who control the strike action, not the representatives of senior managers, headteachers: union bureaucrats.

Unison: Jon Rogers for general secretary

Members of Britain's biggest union, Unison, will be voting in early 2005 for the post of general secretary, writes **GR McColl**.

Remarkably, the winner of the Unison poll will not actually assume office until January 2006 – nine months after the scheduled confirmation of the election result.

In addition to Dave Prentis, the incumbent general secretary, there are three other declared candidates seeking nominations, which close on 10 December. They are Roger Bannister, secretary of the Knowsley local government branch and a long-standing NEC member, Malkiat Bilkhu, leader of the courageous Hillingdon Hospital cleaners' strike in the late 1990s, and Jon Rogers, secretary of the Lambeth branch and in his second year as a NEC member from London. Jon is also the standard-bearer of the Unison United Left.

Workers Power urges Unison members to support Jon's nomination and ensure he gains the support of at least the 25 branches required to win a place on the final ballot paper.

While we differ sharply with Jon over the nature of the Labour Party and the possibility of transforming it, he has a strong record in support of members in struggle, in combating racism within the public sector and in defence of union democracy against bureaucratic witch-hunts. He has pushed for the union to support the Liverpool social workers and played a principled role during the long-running but ultimately defeated London Weighting dispute.

Recently, Jon has led the opposition on the NEC to the blatant betrayal of democratically agreed union policy calling for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq by Unison's delegation to Labour Party conference.

His call for internal reforms such as the direct election of regional full-time officials is welcome, even if these fall well short of the root and branch transformation of the union that we believe is essential to mount a sustained and effective resistance to the range of attacks New Labour will certainly unleash in a third term.

Though capable of the occasional flirtation with left rhetoric, Prentis is a career bureaucrat, who has time and again proved a pliant tool for New Labour. Prentis declared in *The Guardian* that "it's not a time for us to be heads down, gobs shut for Labour".

Fighting talk, but in practice that has been precisely the stance of the union leadership – "heads down, gobs shut" – in the wake of the meagre concessions emerging from the Warwick policy forum in July. The dominant faction in the Unison bureaucracy is determined to pursue a politically bankrupt strategy that will inevitably cost members' jobs, terms and conditions.

Though Jon remains in the Labour Party, he has consistently supported a democratisation of the union's affiliated political fund, creating the possibility of support for candidates outside Labour's ranks and, indeed for the formation of a new workers party.

Jon Rogers can almost certainly achieve the required 25 branch nominations and has already won the support of his own region (Greater London) in a ballot of regional council delegates, but for the United Left this marks a golden opportunity to link up with the concerns of ordinary members and put the case at rank and file level for a fundamentally different kind of trade unionism.

Between now and 10 December militants in Unison need to spread the word about Jon's candidacy and explain why Unison needs much more than just a change of general secretary. We should be pressing for hustings with all four candidates invited, and using the campaign to raise the profile of disputes like the brave fight by the Liverpool social workers, while building solidarity with PCS members facing a massive attack on jobs.

Most importantly, we need to point to the record of the "awkward" squad. Andy Gilchrist's sell-out of the firefighters' dispute, CWU's Billy Hayes' return to the Labour fold, and Mark Serwotka's hesitant lead in the PCS dispute all show the limits of "left" leaders. Only a rank and file movement can hold them to account and transform the unions.

Anti-Capitalism

FROM SUMMIT SIEGES TO SOCIAL FORUMS

If you think another world is possible, you're not alone.

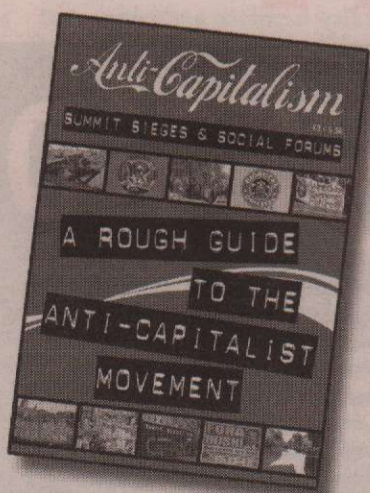
The employers call it the antiglobalisation movement. Radical youth on marches and protests call it the anticapitalist movement. Academics, journalists and union leaders call it the 'altermondialist' or global justice movement.

Whatever you call it, on one thing all are agreed. The movement against corporate globalisation and war is at a crossroads.

Will it remain nothing more than a space in which other worlds can be discussed? Will it return to its roots in direct action, launching new protests on the scale of Seattle 1999, Genoa 2001 and the 20 million strong world march against war on 15 February 2003? Above all, will it be able to decide how to wield its awesome power not just to resist capitalism, but also to overthrow it?

This pamphlet surveys the global movement, from its origins in Chiapas and Seattle, through the writings of its principal theorists, and the history of its summit sieges and its social forums. Unapologetically partisan, it argues that to rid the globe of capitalism, the movement must take a big step towards the formation of a new world party of social revolution.

It is indispensable reading for anyone who wants to make another world not just a possibility, but a reality.



Available now from:
League for the Fifth International
BCM 7750
London WC1N 3XX

£3 (GBP) - UK
£4 (GBP) - Europe
£6 (GBP) - Rest of the world

Make cheques payable to: MRCI
Price includes postage and packaging

Warning: racism on the rise

The scapegoating of asylum seekers, the denial of human rights to those accused of terrorism and the cynical use of the race card to shore up electoral support have all contributed to the highest level of racism in this country for many years. *Rekha Khurana* considers the evidence.

Open a newspaper, apply for a job or visit your local takeaway. Whatever you do, wherever you are, you will find racism. And that racism is on the increase.

Over the past year many reports and articles have been published warning of the dangerous increase in the number of racist attacks in the UK. In some areas racist attacks have increased by more than 50 per cent. When you read through the reports they show the pervasiveness of racism in our society. It exists in every nook and cranny.

A BBC article published in August reported that more than one in three ethnic minority people working in takeaways in the South East regularly suffers racial abuse. This can be both verbal and physical. Incidents included restaurant windows being smashed in, people being spat on and, in one case, a piece of wood hurled into a Chinese restaurant landing in a vat of boiling oil and splashing the scalding liquid across the kitchen.

Research carried out in Wales (published in September) has revealed that ethnic minority workers have been bullied five times more than their white colleagues both by managers and work-



Members of the socialist youth organisation Revolution protest against the racist press lies of the Daily Mail

mates. It showed that one on four ethnic minority workers had been bullied compared to just 5 per cent of white workers. They were also five times more likely to be given demeaning jobs and twice as likely to be ignored or excluded by their line manager.

The research also showed that ethnic minority workers were five times more likely than white workers to have been told to quit their jobs by colleagues

• Ethnic minority workers were three times more likely than white workers to be continually reminded of their errors by colleagues

• One in 10 ethnic minority workers also reported suffering suicidal thoughts.

A report published by the TUC in April called *Moving on: How Britain's Unions are Tackling Racism*, revealed that unemployment is two and a half times greater amongst black and ethnic minority workers than in the white population.

This position is worse than in 1990 and confirms the trend reported by the *General Household Survey* that unemployment rates have got worse for second-generation British-born minorities.

In July the BBC sent CVs from six fictitious candidates to 50 firms in the UK. The candidates were given traditionally white, Black African or Muslim names. The results showed that "white" candidates were far more likely to be given an interview than sim-

ilarly qualified "black" or "Asian" names.

This increase in racism in the workplace has occurred despite TUC campaigns like *Respect* and *Unite Against Fascism*. Clearly the unions are not doing enough. Racism is divisive poison in the workplace, as well as living hell for the victims. We need to stamp it out.

First and foremost, much of this increase is happening in services and industries where the unions have been wiped out, or were never built. A massive unionisation drive must be launched using volunteers from the anti-capitalist movement, as in the USA.

But a union card doesn't make you an anti-racist. The TUC and other unions need also to launch anti-racist campaigns. Activists can follow the lead of Merseyside TUC and the NUJ by ordering copies of the *Asylum Lies* leaflet, produced by and available from *Workers Power*.

Black and ethnic minority members need the right to caucus in every workplace and at every level of the union. They should monitor racism, compile evidence and fight for the whole union to take up their demands, both inside and outside the workplace.

These are methods to unite the working class against the evil of racism. But no one should be under the illusion that the employers will be won over by such methods. United strike action against each and every instance of racism in the workplace will still be necessary to stamp out racism.

'Privatised' civil servants sacked

Working Links, an organisation which was originally contracted to help people get back into work, is making 85 workers redundant across London. Working Links has metamorphosed over the years and is now a private company.

Some of its staff are seconded from the Department of Works and Pensions to work for the company and although some of the 85 will be redeployed, at least 50 are being sacked. The irony of Working Links' slogan, "Changing lives, creating futures", is not lost on the workforce.

But this isn't because the work has disappeared; indeed, the company has advertised jobs which involve the equivalent work but at a much lower pay rate. The pay cut will be from around £16,000 to between £12,000 and £13,000. The com-

pany has said there will be about 35 new posts advertised in the local paper. The sacked staff were told to reapply for their jobs via this advert.

The Lambeth and Southwark DWP branch of the PCS organised a meeting of the Working Links workers, who voted for strike action. It was not only workers threatened with redundancy who wanted to strike. The rest of the Southwark Working Links employees wanted to take action, both in solidarity and because they believed that they will be next.

The branch is currently awaiting a response from the union's commercial sector disputes committee.

While the branch has argued that the action should be London-wide, the PCS full-time official was against this saying that there

By Dave Ellis

were not enough union members across London to make a strike effective.

But the experience of the Southwark, where the union has organised workers, taken up their cases and represented them, proves that Working Links workers can be unionised. If the officials pushed for action, many workers across London would join up.

The union officials have been slow to respond to this attack. It was left to the local branch officials and the Southwark Working Links rep to speak out against the redundancies. When the full-time official finally went to meet the workers, they were justifiably angry, as the redundancies were already well under way.

Now, some that have reapplied for their jobs have not been selected, though the reasons are not apparent as there are no clear

selection criteria.

Despite the fact that Working Links has an "inefficiency procedure" for workers who were not fulfilling their work responsibilities, not one of the sacked workers was under review.

When the union branch took up their cases as discrimination, the Working Links bosses even had the gall to ring the national union to complain about the attitude of the union rep!

The company claims that it has had to make these redundancies as it has no money. Yet the management of the company is to blame if anyone. For example, one building, which was leased by the company at a cost of thousands of pounds for a service to get disabled people back into work, couldn't be used because the building was not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act!

If Working Links really is

bankrupt, let's see the books. If it is, then it should be renationalised under workers' control: after all, it survives on taxpayers' money, it should be accountable.

The union branch has taken their case to local MP, Simon Hughes. Not only are there to be redundancies in Working Links, but also, as part of the DSS national cuts, Bermondsey Job Centre is also to close.

Along with the national cuts package, the government will be increasing the amount of privatisation of the civil service. What has happened at Working Links is an example of just how these new agencies and companies will treat PCS members if Gordon Brown succeeds in slashing civil service jobs.

• For a London-wide strike to stop the cuts!
• Renationalise Working Links under workers' control!

Stop gay and lesbian murders!

The brutal murder of David Morley, 37, at 3am on the morning of Sunday 31 October has brought home the daily – and nightly – reality of homophobic attacks on Britain's lesbian and gay community, writes *Jeremy Dewar*.

David was attacked while sitting with a friend on a riverside bench on London's South Bank by a gang of youths. He died as a result of at least 40 separate blows to the head and body. The police are treating it as a homophobic attack.

At least four other people were attacked on the same night in the same area: all but one of them out lesbians or gays.

David was well-known the barman at the Admiral Duncan pub in Soho. He was on duty on the night in 1999 when a nailbomb, planted by a member of the fascist BNP, killed three and injured 70. This direct linkage to Britain's worst-ever homophobic attack has only served to intensify the feeling of being under siege.

While the police has swiftly arrested six youths suspected of killing David, they cannot be relied on. Now is the time to build on the spontaneous all-night vigils and organise lesbian and gay self-defence guards.

Bristol take steps to set up social forum

Britain's growing social forum movement looks set to expand on 7 December when Bristol holds its inaugural meeting.

The launch follows the success of an ESF report-back meeting held at the end of October. This meeting brought together upwards of 70 activists from the trade unions (RMT, Natfhe and Unison), campaigning groups (Stop the War Coalition and the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers), the Green Party and

By Pat Spackman

Respect, NGO's (World Development Movement, People and Planet) and the anarchist Dissent G8 group as well as scores of independents.

Following a workshop style structure the meeting broke up into groups to discuss areas of particular interest, such as Iraq, the environment, G8 and neoliberalism. These groups had lively debates and, when the meeting

reconvened at the end, it became clear that this was something we needed to continue.

The direction of the meeting was helped considerably by the practical support given by Jon Blake from the Cardiff Social Forum. He was able to demonstrate the practicalities and pitfalls in starting a local forum based on the Cardiff experience.

Activists busily networked afterwards and established an e-list to get the ball rolling. Since then the list has grown to some

200 members. And already a debate has developed on the list around whether to have a constitution, set of principles, or not. Three proposals can be found on the list for a constitution based on: Cardiff Social Forum's; the Porto Alegre principles; or the hallmarks of People's Global Action.

Workers Power supporters will be pressing for the forum to be based in the working class and will want to see it strengthened in the unions, anti-war

organisations, anti-racist and anti-fascist groups, tenants associations and amongst the youth.

A basic set of principles must enable the forum to become more than just a talking shop. It has to set out the goal for Bristol Social Forum to develop into an organising centre for anticapitalist struggles: a council of action.

The determination to build such a forum is here in Bristol and, judging by the messages of support from around the country, it exists elsewhere in Britain.

Union tops threaten Stop the War Coalition

Mick Rix, has publicly resigned from the Stop the War Coalition and Unison has threatened to follow. Meanwhile, Respect's conference has rejected key socialist demands, including nationalisation. *Sean Murray* argues that the SWP is caught in a crisis of adapting to two opposing camps and is now paying the price

Members of the Stop the War Coalition were more than likely shocked to read in the *Guardian* on Saturday 23 October that "Unison has threatened to sever its relations with the Stop the War Coalition" and that Mick Rix, the former general secretary of the train drivers unions Aslef, had resigned from the steering committee.

The political tensions in the StWC are rooted in the role of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) at the Labour Party Conference. It played the key role in convincing the delegations of the big four unions (Unison, TGWU, GMB and Amicus) to backtrack on the position adopted on Iraq.

At the TUC conference they called for "the speedy withdrawal of the coalition forces and the dismantling of their military bases". At the Labour Party conference they endorsed a statement by Labour's National Executive Committee that accepted that UK forces will stay as long as the Iraqi government wants them there.

The StWC released a press statement after the Labour Conference condemning the IFTU for its role as an organisation that collaborates with the US/UK occupying powers in Iraq (see article of IFTU on page 10). Unison's deputy general secretary Kenneth Sonnet reacted to the StWC statement by saying that "it's not for us to tell unions

in other countries how to operate. We have to listen to what they want."

It does not seem to matter that the IFTU, against the wishes of most Iraqi people, wants the occupation to continue.

The leaders of the British trade union movement have made their peace with Tony Blair and the Labour government on Iraq because of the upcoming election. They now back him in the continued occupation of Iraq until "such time as they are asked to leave by the Iraqi government."

This policy is particularly treacherous when you consider that the only government the US/UK will allow to be elected is one that is utterly at the service of imperialism. The attack on Fallujah is part of a process of trying to wipe out any resistance and dissent before the elections for a new Iraqi government are held in January.

Many in the union movement are trying to downplay the obvious tensions within the StWC. Tony Woodley, general secretary of the TGWU said: "It is a time for the tolerant discussion of differences. Certainly, now is not the time for splits or resignations. It is a time for unity against the war danger, and unity to get the most rapid possible withdrawal from Iraq."

But unfortunately the very difference is over the question of "the rapid



The masses march but coalition fails to challenge union leaders

withdrawal of troops". The question we should ask Tony Woodley is how he interprets "rapid" – in weeks, months or years. Tony Blair is clearly thinking of years of occupation and the union leaders are going along with it.

Unfortunately, the StWC is not clear on the question either. In a letter to *The Guardian* on Monday 25 October, Lindsey German, convenor of StWC, said that the Coalition's policy "is the same as that adopted at the TUC conference, that an early date be set for the

withdrawal of British troops from Iraq."

This only fudges the issue and provides a cover for the union leaders like Woodley who will talk about an "early date" for withdrawal but in practice now support the occupation.

The StWC is a united front of broad organisations that came together to try to stop the illegal war on Iraq. Its only condition of membership and affiliation was that individuals and organisation shared this aim. Like all united fronts it was a temporary alliance around the

need to unite in common action to achieve a common aim.

But the war has happened and the situation is now different. Now we need to be united around another simple aim – an end to the occupation through the immediate withdrawal of the US/UK troops. Would this lose the support of the unions? It might alienate the leaders who want to conciliate with Blair but it is the rank and file that count – the hundreds of thousands who come on demos and, in the end, can call their leaders to account.

The leaders of StWC are now paying the price for accepting the limits the union leaders imposed on the movement as a condition for its support. Back in February and March last year, they felt forced to join the platforms in Hyde Park because of the sheer size of the demos. They were never asked to "stop the war", i.e. call their members out on strike, because this would "split the movement".

Now those millions are no longer on the streets, Mick Rix has led the charge to split the movement. It was unprecedented for these gentlemen to oppose Britain's imperialist foreign policy. Now they have reverted to type.

Their caste unity will mean now all of them will follow Rix out the door. Our job is to relate to the rank and file of the unions and give them all the support they need to win the unions back.

Respect conference rejects socialism

The first national conference of Respect was held in London on the weekend of 30-31 October. There were 280 delegates at the conference representing one delegate for every 10 members; Socialist Workers Party members made up a clear majority of delegates. The conference confirmed Respect as a populist coalition whose primary focus is on electioneering. This was always the aim of the SWP, which set up Respect to turn the broad and varied antiwar movement into a political party to oppose Labour.

The next general election was central to the discussion of Respect's prospects. It was decided to concentrate resources and to focus on a small number of seats. The conference adopted the following position on the Labour Party: "That the Labour Party is, unlike any of the other left parties, a mass party to whom millions of working people still owe their allegiance. If Respect is to prosper it is predominantly from among these people that we will need to gain support. Consequently we will not challenge antiwar Labour MPs and will consider calling for a vote for Labour in those areas where Respect is not standing and where there is no other credible left candidate."

But how will Respect break the allegiance to Labour of these millions? Nowhere in the policies that were adopted is there a sense that Respect should be an organisation that actively intervenes into the class struggle and campaigns and takes up the issues of the working class and oppressed.

For example, on the question of abortion and a woman's right to choose, the conference rejected a motion that would have committed Respect to "actively campaign for the defence and extension of abortion rights" and to have bound Respect MPs to vote for such a policy. This was denounced by the SWP as "deliberately divisive". Conference did agree "to oppose any change in legislation and defend the right to choose".

How these things go together is not clear given that the current legislation does not allow women the right to choose, it restricts this right and gives it to two doctors working within a state-set framework.

More importantly to the best of our knowledge this policy is not binding on Respect's representatives, indeed it will be seen as a matter of individual conscience.

In fact the whole conference followed

a similar pattern. Resolution after resolution of progressive sounding statements on asylum seekers, the war on Iraq, nuclear disarmament, jobs, housing, education, youth, the attack on civil liberties, PFI, union rights and Palestine were adopted. But little was said on how Respect will actually go about fighting for its policies.

Wherever a clear socialist demand was raised it was quickly denounced as "divisive", "too advanced" or as part of an evil "plot" to disrupt Respect by sowing division. So an argument in favour of a single secular state for Palestine encompassing Jews, Palestinians and Christians was dismissed by the SWP as being too far ahead of people who might join Respect. A call for an end to all immigration controls was declared by the SWP as "a step backwards" from simple support for asylum seekers, the call for Respect MPs to take the average wage of a worker was "not an appropriate demand for the broad movement". And so it went on.

Socialism of course was never in the frame. Left apologists for Respect like to declare that of course the organisation is socialist in its broad outlook. Lindsey German of the SWP once again was

wheeled out to correct this misapprehension. A call for the big multi-national companies based in the UK to be taken into "common ownership" was said to be "against what Respect is standing for at the moment", while in an argument about defining Respect as a socialist organisation, German declared that "she would not have joined" had that been the case. Both proposals were of course resoundingly defeated.

The war in Iraq was the only area where Respect was allowed to abandon its "broad appeal". It adopted the principled position of calling for troops out now and supporting the Iraqi resistance against the occupation forces. But how is this to be fought for? Only continued backing for the Stop the War Coalition is mentioned and this organisation does not support the resistance (see above).

Many delegates have complained of the lack of democracy within the conference and the practice of leading members of the SWP attacking and ridiculing critical members rather than trying to answer their points politically. Already there have been resignations as a result.

But the lack of democracy is not the main problem with Respect. Electoral cretinism is. By posing elections, backed

up by the occasional mass demo, as the only political activity respect should engage in, policy decisions hang simply on the question, "How can we get more votes?"

Hence, Lindsey German's irritation at socialist policies that could "alienate" potential supporters. The sickening hypocrisy of this is that it makes sexist, maybe even racist assumptions about this target audience. By treating abortion rights as a "matter of conscience" not an essential demand for women's liberation, the SWP is adapting to the Muslim clergy and the arch-Catholic George Galloway.

What about the thousands of Muslim and Catholic young women who every year have to seek abortions in the face of communal pressure? Don't they count?

In contrast to this filthy trading of prejudices, Britain's working class and oppressed need a party based on the class struggle and an action programme that starts from the needs of the exploited and downtrodden, not their "elders". In such a programme, elections will be a subordinate tactic, primarily to register, through votes, the advance of our movement, not the end to which all else is subordinated.

Workers take on Dutch Thatcher

Dear comrades

The government that was formed as a result of the Dutch general election in 2003 is the most vicious in years. The party with the largest number of votes was the Christian Democrats (CDA), but as usual in a PR system they did not obtain an overall majority of seats and so had to form a coalition.

The CDA leader Balkenende turned to the VVD. If the CDA can be described as Tories with a Christian conscience, the VVD are Tories without any kind of ethics at all. Their recent rhetoric has been notable for its vicious attacks on asylum seekers. There is a third party in the coalition, the liberal D66, but this is not large enough to exert much of a moderating influence on the others. With such a composition, it is no wonder that the word most commonly being used to describe this government in the press is "Thatcherite". Let me give you some examples to illustrate just what their policies mean.

Pensions

Until now, workers had had the opportunity to make extra payments into their pension schemes, and received tax relief on those payments. Now the government is abolishing the

tax relief. People who had expected to retire in their 50s may now have to work until they are 65.

Unemployment Benefit

There will be no more unemployment benefit for younger people, people who have only recently returned to work before losing their jobs again, or people on "flexible contracts". For those lucky enough to receive UB in the first place, once the initial period runs out they will be expected to sell their house before becoming eligible for means-tested benefits. The number of workers ending up jobless is quite likely to rise, given that the laws protecting workers from dismissal are being relaxed.

Health

The government will no longer allow deals between unions and employers for topping up sick pay after the first year. For those on low pay or benefits who are in the government-run "ziekenfonds" (health insurance scheme), there will now be a "no claims bonus": those lucky enough not to be ill will get part of their payments refunded. As for those physically unable to work, new claimants for sickness benefit will only be eligible if they can



"scarcely lift a finger" according to the trade unions. And finally, many medicines that are currently paid for out of the "ziekenfonds" will no longer be allowed. One elderly man, for instance, has been told that in future he will have to find the 800 Euros per month for his heart medication.

Working Conditions

The government wants to introduce a longer working week and fewer holidays, for the same pay. There will be a pay freeze for all public sector workers.

Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that Dutch workers are furious. The two main union confederations, the FNV and CNV, called a rally for 2 October in Amsterdam's Museumplein, for 12 noon. By 10 am the Museumplein was already overflowing with people. Meanwhile, various opposition groups including the Socialist Party wanted not only a rally but a march, and had called on their supporters to assemble in Dam Square, in front of the Palace. I joined a Socialist Party delegation that was heading for the

Dam. By mid-morning the Dam Square was also overflowing. By the time the feeder march from the Dam arrived at the Museumplein the marchers were being turned back by the police, but we diverted through the Vondelpark in order to reach our destination! At the rally there were repeated calls from the podium for the TU leaders to follow up the demo with strike action, and chants of "aktie!" (action) from the crowd were frequent.

In all, the demonstration drew 300,000 people, making it the biggest TU demonstration in

Holland ever, and the biggest of any kind for 20 years (bigger even than the protests against the war in Iraq).

Strikes

Within a week of the demonstration the unions had embarked on a series of rolling strikes, which are continuing at the time of writing. Each week a different sector of workers comes out for a day: one week the bus and train drivers shut down the entire public transport system; the following week it was the steel workers' turn, and education is likely to be next. The level of solidarity and determination is extremely impressive.

The government and the unions are now rumoured to be close to a deal, but the talks are taking place behind closed doors. Any new offer will have to be a dramatic departure from what the government has so far announced, or it will be seen as a stitch-up rather than a victory by the trade union members who have participated in the demonstrations and strikes in their hundreds of thousands. Watch this space: what Balkenende does today, Blair will probably try tomorrow.

Yours Sue Blackwell
Netherlands

Threat to abortion rights

Dear Comrades,

The re-election of George W. Bush and the influence of the moral right on the US election campaign is not good news for women anywhere. And the reactionary wind is blowing across the Atlantic.

It looks likely that we will see an attack on abortion rights in Britain in the near future. Tory MP Ann Widdecombe is pushing for a private members bill to stop NHS from funding British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), which is the largest provider of late abortions - 140,000 out of 180,000 late abortions were provided by the BPAS.

We won't know whether Widdecombe has been successful until the ballot for private members bills is held, after the Queen's speech later this month.

But a campaign is already being organised to stop the bill.

At the first meeting in London there was an debate on what would be the demand of the campaign. Should we be calling just for the defence of the 1967 act? Or should we fight to unconditionally defend a women's right to choose? The meeting decided to oppose any restrictions on a women's right to choose. But there was also an agreement that we wouldn't know what approach to take until we knew the nature of the attack.

There was also a lot of debate about how the campaign should be organised and who should be involved. Some at the meeting argued for a women only campaign. But abortion is an issue that affects everyone including men. Any restriction on abortion rights will particularly affect working class women, who

do not have the resources to access private health care. Yet, no one suggested excluding middle class women from the campaign. All men have a responsibility to defend a women's right to choose. A campaign that excluded men would let them off the hook.

The meeting also supported the involvement of trade unions (overwhelmingly led by men). We also recognised the importance of young people being involved. This is particularly important because of the pressure to deny confidential pregnancy advice to under 16-year-olds.

It is important that we build the largest campaign possible, with a clear commitment to a women's right to choose and free abortion on demand.

In solidarity
Clare Smith

Arrests at Leeds demonstration

Dear Comrades

Young activists were arrested in Leeds at a peaceful demonstration that was organised in the town centre to coincide with the US elections and the planned attack on Falluja.

The action was organised by Revolution, a socialist youth organisation, and involved someone dressing up as George Bush and our members calling on the shoppers of Leeds city centre to throw wet sponges at them.

Although some passers became annoyed at getting a bit wet when the sponges missed, (nothing compared to what is going to happen to the civilians in Falluja!) most people gathered round to watch and some joined in.

The city centre ambassadors explained that there had been some complaints from members of the public getting a bit wet but they didn't try and stop the action. But after an hour and a half a more senior "warden" turned up and told us to stop.

We refused, saying we had been given permission to continue. He called the police; one officer arrived after a few minutes and tried to confiscate our bucket of water and sponges, we replied with some chanting and then he proceeded, without warning, to order the arrest of two of our comrades. A massive crowd gathered as the policeman wrestled one of them to the ground, the wardens grabbed the other and held her in an arm lock, and then both were

carried off to a police station.

A peaceful demonstration that ends with two arrests because of the actions of the police is a sad example of the kind of Britain that we live in today. Where young people are silenced by the state for daring to protest and raise opposition to the war on terror and Blair's best friend Bush.

Messages of solidarity can be sent to yorkshire.revo@worldrevolution.org.uk
Yours
Simon, Leeds

Animal experiments

Dear comrades,

The article *Animal Rights Activists Get It Wrong* (WorkersPower289) asserts that "socialists defend the use of animals in experiments", as a socialist I beg to differ. The article is full of misinformation, misunderstandings and oversimplifications to say nothing of the belittling of the views of young activists. The central thrust of the article seems to be that animals do not have any rights or not the same rights as people.

But rights cannot be demanded by babies or infants (nor can they be granted by them) but this does not stop human beings from demanding and granting rights to very young children even if they cannot offer opinions about these! So I do not see why rights should not also be granted to non-human animals even if they cannot campaign for them. So please, ditch the spurious and lazy rights argument.

The article also rehearses the mantra of the pharmaceutical industry that animal experiments alleviate suffering of people and expand our medical and scientific knowledge. Actually there is a growing body of medical and scientific opinion which points out the very opposite. The problem has been that animal research can find drugs safe or unsafe in certain non-human animals, but that they have the opposite effect in humans. Good examples for this include asbestos and smoking, neither of which was shown to have any bad effects on the health of animals they were tested on. Further more animals can't report other possible side effects of drugs, so drugs can never be considered safe until they have under gone human trials.

Now one might argue that such bad results are bad luck, but the statistics are actually rather frightening, every year thousands of patients die of side effects of drugs, which have been considered safe in animal trials. Dr Vlasak has for example reported on a recent study from the US that found that 106,000 patients die every year making "drug side effects the sixth most common cause of death" in the US. GPs are also expressing concerns about animal experiments. In a recent survey of 500 GPs commissioned by the group Europeans for Medical Advancement 82 per cent were concerned that the data derived from animal trials was misleading. Similarly, some scientists such as Dr Ray Greek have argued that using animals has slowed down or hampered attempts to find vaccines for certain conditions including (historically) polio and more recently HIV/Aids.

Fears are being expressed that animal experiments can label certain drugs safe, which can then be put on the market quickly to make rapid profits for the pharmaceutical company. Rather than acting as a mouthpiece for pharmaceutical companies and the pro-vivisection lobby real socialists should take the issues raised by the anti-vivisectionists more seriously, rather than belittling anti-vivisectionists, take a serious look at their findings, precisely because this would benefit people.

As a last word, what would be so terrible a bout giving equal rights to all organisms that can suffer? Non human animals are sentient beings with complex fears and feelings. What gives us the right to use animals and cruelly abuse them just because they are different?

Yours,
Miriam
Birmingham

European Social Forum

The European Social Forum, was half the size of its predecessors in Florence and Rome. It was expensive and bureaucratically run. Its platforms groaned with union general secretaries, academics, superannuated third world leaders and chief officers of the NGOs. Was it a mistake to hold the ESF in Britain? *Dave Stockton* argues that despite its defects the results justified holding the event here

Yes the 20,000 people who attended the official ESF over the three days was less than half the number who attended the two previous forums. It was one whole day shorter. It was so expensive as to deter many young people and lower paid workers from attending it. Up to three thousand attended the "horizontals" fringe events- Beyond the ESF, Life Despite Capitalism and the Solidarity Village. This was probably more than attended the Hub in Florence or the GLAD in Paris, certainly as a proportion of the main event and can certainly be put down to the control freakery of the London Mayor's organisers.

The low number of British attendees exposed the fact that most unions that formally affiliated did little to inform, let alone mobilise their members. The complete absence of ESF banners at Congress House, indicated the hollowness of the TUC's commitment. Despite the fact that the overpaid top officials of Greater London Assembly, aided by the Socialist Workers Party, assured the presence of general and deputy general secretaries on the platforms, the biggest venues to the official union seminars, they could not guarantee a big audience for them, let alone any enthusiasm.

Shamefully the totally excluded speakers from the anticapitalist youth or representatives of rank and file trade



unionists. Workers Power during the preparatory assemblies and programme meetings argued time and again that such speakers must be included. A solid phalanx of the GLA and the SWP blocked it time and again.

The weakness of the anticapitalist movement in Britain was on display to visitors from the continent. The pro-

portion of young people and trade unionists from Italy, France, the Spanish state, Eastern Europe and Greece to those from the host country was embarrassingly high. If they did not already know it, the "continentals" must have realised that Globalise Resistance is just a Potemkin village of the SWP. The representatives of the French

and Italian unions, of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire and Rifondazione Comunista were plainly discontented with the bureaucratic (and commercialised) running of the ESF, and the enormous privileges which the tiny Socialist Action sect and the shrinking SWP shamelessly accorded themselves. Their actions in turning

the final demonstration into yet another routine Stop the War march, downplaying the resistance to the neoliberal offensive in Europe and even excluding the "the Europeans" from the final platform in Trafalgar square.

So was it a flop? No. 20,000 people debating and networking is bigger than anything Britain has seen for decades. The biggest and most enthusiastic seminars and plenaries focussed on the struggle of the Palestinians and the resistance to the occupation of Iraq. On Friday afternoon in West Hall between 2000-25000 attended the session "What future for Palestine?" Speakers included Mustafa Barghouti (Director, Health, Development and Information Project, Ramallah); Jamal Juma'a (Director, Stop the Wall campaign); Yonathon Shapira (Israeli refusnik helicopter assault pilot); Nurit Peled (Israeli peace activist, mother of child killed in suicide bombing).

The two Israelis gave moving accounts of their very different journeys to resistance to the Sharon government. Peled's daughter was killed by a Hamas bomb, while Shapira flew many missions delivering deadly missiles to West Bank and Gaza Palestinian homes. Shapira reflected upon the very different landscapes of oppression as he flew his missions: the gleaming white homes with red tile roofs and well-watered lawns of the Jewish settlements - oases of oppression in the

Calling for the Fifth International

Over 100 people attended a seminar called by the League for the Fifth International on the subject "Networks of Struggle or New World Party of Revolution: Which Way Forward for the Global Movement?"

Kirstie Paton of the National Union of Teachers and Workers Power (Britain) opened the meeting, reviewing struggles that have taken place against capitalist globalisation over the last ten years. Touching on the resistance in Chiapas, Mexico, the popular rising in Argentina, the protests against the IMF, WTO and G8 between 1999 and 2001, and the mass antiwar movements of 2002-03, she pointed to two important phenomena.

The first is that under globalisation every major struggle has carried with it the need to make international connections and build new international networks. The second is that despite the many different causes of protest and resistance today, millions of people have once again identified a common source of inequality, oppression and war: global capitalism. "When people at this ESF talk about neoliberalism, it's easy to forget what that means, she said. "But neoliberalism is just the most blunt form of capitalist policy. The real problem is capitalism."

Richard Brenner then spoke on behalf of the International Secretariat of the League for the Fifth International. He surveyed the competing strategies for the movement being proposed at the European Social Forum, from the anti-

power networking of the anarchists, though the insistence of the social-democratic and reformist politicians that the ESF should remain a Space, and should therefore not organise action. These ideas, he said, reflected the origins of anarchism and modern reformism in the collapse of two former world parties of revolution: the First and the Second Internationals.

The failure of the anarchist fragments of the First International to fight for political power could only mislead the movement today. "As the failure of the Zapatistas to fight for political power showed", he said, "the opposite of power is not some post-modern anti-power, but powerlessness." As for the Second International, the reformists' proposals - those of Bernard Cassen, Jacques Nikonoff and the Brazilian leaders of the World Social Forum - were downright dishonest. "They say we should not form a new structure to organise the struggle because they already have their own structure - the reformist parties of the Second International in Brazil and France, which will govern jointly with the capitalists and carry out neoliberal policies."

Communist Parties in Europe and Asia alike were still wedded to the idea of governing jointly with capitalists in "people's fronts", and were trying to coordinate the parties of the former Third International around this policy of failure and class collaboration.

The Fourth International also came in for criticism. Its representatives at the ESF were trying to engineer the cre-

ation of a new world party whilst at the same time minimising and reducing conflict with the reformists and refraining from bringing forward revolutionary policies. The French section of the FI had plainly done a deal with the liberals of ATTAC to stop the Assembly of Social Movements from calling for the immediate withdrawal of the troops. They still adhered to the false policy adopted by the FI in 1951 of dropping revolutionary policies and waiting for the objective process, to push the Second and Third Internationals automatically to the left. This had failed in the past and would fail again. The solution depended on conscious revolutionaries struggling to resolve this crisis of leadership. The ESF and the Assembly of Social Movements had tremendous power, as the huge response to its call for action on 15 February 2003 showed, when 20 million people marched against war all over the world.

The movement should reject self-limiting proposals by the latter day fragments of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Internationals, and should instead go forward to create a new political party of our own "an anticapitalist, international party, a Fifth International, committed to the forcible overthrow of this system and the establishment of a democratic planned economy and a classless communist world.

About twelve speakers from the floor stressed the dangers and opportunities inherent in the situation. Sam, a REVOLUTION member from Durham, pointed out how reformists were using

the current confusion of the movement to reorganise, and how unless this were challenged then today's youth would face a future not of freedom but of defeat. Chris, a disabled activist from London, stressed the importance of today's movement challenging all forms of discrimination and oppression, including that facing disabled people under capitalism.

A comrade from Slovakia described in heart-rending detail the appalling conditions facing workers in his factory, the complete absence of protective legislation in the newly capitalist countries in Eastern Europe, the low pay, overwork and physical violence meted out against workers by foreign owned companies. He told how workers there decided to fight back and form an independent union and was at the ESF to learn from workers struggles in other countries and win their support.

Summing up, Richard Brenner said some activists were attracted to the launch of the new RESPECT Coalition in Britain. But this was a dead end - something that would tie any working class forces within it to raising only those demands that would not alienate small property owners and the Muslim clergy. This was why RESPECT refused to call for nationalisation of monopolies and abolition of the monarchy.

Foreign delegates were shocked to hear that RESPECT does not back free abortion on demand, and that the Socialist Workers Party in Britain had obviously decided not to press this demand in return for an alliance with

non-working class forces. To loud applause, Brenner said: "This is not some detail to be bargained away - this is the emancipation of womankind!"

The main problem with half-baked initiatives like RESPECT was that they revealed how the fragments of the collapsed Internationals did not really believe that revolutionary ideas have practical relevance in the struggles of today. Chris Nineham of the Socialist Workers Party had stated in a seminar on the Future of the Movement that "We do not have forever - we probably have about another 15 years" Yet he seemed to have no realisation of what it would mean if it were true: that unless we take the power when the situation comes to a head, then we will be defeated and another terrifying cycle of depression and war will take place over the backs of a broken movement. That was why it was so scandalous that they will not take up the call for the movement to organise itself in a party and fight for power.

The Fourth International and its splinters like the SWP always greet the revolutionaries, proposals with the words "too soon!". It is too soon, for the ESF to adopt a permanent coordination, "too soon", for it to adopt the call for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq, "too soon", for a new Workers Party in Britain, "too soon", for the left to advance a programme of revolutionary demands, "too soon" for the ESF to take up the fight for a new world party. Today they say it is "too soon", but tomorrow they will be the first to say: "too late!"

Palestinian homeland. Flying over them he arrived at the broken-backed communities of rubble and barbed wire that signalled the Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps.

Both had the courage to break with the Zionist consensus that the Palestinians resistance to their oppression is a form of terrorism and support their right to self-determination.

But the most interesting political development at the meeting came from the Palestinian speakers, especially Mustafa Barghouti. Detailing the ongoing misery of death and injury inflicted upon the Palestinians in the West Bank from his position of chief health official in the occupied territories, Barghouti announced to thunderous applause that the time had come to launch an antiapartheid solidarity movement for the Palestinians with its focus on a massive international campaign to boycott Israeli products and contacts with Israeli officials and representatives.

Coming as it did from a leading voice within the occupied territories it signals a new opportunity for the boycott movement to attract mass forces to a campaign that to date has been rather confined to the far left and human rights activists.

The discussions in many of the seminars held on the future and direction of the movement were varied in their viewpoints, more critical, more suggestive of concrete actions, than they had been in Paris and Florence. A series of seminars and workshops did address the central dilemmas facing the anti-capitalist movement: space or movement, movement or party, new workers party or populist electoral bloc?

In key sessions addressing the major areas of struggle, important questions were also posed: do we need an autonomous youth organisation, do we need rank and file trade union organisation, are we militantly in support of those fighting imperialism and

Zionism in Iraq and Palestine?

Scarcely any speakers, including Susan George and Jacques Nikonoff of Attac and Chico Whitaker of the international council of the World Social Forum, seemed to think everything was fine in the movement. Their solution was reduce the regularity of the ESF and the WSF to once every two or three years and to bureaucratise the Assembly of Social Movements, by making it up of mandated representatives of "the mass organisations".

Obviously they want to further exclude and marginalise the anticapitalist youth, the revolutionary left and rank and file union militants too. If they succeeded they would kill the movement stone dead. Fortunately, though they occupy a privileged position on the platforms and in the International Council of the WSF, they have a small and less active following at a grass roots level - even when it comes to the local level of ATTAC. That is why Attic's constitution rigorously protects it again any take-over - by its own members.

The Fourth International members from France and Italy were arguing for a different direction, prominent in the union and social movements. They clearly wanted to focus attention on resistance to the neoliberal offensive underway in mainland Europe. The SWP on the other hand showed their insular obsession with the war to the exclusion of everything else. Despite having IST sections in Greece, Germany Spain and France, they showed little interest in the crucial battles being fought on the continent and the fact that equally with the war these should be at the centre of the ESF's deliberations and the action it is planning for next year.

Symbolic mobilisations, "demonstration cretinism", more huge inconclusive talkfests are not, however, what the movement needs. Nor are the hole in the corner utopias and carni-

valesque stunts of the horizontals much use either. Anticapitalist militants - of which as the ESF once more demonstrated there are tens, probably hundreds of thousands in Europe alone - need to focus their thoughts and their deeds on the linked fronts of struggle, dictated by the capitalist/imperialist offensive.

These must centre on Bush and Blair's attempts to occupy and "pacify" the middle east oilfields and the EU's Lisbon agenda to create an imperialist superstate to rival the USA. We are five years into the offensive to privatise the social gains of the continent's workers. We are facing on employer's offensive to lower wages, increase working time, slash pensions, and worsen work conditions. We face an assault on the democratic rights of EU citizens and on the asylum seekers and immigrant populations, all embodied in the neoliberal European Constitution.

That is why the call for a huge mobilisation against the EU summit in Brussels on 19-20 March must be heeded in Britain.

We need to agree on a combined series of actions - a strategy - to fight off the linked employers and EU offensive, and to defeat the imperialist war machine. Our goal is to establish not just a "social" Europe (welfare capitalism), the catch phrase common at the ESF, but a socialist united states of Europe.

What are the obstacles to an effective fightback? The social democratic parties as well as the major union federations - are all, to a greater or lesser degree, in trouble and do not have the loyal and disciplined legions of followers they had in back in 1980s and early 1990s. The crisis of party politics is not a crisis caused by a lack of radicalism from the base, but by a lack of trust and confidence in the leadership.

The ESF process - the preparatory assemblies and the Assemblies of the



Social Movements - has become the crucible in which this crisis is being worked out.

On the issue of where the movement should go, whether what is needed is a new international party, the slogan of the Fifth International was raised not just by us, but by Raffaella Bollini of Italian Social Forum and Jacques Nikonoff of the French Communist Party as well. Of course they raised it only as a ques-

tion swiftly to be answered by a "no" or a "not yet." But hundreds of young activists were not so easily dismissive. The widespread acceptance that the movement stood at a crossroads, that it cannot go on as it is proved how correct our call for the Fifth International is. What is widely called "the new internationalism" must take material, organisational form - a new world party of socialist revolution.

The Assembly of Social Movements

The daily holding of preparatory meetings for the Assembly of the Social Movements of up to a hundred people from across Europe, was a step forward. But the procedure for doing this as well as the de facto leadership of this process showed structural weaknesses. Pierre Khalifa (Attac, G10, Fourth International) produced a draft declaration, inadequate in many respects but a basis for amendment.

Rahul Patel (London Unison and SWP) who chaired sent out an appeal for amendments to which the League for the Fifth International responded before the ESF started. Despite vigorous and repeated efforts, we could not get them discussed at the preparatory meetings or even a decision taken. Instead they were talked out by a fatuous debate between the IST and the FI as to what dates a global anti-war or a Brussels anti-EU constitution demonstration should take place.

It is clear that the IST-SWP are desperate for another "mega demo" for StW coalition as a ramp for Respect's general election campaign to take off from. However any sincere concern with the war must call for action now and up to the projected elections in January as the occupiers seek to crush the resistance. March really is too late this time and dictated by ridiculously secondary considerations (two years since the war started, the need to support the Americans) and are just pretexts for the SWP's electioneering.

But rather than have an open fight over this, at the end of each of the daily preparatory sessions, a self-selected working group announced that they would take it all away.



The final morning saw about 1,000 activists present for the Assembly of Social Movements. It heard from a range of speakers amplifying points in the agreed draft of the call of the ASM. Reflecting the limited consensus of the major forces involved in the ASM it did at least give the ASM seal of approval to a range of demonstrations and protests this year and next.

It states; "We are fighting for the withdrawal of the occupying troops in Iraq, for an immediate halt to the bombing and for the immediate restitution of sovereignty to the Iraqi people. We call for an end to the Israeli occupation and the dismantling of the apartheid wall. We call for political and economic sanctions on the Israeli government as long as they continue to violate international law and the human rights of the Palestinian people."

Good. But not good enough. Elastic

formulations like this cover up the fact that some sections of the movement do not intend to fight for the withdrawal of troops now. It would have been much better to call for "an immediate withdrawal of the occupying troops" since this alone can restore sovereignty to the people of Iraq. Masks off! Let us see who is willing to solidarise with the resistance and who is not.

The ASM agreed to call "a central demonstration in Brussels on 19 March against war, racism, and against a neoliberal Europe, against privatisation, against the Bolkestein project and against the attacks on working time; for a Europe of rights and solidarity between the peoples. We call all the social movements and the European trade union movements to take to the streets on this day."

Good. But not good enough. This alone will not help the German, French

and Italian workers who are in the firing line of these attacks if it is not linked to a day or days of common action across Europe. If we do not set about planning both before and in Brussels, of a Europe wide campaign of strikes, road blockades, direct actions to halt the implementation of the Lisbon agenda in all its aspect, to take up the issues of racism and war and the constitution too so that the summiters are made painfully aware of what they are up against.

Let's stop the railways, the roads, the factories, the offices, the schools and universities, even the farms too, right across Europe from Finisterre to the Vistula. Let's say to the many gentlemen and few ladies reviewing their progress in destroying the destruction of the meagre social palliatives for capitalism, the Lisbon agenda: "tear up that agenda" before we tear up your rotten

system. Beware! Our plans for another Europe are in an advanced state of preparation and we are assembling the forces to impose them.

Among the many other days of protest supported the call says: "we pledge to mobilise massively on the occasion of the G8 summit in Scotland in July 2005". The excellent resolution from the Youth Assembly (see box) goes further and calls for shutting down the G8, and relaunching the kind of direct action that characterised the movement from Seattle 1999 to Genoa 2001. Plans are already afoot for a four day counter-conference in Perth. This is a useful addition to the calendar and should be converted into a UK and Irish social forum with participants from all over Europe to give us their advice and experiences.

The preparatory meetings for the ESF/ASM throughout 2004-06 - the first of which will be in Paris on 18th-19th December - will continue to debate the future of the movement. Because these gather the leaderships of the most radical mass forces in Europe - those who could, if they had the political will, form a new International - they also will be the site of battles, started but unfinished in London.

However if the ESF leaders continue refuse to debate the resolution from the L51 to set up permanent structures for the ASM, that could allow it to co-ordinate actions on an ongoing basis between meetings of the ESF, then the movement could decline and eventually disintegrate. The re-election of Bush, and the speeding up of the attacks in Europe should underscore the fact that such a missed opportunity would carry a huge cost for the world working class.

Revolution at the ESF

By Luke from Leeds
Revolution

Revolution Europe was at the forefront of the struggle to give the young people an independent voice at the ESF.

The Revolution workshop - Uniting Youth Struggles Across Europe! - was a lively one, with around 90 to 100 people participating. Rachel from North London-Revo made the case for how all the different struggles being waged by young people today were connected under the capitalist system and why only a revolution could free us from our chains. Then we broke down into smaller groups to discuss in greater detail the different campaigns we were involved in and how we could support each other across borders.

The highpoint of Revolution's work both before and during the ESF was the holding of a Youth Assembly, the only self-organised space for young people within the whole ESF. We had to fight hard to get this Assembly to even happen. Right up to the last minute, it looked like we would be denied this. As it was, this concession was delivered with bad grace: no translation facilities were provided and the venue far away from the main site. Like Victorian parents, the SWP and Socialist Action believe young people should be seen but not heard! They were to be disappointed in this.

Despite their malign neglect, the Youth Assembly proved a great success. It was a culmination of a year-long fight to establish a self-organised youth space and assembly throughout the entire preparatory process. Although Socialist Action and the SWP continued to veto this proposal, we managed to gain support from other youth organisations.

Members from other youth organisations came to the Assembly and discussed with us - Welsh Youth Forum

on Sustainable Development, SEGI (Basque country), ECOSY (social democratic youth), Scottish Socialist Youth, International Socialist Resistance, Student CND, MJS France, LCR, World Youth Forum, SWP, Youth Section, and many others. All in all, there were over 200 participants.

We put forward a resolution that embodied the radical activism of the youth. We won the political argument and passed the declaration with a few amendments by voting (see below). ECOSY and the Socialist Action NUS bureaucrats tried to amend out all the radical policies and actions, but they were heavily outnumbered.

Then we demanded our right to speak at the Assembly of the Social Movements - the SA and SWP chairs were still busy trying to stifle the voice of youth by repeatedly dropping the Youth Assembly speakers down the speakers list. A Revo member who protested to the SWP chair was told he would be "humiliated" if he did not shut up and sit down. Eventually Revo members and others from the Youth Assembly took up a highly visible position with its banner alongside the platform.

With the aid of an Italian member of the chairing team we were then finally called to speak and read out the declaration. It was received with loud applause - especially from the Italian, Spanish and other European delegation. The SWP 'comrades' were notably by their silence, as well as their small numbers.

We have set an important political precedent for the ESF by hosting the youth assembly. A large number of individuals and a number of organisations want to take this project forward. This means continuing to intervene into the ESF process over the next 18 months and continuing to network - and demand our right for a large space and simultaneous translation for the youth assembly at the next ESF in Athens in March 2006.

Call of the Youth Assembly

The Youth Assembly of the 2004 European Social Forum declares opposition to the world of war, racism, poverty, and the system that causes it - global capitalism.

The youth have been at the forefront of this movement. We have besieged the meetings and summits of the rich and powerful. We have marched in our millions against the war. We continue this struggle today. We call for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and for solidarity with the Iraqi resistance. We call for solidarity with groups involved with national liberation struggles such as the Basque people and Palestinians. We call for strikes and a campaign of civil disobedience and direct action to halt the European Union's attacks on welfare and workers, and to stop the neo-liberal European Constitution.

We resist the racism of fortress Europe and demand equal rights for immigrants, freedom of movement and an end to the border controls of racist EU states. We demand action to be taken against the destruction of the environment. We demand equal rights for young people and control over our education, our work, our sexuality, our leisure and our lives.

We call on the Assembly of Social Movements to make a bold call to mass action:

- * Shut down the European Summit in Brussels in March 2005.
- * Shut down the G8 in Scotland in July 2005.
- * Build local social forums in schools, colleges and workplaces.
- * Call an international day of action against the war.
- * Call a day of action on February 1st against the neoliberal constitution.

Youth are under-represented on the platforms at the ESF. We must * Establish a youth space and youth assembly at all future ESFs and WSFs. * Establish a permanent co-ordination and meet in March 2005. Young people are at the forefront of this struggle on the streets but on the platforms of the ESF and WSF we are almost absent. We young people are being marginalised because they fear our militancy. At this year's ESF we have been denied the right to a fully translated Youth Assembly. This must not happen again. At the ESF and WSF too there must be a Youth Assembly. This can be a step towards a revolutionary youth international that can unite young people across Europe and the world in a fight against global capitalism and for a world free of poverty oppression and war. As a step towards this we call on all anti-capitalist youth organisations who fight to give a political voice to youth in the movement to come together in a delegate meeting to plan common action and develop a structure of discussion and debate around our political differences.

In addition we put forward the arguments to a wide audience that young people need a revolutionary Youth International to co-ordinate the struggles of young workers, school and

college students against their oppression in the home, in the school, in the workplace, their harassment by the police and the bullying and super-exploitation they suffer at work.

Unions and the crisis in social democracy

By Jeremy Dewar

The League for the Fifth International's workshop on "Should unions form new parties?" was so packed that the audience had to resort to direct action in Congress House and dismantle the partition wall, doubling the room size.

Over a hundred activists crowded in to hear Pat Spackman (Bristol RMT), Jimmy Nolan (Liverpool dockers), Markus Dahms (IG Metall-Siemens) and Laercio Pereira (PSTU - Brazil) debate the need for the unions to break with reformism and create new parties to defend working class interests. Union militants and young people, especially a substantial number from the Czech republic listened intently as the meeting went 20 minutes beyond its allotted time.

What a contrast this was to the one that followed, where Bob Crow hosted a seminar in a large but sparsely populated hall and participants who were not among the chosen few were ignored or rudely put down.

"What have you done to get other unions to follow your break with Labour, Bob?" - "Nothing."

"But our union has a policy to ask other unions and political groups to join a discussion on the crisis of political representation," complained an RMT activist. - "Show me the policy and I'll buy you a fruitcake," (lyingly) rejoined Crow.

The League's workshop proved that there was a large audience at the ESF who were prepared to go to the inconvenience of DIY translation and basement location to debate the most pressing questions facing the movement. And debate there was, both from the top table and from the floor.

The SWP and the Iraq protest

Every honest SWP member should be ashamed of what their leadership's pact with the bureaucracy meant at the ESF. And nothing illustrated it more clearly than a plenary session on the Iraq war. For an organisation that proclaims that it sides with the resistance in Iraq and emphasises the absolute centrality to politics today of the war, the SWP ended up defending the presence of a collaborator with that occupation on a plenary platform.

When protestors at a plenary on Iraq demanded the removal of the IFTU general secretary Subhil al-Mashadani from the platform because of his organisation's support for the imperialist occupation and hostility to the resistance, the SWP took the lead in denouncing the protestors and defending the collaborator's "democratic" right to speak. Their special issue of Socialist Workers attacked "a couple of dozen people with no connection to the anti-war movement" for barracking the collaborator.

They then tried to get the protest condemned unheard at the preparatory meeting for the Assembly of Social Movement, pressured by the blustering bureaucrat Redmond O'Neill of the GLA. But their undemocratic plan collapsed when a member of the League

for the Fifth International asked the meeting - to applause from everyone present not in the SWP or Socialist Action - for the other side of the argument to be put.

We remain proud of our role in bringing this protest about. First, it was legitimate, as the ESF process had never invited Mashadani of the IFTU to speak; it was a dirty backroom deal. Secondly, this protest has done more than anything to bring to light the role of the IFTU as collaborators. Third, and most importantly, it is a matter of principle, understood by the Iraqis at the heart of the protest, to deny collaborators in an ongoing war a platform at an anti-imperialist conference.

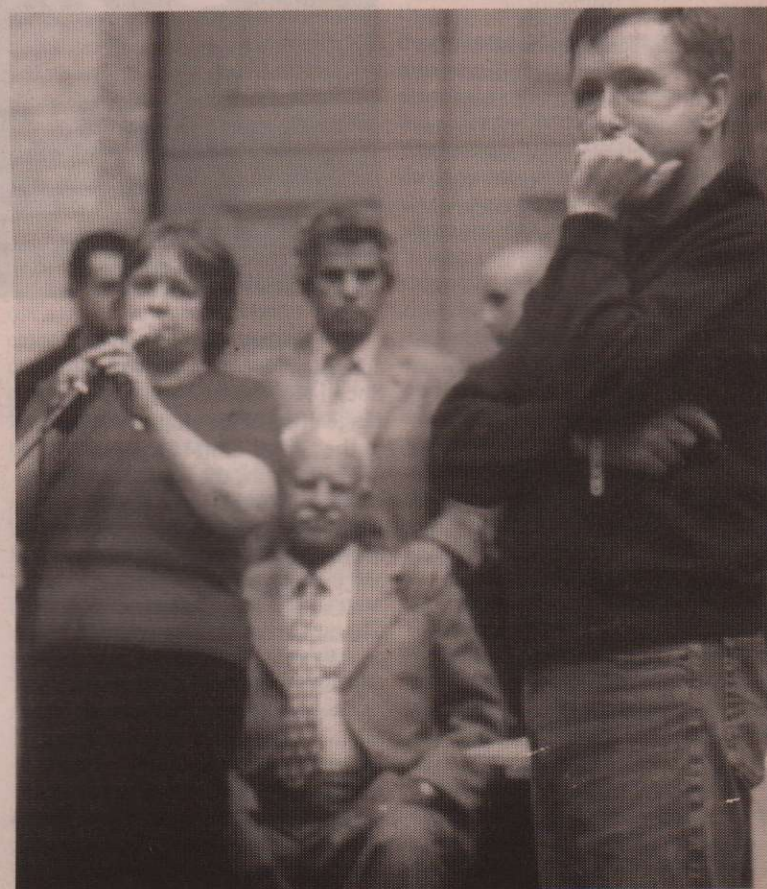
Nearly every political group, including those who now say we are right about the IFTU and that they should not have been allowed to speak, say we were wrong to "disrupt" or "break up the meetings". And that we violated democratic rights. As revolutionary communists we do not turn democratic rights into either an absolute or a classless abstraction. Strikers should not give a scab the right to speak at their meetings. Any trade unionist worth the name knows this. A fascist should not be allowed any democratic platform.

In short when a physical and organised mass struggle is underway it is

impermissible to debate with the enemy. The task is quite simply to destroy them. In the words of Marx, "the weapon of criticism is replaced by the criticism of weapons". In Iraq Fallujah is under brutal attack. All Iraqi trade unionists worth the name - like the oil workers did when Najaf was under attack - will be taking action against the US and British occupiers and their puppet government, not denouncing its heroic defenders as "foreign terrorists."

We did not break up the meeting: we demanded that Mashadani should not speak. This request was never put to the meeting. Lindsey German would only put to the meeting the resolution that the meeting go ahead with Mashadani present. Why would she not put the question do you want the meeting to go ahead but without Mashadani? Then we would have seen how many people were eager to hear him. Instead Lindsey German abandoned the meeting and then the SWP accused us of breaking it up.

This is good illustration that, while the SWP are quite capable of adopting principled positions (they "oppose" the IFTU), they are quite incapable of turning them into action when it matters. It is a clear illustration of their centrism.



Lindsey German (mic) Subhil al-Mashadani (seated), Redmond O'Neill (right)

Roma organise across borders

Travellers and Roma discussed the European-wide attacks on them and how to fight back. *Joy Knight* reports

At the European Social Forum, the Free Mario Bango Campaign, along with the Traveller Law Reform Coalition, The European Roma Rights Centre and many other Roma and traveller campaigning organisations, hosted a seminar to discuss and debate the plight of Roma and travellers.

As many of the East European states with the worst records on human rights abuses against Roma have now joined the European Union and the persecution of Roma and travellers is increasing in the Western states, such as Britain, the battle is on for the rights

of these communities.

There are approximately 9 million Roma in Europe. Roma are marginalised and discriminated against in employment, housing, education and the judicial system. They face institutional state racism and are treated as second class citizens within the EU.

The anti-Roma hysteria that was whipped up in the tabloid press in Britain before accession of the Eastern states – warning against an invasion by “hordes of gypsies” – is evidence of this.

In Eastern Slovakia, unemployment can be as high as 93 per cent in Roma communities. Eduard Bango, the

brother of Mario, could not attend the seminar to speak about his brother's case because his boss would not let him have the time off work to attend the forum. He cannot afford to lose his job – for as a young Roma it would be extremely difficult to find another.

The seminar attracted more than 150 participants and focused on a resolution drafted by the Traveller Law Reform Coalition (see box). Florina Zoltan of the Roma Community Centre gave a passionate speech about the situation of the Roma community in Europe.

The Free Mario Bango Campaign moved an amendment in support of

Mario and for the right of Roma and travellers to defend themselves against racist attacks. Many campaigners spoke in favour of the amendment. The need for self-defence was highlighted by the tragic case of Johnny Delaney, a 15 year old boy who was murdered in a racist attack last year in Cheshire.

A number of campaigners spoke about the situation for travellers in the UK who are coming under severe attacks from local councils. Many families are being threatened with eviction, and many more have already been thrown off their land.

The case of Harry and Linda Smith at Paynes Lane, who were evicted last

month from the land that they had lived on for 15 years, highlights the persecution that travellers face in the UK.

In summing up, Michael Proebsting from the Free Mario Campaign came back to the issue of concrete support and called upon all activists within the social forum movement to support Mario, not only because of the grave injustice that is being carried out against him, but also because he is one of our movement – an anti-capitalist fighter who was on the streets in Prague in 2000 to protest against the IMF and the World Bank. We must continue to fight for his freedom.

'Roma? - I live next door to one and we get on fine'

Joy Knight tells of her extraordinary meeting with Juraj Zervan, First Secretary of the Embassy of the Slovak Republic - and gets a taste of what Mario is up against

The Monday morning after the ESF, Andrew Ryder (Traveller Law Reform Coalition) and I arranged a meeting with Juraj Zervan to discuss the resolution and to hand in around 50 sheets of petitions collected by the Free Mario Bango Campaign over the past 6 months.

It was obvious from the start that the First Secretary was on the back foot. After stating that he was a human rights campaigner, he went on to say that we could not link the statement regarding the treatment of Roma in Europe to the case of Mario Bango. “These are very separate issues.” When questioned why the issue of racism against Roma can't be applied to Mario's case, Zervan said that it was not a racially motivated attack. Zervan also attempted to perpetuate the lie that Mario and Eduard were pick-pocketing, something that was never proven in the courts and was quickly dropped by the prosecution when their police informant proved to be unreliable. But, as Zervan put it, conflicts like these happen “when you live beside these communities that steal.”

Zervan tried to deny that Roma encounters “institutional racism”. Zervan was totally ignorant of the idea of state racism, and even claimed there was no racism in Slovak society - ‘Oh sometimes you hear racist comments on the football field, but that's it.’

This is in direct contradiction of a report in January 2004 by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) that concluded “the Roma minority remains severely

SELF DEFENCE IS NO OFFENCE!



FREE MARIO!

disadvantaged in most areas of life, particularly in the fields of housing, employment and education.” Accordingly, the proclaimed goal of improving the situation of the Roma “has not been translated into adequate resources and a concerted interest and commitment on the part of all the administrative sectors involved.”

The Slovak Republic was brought before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in August 2004 to monitor its progress to end racial discrimination, including measures undertaken to remedy the serious human rights issues Roma face.

But this wasn't going to deter Zervan. He told us that the reason that there was high unemployment amongst Roma was because they didn't send their children to school. He didn't

mention that in many Roma communities they don't have access to electricity or clean water, let alone an education system. He didn't mention the fact that many Roma children are sent to “special schools” that reinforce their social exclusion. He didn't mention the racism that Roma encounter every day.

Zervan talked about ‘luxury flats’ that were given to a Roma community and now look like a slum - but didn't mention the fact that Roma make up 40 per cent of the unemployed in Slovakia, even though they are only 10 per cent of the population. You can't maintain a luxury flat if you don't have any money.

True to form, Zervan started to cover up his own racism by talking about his

Roma mates: “I know a lot of Roma. We get together quite often and ... talk”, “I live next door to one and we get on fine.” Fantastic. With friends like these, no wonder there has been little progress on eliminating racial discrimination.

Zervan also told me that there was nothing that the government could do for Mario - that they had no influence on the decision of the courts and it would be unconstitutional for them to intervene in any way. So I guess an amnesty for Mario is not on the cards if he has anything to do with it - nor for any other person that suffers a miscarriage of justice.

What was interesting is that Zervan knew the ins and outs of Mario's case. He knew every little detail. This shows that the campaign is making progress. The best thing was when he said in exasperation, “And we keep getting all these letters!”

RESOLUTION FROM THE ROMA AND TRAVELLER WORKSHOP AT THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM, LONDON OCT 16th, 2004

We, participants of the European Social Forum, note that the Gypsy/Roma/Traveller community in Europe endure extreme levels of social exclusion, reflected by extreme racial discrimination, spatial exclusion, poverty and unemployment. The ESF believes that in addition to greater legislative protection, the Gypsy/Roma/Traveller community needs decent accommodation and equal and fair access to all public services and economic opportunities. We note the importance of the EU in the resolution of this problem and calls upon it to:

- Without delay, adopt a “Directive on Roma Integration”, as called for by the EU Network of Experts on Fundamental Rights, legally binding all EU Member States and aspiring Member States to act to integrate Roma, Travellers and others regarded as “Gypsies”
- Significantly strengthen the human rights enforcement mechanisms of the European Union institutions
- Without delay, begin infringement proceedings against those European Union Member States which have not adopted comprehensive anti-discrimination laws in conformity with the EU anti-discrimination directives
- Make Roma rights a component of EU foreign policy, such that the very serious issues facing Roma in countries beyond the current borders of the European Union are addressed by EU policy.

We note the political exclusion of Roma/Gypsies/Travellers at an international level. The ESF calls upon:

- International/National/Local Gypsy/Roma/Traveller organisations to continue to develop democratic structures which, represent the true aspirations of the Gypsy/Roma/Traveller community and be given a greater level of inclusion in decision making processes
- The Gypsy/Roma/Traveller community at a ‘grassroots’ level to take a more active role in the political process
- Gypsy/Traveller/Roma groups to forge greater working relationships/alliances with groups and minorities, working to combat racial, economic and gender discrimination, and which are working towards the creation of a fair and egalitarian society founded upon the principles of tolerance, social justice and equal rights.

We note that many Roma asylum seekers are wrongly classed as “economic migrants”, and that a number of EU Member States operate racially discriminatory border policies. We call upon governments to:

- Ensure that all persons fleeing persecution on ethnic or other grounds have access to substantive review procedures of their request for refugee status on the basis of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (“1951 Geneva Convention”), insulated from political concerns such as the desire to “reduce the number of asylum seekers”. All persons who are refugees in the sense of the 1951 Convention should be provided with protection and not forced to return to their country of origin
- Review border policies (including entry, expulsion and detention pending expulsion) to ensure that they are not racially discriminatory and do not have disparate impact against particular groups.

Anti-Romani sentiment is at very high levels in many European countries and anti-Romani hostility is frequently further provoked by the media. The ESF calls upon members of government at all levels to speak out against racially inciteful media reports, including those pandering to widespread fears about Romani and other “waves” of “hordes” of migrants. The ESF also urges all European governments to take proactive measures to address and reduce high anti-Romani sentiment in all European societies.

We support the right of Roma and Travellers to defend themselves against racist attacks by individuals or the state.

We campaign for the freedom of Mario Bango, a 21 year old Slovak Roma who has been sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for defending himself and his brother against a racially motivated attack. He was convicted of attempted murder, despite the fact that he did not initiate the attack and his brother's attacker died later from head injuries that medical experts have testified were of unknown cause.

The outcome of Mario's case should be seen in the context of racial discrimination against the Roma people by the Slovak state. Before his sentencing, the judge described Mario as a member of “a lower social order, [who] might continue his crimes”; while his attacker, known racist Branislav Slamka, was accorded one minute's silence in the Slovak parliament. The lack of a fair trial contravenes human rights. Self-defence is no offence! Free Mario!

Victorious Bush prepares onslaught on Iraqi resistance

By Michael Pröbsting

The assault on Fallujah was not a campaign issue in the US election. Both Kerry and Bush agreed on the need to "stabilise" Iraq. Blair was only too happy to help, dispatching the Black Watch to fill in the holes in the American line. According to Allawi the stooge Prime Minister of the interim government: "The window really is closing for a peaceful settlement." Brigadier-General Dennis Hajlik, the US Marines' deputy commander, is less circumspect: "We are gearing up to do an operation and when we're told to go, we'll go, and we'll whack them," he said.

The US occupation of Iraq has been a political and military disaster for the imperialists. Not because of the Iraqi dead, - around 100,000 killed since the fall of Saddam on 9 April 2003, according to UK medical journal *The Lancet* - the occupiers couldn't care less about them. Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, responded to the report by claiming there were just 3,000 Iraqi dead!

No. It has become a disaster: politically, because the imperialists have failed to rally any substantial parts of Iraqi society - not even the bourgeoisie - around its Allawi puppet regime; and militarily because, since the uprising in April 2004, a dozen or more cities have been liberated by the Iraqi resistance.

Now that the US bosses have their election over with, they can return to their primary goal of subordinating the Middle East. The key to this is the pacification of Iraq under pro-imperialist control. And to do this they need to crush Fallujah.

Iraqi forces will be deployed to provide an Iraqi face to the operation but,



Officers outline to US troops their plan of attack

as Cameron Begbie, a 23-year-old Marines medic from Fresno, California, explained: "It's a city that needs to be liberated, to ensure elections go down in the rest of the country. You can't have a free country when you have pockets of resistance."

The destruction of Fallujah is not the only precondition for US-style "democracy". Alongside their military campaign, the US seeks to incorporate the Iraqi clergy, both its moderate and radical wings, into the collaborators' regime.

On the one side, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, calls on Shiites to participate in the coming elections. On the other, Moqtada al-Sadr, his radical rival, uses the urban poor of Sadr city and his militia, the Mahdi army, as his card for getting a place at the collaborators' table. Sadr doesn't want to defeat impe-

rialism, but to negotiate with it. So while he stood at the centre of the two armed mass uprisings in April and August, he has now signed a ceasefire and agreed to surrender a token part of the Mahdi army's arms. He is wavering between boycotting and participating in the January elections.

The elections, planned for 27 January 2005, are central to the imperialists' pacification strategy. They hope to give the occupation a democratic legitimacy, both internationally and domestically, to integrate sectors of the Sunni and Shia bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie into the regime and therefore isolate and weaken the resistance.

So they use Saddam's food ration system to pressurise people to register and to vote. The message is clear: register, vote and eat. Boycott and

starve. And vote for what? Allawi's united national list, which will unite all the various collaborationist parties and, aping the Stalinist dictators of Eastern Europe, receive the acclaim of 99 per cent of the united and "free" people.

But in spite of their military and political power, things are not plain sailing for the imperialists.

The Allawi government backs every action the US/UK takes against the growing popular resistance as well as its grab for lucrative "reconstruction" projects. That is why members of his government, like the recently assassinated senior figure in the Iraqi oil ministry, and dozens of trainee police and soldiers routinely come under attack.

Allawi himself is well-known and despised. He was a paid agent of both the CIA and MI6. Before that he was a secret

police chief in the Ba'athist regime. In June 2003, a top Australian journalist witnessed Allawi shooting six prisoners dead, in cold blood. In short, he is a thug, doing a thug's job.

The war in Iraq is moving into a new stage where by it is no longer only a war against an illegal occupation, but it is also becoming a civil war against the collaborator Allawi and his allies.

Meanwhile, the destruction of whole cities like Fallujah will potentially create a massive upsurge in the resistance it intends to destroy, undermining the very election they are a designed to support.

In fact the elections are a referendum about the occupation. And the resistance calls for their boycott. The most senior representation of the Iraqi Sunnis - the Association of Muslim Scholars - correctly calls for a boycott of the elections because there can't be any free elections under the conditions of occupation.

Anti-war activists around the world should support this call and oppose any international recognition of the elections.

But boycotting the election cannot replace the need for a political alternative to fight the occupation. The workers, peasants and youth must organise in popular committees and militias to fight the occupation and act independently of the Islamist forces. The Islamists will never see the fight for national liberation through to the end. Iraqi workers need their own party, a revolutionary workers party, to fight for a general strike and popular armed insurrection, for the liberation of Iraq from the occupation and their own government of the workers and poor.

Bush might have won the presidential elections but he can never win the support of the people around the world - including millions of US workers and youth - for the occupation and terror against the Iraqi people. The European and US anti-war movement must take up the cause of Iraq. Their fight is our fight.

- Defend Fallujah!
- Troops out now!
- Victory to the Iraqi resistance!

Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions: a yellow union

By Jeremy Dewar

The Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) is presented by the British TUC, and important trade union general secretaries ranging from Dave Prentis through to Bob Crow, as the sole authentic trade union in Iraq.

And indeed the IFTU has grown from a small group of 400 in May 2004 to include 12 national unions today. Why? Primarily because the IFTU is the only union recognised by the US appointed interim government and because Iraqi workers (suffering from between 50 and 75 per cent unemployment) have to join in order to get a job in the new Iraq.

And unsurprisingly for an organisation, whose General Secretary Subhi al Mashadani was appointed by the US consul Paul Bremer, and who receive the active support of the CIA, it fails to oppose privatisation and refuses to call for troops out now.

It claims to have no links to the interim government, but it is dominated by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), which is part of the interim government.

The ICP - which is widely hated because of its record of collaboration with Saddam's regime in the 1970s - also supported the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which issued on 28 January 2004 its Article 16, making the IFTU the sole legal trade union.

On 13 June, the International Labour Organisation responded positively to "hundreds of trade union branches, national trade unions, trade union federations and trade union confederations in more than 40 countries around the world" asking for the UN body to condemn this breach of the ILO Conventions. The ILO also recognises the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) and the Union of Unemployed Workers in Iraq (UUI), as well as other, minor unions.

The IFTU has never opposed the CPA's Order 39, which allows Halliburton, Bechtel and co. to take over Iraq's services, nationalised industries (except oil) and infrastructure, nor has it opposed Order 30, which sets a monthly minimum wage at 69,000 Iraqi dinars at a time when rents average at between ID 25,000 and ID 50,000 a month.

Yes, the IFTU website calls abstractly for the occupation to

end but its representatives have shared platforms with Jack Straw (who also calls for an end to the occupation - in December 2005!) and Blair's repulsive apologist Ann Clwyd. It labels the resistance a "mixture of Saddam's loyalists and foreign terrorists" (according to its own website).

The IFTU even urged union delegation leaders at the Labour Party conference to break their democratic mandates (calling for troops out now) and back the occupation. Their UK representative Abdullah Muhsin told a fringe meeting that an immediate end to the occupation would be "bad for the emerging progressive forces, a terrible blow for free trade unionism, and would play into the hands of extremists and terrorists". Indeed, this one act of treachery fully exposes the role that the IFTU is playing for the imperialists: to confuse and defuse the anti-war movement, while ensuring that the emerging workers' movement in Iraq is sealed off and even opposed to the armed resistance.

The IFTU is a collaborationist yellow union, but the fact that the Southern Oil Company union, which carried out acts of solidarity (e.g. boycotting the

delivery of fuel to the occupation forces) in Najaf and Fallujah's hours of need, is still in the IFTU proves that the ICP leadership is not unopposed.

Against the IFTU leadership we call for direct links to, and solidarity with the base units of the unions under its umbrella. We specifically call for links between unions in the same branch of industry, and for solidarity with those sections that are fighting unemployment, low wages and privatisation or campaigning in solidarity with the resistance, in defence of Fallujah and Ramadi.

The other significant trade unions in Iraq mostly organise under the umbrella of the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) and the Union of Unemployed Workers in Iraq (UUI). Both these organisations are controlled by the Worker Communist Party of Iraq. While these unions bitterly oppose the interim government, they too refuse to call for an immediate end to the occupation.

Against the collaborators or abstentionists, we support militant opposition to privatisation, low wages and unemployment, for solidarity with the resistance, and for a political general strike to force out the occupation forces and establish

the election of a sovereign and constituent assembly. All unions should raise the immediate demand for an emergency plan of public works to restore and guarantee a decent standard of living for all, under the control of the working class and the poor, not Allawi's government and the multinationals.

We oppose any platform for collaborators - like Subhi al Mashadani - in the trade union, anticapitalist and anti-war movements. We support:

- Tours of trade unionists who oppose the occupation and call for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops.
- Calls for solidarity action across borders, e.g. boycotting the movement of military or civilian supplies destined for the occupation forces.
- Protests and, where possible, industrial action in support of workers' struggles against multinational companies and in solidarity with towns and cities under siege.

Above all, trade union activists need to oppose any disaffiliation from Stop the War and reaffirm union branches' commitment to calling for an immediate end to the occupation, in support of Iraqi self-determination.

Who are the Iraqi resistance?

By Bill Jefferies

The Iraqi resistance is the accepted short hand for the popular rising against the US/UK colonialists. Far from being a single coherent group united behind a single Islamic fundamentalist ideology, as is presented in the Western press, the overwhelming majority of resistance activity is spontaneous, small scale and opportunistic, responding to particular colonial outrages or opportunities presented by the occupying forces.

During August, for example, according to the US government and therefore without question an underestimate, there were over 2,700 reported separate actions against the occupiers, around 90 a day or one every 15 minutes. Just six of these were attributed to Al Qa'ida fanatics like Zarqawi, responsible for the beheading of Ken Bigley.

How has the resistance been able to achieve so much with so little?

Very simple. The majority of the Iraqi male population in Saddam's army and have military training. Saddam's armouries were systematically looted during the war and most soldiers returned home with their small arms intact. According to CIA estimates over 5 million AK 47 rifles and countless Rocket Propelled Grenades, mortars, hand-grenades and explosives remain missing.

The Iraqi working class is already



armed. It has no need of foreign finance or support. The question is to organise it as a separate and conscious force fighting for its own interests within the resistance movement.

So, although the resistance is far from united behind the Islamists, their influence is growing, something which is hardly surprising given that it is only the Islamists who have proclaimed their opposition to the colonial occupiers.

This shows that the room still exists for a distinctively working class and revolutionary socialist force within the anti-occupation insurgency.

The Sunni resistance:

1. The Iraqi National Islamic Resistance: "The 1920 Revolution Brigades". Formed around July 2003, their declared aim is to liberate Iraqi territory from foreign military and political occupation

and to establish a liberated and independent Iraqi state on an Islamic basis. As such they are fairly typical of the admixture of Islamic and nationalist politics which dominates the resistance movement. Their attacks are concentrated in the area west of Baghdad, in the regions of Abu Ghraib, Khan Dari, and Fallujah. Even so, by their own estimates they carry out just 10 operations a day, i.e. only a small fraction of the overall resistance activity.

2. The National Front for the Liberation of Iraq. Formed days after the occupation of Iraq in April 2003, it includes 10 resistance groups and consists of nationalists and Islamists. Its activities are concentrated in Arbil and Kirkuk in northern Iraq; in Fallujah, Samarra, and Tikrit in central Iraq, and in Basra and Babil Governorates in the south, in addition to Diyali Governorate in the east.

3. The Iraqi Resistance Islamic Front, 'JAMI'. The newest Sunni resistance group formed around May 2004. It includes a number of smaller organisations and is concentrated in the two governorates of Ninwi and Diyali. Antisemitic and Islamic fundamentalist, the JAMI warns against the Jewish conspiracies in Iraq.

4. Other Small Factions: Hamzah Faction, The Iraqi Liberation Army, The White Banners and the Al-Haqq Army share a similar Islamic/nationalist ideology to their larger counterparts.

5. Ba'athist Factions. In spite of US/UK propaganda about the role of former regime elements, the activities

of the Ba'athist groups are generally limited to the financing of the resistance operations, with many members of the Fedayeen abandoning the organisation for other rival Islamic or nationalist groups.

The Shiite resistance

Dominated by the Mahdi Army. Formed in July 2003, by the Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr, it has around 10,000 to 15,000 members, mainly young and in their majority recruited from the poor of Sadr City, Shu'lah, and the southern cities. The militia was not initially directed against the occupation, but starting with the closure of Sadr's Al-Hawzah newspaper in March 2004 and the arrest of Sadr's assistant Mustafa al-Ya'qubi, the al-Mahdi Army was placed in direct confrontation with the occupation forces in Baghdad and the southern governorates. This erupted in Najaf in August 2004 and continued for nearly three weeks, before ending with the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the two sides.

In addition there are tiny groups, many linked with Al Qa'ida, who undertake kidnappings and suicide attacks, such as the Assadullah Brigades, the Islamic Retaliation Movement, the Islamic Anger Brigades, the Khalid-Bin-al-Walid Brigades, Iraq's Martyrs Brigades, the Black Banners Group, The Abu-Mus'ab al-Zarqawi Group, The Al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad Group and the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Ansar al-Sunnah Movement.

US military performance in Iraq deteriorates

By James Thorpe

In the first 18 months of the US occupation of Iraq, the military situation has become less and less favourable for 'the world's only superpower'. Their casualty rate has risen and they are dominating smaller areas. Their response - to increase troop levels - is fraught with difficulty as it fuels the insurgency.

Rising casualties...

In the first six months from May 2003, the US suffered an average of 38 dead per month; in the subsequent 12 months the average rate has been 63 dead per month (with wounded running at around ten times the number of dead throughout the period).

The first month to break the 80 mark was November 2003. This record was surpassed, however by April 2004 (135 dead, and a further 81 in the following month), thanks to the violent attack on Fallujah, in which nearly a thousand Iraqi civilians were killed. None of the past four months has seen less than 50 US soldiers die - and in September the total was 80 again.

This process of attrition by no means takes place in the areas that British newspapers and broadcasters indicate as scenes of important combat.

For example, the media focused on "heavy fighting" against the Moqtada al-Sadr militia for control of Najaf in August 2004; in fact, during that month, only 10 GIs were killed in Najaf, while eleven were killed in Baghdad, and 26, mostly Marines, were killed in

and around Fallujah.

...doing less...

One explanation for rising US casualties might be that the troops have been fighting harder, and achieving more; extra deaths were the price of success. Sadly for the occupiers, this is not the case. On the contrary, over time they have done less, and controlled less.

In June 2003, they carried out over 2,000 patrols per day. By November this had fallen to 1,500, by December to 500. What became apparent in 2004 was that large areas of Iraq were no longer controlled by occupation forces.

...with more troops

Immediately after the invasion, it was planned to reduce US troops from 140,000 to little over 30,000 by September 2003. However, by the end of the year there were still 130,000 US troops in Iraq. A rotation planned to begin in January would have reduced the force level to 100,000, but this plan too was scrapped and by May 2004 the number of US troops had grown back to 138,000, with no planned reduction until 2005.

Now the US plans to up its own force to 142,000. These developments smack of the road the US government took in Vietnam.

Mutiny?

The worsening material conditions for US troops is bound to have an effect on morale. However, danger, death and year-long separations from family are part of the deal they signed up for; it's what they expected. Much more dam-

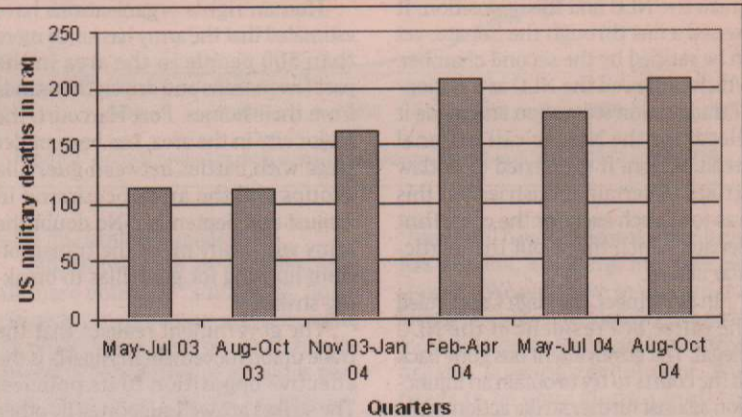
aging is the uneasiness arising from the gap between the mission they were led to expect, i.e. the spreading of "freedom" to Iraq, and the daily reality before their eyes.

Eighteen soldiers were demoted and reassigned in October, following a well publicised refusal to make a delivery of helicopter fuel. They described the task as a "suicide mission", and pointed out that the fuel was, in any case, contaminated and unusable. They did not execute their officers, or lay down their arms and head for home; rather, they refused a specific mission, because they judged it a fool's errand.

This limited, and highly reasonable insubordination echoes the French mutinies of 1917, in which troops refused to attack German lines, but remained at their posts, informing the generals:

"You have nothing to fear, we are prepared to man the trenches, we will do our duty, and the Bosche will not get through." Nonetheless even this mutiny terrified the French command, all too aware how the defiance of orders can become an endemic problem threatening the whole mission if allowed to go unchecked.

The problem for the US high command is that, with no WMD found and the Iraqi people palpably suffering more under occupation than in the pre-invasion period, GIs are able to characterise the entire operation in Iraq as a "fool's errand", legitimising the rejection of any component mission they don't like the look of.



A rising toll. US military deaths in Iraq, since 1st May 2003, by three month periods (quarters).

The attacks on US troops are individually small scale affairs, easy to organise among a population with near universal military training, in a country awash with weapons and explosives - 250,000 tonnes of unaccounted for munitions mean the resistance have to all intents and purposes unlimited supplies. But these individually small scale affairs are collectively, very, very numerous.

October 2004 provides a snapshot of US fatalities. The Pentagon has so far

reported that sixty-one soldiers died in the month. Of these, it briefly stated the circumstances of the death in forty-two cases. (The other 19 were all Marines, who are always listed as killed simply "by enemy action".) Of the 42:

- 24 (57%) involved an improvised explosive device.
- 11 (26%) involved small arms fire.
- 2 (5%) were caused by long-range fire (i.e. mortars or rockets).

Vehicles crashes and other incidents accounted for the rest.

The limits of power

Being the world's number one technological military power is critically important if you have to fight the world's number two (e.g. in the now redundant NATO versus Warsaw Pact scenario) but not otherwise. Being equipped with the superb F-15 fighter is useful if your opponent has any sort of airforce, but it is irrelevant if they don't.

This problem extends to the entire US war machine. A \$350bn defence budget sounds good but only a small proportion of those capabilities are useful against Iraqi opponents who ride in cars and use home-made bombs. Thus the war in Iraq has demonstrated the limited usefulness of conventional military forces in colonial occupation.

American military power is formi-

dable, but only in the game it is designed to play. Woe betide whoever takes literally the Spanish word "guerrilla" (little war), because guerrilla fighters aren't small versions of conventional enemies. Rather, they choose to fight in ways which make many of the occupiers' material advantages redundant: in short, they cut him down to size.

Hence the enthusiasm with which American commanders have studied Israeli counter-insurgency in Palestine and, in the build up to Fallujah, the experience of the Russians in the Chechen war. It is possible to crush a national resistance movement, but only at a terrible price, not the 100,000 Iraqis already dead, but millions of Iraqi casualties. And even then victory is not assured.

Nigeria: general strike can defeat the government

Another confrontation is imminent between Nigerian workers and the government, one that could lead to either a decisive victory for workers or a defeat that would open the road to even greater neoliberal attacks, *writes Keith Spencer*

Workers in Nigeria are set to go out on indefinite general strike from 16 November. The main trade union

federation the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) called the action after a breakdown in talks with the government over another fuel price increase. The strike follows on from a four-day general strike last month that brought industry and government to a standstill and a three-day general strike in June. Both had enormous popular support throughout the country.

But since the first strike in June the government has used its full range of legal and military powers to try and break the NLC and the opposition. It passed a law through the Senate, yet to be ratified by the second chamber, which outlawed the NLC as a national trade union federation and made it illegal for the NLC to call national strike action. It even tried to outlaw strikes in certain industries but this was too much even for the compliant Senate, which threw out that particular clause.

In September, the High Court ruled the office of President of the NLC illegal. The government has gone back to the courts to try to obtain an injunction against further strike action while Shell, which is the biggest oil compa-

ny in Nigeria, has gone to the courts to prevent white collar and blue collar oil unions from joining the strike. In both cases the judge postponed the hearings to the 18 November, two days after the indefinite strike begins.

The police have also attacked workers demonstrations and harassed trade unionists including the leaders, such as NLC President Adams Oshiomole.

Meanwhile, the largest oil producing area, the Delta, is under military occupation by 5,000 troops sent there to put down a revolt by an Ijaw organisation, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteers Force. This group had threatened an "all out war" on Shell's and Agip's oil production.

Human rights organisations have estimated that the army has killed more than 500 people in the area in the past few months and driven thousands from their homes. Port Harcourt, the major city in the area, has been under siege with battles between guerrilla groups and the army occurring in August and September. No doubt the army will easily make the transition from hunting for guerrillas to breaking strikes.

The government realises that the trade union movement in Nigeria is the effective opposition to its policies. The strikes are well supported by other unions such as the white-collar feder-

ation, the Trades Union Congress, and 30 or more civil society and ethnic groups. Recently, these groups have formed the Labour and Civil Society Coalition to organise and prosecute the strikes.

The NLC has been leading the campaign against the government's neoliberal policies for the past four years and has gained in popularity, as its strikes have grown in solidarity.

These strikes have mainly centred on the rising price of fuel. Nigeria is one of the top 10 producers of oil in the world and is the fifth biggest exporter to the United States. In a country where 70 per cent of the 120 million people live on less than a dollar a day, subsidised cheap fuel is the only benefit of this oil bonanza. But the government of President Olesugun Obasanjo has set out to raise the price of fuel to a "true market price" and cut subsidies.

In June, the government tried to raise the price to more than 50 Naira a litre (about 20 pence) but settled for a price in the low 40s. In September, the government tried again to raise the price, which sparked the recent workers' action.

To buy off the NLC trade union leaders, the government set up a committee that proposed some tax reductions but did not budge on the question



Thousands of people marched through Lagos, Nigeria's biggest city, in a show of support for an upcoming general strike

of halting the price rise.

The unions rejected the committee's deal and set out to plan the November action.

But despite the militancy of the workers and the support of the civil society organisations, the trade union leaders have squandered chance after chance to deliver a knockout blow to the government. Even the four-day general strike in October saw the oil industry relatively unhindered, although in the November strike the NLC plans to disrupt oil production.

Oshiomole and his fellow leaders have led workers out on strike for a few days, action which has been solid, and then led them back to work for more negotiations with the government. There has been a general strike every year for the past five years and yet the conflict between unions and government has continued with no side having outright victory. Only an indefinite general strike can force the government to abandon one of its key policies and open the road to removing it from power.

The development of links between unions and civil society organisations is a progressive move that can contribute to victory. Workers and activists need to set up local councils of action in all the major towns and cities to run the strike. With local control and by developing links with other such bod-

ies regionally and nationally they can guard against a sell out by the national leaders.

These committees should organise effective picketing – the June strike saw innovative flying pickets on motorbikes and columns of union trucks to enforce the strike. They could take on the distribution of fuel to emergency services like hospitals and take charge of the transport and distribution of food.

In the unions, especially the NLC, rank and file activists should organise committees to close down industries, plants, firms and government offices – and crucially to help fight for control of the strike from below rather than leave it in the hands of trade union leaders. Furthermore, trade union strike committees and labour and civil society organisations need to organise nationally to build an effective leadership to stop the government.

The NLC this year launched a Labour Party but one under the influence of its reformist and pro-market programme. What is needed is a revolutionary workers party that can unite trade unionists, civil society bodies, ethnic groups and young people, who are often the most militant in these struggles, and fight for the revolutionary transformation of society. A rank and file led general strike with local councils of action taking over the leadership and co-ordinating nationally would give an enormous opportunity to build such a party.

Those fighting for such a party need to raise demands to oust Obasanjo and his cronies, to nationalise the oil industry and other sectors of the economy and to fight for a workers government. Furthermore key to the successful winning of the indefinite general strike will be defending picket lines and activists from police and army violence. This would mean arming the strikers and their supporters and laying the basis for building a militia that could fight for and defend a workers government.

A general strike poses the question of who runs society. If the government is victorious, maybe by making a few concessions and buying off the union leaders, it will continue its privatisations and kow-towing to the multinationals like Shell, causing greater misery and poverty, and suppressing all the national and ethnic struggles of the masses.

However, the general strike opens the possibility of the workers leading other sections of society such as ethnic organisations and youth groups towards a struggle for power and a socialist future. Such a result would act as a beacon to workers and peasants all over Africa.

That is how high the stakes are in Nigeria in November. And that is why the workers need to take control of their own future.

Swedish postal workers flex muscles for pay rise

By Jens-Hugo Nyberg, post worker, Stockholm

Postal workers across Europe are feeling their pay and working conditions threatened as the bosses use creeping privatisation to demand lower wages and higher productivity. Sweden is no exception.

For many years now, the wages of post workers in Sweden have been lagging behind, and are among the lowest of all wage earners in the country.

The Swedish Post was previously state run, but has been commercialised for over a decade; now it is intended to run it for profit. The state monopoly was lifted at the same time, so now

arguments about profit can be used against workers demanding better pay. For the last couple of years the Post has been losing money – which didn't stop it from throwing bonuses at the managers – but can this year show a considerable profit, so the workers this year expected a pay rise.

SEKO – the union for services and communications, of which the post workers are part – this time did threaten a strike: the workers at three post sorting offices around Stockholm were due to strike beginning on 25 October at 4 pm – the first post strike in living memory in Sweden.

No other post workers, like delivery workers, were called out at this point. But as those in Stockholm and the surrounding towns would get no post to

deliver during the strike, a lock out was to be expected, should the strike take place.

The issues were about wages and job security. The union demanded a pay rise of at least 3.2 per cent as well as higher wages for new workers: a starting salary of 14,000 skr (about £1,000) a month, with three annual steps up to 18,000 skr.

However, on the evening before the strike was to begin, SEKO signed a three-year deal: the strike was called off. It was not a total defeat; the agreed pay after three years as a post worker is to be 17,500 skr, which will mean an improvement for the rookies, and the attacks against job security for older workers were withdrawn.

The union leaders claimed it

was a partial success – and the paper of the supposedly radical syndicalist union SAC called it a victory. However, the general pay raise was merely 2.4 per cent, which will in no way stop us from lagging further behind. There was widespread discontent amongst the workers – indeed three years ago many were angry we only got 3 per cent – so it's not the first time that they feel the union has let them down.

SEKO, like other big unions, is controlled by bureaucrats, most of them social democrats. The cancelled post strike shows once again the need to build a rank and file movement to oust the right wing leaders and make the unions organs of class struggle – or we will continue to be stuck with 2.4 per cent.

Climate change: How can we save the planet?

Stuart King reviews *How can we save the planet?* By Mayer Hillman with Tina Fawcett, Penguin Books 2004 £7.99.

Once you have read this book you will realise that Mayer Hillman's question is no polemical exaggeration. He lays out with the utmost clarity the causes and consequences of what could become the greatest challenge to humanity – climate change.

Global warming is caused by human activity adding large amounts of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, thus increasing the amount of heat that is trapped within it. The most important greenhouse gas in this respect is carbon dioxide (CO₂) which is produced by using fossil fuels for energy – coal, oil and gas.

Other less important contributors include methane gas – farting animals! – and clearing forests. Several hundred years of deforestation of the planet contributed one fifth of the additional CO₂ in the atmosphere.

While the build up of CO₂ in the atmosphere began in earnest with the industrial revolution the last few decades have seen a runaway increase in emissions (see diagram), having doubled since the mid 1960s, tripled since the 1950s. If nothing significant is done by the end of the century they will be five times the current level.

DEVASTATING IMPACT

What effect will this have? Global temperature has already increased by 0.6°C during the 20th century. The 1990s was the warmest decade of the twentieth century. August 2003 saw a new UK record temperature of 38.5°C (over 100°F); 35,000 people are estimated to have died in Europe during that summer's heatwave. No wonder the UK government scientist dared suggest that this was a greater threat than the one posed by "terrorism".

But global warming also produces more rain in certain areas and more flooding. In July this year 600 died in floods in Bangladesh, the worst for six years, and a few weeks later the capital Dhaka was completely underwater – the worst flood in half a century.

Rising sea levels due to melting ice-caps and glaciers add to the problem: heavily populated river delta areas in Bangladesh and China will gradually be inundated; some island nations will disappear. The Thames Barrier, built in 1982, is now seen as inadequate for the coming decades. Between November 2000 and March 2001 it was closed 23 times; normally it is closed two or three times a year. Sea levels around Britain are 10 centimetres higher than they were in 1900.

All this is happening with a 0.6°C increase in the last century. The predictions of temperature increase by the end of this century range up to a 6°C increase, with northern North America and parts of Asia rising by 10°C. To put it in perspective such rises in southern England would lead to Sahara-type conditions!

But even this is not certain. World climate is complex; there might be "positive feedback" as the temperatures

soar, reinforcing the temperature climb. The Amazon forests might turn to Savannah losing a massive "carbon sink" – forest that absorbs CO₂. Warming oceans might release huge deposits of frozen methane stored under the arctic, leading to runaway temperature rise. The Gulf Stream which warms the UK and part of western Europe could reduce or fail, leading to a fall in temperature of 5°C resulting in equally catastrophic effects for our climate.

Such dramatic climate changes would wipe out many species. Desertification and flooding could dramatically effect food production. Hundreds of millions of climate refugees could be forced from their homes. Sustaining the nine or ten billion world population of 2050 could become very difficult indeed under such circumstances.

DOING LITTLE

It is little wonder, therefore, that even the world's politicians are having to take notice. Tony Blair says he will use the British presidency of the G8 to make climate change a major question for discussion. But the results of the Kyoto Treaty show that the capitalist politicians have little stomach for pursuing the actions necessary.

The Kyoto Protocol was signed in 1992 under the auspices of the UN. Its aim was to cut emissions of the main greenhouse gases. Its target was to reduce the industrialised countries' emissions by 5 per cent by 2010. The aim was largely symbolic – to kickstart the development of technology that would reduce emissions. This would then be used as a basis for more realistic cuts.

In fact Kyoto has become a symbol of the failure of the major powers to take global warming seriously. George Bush led the way declaring in 2001 that the USA, the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, was not going to ratify the treaty. The US, he said, could not hit the targets and to try and do so would be damaging to business and the economy. Even in Europe, ten of the fifteen EU member states are likely to miss their targets by a wide margin.

Labour's record

Tony Blair likes to be upbeat, to trumpet Britain as a world leader in its targets to cut emissions. It is certainly true that the current Labour government has committed itself to reduce CO₂ emissions by one fifth by 2010 (more than its EU/Kyoto target of 12.5 per cent) and by 60 per cent by 2050.

Blair of course had the "advantage" that Margaret Thatcher and John Major had dramatically de-industrialised the British economy and closed most of the coal mines. And recently the Blair government has been backtracking on reduction of CO₂ emissions because of pressure from business.

Mayer Hillman points out that there are real contradictions between Labour's words and its actions. For example, the Kyoto Protocol excludes emissions from international aviation because agreement could not be reached on how to measure its impact.

What is known is that flight emissions' contribution to global warming is three times greater than indicated by their mass, because they are emitted in the high atmosphere.

Britain has led the way in pioneering cheap air travel, doubling the number of passenger kilometres flown between 1990 and 2000 from 120 to 260 billion. Government predicts that air travel will continue to grow, which Hillman says will "negate at least half the government's efforts to combat global warming" by 2010.

Add to this the abandonment of targets to reduce car miles driven in relation to public transport and predicted 17 per cent increase in road traffic by 2010, the target for transport emissions by 2010 is not a cut but to keep it at a level with the year 2000.

Hillman ends by concluding that while the government might meet its Kyoto target, the one fifth reduction by 2020 looks doubtful. He also concludes that the foundations are not being laid to get anywhere near the 60-80 per cent reductions by 2050. Yet these are essential targets to meet in Britain and the world if the impact of global warming is to be reduced for future generations.

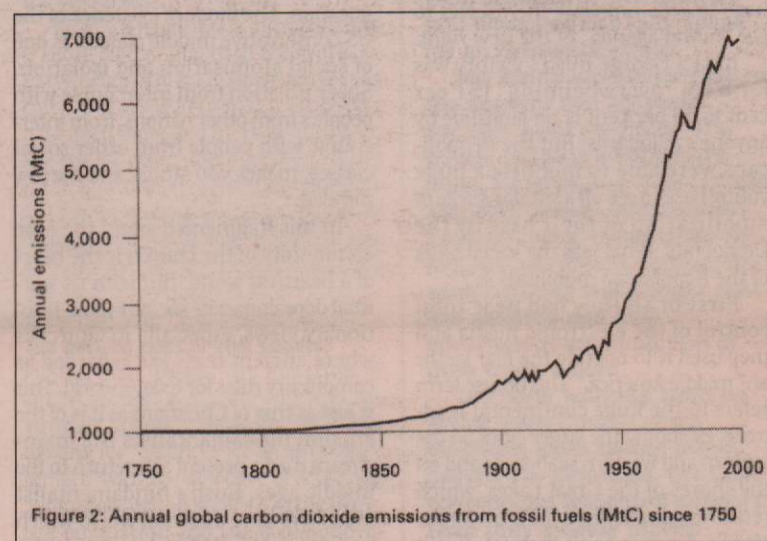
Again and again the book makes the point that the effects of current levels of emissions will work their way through to climate change for generations. Changes now and in the next ten years will only make a significant impact on the pace of global warming 40, 50 or even 100 years down the line – and those changes are not even being contemplated.

WISHFUL THINKING

In this sense *How We Can Save the Planet* paints a fairly bleak picture of the future. A whole section of the book is devoted to the holy grail of solving the problem – new environmentally friendly methods of energy production. The solution to the problem of global warming is deceptively simple: reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and move to renewable energy sources. Hillman thinks that relying on the magic bullet of such technology is wishful thinking.

He looks at renewable energy, energy efficiency measures, alternative vehicle technologies, the hydrogen economy, carbon sequestration (removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere) and nuclear energy. All of them can make a contribution, he argues, none of them can even approach the dramatic cuts in CO₂ emissions necessary.

For example renewable energy currently supplies a mere 1.4 per cent of primary energy needs. The government target is for renewables to provide 10 per cent of electricity by 2010. Windpower is the most likely prospect for rapid expansion. Britain has a favourable position and climate for it. To provide 10 per cent of electricity would require 10,000 wind turbines (ten times the existing number). Yet there is massive environmental opposition. Offshore turbines are a possibility but much more expensive. And windpower is an unreliable source –



with intermittent generation.

Similar problems are described with all these potential "solutions". Solar power is very expensive and unreliable for our climate, wave power technology is still being developed and is perhaps ten or more years off, "bioenergy" (plant material used for fuel) would use up huge amounts of arable land to make even a small impact. On transport, one of the most important areas to reduce emissions, efficiency can be increased most hopefully through "hybrid cars", but here too the technology is problematic.

To read these problems is to understand why the question of nuclear power has recently split the green movement. Nuclear power stations currently provide 25 per cent of UK electricity. No new stations have been built since Sizewell B came into full operation in 1996. By 2035 they will all have outlived their working life and the contribution of this zero emission sector of energy production will decline to zero. What will fill the gap? Gas or oil power stations.

Hillman outlines the problems with building new nuclear power stations. The risk of accidents like Chernobyl, the problem with waste, the costs of safely dismantling existing power stations (£85 billion is a guess). Yet, say people like James Lovelock, a famous and early environmentalist, the risks of nuclear power are known and can be controlled; the risks and consequences of global warming are running out of control.

Hillman has a different solution as to how we can save the planet. It is to abandon the energy consuming lifestyles that we have adopted. Society will have to be completely re-ordered:

"travel will have to become more local, less frequent, less energy intensive and slower". We will have to give up our foreign holidays, work will have to be local, foreign foods imports reduced, organic farming encouraged. This needs to be done alongside all the measures to develop environmentally friendly technologies which on their own will not solve the real threat of global warming.

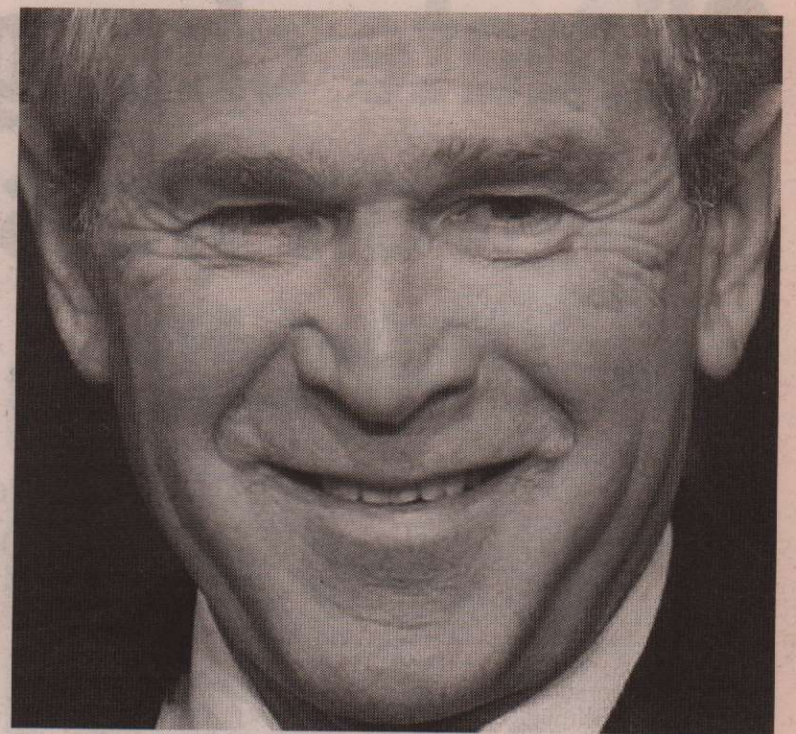
Hillman and Tina Fawcett's proposals, however, work within the framework of the continuing existence of a profit driven society which give their international solutions – where the big capitalist states agree to dramatically curtail pollution and hit profits while at the same time making massive transfers of wealth to the developing world through "carbon exchange systems" – a high degree of utopianism.

Unfortunately it is only when their very system faces the abyss, when their actions force the state to act in all their collective interests, that such a solution would be adopted on an international level. By that time global warming will be out of control.

There are no simple solutions to this massive crisis. Even a world socialist republic would have to grapple with this legacy of environmental degradation. But it would have the enormous advantage of doing it by mobilising the whole of society, and it would not be hobbled by the profit motive in deciding what should be produced and how. Without an emergency plan to tackle global warming, one debated and adopted by the multi-millioned masses around the world, the planet will certainly not be saved from the impact of global warming.

As Bush promises new attacks - don't mourn, organise!

In his first speech after the election, Bush declared "I have the political capital. I intend to spend it." *Dave Stockton* looks at why the Democrats' challenge failed and how US workers and the poor need to build their own party



In the USA supple-spined commentators are already doing what they did back in the Thatcher era in Britain. They are treating Bush's victory as marking a "sea change", arguing that the Democrats, like Labour before them, will simply have to accommodate themselves to the "moral agenda" of the new right. In fact George Bush's victory was far from "overwhelming" (51 per cent to 49 per cent is no landslide by anyone's standards. But the Republicans were able to mobilise a huge voting base to see off a similar surge of mobilisation of their base by the Democrats. What was the social basis of the Republican mobilisation?

First of all they had near total control of the electronic media and they used it to operate the fear factor on "middle America." This obtuse term refers to the huge continental land-mass, excluding the larger cities on the eastern and western seaboard and on the shores of the Great Lakes, which remain strongholds of the Democrats. Middle America is all the rest. But it now includes the outer suburban developments where privileged white professionals have gone to avoid the inner cities where live blacks, Latinos and "white trash" - i.e. the working class and the urban poor.

Ironically middle America is the part of the USA which has no likelihood whatsoever of becoming a target of Al-Qa'ida terror attacks. But this has made no difference when it come to the effect of the suspiciously convenient showing of the Osama bin Laden tape a few days before the poll.

Despite - or perhaps because of - their bloated but insecure privileges, this segment of the population has always been easiest to panic about an Armageddon threatening America. A pathological amount of bible reading and a diet of Hollywood 'good guys versus bad guys' movies lays the psycho-cultural foundations of the "holy simplicity" that predisposes millions to the message of the "religious right."

Likewise the religious right can lead millions by the nose about their country's inner cities because they never see them, except on screen. They imagine them as a veritable Sodom and Gomorrah, as simmering cauldrons of gay sex, mockery of marriage and religion, of promiscuity and wholesale abortion, just waiting for the divine wrath to descend and burn them up. Now with his mandate Bush can launch a systematic assault on women's and gay rights, on the separation of church and state and church and school.

The US people are far from being the ignoramuses some snobbish European commentators make out. The working class militants, the millions of working class voters who voted against Bush, the million people who

marched in defence of abortion rights, the organisers of the hundreds of anticapitalist and antiwar actions of the last five years hate Bush and know well what he stands for.

Intelligence and stupidity are not national or racial questions. It is a class question. The mode of existence of the US conservative middle classes, is one of social atomisation and isolation. Sheer isolation from intercourse with people's from other nations, from intercourse with people from other social classes, makes you stupid and narrow minded.

In this fragmented world the false community of the church is the heart of a heartless world. But with its spiritual dope comes its socially ultra-reactionary views, especially in churches where ancient texts are regarded as compulsory rules for today's world. This is just as true of Christians as it is of the Muslim fundamentalists the mainstream media present as a return to the middle ages. Bush's fundamentalist preachers have a mental world which pre-dates the Enlightenment, the American and the scientific revolutions quite as much as Wahabi imams or Shi'ite mullahs.

An aggressive resistance to the attempt to bring back religious teachings and restrictions into the schools, the hospitals, the courts, must be resisted and the left should combine this with vigorous secular, atheist propaganda.

In addition to the middle classes a significant minority of the white working class has switched from the Democrats to the Republicans, those who have lost their jobs in unionised and relatively well-paid factories and mines and had to take on precarious, badly paid and unorganised work. Many have had to move far away from the working class communities to areas with no labor movement traditions. And the blue collar unions in the AFL-CIO have little or nothing for these workers

John Kerry in his speech of capitulation urged the union members, women, black and Hispanic voters and activists who had campaigned for him in their hundreds of thousands and voted for him in their tens of millions to unite with their hated foe, George W Bush. Unite with him whilst he attacks their democratic rights, like the right to abortion? Unite with him whilst he shifts the tax burden even further from the rich to the poor? Unite with him whilst he attacks workers jobs, pension rights, union rights? Unite with him whilst he sends their sons and daughters to kill and be killed in Iraq and possibly Iran?

Unity or confrontation?

In fact the 2004 election demonstrates the total fiction of all Kerry's nauseating talk of national unity. When Bush demands national unity it

is behind his agenda, i.e. he is calling for surrender.

Between the America of the rich and powerful - a tiny minority and their middle class dupes and the half of the nation made up of the working class and the racially oppressed and disadvantaged there is a huge gulf.

The election revealed a country polarised by Bush and the Iraq war. The right will now control all three branches of government - the presidency, both houses of the of Congress and soon the top judiciary too. A series of Supreme Court appointments by Bush during his next term of office will decisively shift the Court to the right, and will possibly lead to the overturn of the

"We say let's give them all the war they want - wars of national liberation in the Middle East and the class war everywhere including in Europe and in the USA"

Roe v. Wade ruling on abortion rights.

Kerry was a totally useless candidate behind whom to rally the anti-war, pro-working class, even the pro-democratic rights forces. He was a totally compromised figure, facing both ways on key issues. He criticised the war in Iraq as "the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time" but both he and his vice presidential running mate, John Edwards, voted for it.

Indeed, Kerry absolutely refused any pledge to withdraw the troops. Instead, he promised to fight the war more effectively. Sure the Democrats thus tried to capitalise on the antiwar feelings of more than one-third of the US population, yet they still supported the occupation of Iraq, even the impending assault on Fallujah.

Massive mobilisation

Likewise Kerry and Edwards tried at one and the same time to bemoan the economic hardships facing working people and promise a return to fiscal austerity which would mean that promises such as a health care system would be broken even more quickly than the Clintons did it last time around.

The Kerry campaign benefited from a massive mobilisation of activists, especially young people from the anticapitalist and antiwar movement, who followed the lead of people like Michael Moore, Noam Chomsky and trade unionists, most notably Andy Stern leader of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

SEIU is the largest and fastest growing trade union in the AFL-CIO, with

1.6 million workers in a whole range of occupations - health care, public services, building, etc. It mobilised 2000 members fulltime in the campaign and spent US\$65m on it. SEIU activists went to live in very poor neighbourhoods, reviving the Democratic machine where it was moribund. It is not these people campaigning to get out the vote that has failed. It is the candidate and the party they were campaigning for who failed them. But why did they waste their time and money on Kerry?

Kerry is a typical modern Democrat. An aloof north-easterner, stinking rich but with "old money". Bush is an upstart populist compared to Kerry. He can mimic the language of ordinary folks whilst fully intending to rob them blind.

Nothing more radical than Kerry can be expected to make it through the Democratic machine. And even if they did they would not get the billions needed to mount a winning presidential campaign. In the land of the free the one thing which most certainly is not free is its "democracy". It comes with a multi-billion dollar price tag.

But the big problem is that the Democrats are and always will be a party of the billionaires. Out of favour with the majority of that class certainly, but charged with the task of keeping the working class, the Black and other racially oppressed communities and the poor under control and out of politics.

Break with the Democrats!

The Democrats prevent the working class from building a party which can fight for their interests on an everyday basis, in the workplaces, on the streets, in the inner cities.

Such a party could use all these struggles to prepare the working class - black and white - for a decisive struggle for power. Elections would be a way to spread awareness of its programme and count the growth of its support but only if this party intransigently refused to trade a single workers vote to the Democrats or maverick populists like Ralph Nader.

The task now is, in the words of Joe Hill: "not to mourn but to organise!"

It is vital for the activists to turn back to activity on the streets and in the workplaces but above all to begin the struggle to build an alternative to the Democrats, a new party of the working class. The SEIU for example was preparing an offensive for healthcare for all on day one of a Kerry administration: the union leadership has been wrong footed by their lost bet on Kerry. The rank and file now needs to challenge Andy Stern and the leadership to carry on with that campaign but to realise that it will take mass action, direct action, organisation, to get anywhere.

Above all Stern needs to be politically challenged on his lifelong loyalty to the Democrats. What all the

unions and the working class need is not a revived Democrat laborism but a party of Labor, patiently but intransigently won over to an anticapitalist, i.e. a socialist programme.

The millions of union dollars, the tens of thousands of union activists might be small beer when it come to getting a president elected but deployed in the deprived inner cities, in the workplaces, on the campuses they could eventually mobilise millions in action for their own interests.

They could start a huge organising drive like that which launched the CIO in the early 1930s. they could penetrate the strongholds of the right turning the workers and the poor who voted for Bush from hopeless victims back into class fighters with hope in a better America, a better world. Revolutionary socialism, communism, can be reborn in the USA.

As a first step to this socialists in the United States need to place demands on all the key figures who have opposed the war and who lead the unions, to unite to convene a congress of Labor. This should be open to all socialist organisations, the whole spectrum of the anti-capitalist movement, unionists both those for an independent party and Labor Democrats.

Congress of Labor

This congress could do two things. Firstly it could hammer out an action plan to resist Bush - including such questions as defence of workers and women's rights (abortion, etc) and campaigns for a health service, against the war and for the immediate recall of US troops from Iraq.

Secondly, it could start a democratic debate in every union local, in every college, in all the communities of the exploited and oppressed as to how they can win real political representation at local, state and national level and how to struggle for the power to totally change the basis of society whilst building up that power from below day by day.

This new movement must link up to the forces all over the world that are fighting imperialism and capitalist globalisation and build a new Fifth International.

William Tecumseh Sherman, a famous Northern commander in the US Civil War once said,

"War is the remedy that our enemies have chosen, and I say let us give them all they want."

War - on the workers, on the racially oppressed, on the poor, on women, on the peoples of middle east and the developing world - is the remedy Bush and the neocons have chosen.

We say lets give them all the war they want - wars of national liberation in the middle east and the class war everywhere including in Europe and in the USA.

A new left party in Brazil

The Party for Socialism and Liberty, popularly abbreviated to P-SOL, was founded in June 2004. The "Party of the Sun" originates in an initiative taken by left parliamentarians who were expelled last year from the governing Workers' Party, the PT. *John Wagner* asks if it offers an alternative to Lula's Workers Party



Brazilian workers march against Lula's neoliberal reforms

Lula's government was elected to office at the end of 2002 with massive support from the Brazilian working class. For the first time in the history of the country, a former worker sat in the presidential office. The party, born in the struggles of the engineering workers of São Paulo at the beginning of the 1980s, now stood at the very pinnacle of the state.

However, anybody who believed that this workers' party would act in the interests of the workers was going to be very quickly disillusioned. Once in office, Lula began to attack the workers. In the public service sector, the pensionable age was raised while the value of the pension was reduced. In Brasília, Lula allowed tear gas to be used against tens of thousands of protesting teachers.

Since its foundation, the workers' party has been a home for a range of left currents: Maoists, supporters of Gramsci, left Catholics and would-be Trotskyists. As early as 1994, a Trotskyist current was expelled and this went on to found the United Socialist Workers' Party (PSTU). Other tendencies remained in the workers' party in order to work their way up the party apparatus. The biggest of these was Socialist Democracy, the Brazilian section of the Fourth International.

Militants jailed

Although it was clear that Lula could only govern in the interests of the ruling class, Socialist Democracy entered his government. A leading member, Miguel Rossetto, became the Minister for Land Reform.

His promises, that he would "push the government to the left" and "advance the self organisation of the peasants" were quickly revealed as just

empty talk.

Several important leaders of the landless movement, the MST, were jailed for illegal land occupations. In total, Rossetto has distributed less land to poor peasants than his predecessor in the right wing Cardoso government.

Nonetheless, when Lula began to attack the past gains of the working-class via the pension reform, some members on the left of the party refused to support this. In Congress, four members voted against the government's draft law and, as a result, were unceremoniously expelled from the party.

The most well-known of these is the popular senator, Heloisa Helena. She is a member of Socialist Democracy but, despite this, has not supported its openly treacherous policy. Now she has founded a new current, Red Liberty as a "public faction" of Socialist Democracy, although this has not been recognised by the party for all practical purposes.

This means that, at the moment, the Fourth International has got two Brazilian sections. Helena criticises her comrades' participation in government but is not prepared to demand either their immediate exit from government or their expulsion from the Fourth International if they remain in office.

Helena and three other members of Congress (two from Trotskyist currents and one from a left-Christian group) formed the leading nucleus of the new party.

A revolutionary or reformist programme

The politics of the P-SOL are defined more clearly by what is left out than by what is included. The party demands a "new constitution" based on "the universal right to vote" (which has existed in Brazil for 15

years!) without mentioning that capitalist "democracy" is only a concealed dictatorship of the capitalists and has to be overthrown by the working class using revolutionary means.

They demand "the democratisation of the police forces and, above all, the army" without mentioning that the apparatus of repression of the bourgeois state cannot be "reformed away" but has to be destroyed.

There is not a single word about the right of the oppressed to self defence (an important demand in a country where landless peasants are regularly murdered by the big landlords!).

Not to mention the necessity that the working class will need to establish militias to ensure its own self-defence.

In the section dealing with women's rights, there is no demand for the unlimited right to abortion. That has not been left out because of a lack of room. Sections of the Catholic Church belong to the P-SOL, for example the parliamentarian Joao Fontes, who opposes this demand and must not be offended.

In general, socialism is characterised as the "horizon" (and, as is well known, one can never actually reach the horizon!) Meanwhile the day to day practice of the party is limited to the struggle for "popular reforms". The programme presents no organic connection between the daily struggles of the masses and the struggle for socialism, what Marxists call the transitional method.

The socialist revolution does not appear a single time as a strategic objective in the programme of P-SOL. That is to say, it is not made clear anywhere how the party might achieve its demands. However, the programmatic uncertainty of P-SOL is clarified by its unmistakable electoral practice.

The P-SOL wants "the political independence of the workers and the excluded". However, the only demand related to this is "rejection of sharing government office with the ruling class".

What kind of government the new party is positively fighting for is left open: the perspective of a workers' government, based on the fighting organisations of the class, for example workers' councils and not on parliament, is not mentioned.

Even before the new party has worked out a clear programme it is already fighting for votes for the next presidential election. The party's orientation can be seen from posters which were available at the founding Congress with the slogan "Once again a hope, Heloisa 2006", before the party even actually existed!

In comparison to this, one should not forget that the Workers' Party, in its first years, emphasised that "participation in elections and parliamentary activity has to be subordinated to the objective of organising the oppressed and their struggles" and that it boycotted presidential elections until the year 1989.

What we have here is a strategy that is more electoralist than the Workers' Party originally had! However, just as the Workers' Party had to subordinate itself more and more politically to the ruling class, and ended up ruling for it, because it had no clear perspective for socialist revolution in Brazil, so the new party will equally be forced into compromise with the ruling class if it does not try to overthrow it.

The working class or civil society?

P-SOL also fudges the question of which section of society will lead the struggle against capitalism. P-SOL is looking for "alliances for an alternative project" with the objective of achieving "unity between all sections of the working population and the social movements, the rural workers, the landless, the small farmers, the urban middle classes, the liberal professions, the academics and the opinion formers who are being pushed further and further apart by finance capital."

That such an alliance needs to be politically led by the working class and have as its purpose the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is left unsaid. If one takes this declaration literally, it means that the new party is looking for small employers and media-owners as allies with whom it can advance against a common enemy, "finance capital"

This perspective is already being put into practice, the new party has formed electoral alliances with parties that have members in Lula's government, such as the Popular Socialist Party (the main successor of the Communist Party of Brazil), the Greens and the Christian Workers' Party, the PTC, in several towns. Not much remains of the "political independence of the workers"!

The new party is a reformist project. Thousands of workers who are breaking away from the right reformism of Lula will be drawn towards this party. Marxists must patiently explain that the treachery of the Workers' Party government is rooted in the logic of reformism itself.

The "Golden Age" of reformism (the Workers' Party of the 1980s) was not so golden and, because of the deep, worldwide crisis of capitalism is, in any case, not going to return

The alternative to right reformism is not a somewhat more militant or more left reformism. On the contrary, it is necessary to create a revolutionary party as one section of a new World Party of Socialist Revolution, the Fifth International.

"Oh Oh Oh the union has been sold": 30-day bank workers strike meets Lula's repression

By Martin Ralph of the International Socialist League

On 14 September 2004, the leadership of the bank workers union, mainly PT (Workers Party) loyalists, was heckled for defending the bosses' pay offer; "Eu, eu, eu, o sindicato se vendeu" (oh oh oh the union has been sold) chanted thousands of workers. When a union leader was speaking, the bank workers turned their backs on him. Dirceu Travesso, the former leader of the bank workers' union and a militant of the PSTU (www.pstu.org.br), argued that the proposal should be rejected and the vast majority of the 200,000 who attended the rally voted for an indefinite strike.

The strike spread throughout the country and 18 state capitals went on strike. The leader of the bank workers trade union in Sao Paulo, faced with this defeat, accused the PSTU of being responsible for the strikes. This is untrue; the bank workers were angry over low salaries and over government manipulation of their trade union.

The bank workers went on strike even though state elections were taking place. Before the elections, the Lula government indicated support. Then they quickly moved against the strikers, attempting to outlaw the strike, stopping strike pay and using the police against the pickets. However, there was a great deal of support from the population for the strike.

The strike clashed with the government's economic plans to appease national and foreign "big" business. This year the government will pay R\$75.8 million to the IMF, taking the money from land reform, education and health.

The thirty-day strike was the second longest in the history of bank workers. The rebellion of the bank workers was the tip of an iceberg. The workers had not had a joint national strike in the past decade and had not challenged the leadership of the National Confederation of Bank Workers (CNB) of the CUT.

The strikers were supported by the Banking Opposition linked to CONLUTAS (National Coordination of Struggles, www.conlutas.org.br). CONLUTAS was created in March at a national meeting in opposition to the trade union and labour reform. It has grown and has developed links with unions that are outside of the CUT and also with those who remain inside.

In January, during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, a national meeting of CONLUTAS will be held to discuss the development of an alternative of leadership for the forthcoming struggles in Brazil.

Civil service workers strike back as Brown prepares to slash jobs

By a PCS branch secretary

Gordon Brown wants to put 104,000 civil service workers on the dole. As well as savage job cuts, the Government is planning to attack pensions, replacing the final salary scheme with an average salary scheme and raising the retirement age to 65. Even those who will escape the jobs massacre will face increased workloads and draconian new rules that could include cutting pay for the first three days off sick.

It is a wake up call to all those who believe that any Labour government headed by Brown, instead of Blair, will be more worker friendly.

Gordon Brown is preparing these cuts so that he can free up money without raising income or business taxes, already among the lowest in the EU. He aims to expand public service provision by getting public sector workers to foot the bill with attacks on jobs, pay, pensions and working conditions. And Brown insists this is necessary while he happily hands over £3.5 billion to finance the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq.

But the Public Commercial Services Union (PCS) has refused to give in to such blackmail. On 5 November over 200,000 civil servants went on strike.

Other public sector workers must take heed of what is going on in the civil service. While the government has deliberately decided to take on the PCS this side of the general election, we can be sure that Blair and Brown have similar plans for other public sector workers.

The government has clearly decided to attack civil servants for two main reasons. Firstly, civil servants are an easier target than education or health workers, for example. The image of civil servants as faceless bureaucrats who are only involved in pen pushing and paper shuffling means the government can pass off these job cuts as a strategy for cutting waste and red tape. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The deepest cuts - 40,000 jobs and 550 offices - are reserved for the Department of Work and Pensions. A total of 37 social security offices and jobcentres across the UK are due to close in the first wave of cuts. This proves it will be



More than 200,000 PCS members took part in the biggest national Civil Service strike for a decade.

The strike involved 160 government departments and agencies. Museums, including the British Museum, Science Museum and British Library were closed. Jobcentres, driving tests, benefit offices and Customs were all disrupted.

In Central London, around 1,200 workers attended a protest march in Central London, which ended in a rally at Westminster Cathedral Hall. Other union leaders including Dave Prentis of Unison, Andy Gilchrist of the Fire Brigades Union, and Bob Crow of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union

spoke to offer support.

Dave Prentis told the London rally: "It's a nonsense to say you want to provide better and more efficient public services and then wield an axe to thousands of jobs, demoralising staff, cutting services and hitting local economies. This strategy is naive, ill conceived and should be reversed."

Prentis failed to mention that he supports the man wielding the axe, Gordon Brown! PCS members should demand their union takes concrete steps towards building a new workers party that can support jobs and services, not profits and wars.

Paul Mackney of Natfhe and Andy Gilchrist spoke at great length about the

importance of unity within the union.

"There may be times you don't agree with the decisions of the leadership but you must stand by them" said Mackney. Gilchrist echoed this reminding the rally how the media attempted to split the FBU and personally smeared him during the fire dispute.

Unity in action is important but it should not be used as a cover for trade union leaders to sell out a dispute, like Gilchrist did. And, for all their fine words, none of the general secretaries offered one iota of practical solidarity. That's why we should approach rank and file workers and ask for solidarity from those at the sharp end of Brown's attacks.

mainly "frontline" jobs that will go and most of these posts are very low paid. The cuts package will hit services to the most vulnerable in society, the poor and the unemployed, the sick, disabled and elderly.

Second, this is an old-fashioned piece of a union-busting. The PCS has been growing precisely because it has taken

action. The DWP is the best organised group in the PCS. Its members have been subjected to a two-year pay freeze and its activists targeted for intimidation, prompting unofficial walkouts from Fife to Basildon.

For a national strategy

While the one day strike was a success

the danger is that each section of PCS is now left to fight on its own. In Leeds, the Department of Health has already lost 38 per cent of its workforce: 1,000 jobs have gone at Quarry House alone.

Other departments have been promised no compulsory redundancies. However, promises can easily be broken. The union has to say "No" to the

whole package and fight together until there is a satisfactory outcome for all.

The strike showed the depth of anger among members. But a one day strike is not enough. The union should rebalot immediately for escalating action. The anger of members must not be allowed to fade into resignation and despair.

The PCS needs to learn the lessons of the DWP pay dispute. One and two day actions spread over several months are ineffective. Some activists are calling for selective action, arguing that members are not ready yet for an all-out indefinite strike. But a total stoppage is the surest and, in the end, the least expensive way to shake the Government into real concessions.

Of course this will take a lot of work to win. Activists will need to call workplace meetings, elect strike committees made up of the most enthusiastic and trusted members, build city and regional co-ordinations, produce strike bulletins to keep members and other unions posted.

If the union - from the national leadership and down to local stewards - gives a clear lead, members can be won to an indefinite strike. The point is not whether this is a difficult task - these are matters of tactics and precise timing - but that a national strike is necessary to win. And if the PCS doesn't try to win the national strike now, it may be too late.

The PCS should not wage this fight alone. This is an attack on everyone's public services. We need to directly ask rank and file health workers, firefighters, rail workers, local government workers, teachers and the public to support us.

Serwotka had done good work in getting support from other unions. But every significant trade union struggle in the past 20 years, from the miners to the firefighters has had TUC "support".

What they did not had was solidarity action. We should invite service users, especially claimants, unorganised workers and activists in other unions, to join us in local PCS support groups. These can get the message onto the streets, build demos and picket lines, collect hardship funds and pave the way for a public sector fightback that can really rock Blair and Brown.

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

Even the onset of war did not stop the global revolt against it.

Across the world the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence and Paris, in Asia at Hyderabad and Mumbai, and in South America at Porto Alegre.

Together with the L51, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New

World Party of Socialist Revolution - the Fifth International.

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against war and capitalism, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or email us at workerspower@btopenworld.com

JOIN US!

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

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Email:

Tel no:

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month.

I enclose:

£9.00 UK

£12.00 Europe

£18.00 Rest of the world

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International (L51)

Mail: Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 020 7820 1363

Email: workerspower@btopenworld.com

Print: Newsfax, London
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)
ISSN 0263-1121