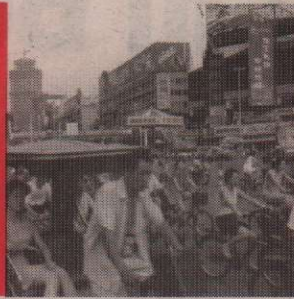


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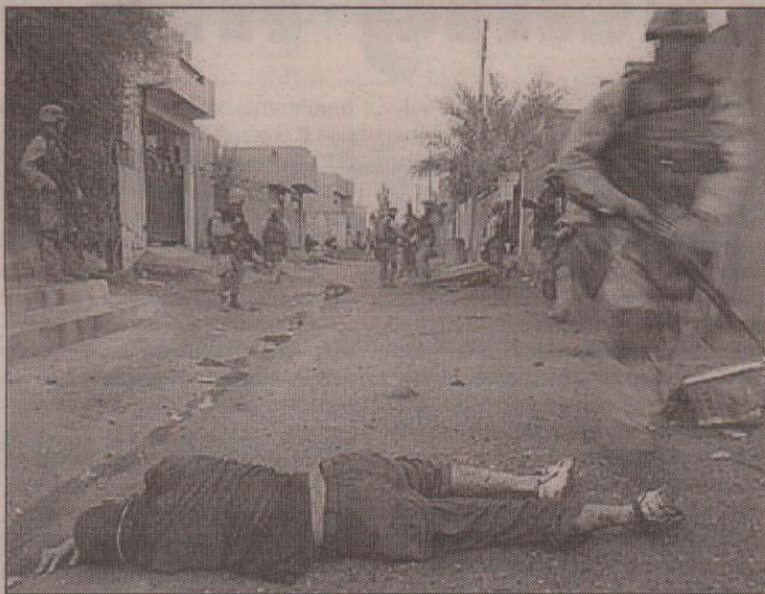
# TROOPS OUT NOW!

A car driver fails to stop outside a US military checkpoint near Samarra, Iraq on 30 May. The driver and his cousin die in a hail of bullets fired by US soldiers. The man had not stopped because his cousin had gone into labour and they were trying to reach hospital before she gave birth.

This bloody killing is just another in the long and growing list of atrocities carried out by occupying troops across Iraq. A videotape obtained by the BBC appears to confirm the story told by Iraqi police and civilians of a raid by US troops that killed 11 people, including several children, in the town of Ishaqi to the north of Baghdad. The US military's initial investigation claimed that only four died and that they were killed accidentally.

But the explanation offered by US officials of the deaths in Ishaqi will have little credibility with either Iraqis or a growing number of Americans. A Democratic Party politician, John Murtha, himself an ex-Marine, has openly admitted that Marines were responsible for a massacre of 24 Iraqi civilians in the small Iraqi city of Haditha in November 2005. In Murtha's words, the soldiers "killed innocent civilians in cold blood" as an act of vengeance for a roadside bombing that killed one soldier and injured two others.

Murtha has suggested that the evidence points to a cover-up of the Haditha bloodbath, a view confirmed by the testimony of one Marine who was ordered to clean up floors soaked with the blood of children, several under five years old, shot in the head. An additional investigation of the alleged cover-up has yet to report its findings, pending



the outcome of a criminal inquiry.

Even Nouri al-Maliki, recently installed Iraqi prime minister who owes his position to the US and British-led occupation, has felt obliged to describe attacks on civilians as routine and said, "There is a limit to the acceptable excuses". Those excuses from the Pentagon and other US spokespersons refer to soldiers becoming "stressed" and "fearful". As in Vietnam, more than 30 years ago, anyone could be the enemy with civilians and "insurgents" appearing the same - or so they claimed.

The BBC and much of the media here suggested that somehow British forces were running a more humane occupation that had the widespread support of the population of Basra and other southern Iraqi cities and towns. Events there in recent weeks, especially after a British helicopter was shot down by insurgents, have shown that British

troops are not just unwelcome but ever more hated.

The daily bloodshed continues not only in Iraq but also in occupied Afghanistan. Nearly five years after the invasion of the country, Washington has had to pour in more troops in a desperate attempt to stem a rising tide of opposition made up as much of ordinary Afghans as of the Taliban. This year the number of US troops increased from 19,000 to some 22,000, taking the total number of occupying forces to 30,000.

Until recently the puppet government of President Hamid Karzai at least appeared to control the capital of Kabul. Events on 29 May shattered that illusion. Eyewitness accounts state that six US military vehicles were driven recklessly through jammed Kabul streets, hitting a taxi and killing a man.

As word of the incident spread, thousands poured onto the streets chanti-

ng "Death to America" and "Down with Karzai". The ensuing clashes between US soldiers, Afghan security forces loyal to the government and the largely unarmed demonstrators, killed at least 20 and injured an estimated 400.

On the same day 50 people reportedly died in a US bombing raid that hit a mosque. Time and again, Washington describes the victims of such raids as simply supporters of the Taliban, but whatever their views of the Taliban, fewer and fewer Afghans are buying such explanations.

More than 90 per cent of the Karzai regime's budget comes from Washington, London and a handful of other Western capitals. Corruption is certainly widespread, with most people believing that huge sums of aid go into the bank accounts of senior government officials and a handful of contractors. The official unemployment rate remains above 35 per cent while only 20 per cent of the population has access to clean water. Only one in 20 Afghans has a regular electricity supply.

Back in Iraq the day-to-day realities of occupation include homelessness for people displaced by bombing more than three years ago. A United Nations report highlights increasing malnutrition among children, while the US Army Corps of Engineers points to corruption and incompetence on the part of KBR, one of the multinationals profiting from the rebuilding of the country's battered infrastructure.

In late March 2003, the US and British governments unleashed megatons of bombs from the air and nearly 200,000 troops on Iraq with the supposed aims of protecting the rest of us from weapons of mass destruction and liberating the Iraqi people from the

murderous tyranny of Saddam Hussein.

But a British general, Robert Fry, gave the game away in a BBC radio interview in early May this year. He said that the biggest gain of the invasion and occupation had been to take Iraq "from a moribund state socialist economy into something that will end up using the devices of the market, and if security has to be provided here for an extended period of time then that's what needs to happen."

In short, Fry has admitted that the Iraq war was about corporate profit not people's rights. All this makes the argument to get the troops out now that much more obvious and compelling.

The departure of US, British and other foreign troops will not guarantee a "happy ending" for the long suffering peoples of Iraq or Afghanistan. They need to build revolutionary socialist parties, that can both oppose occupation and put forward a programme that really addresses the immediate needs of workers, poor peasants and the unemployed, and links these to a fight to take over the stolen property of the multinationals so that they can rebuild their shattered communities.

By stepping up the antiwar movement in the US and UK, and demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of their troops, we can bring such an outcome nearer. It is also the best way to prevent the politicians responsible for this chaos turning their war machines against Iran.

- Troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now!
- Hands off Iran!
- Victory to the resistance!

## END THE OCCUPATION!

## Stop the deportations! Scrap section nine! Demonstrate in Bolton on 17 June

By Jason Travis, Bolton NUT

**C**ampaigners will be assembling in Bolton, the hometown of the Sukula family, on 17 June to continue the campaign against section nine.

Section nine is a vicious piece of UK immigration legislation where families of failed asylum seekers who cannot be immediately deported (for example due to lack of travel documentation) can be denied all benefits and housing. As most asylum seekers are not allowed to work, the legislation allows for the taking of children into local authority care whilst the adult members of the family are left homeless and destitute. Since section nine was piloted in Greater Manchester, parts of Yorkshire and parts of London, some thirty families have gone into hiding.

A campaign initiated by the Bolton based Sukula Family Must Stay campaign and supported by Bolton Unison, NUT and the Bolton Trades Union Council has meant that Greater Manchester and Yorkshire councils have refused to evict families. Not a single child has been taken into care and the government has not rolled the scheme out nationally from February as previously planned. The rumours are that it will be quietly dropped. But we can't wait on rumours: we must organise to make it happen!



ise to make it happen!

Events at the end of May in Liverpool should give pause to anyone who assumes the battle is over. Three families were targeted by legislation similar to section nine: a lively campaign by local activists and trade unionists led to the threat being withdrawn. In the meantime, however, one of the families, in utter desperation, went into hiding and have joined the ranks of many thousands of migrants living at the margins of society.

Section nine is just one of a huge

number of weapons used to terrorise immigrant communities. Immigration benefits the economy by some £2.5 billion a year according to Home Office studies (and that doesn't even account for illegal immigration) but immigration controls are used to divide and weaken the working class by creating a reserve army of labour that is more vulnerable and easily exploitable. They also serve as a diversion for the tabloids to attempt to deflect anger from the real enemies of the working class: the bosses.

The Sukula Family Must Stay campaign has been against all deportations and immigration controls from the very beginning. "We support everyone campaigning together," says Flores Sukula, "we're not 'special cases'. We're against all deportations." Flores and her family campaign have gained national prominence and helped organise a conference of social workers, other trade unionists and campaigners to begin to organise workers' resistance in the unions against the implementation of Section nine and other parts of

the racist immigration laws.

Labour movement support in Bolton has created an atmosphere where it is popular to be anti-racist and politicians and celebrities alike have come forward to support the Sukulas and their campaign. It has also added to an antiracist tradition that means that fascists like the BNP can't even begin to get a foothold in the area.

The Sukula Family Must Stay campaign and seven other local campaigns are hoping that the 17 June action in Bolton is a stepping-stone to a larger demonstration outside the Labour conference in September in Manchester. We must unite against racism, including all immigration controls and all attacks on welfare and the right to work. Rather than migrants being behind bars it should be the imperialist directors of companies who organise wars to seize the resources of countries like the Congo (from where the Sukulas come) and war criminals like Blair who support them.

Workers must fight to create a socialist society that is democratically planned to meet the needs of the needy majority, not the greedy minority at the top. Fighting for the rights of immigrant families like the Sukulas is part of this struggle to change the world.

**Assemble: 12 noon 17 June on the steps of Bolton Town Hall**

# Super exploiting migrants

By Alison Higgins

**A**n investigation into the death of the 21 or more Chinese cockle pickers who lost their lives in Morecambe Bay in 2004 has revealed that the Labour government has long been turning a blind eye to illegal immigrant workers as long as they were not a 'drain' on the state. Under pressure from the far right and the Tories, the government has decided to "do something" about illegal immigration.

Just before the Morecambe Bay trial on 7 March the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, announced the government's plans to reform the way in which people can legally apply to live, work and study in the UK.

In its new system, 'A Points Based System - Making Migration Work for Britain', Labour is scrapping the 80 plus different schemes that currently allow people from outside the EU to apply to live in Britain and replacing them with a 'firm but fair' 5 tier system that is 'simple and transparent'.

According to the government the new system will have the effect of 'benefiting our economy and protecting our borders'. In reality its intention is to welcome in the 'high skilled', i.e. well off professionals, business people, academics etc., at the expense of the low skilled poor and those desperate to improve their lives and those of their families back home through economic migration.

The poor can still come to the UK but only if particular bosses want them for fixed contracts - and certainly not to settle and become citizens.

As with similar schemes in the US and Australia, applicants will be awarded points depending on age (the younger the better), skills, qualifications, experience, language skills, level of earnings, etc. If you have enough

points you may be lucky enough to be counted in tier 1 - doctors, scientists, other professionals, and entrepreneurs are the privileged who will have few problems coming to work and settle in the UK.

Skilled workers, such as nurses, engineers and teachers, will fall into tier 2 - this means they can only come if they have a firm job offer.

Tier 3 - workers with 'low' skills, e.g. building workers, can only come for particular projects or if they are needed due to a skills shortage in an industry or sector. A new skills advisory body will decide on when and where those shortages are.

Students will fit into tier 4 - there will be a crack down on bogus colleges, that charge to sign people up then allow them to 'disappear'.

Tier 5 covers 18 - 30 year olds in the youth mobility bracket, young people working while travelling plus musicians, sports people etc., allowing them to stay for a maximum of 2 years.

Tier 3 workers will certainly get the rough end of the deal - 12 months maximum stays, no spouses or children allowed. They may even be required to provide biometric details to enable them to be traced if they try and disappear, and they will probably have to show a return plane ticket or pay a financial bond that they will only get back when they leave the UK.

Until now temporary migration has been allowed from any country in the world if migrant workers want jobs in the hospitality or agricultural and food processing sectors. That has now ended in favour of workers from the EU accession states (for example Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Czech Republic) - the preferred cheap supply of labour for British bosses.

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants is concerned that the new

blocks on non-EU migrants will only exacerbate illegal migration. As the Morecambe Bay tragedy shows, there are dirty and dangerous jobs that only those with no rights are desperate enough to do. These workers will become the underclass of the underclass. Super-exploited, unprotected by health and safety legislation, the minimum wage, or union rights. This means that the new points based system, biased in terms of class and race, will ensure we can expect to more deaths like those in Morecambe Bay.

Not only this but the new system enshrines the practice of raiding developing countries of their skilled workers - more nurses, engineers and teachers will be lured here to plug the UK's skills gaps while their own countries' public services are in crisis. Last year the UK recruited 3,300 trained nurses from the Indian sub-continent, Africa and the Caribbean.

British bosses are not interested in having to pay, through taxation, for the training of skilled workers. It is much easier to raid the developing world and get your skilled workers on the cheap. That is why the government has been making students and young people carry more of the burden for their training and education. The recent introduction of £3,000 top up fees for students is part of this general trend.

The new 'managed migration' system will have further devastating effects on developing countries. Migrant workers from outside the EU send money home, keeping families and even whole communities going. Migration is a route out of poverty for some, or the only means of survival for others. This income sent back to families overseas is estimated to be greater than the foreign aid most poor countries receive.

Habib Rahman, chief executive of the Joint Council for the Welfare of

Immigrants, said: "The Government says it is committed to making poverty history in the developing world - how is making migration harder for people from those countries going to help that?"

With Charles Clarke stating that he wants the 'brightest and best from across the world' and Immigration Minister Tony McNulty boasting that the new system will keep out the 'wrong sort of people' it's clear that Labour's

immigration policy is conceding ever more ground to the Tories and the far right - if you're well off and white no problem, if you are poor and black forget it.

The only just and fair migration system is to have no migration system. If capital is free to move around the world in search of higher profits, workers should be freely able to travel the world in search of a better life - scrap all immigration controls.

## Turning a blind eye

Lin Liang Ren was convicted of 21 counts of manslaughter, facilitating illegal immigration and perverting the course of justice and was jailed for a total of 14 years at Preston Crown Court. The court case revealed to the public the harrowing testimony of survivors and recordings of desperate mobile phone calls to loved ones.

But during an investigation in to the tragedy, Lord Carlisle QC revealed that "The state, through the agency of UK Immigration Service and its responsible ministers, created the situation in which it was an everyday and accepted part of British industry and exports that Chinese illegals would gather cockles, and ... would be self-sufficient."

The health and safety in such dangerous conditions did not, it appears, need to be considered.

At a pre-trial hearing last September the government was accused of not doing enough to stop the "shadow industry" of cockle picking by illegal Chinese immigrants.

Ministers from the UK Immigration Service (UKIS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) acted as "agents provocateurs" and created a

situation in which cockling was an accepted part of British industry, it was claimed.

The court heard that instead of detaining the Chinese cocklers, UKIS and the DWP allowed them to carry on working, happy in the knowledge that they were self-sufficient and not a drain on the state.

Lin Liang Ren got his just deserts for profiting from and exploiting immigrant labour but all those further up the supply chain and those who turned a blind eye to the plight of those immigrant workers should also have faced charges.

The father and son businessmen David Anthony Eden Snr, 63, and David Anthony Eden Jnr, 35, who were accused of buying the cockles harvested by the illegal immigrants were cleared of any wrongdoing. Not one government official has been held to account.

The lessons of Morecombe Bay are clear - the state and the bosses are not interested in the plight of immigrant workers and won't be held to account for the terrible conditions they work and live under.

# New union needs new strategy

By a UCU member

The new University and Colleges Union (UCU) has been forged in the heat of battle with Labour over privatisation and pay.

The new union will have to show whether or not by uniting our ranks we can begin to fight for the demands of the members and for public education as well as on wider questions.

The merger of the AUT and Natfhe is a small step towards the building of one union for all education workers. But we need to go further and organise all the workers in education, not just teaching staff, to have maximum strength and deliver effective action.

## RANK AND FILE CONTROL

Activists must watch the leaders, so that the process of the merger is not used to further erode the limited democracy of both unions. Union members are already concerned about the lack of democratic accountability, particularly during the changeover year when the Transitional Arrangements Committee (TAC) will be in the driving seat.

The leadership of the new union must be accountable to the rank and file members. During disputes the members and branches must have the final say on the calling of strike action and on agreements negotiated with college bosses.

All officials of the union should be elected and recallable. Similarly, officials of the union must be paid salaries equivalent to that of a skilled worker within the union and not expect to be paid a privileged bureaucrat's salary.

We have to organise the members of the union into a rank and file move-

ment that is able to force the leaders to act and, if they do not, organise action independently of the union bureaucracy. The aim of such movement must be to get rid of the bureaucracy.

A rank and file movement should also seek to win the whole union to a fighting programme – not just for education, but also on all the issues facing the working class. It should link up with rank and file organisations in other unions and aim to transform the labour movement into a movement that not only defends its members, but fights for socialism.

## TESTS AHEAD

The strength of the new union is already being tested. Provocations by university managements in the higher education pay dispute show that the new union must be born fighting or

spend its infant years in a weak and sickly state.

The decision by the University of Northumbria to dock 100 per cent of lecturers' pay in response to union members carrying out sanctions short of a strike shows that the employers aim to take on the union. The problem is that unions members are being left to fight alone in each college, which weakens the national campaign.

The new union cannot allow a piecemeal response. If these deductions are not stopped immediately and the money is not restored then there must be all-out national strike action in defence of those members and the union itself, as well as to win the pay claim.

The new union must also take on the government over the question of privatisation. While local businesses, charities and rich individuals are being

invited to take over the running of schools (and perhaps a seat in the House of Lords!), the Further Education white paper threatens to introduce contestability (privatisation) and employer engagement. This is all about business setting the agenda in the colleges.

The current response of the union is to organise a public opinion campaign. This is all very well but lobbying politicians and sucking up to aspiring business tycoons will never secure adequate funding for post-16 education. It will be totally ineffective without the additional impact of industrial action.

UCU members should unite with teachers in NUT and NASUWT and with other unions within the education system to fight the government's plans as part of a political campaign that will have at its heart direct action – strikes, demonstrations and occupations – by education workers and students.

## SOCIALIST EDUCATION

The Further Education sector must be state funded. Colleges should be put under workers' and students' control. Those who work and study in colleges, together with local working class organisations and communities, are best able to plan a curriculum relevant to the needs and aspirations of the local areas.

We need a secular education system. No religion has any place in the classroom. The new union must advocate these things as part of a policy to fight for a socialist education system as part of a socialist society.

This is the policy that Workers Power UCU members will be arguing for at the Education is Not For Sale conference.

## Lecturers greet UCU with London demo

# UCU

University and College Union

By Josh Davies

On 1 June lecturers and academic staff from across the country marked the merger of the AUT and Natfhe into the UCU, by marching in London for higher pay. The march was small, attracting about 200 people and only 20 or so students but the mood was buoyant.

Lecturers chanting "The money's there, where's our share?" seemed optimistic about the future of the dispute against the University and College Employer Association (UCEA), with one speaker at the end, Simon Becton from UCL, saying "we are winning this dispute, we can win this dispute".

The creation of the UCU was also greeted warmly, with it being seen as something that would help the staff win better pay and conditions.

Although many of the speakers did slip into the habit of introducing themselves as representatives of their old unions – this was greeted by educated, friendly heckles from the crowd.

Aside from welcoming the formation of the new union and firmly rejecting the latest offer from UCEA the other theme of the demo was a willingness on the part of the lecturers to take strike action if there are any penalties or cases of victimisation as a result of the assessment boycott. Indeed, one of the most repeated chants on the demo was "VCs [vice chancellors], hear us shout, dock our pay, we walk out!"

The refusal to set exams, or mark results is clearly hitting the universities and the actions should continue. While the press is full of stories of the ruined futures of students by greedy lecturers, what is never reported is that on many campuses their students have been organising meetings in support of the lecturers' pay campaign.

But the formation of UCU makes one point blindingly obvious. Further education lecturers are also in dispute over pay, so why not link the two campaigns?

The FE pay dispute has badly stalled. A well supported one-day strike last year has never been followed up. Two days of action in May were called off on the promise of consultation. In the meantime, a work boycott is failing to hit home.

Both disputes now need to turn to sustained strike action. A day here and there will not win. We need to work swiftly towards an all-out national strike across both sectors. Now that would be a good start for a new union!

## EDUCATION IS NOT FOR SALE!

### A one day conference to organise a new left in UCU

Saturday 24 June 2006, 11am-4pm  
London Metropolitan University

Registration: £7(full-time) £5 (part-time)

To book a place at the conference or for more information:  
[www.uculeft.org](http://www.uculeft.org)

# Supersize my pay!

By James Roberts

This summer, Revolution the socialist youth group is launching a campaign of stunts and unionisation on the high street to fight against the harsh working conditions dealt to young workers.

Globalisation has many faces – the summits of world leaders, the war on Iraq, the hysterical stockbrokers sweating over the latest change in oil prices. One of the most immediate faces of globalisation is on the high street.

We've all heard the stories of McDonald's environmental destruction, Nike's sweatshop factory conditions and the slave labour that goes into harvesting the coffee for café chains.

These are all big problems, which have implications the world over, but the harsh effects of globalisation aren't confined to overseas. Every high street in Britain is staffed by young low paid workers, whose hard work fills the pockets of their bosses.

The minimum wage is just £5.05 for workers 22 and over. Younger workers get an even rawer deal – just £4.25 an hour for under-21s, £3.00 an hour for 16 and 17 year old, and no protection at all for under-16 year olds!

These wages are well below what even the European Union says is needed to live decently – £9 an hour – and the fight for a £9 living wage for all workers is the key target the campaign is fighting for.

But the campaign is about more than just winning enough money to live decently on – although it's an indictment of the system we live in when a fight needs to be mounted for enough money for proper food, housing and transport. What the *Supersize My Pay* campaign can offer is a way for young workers

– who are often unorganised because of the type of work they do and because by and large they aren't touched by the unions – to collectively fighting back for better conditions.

The name of the campaign is taken from an organisation drive initiated by unions in New Zealand who made a push to recruit young workers in Pizza Hut, Starbucks and KFC amongst others and has already won increases in pay in several workplaces.

Whilst we don't have the membership numbers to have the same clout as a trade union campaign, we will be trying to get young workers to join a union and asking for support and information from local union branches. A victory for young workers in a branch of a well-known high street chain could be a significant step forward and inspire further action and organisation.

The campaign shouldn't just be supported by young workers. Organising young workers can have a very positive effect on the working class as a whole. We all need to unite to prevent the bosses from squeezing more money out of our work.

This generation abandoned school for the streets the day the war broke out. They shut down summits of world leaders and stopped financial districts working in protest at globalisation. If they now take the anticapitalist movement into their own workplaces, then it could spell danger for the bankers and the bosses.



# Unions key in struggle for new workers party

The Campaign for a New Workers Party has held some successful meetings. But *Jeremy Dewar* believes the Socialist Party leadership is backing off from the crucial arguments we need to have with the union tops

Over sixty people were crammed into the room at the Coventry launch of the Campaign for a New Workers Party, when a group of Peugeot workers walked in towards the end, fresh from a protest in Leicester.

The meeting may have been taking place in the Motor Museum, but the car workers there were far from ready to be confined to history. In fact, the meeting immediately agreed to set up a support group to save the plant.

This was one of several such meetings, held recently or planned over the next month around the country. Likewise, fringe meetings at union conferences have discussed the need for a new party. Not all have been as lively as the Coventry one.

While over 25 lecturer delegates from the Natfhe conference debated whether the new party should be reformist or revolutionary with NEC members Andrew Price and Pauline Atienza, the meeting at the CWU conference was a flop. Clearly there is both potential and plenty of work to be done to build the campaign in the unions.

It was a shame therefore that the first meeting of the national Steering Committee on 21 May shied away from launching an offensive against Labour



**Dave Nellist, Socialist Party councillor in Coventry**

inside the trade unions. Workers Power members brought a series of amendments to the meeting, which, if they had been carried, would have outlined such a campaign.

We argued that breaking the unions from Labour, by getting them to disaffiliate from the party of war, privatisation and racism, and using the political funds to begin the process of setting up a new party was the key to achieving our aims. Standing in local elections as a means to popularise the issue and accumulating signatories to the

CNWP declaration may have a role to play, but, on their own, were insufficient to get a mass party off the ground.

In particular, we proposed a campaign both inside and outside of the RMT to encourage the rail union (which has been expelled from Labour) to recall its January conference on the crisis of working class political representation. While this conference was well attended and most speakers called on the unions to set up a new party, the chair refused to take resolutions. This reduced it to the status of a rally, albeit an uplifting one.

But the SP refused to call on RMT leader Bob Crow and the executive to base any recall conference on delegates, elected from union branches, campaigning and political organisations, or to debate and vote on resolutions. Similarly, the comrades didn't want to focus on a fight to win the unions to the position of campaigning to form a new working class party.

Dave Nellist, Socialist Party councillor in Coventry, said that he had spoken to Crow and "he won't have resolutions" so we shouldn't push him on that or he may turn against the idea of holding a conference at all.

This is cowardly nonsense. Bob Crow is not the RMT. We should aim to defeat him if this remains his point of

view. By fighting for our position, we could persuade him to change his mind or win the majority in the RMT to overturn his lead. If most or a large number of the participants at the conference, which may be held in October, agree with our demands for a working meeting, we could book a hall nearby and take them with us after the rally.

What is certain is that if those of us, who are ready to fight for a new party now, sit on our hands, we will only proceed at the stop-start pace of the left wing bureaucrats.

In reality, the SP does not want to confront the union tops. Instead of winning the unions, they want an individual membership campaign; hence their target of 5,000 signatories is the centrepiece of their strategy. When the CNWP gets enough members (which, Nellist has stated, could take ten years!), the SP will call a conference and declare "the" party.

What small mindedness! We have a rare opportunity to break millions of workers from Labour and build a mass, revolutionary alternative. But the SP wants just a few thousands, leaving Labour in tact and the unions shackled by their ties to reformism.

But the full extent of this crass manoeuvring was revealed when the SP proposed a statement on the BNP,

which failed to warn the working class that it is a fascist party. Workers Power moved another amendment to the statement, calling on workers to deny the BNP any platform, to support self-defence against racist attacks, and to help found a party that could make a truly radical - revolutionary - change to society.

But even this was too much for the timid SP. Why? Not because they don't understand fascism, but because these are revolutionaries, who will not tell the working class the truth for fear of frightening off reformist workers. Rather than patiently arguing with such workers and using the united front as a means of winning them to a revolutionary programme, the SP hankers for the days when it could burrow away in a reformist party, assimilating the ones and twos by mimicking their policies.

Workers Power has a bolder vision than this. We will energetically fight, alongside honest reformists, for a new workers party, without, for one moment, concealing our views that such a party should adopt a revolutionary action programme. And we have sufficient confidence in the intelligence and courage of working class fighters that they will not be afraid of such a fight.

## Force Blair out now! No support to Brown!

By Andy Smith

May's local election results were very bad for the Labour Party. It lost over 300 council seats and ended up in third place polling only 26% of the votes. Even more troubling for them was the Tories under David Cameron won 40% of the vote, raising the real possibility that the Tories could win the next general election.

The response of Tony Blair has been dismissive: a cabinet reshuffle of the "deckchairs" and a commitment to push on even faster with the neoliberal reforms. While conceding that there will be a "stable and orderly transition in adequate time" to the next Labour leader, no timetable has been set out.

In the meantime he will continue with his "scorched earth" policy. This has included a raft of repressive policies on law and order plus anti foreigner hysteria in the wake of the administrative chaos in the Home Office. There has also been no let up in his slavish support of Bush and the war in Iraq.

In the party and the affiliated unions there is now real anger and demands for Blair to go now. This is true of an increasing number of Labour MPs, beyond the Labour Representation

Committee. The new opposition comes from two sources: the 40 or so old Labour MPs and peers in the Compass grouping; and a growing number of malcontents who have either fallen out of favour, like Nick Raynsford, or don't agree with particular policies, notably on education.

What unites all of the new opposition is a fear that their individual careers are under threat. The overwhelming attraction of New Labour was its ability to win votes in "middle England". No more and the MPs are worried. The more time passes, the more Cameron improves Tory fortunes, the more urgent it will appear that there has to be a change at the top.

Compass wants Blair to go and Gordon Brown to replace him. They have no intention of mounting a challenge to Brown. Instead they hope a more traditional Labour agenda can be forced upon him. Now Compass has merged with the trade union think tank Catalyst. Previous awkward squad members, like Derek Simpson of Amicus and Tony Woodley of TGWU, are now locked into a project of lying low and hoping for the best under Brown.

This approach is disastrous. Politically there is no difference between Blair and Brown. They are the co creators of New Labour. Brown has

been the prime mover of policies introducing the market in the public sector. Brown is, as Blair remarked, "New Labour to his fingertips".

Brown recently held out against Blair for any early linking of pensions to earnings because British capitalism couldn't afford it! Meanwhile, Unison leader Dave Prentis called off the local government pensions strikes, which pulled a million workers out. This is the price union members and other workers are paying for the union leaders' pact with Brown.

Union activists should demand their leaders break from Brown and give him no support. Instead, the LRC MPs should try to launch a leadership challenge as soon as possible. Even if they fail to secure enough support, it will rock the boat and make a smooth transition of power to Brown more difficult.

However, we predict that any attempt to use the limited democracy left in the Labour Party to transform it into a socialist party would result in further expulsions - as the RMT and George Galloway found out when they simply fought for basic working class positions. That's why we say that socialists should focus their attentions on the fight to break the unions from Labour and fight for a new workers party.

## Fight privatisation!

By Alison Higgins

Tony Blair recently told the Confederation of British Industry, the employers' union, "the opening up of our school system, contestability in NHS provision and breaking down the barriers between public, private and voluntary sector must continue". They rubbed their hands at the prospect of more profit.

Over the last 9 years Labour has embraced the Tories' Private Finance Initiative - the scheme that puts a million pounds into the pockets of private companies every year and that leaves our hospitals and schools mortgaged for thirty years or more. Gordon Brown must have thought the sky's the limit when he privatised air traffic control. Now the postal service is to follow.

Private firms run prisons and detention centres - humane treatment, drug counselling programmes and education are all in decline as a result. School academies are privatisation in a disguised form: companies and tycoons are given control over everything from admission policies to land and buildings. BBC Radio 1 and 2 are even up for grabs!

Rail rolling stock companies, such as Angel Trains, Porterbrook Leasing

and HSBC Rail, are all owned by banks and make profits of £150-200 million a year. This is after they bought the rolling stock at a knock down price - £1.1 billion less than its worth! But it is ordinary people who really pay, through high fares.

Private ownership and investment have clearly not led to improved services at Thames Water, which leaks more water than it supplies. And only this month Care UK has taken over the first GP's surgery. Others are planned around the country, from Plymouth to Bradford.

Civil service union PCS has called a rally and lobby of parliament on 27 June under the slogan, "Public Services Not Private Profit". The Labour Representation Committee and 13 other unions, including almost all the rail, teaching, and custodial service unions, as well as the fire brigade and the communication workers unions are also on board.

This is an excellent - if belated - start. But we have to force the big four unions - Unison, GMB, Amicus and TGWU - to join in. Also, it must develop beyond protest to direct action. United strike action against privatisation and for renationalisation is needed before Labour turns Britain into UK plc.

# Railway pensions: bureaucrats shunt dispute into sidings

By GR McColl

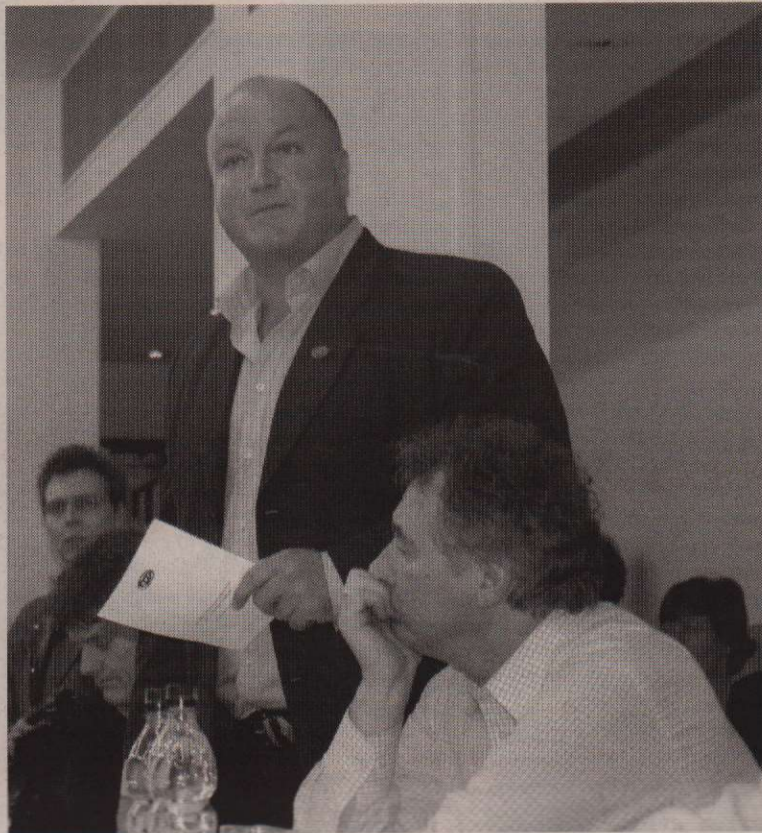
In the spring there seemed a real prospect of a national strike across the rail network on a scale not seen since the 1920s. On May Day, rail workers were a-buzz with news of the pending action.

The three main unions had launched a co-ordinated campaign among their members for strike action to stop the persistent erosion of railworkers' pensions. Rallies involving the three general secretaries, Bob Crow (RMT), Keith Norman (Aslef) and Gerry Doherty (TSSA) attracted hundreds of union members around the country and urged support for strike action.

In mid-May the RMT and TSSA balloted their members working for a wide range of train companies for strikes, but Aslef's leadership, having paid lip service to the notion of cross-union solidarity, postponed its ballot on the basis of agreed or likely deals with some 20 of the companies.

Then, within a week of the RMT and TSSA ballots commencing, the unions announced on 21 May a commission involving the unions, rail management and an "independent" chairperson. Bob Crow said: "In the meantime our ballot will continue, but we hope now that the green light can now be given to finding a long-term solution."

The dispute is still another example of a widespread offensive against workers' "deferred wages" in the form of pen-



Bob Crow

sion provision. But this particular fight stems directly from the privatisation that shook the industry more than a decade ago. The new railway bosses have allowed the fragmentation of a sin-

gle national pension fund into more than 100 different sections. Significant deficits have developed in a number of these sections.

A study conducted by a Manchester

University academic has calculated that the privateers have skimmed some £800 million from the industry. The re-investment of a relatively small fraction of these superprofits into the Railway Pension Scheme could easily plug any holes and prevent any need to increase employee contributions.

All the railway companies have enjoyed surpluses built up during the final years of the British Rail scheme, when railworkers left in their thousands. The employers cashed in on pension holidays, that is, they stopped paying in. Then when some of them closed their schemes to new employees, they increased workers' contributions by 1.5 per cent to make good the shortfall. What a scandal!

The fragmentation of the Railway Pension Scheme into a hundred different sections has led to one of Europe's most complex occupation schemes, with very high administrative costs. In some sections of the scheme bosses have sought to end pensions linked to final salaries, increase the retirement age to 65 and jack up employee contributions.

The unions' demands have been quite simple and modest

- An absolute limit on employee contributions of 10.56 per cent of gross earnings - the rate associated with the old British Rail scheme
- Maintain the Railway Pension Scheme for all current and future railworkers

- No reduction in pension benefits
- Streamline of the Railway Pension scheme from 104 sections into three.

The positions adopted by the union leaders - on the one hand looking to sign individual agreements with companies, and on the other accepting a commission - undermine prospects for achieving these demands across the industry.

In addition, the withdrawal from a real fight over the railway scheme will make it much harder to rekindle the pension battles in local government and defend state pensions. In short, a class-wide response to the attack on pensions has been set back. Many workers were looking for the RMT to derail the neoliberal offensive.

If the ballots return majorities for action, militants need to push for strikes immediately. The RMT annual meeting in Dublin in early July should see emergency resolutions demanding action if the current impasse continues.

The conduct of the dispute to date also reveals the limits of Crow's leadership, albeit one of the most militant union tops. Even under the RMT leadership, strike ballots are merely bargaining chips to win negotiating rights behind closed doors.

Crow has recently and repeatedly called for a national shop stewards movement. The current situation highlights the need for serious rank and file organisation within the RMT itself.

# Europe wide strikes can save car jobs

By Mark Hoskisson

When the president of General Motors Europe, Carl-Peter Foster quipped, "We know, thank god, that the English labour market is more capable of absorption than, let's say, the German or Belgian markets," 3,250 workers at Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant on Merseyside walked out on strike.

This was the first wildcat action at the plant for almost twenty years, although last year workers voted to strike over pay. And the anger that led to the one-day walkout was justified. Foster's remarks, in the middle of negotiations with unions across Europe over job cuts, were a clear sign that it would be easier to sack workers in Britain - thanks to its appalling labour laws - than in other countries.

Up to a thousand jobs, a third of the workforce and an entire shift, are under threat at the Vauxhall factory. This will cause untold misery in one of the poorest areas in Britain, which has already been ravaged by the decimation of its traditional industries of shipbuilding and the docks.

But the response of the workers showed that GM would meet resistance. As one worker from the plant said, "There is going to be a serious fight in the near future and we need everyone to know what is going on."

The proposed sackings are part of GM's drive to squeeze ever more productivity out of its workforce. Workers have broken productivity levels to produce record numbers of Astras that have sold well and given GM ample profits.

But with a new model planned for 2010 the bosses are looking for more cuts.

Across Europe as a whole GM is talking about 12,000 jobs cuts. In Britain they have proposed a 90-point plan to accompany the redundancies, including

- five year pay freeze
- compulsory overtime but only paid at standard rates
- abolition of the shift premium - a wage cut of up to £140 a week
- closing the pension scheme to new workers

- loss of bonuses if you are off sick.

The Ellesmere Port TGWU convenor said, "We've been betrayed." And if the union leaders of the TGWU and Amicus allow the package to go through - even in a diluted form - then this will also be a betrayal.

The possibility of stopping the assault on the car industry is there. The entire car production system depends on "just-in-time" production. Co-ordinated strikes across Europe's GM plants could bring the company to its knees in days. The closure of Peugeot Ryton,

near Coventry, makes unity across the whole industry, as well as across the continent, vital and realistic.

A European wide occupation of threatened plants would generate massive solidarity on an international level, while workers hold the bosses' plant and machinery ransom. When the pupils and students in France used the occupation tactic, they got millions behind them and beat the government. Workers should do the same.

But the union leaders in Britain are set against such a strategy. Amicus' chief negotiator with GM Europe, Tony Murphy, made this clear:

"We are looking for reassurance from the company about the future of Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port and that any cuts in jobs be shared across all five sites rather than targeting the Merseyside plant."

Tony Woodley of the TGWU also opened the door to a campaign to get the other European sites to bear the brunt, when he emphasised the importance of "British workers and their families".

This is approach cannot save Ellesmere Port. Moreover, the only action being proposed so far is a boycott of Vauxhall cars. Neither a boycott nor a narrow "defend British jobs" campaign will stop General Motors. International strikes and occupations will.

And if car companies like GM and Peugeot pull out, faced with such action, then we should fight for nationalisation of the entire car and components industry under the control of the workers themselves and without a penny being paid to the bosses.

Woodley, Simpson and co. will not

organise such a fight or raise such demands. The extent of their radicalism is to demand Labour repeal its employment laws. But those laws won't be repealed without a fight. The rank and file militants in the car industry need to build a leadership that will wage such a fight.

Immediately, stewards from Ellesmere Port should organise meetings with representatives from Peugeot Ryton. A joint campaign committee should be established to publicise the fight to save jobs, raise money and win support. Mass meetings at both plants should elect a strike committee, committed to occupying them and agreeing to not return to work until every job is safe.

At the same time links need to be made with rank and file workers in Peugeot and GM plants across Europe. Information can be shared, plans discussed and prepared, and action called at a moment's notice.

Such rank and file organisation can hold the bureaucrats to account, establish control over negotiations and reduce the scope for deals sellouts. It can also carry the fight for a militant strategy into the unions as a whole - in Britain and Europe.

Woodley and Simpson were only recently elected as "fighters" but have done little fighting since they won office. This shows the need for a rank and file movement that can transform the unions into thoroughly democratic organisations truly serving the needs of the members. Joint action by GM and Peugeot workers could be the catalyst for pushing the unions in this direction.

## Fight Peugeot closure

As we go to press, the ballot for strike action at Peugeot Ryton was about to be announced. Years of cuts have left a legacy of despondency about a fightback. But militant street actions aimed at Peugeot dealers have helped galvanise the workers (see letters, page 15).

So too has the magnificent solidarity action of the French Peugeot workers. Hundreds of car workers - from France and Britain - descended on the company's AGM in Paris on 24 May to tell the shareholders what they thought of them.

Indeed, the French unions have declared their willingness to take solidarity action with Ryton workers. They know that the proposed replacement plant in Slovakia will eventually threaten their jobs, too. The bosses have no patriotism, even if

the union bureaucrats do.

The bosses also know that strike action, especially a sit-in strike, is the one thing they fear. That's why, the day after the strike ballot went out on 18 May, they wrote to every worker, "A vote for industrial action... would force the company to seriously reconsider the [redundancy] packages being offered." For good measure, they also threatened to close the factory early.

This typical piece of blackmail, however, immediately backfired. Workers could see from what great height the bosses thought they could shit on them. Clearly Peugeot bosses could not be trusted to keep their word, so why hold back on action to keep the plant open?

For more on Peugeot go to <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,1045,0,0,1,0>

# Restart the pensions strike!

As Unison activists gather for their annual conference, *George Binette* of Camden branch argues that the leadership's decision to abandon industrial action, which brought a million workers out on 28 March, must be overturned

**F**our "p" words look likely to dominate proceedings at this year's Unison conference in Bournemouth this month. Privatisation, pay (especially "equal pay"), but above all pensions will be to the fore for most delegates during a week that should prove stormy for general secretary Dave Prentis and his supporters who continue their domination of the union's national executive.

## PENSIONS

Since delegates gathered in Glasgow last June the union's long-running, stop/start battle over the future of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) has reached a critical stage and there is a real possibility of a dramatic capitulation by the union leadership before the conference has even begun.

On 8 June the Service Group Executive (SGE) for local government, Unison's leading body for more than 60 per cent of the union's 1.3 million members, will discuss with the government a formula for resolving the pensions dispute. A sometimes bitter emergency meeting of the SGE on 17 May ended without a decision either on the government's offer or on a call to resume the strike action that had been abandoned just prior to the Easter holiday weekend.

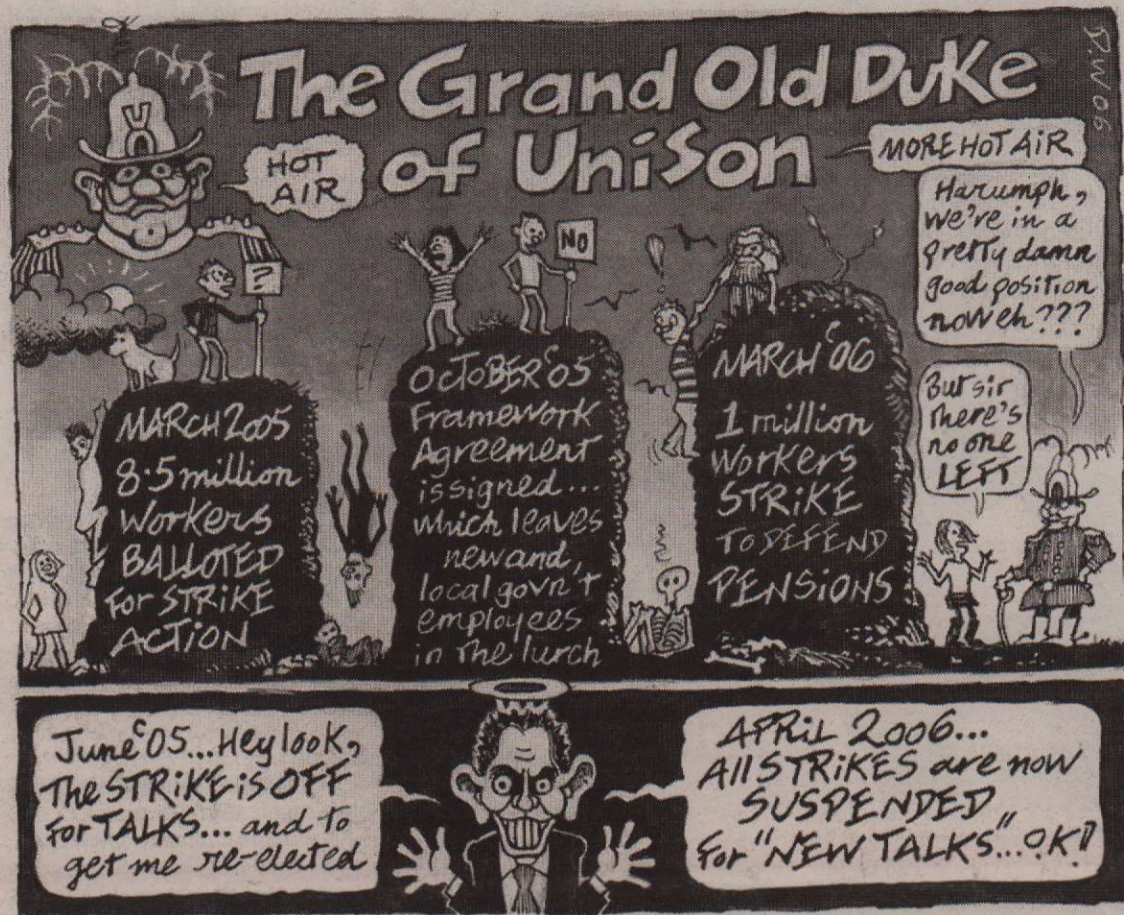
The latest offer from Labour, which is apparently acceptable to the employers' umbrella body, the Tory-led Local Government Association, offers slightly greater protection to existing LGPS members currently aged 50 and above in the wake of the abolition of the so-called "Rule of 85".

The government moved to scrap the rule within 48 hours of the well-supported nationwide strike in defence of the LGPS on 28 March. This measure allowed the possibility of retirement at 60 without damaging pension income for workers with a minimum of 25 years of continuous membership of the LGPS scheme.

The government has offered instead a form of "tapered" protection for those now aged 47-50. Originally, the government had indicated that protection would extend only to those now aged 53 and older.

The vast majority of LGPS members would, however, gain absolutely nothing from the new offer and many would, in fact, still stand to lose up to 30 per cent of their total pension payout with the effective retirement age rising to 65 across the board.

Unison officials decided to launch a "consultation" exercise with members over developments in the dispute. The



ostensible purpose was to provide a guide to the SGE at its June meeting.

On offer were two options: either to call for renewed industrial action, albeit with several caveats, or to accept the union bureaucracy's preferred tactic of waiting for the outcome of further talks and a High Court decision on the union's application for a judicial review of the regulations abolishing the "Rule of 85".

While Unison's leadership looks poised to place the fate of the LGPS in the hands of unelected High Court judges, the union has not even sought to mobilise support for an Early Day Motion, backed by some 20 Labour MPs and calling for the immediate restoration of the rule.

Where shop and section meetings had taken place in late May/early June there were clear majorities in favour of relaunching the industrial battle, but the difficulties activists experienced in persuading members to attend reflect how much of the membership's energy and commitment the leadership has already been squandered by suspending strike action on the mere promise of talks, which began from the outset with the abandonment of the demand put forward by the 2005 Unison conference, which called for the retention of the "Rule of 85" for local government

workers, both old and new.

In the meantime, of course, the leadership had signed up a "framework agreement" last October, which supposedly guaranteed retirement at 60 for existing pension scheme members working in the NHS, but accepted the introduction of two-tier schemes, with new workers within the service facing a higher retirement age.

The rotten formula that the leadership looks prepared to swallow for local government workers would also mark a sharp retreat from the public pledges Dave Prentis made to ensure that any eventual settlement would guarantee that all existing LGPS members enjoyed full protection of their current rights.

There has, however, been mounting opposition within the union's ranks to what is on the table and the leadership's attempts to railroad it through, with some who supported Prentis' re-election in 2005 now taking a stand against the leadership. Some branches, including City of York, initiated an open letter to the 8 June SGE calling for rejection of the proposed formula for ending the dispute or for special conferences of affected service groups as well as a ballot of the full membership hit by the attack on the LGPS.

This statement had garnered substantial support among layers of stewards and convenors, as well as ordinary members in the run-up to the key SGE meeting.

Whatever the eventual outcome of the SGE meeting on 8 June there are certain to be several emergency motions, which the bureaucracy will have little option but to allow on to the agenda of the Local Government conference at the start of the week, with further debate likely to take place during the main conference sessions as well. At least nine motions were submitted and accepted on to the order paper for the main conference, with the national executive's motion attracting numerous amendments.

The pensions issue has undoubtedly become the focal point for anger on



the left of the union, but also beyond the ranks of the "usual suspects". Even in Scotland, a region usually loyal to the Prentis leadership, there are real signs of revolt against the prospect of a sell-out.

The outcome of the pensions-related debates is nigh certain to set the tone for the week as a whole.

Though re-elected in early 2005, Prentis' failure to deliver on pensions and resist privatisation leave him and the national executive majority open to attack on several fronts.

The year ahead is likely to offer renewed opportunities for a rank and file challenge to the dominant wing of the current bureaucracy and with it the chance to debate the alternatives to Unison's increasingly abusive "marriage" to New Labour.

## PRIVATISATION

The Prentis wing of the bureaucracy, with its links to the Brown camp within Labour, could also face opposition over Unison's woeful response to the large-scale axing of NHS jobs in recent months, which has made the "no strike" Royal College of Nursing look seriously bolshie by comparison! More generally, the union faces continued and accelerated privatisation in the NHS and across the public sector as a whole.

The union machine has recently sought to relaunch its all but mothballed Positively Public campaign, but this seems a convenient excuse for Unison to refuse to take part in the "Public Service Not Private Profit" initiative, which has attracted the backing of 14 other unions under the aegis of the Unison-backed MP, John McDonnell.

And the latter has at least called for a Parliamentary lobby and public rally on 27 June.

The union's Northern Region has put forward a motion that both welcomes the revamped Positively Public campaign but is clear-cut in its opposition to "the neoliberal agenda", incorporating calls for alliances with "community and user groups, and other trade unions to defend services and promote an alternative agenda".

It also encourages twinning with unions across Europe to strengthen opposition to neoliberalism. While sidestepping the issue of political strikes, the motion does call for industrial action "to defend jobs, services and oppose privatisation" placing it far to the left of the national executive's position.

## PAY

Four motions dealing with equal pay for women in the wake of the groundbreaking March 2005 settlement between the union and the North Cumbria Acute Care NHS Trust do not even appear on the agenda, apparently on legal advice.

Under last year's agreement some women workers at two hospitals in Carlisle received up to £200,000 in back pay, with total compensation approaching some £340 million after an eight-year legal battle.

## POLITICAL FUND

The conference will not even debate the future of the union's political fund, much less disaffiliation from New Labour despite the union leadership backing the partial withdrawal of Labour Link funds from the party, during the pensions dispute.

In fact, only a single motion came forward calling explicitly for a split from Labour. It came from the Uttlesford local government branch in rural Essex and has been ruled out of order as beyond the conference's decision-making powers and so in conflict with rules.

## Palestine

A fifth "p" word, Palestine, is likely to generate the most heated debate of any international question on this year's agenda.

The national executive has put forward a motion that seeks to overturn much of the broadly progressive policy Unison has previously adopted regarding the Palestinian national question with a proposal that effectively draws an equal sign between the pro-Zionist Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.

While condemning the "appalling social and economic conditions created by the occupation under which ordinary Palestinians have to live" the motion makes no reference to the de facto siege of the Palestinian authority since Hamas' victory in the legislative elections.

Similarly, the question of arms sales from Britain to the Israeli Defence Force features nowhere in the motion, which marks another retreat from the support of the Palestinians' right to self-determination since the start of 2006.

Last month delegates at the Communications Workers Union conference voted unanimously for a national strike in Royal Mail. A postal worker lays out the challenge facing the union

# 'United we stand, and Allan Leighton falls'

The headline is a quote from a London postman, arguing for a national strike at the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) annual conference in late May. Allan Leighton is the universally hated head of Royal Mail. It summed up the mood in sorting and delivery offices around the country.

Conference was a big step forward from last year, threatening to suspend union funding to Labour if Royal Mail is privatised. The postal section of the conference gave a resounding yes vote for a strike ballot in response to Royal Mail's latest bully-boy tactics, its imposed 2.9 per cent pay deal and Chairman Allan Leighton's privatisation bid. Ballots will be sent out to members within four weeks if Royal Mail doesn't change tack.

Postal workers will get back up from their comrades in Post Office Ltd. A second emergency motion called on Post Office to re-open stalled pay negotiations on the 2.9 per cent offer – or the union would hold a consultative ballot, leading to an immediate industrial action ballot.

Excellent, workers can hit postal bosses from both directions and turn up the heat on the Labour government, which is fully behind Leighton's privatisation and cuts plans.

This year has already seen immense changes in the post, with the opening of the postal market to full competition, and "efficiency savings" which plan 5 per cent of cuts and up to 40,000 jobs.

In the last two months, post bosses have upped the stakes, campaigning for a share distribution to staff as a step towards privatisation, going around the union with letters to members, and banning reps from carrying out legitimate union business.

When management broke off negotiations with the CWU and imposed a below-inflation 2.9 per cent pay rise, it was just the icing on the cake.

## "THE BALLOT IS ON"

Royal Mail has dared postal workers to put up or shut up. As Dave Ward, Deputy General Secretary (Postal), said, "We can't afford not to confront the employer." His emergency resolution demanded Royal Mail negotiate. If progress were not made within four weeks, a ballot would be triggered.

Speaker after speaker agreed. Even delegates in weaker areas, who said they would have to work overtime to get a yes vote, said that the union had to draw a line in the sand over the issue. The atmosphere was determined and serious, and the vote unanimous. Dave Ward closed the session saying, "The ballot is on". Now we need to get the word out and ensure a massive "yes" vote from the members.

One of the main themes of the discussion was how to win that vote and then the strike. Delegates expressed concern that the union didn't do enough to win the vote in 2003, the last time there was a ballot for a national strike.

That ballot – for a strike over pay – was narrowly lost. Royal Mail went on the offensive, ripping up agreements and imposing a new regime on the workforce. Allan Leighton proclaimed, "The world has changed". Only sustained wildcat strikes in London and Oxford forced Royal Mail to climb down.

Union leaders and delegates repeated calls to support reps and officials in those areas where the vote was lost in 2003. Dave Ward proposed steering groups at the national, regional and branch level to draw in reps from outside the apparatus of officials, co-ordinate the campaign for a yes vote, and organise the strike action.

## "RESTORE NORMAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS"

What wasn't discussed or raised in the debate was what the demands of the strike would be and how the members could control it. The Postal Executive's

## Strike...for what?

The emergency resolution's vague demands are not enough. We should demand the average workers' wage of £400 a week, and a 35 hour week with no loss of pay. Automated sorting machines do not have to lead to the loss of a single job. Royal Mail has made a £355 million profit this year. Allan Leighton alone gets over £1 million with bonuses.

The government's pockets are deeper still. They have creamed off billions over the last decade from Royal Mail as a public company, in order to fill the hole left by their tax cuts for the rich and big business.

Branches should also forward resolutions calling for the strike to demand the government closes the market and retracts the licences to the private collection and delivery agencies. The CWU needs to use the "Public Services Not Private Profit" alliance against privatisation to mobilise the huge anger against Blair's free market policies in our support.

The union leaders may say this defocuses our campaign for pay and is illegal under the anti-trade union laws. But a mass movement against privatisation, and a solid strike in the post would be a challenge that Blair's weak government could not withstand.

It would send a message to Blair, and put pressure on him to back away from his privatisation plans.

motion leaves the leadership lots of room to manoeuvre. Its demands are unclear.

It calls for re-opening negotiations on pay and ensuring that members are "rewarded for change". If this means accepting "efficiency savings", then it will inevitably lead to job cuts.

It demands Royal Mail and Labour fulfil their obligations to the pension fund, but with no reference to their raising the retirement age. It leaves room to cut a deal where new employees could be on worse pensions, as has happened in several other unions.

The biggest problem is that the resolution demands a return to "normal industrial relations". All this amounts to is a demand that Royal Mail turn the clock back to March and actually work to the National Efficiency Agreement, which Royal Mail signed with the CWU but largely ignored.

Dave Ward and others also demanded a better "work-life balance". The union's demand for a 35 hour week will be on the ballot paper, but activists

will have to be on their guard against backsliding. After all, Billy Hayes and Dave Ward dropped this longstanding policy demand in the Efficiency Agreement negotiations earlier this year, when demanding the 35 hour week with no loss of pay could have saved jobs.

But the union leadership's basic strategy was summed up in the phrase, "things are changing, the environment is different now." That attitude underlies everything the executive has done so far this year, including the strike ballot, minimising its remit to vague demands and implicitly offering to call off the ballot if Royal Mail shows it is willing to negotiate.

## ESTABLISH RANK AND FILE CONTROL

We need to establish rank and file control of the strike very quickly to ensure that the leaders don't drop the ballot for negotiations. Faced with a strong movement for a strike, Royal Mail might well start making friendly noises or offer

minor concessions. We can't let our leaders grasp that bogus olive branch.

Dave Ward's idea for organising committees at every level is a good one. The CWU leadership recognises that it can't win the vote and a strike without the thousands of reps up and down the country. But these should be proper strike committees, with delegates elected from – and recallable by – regular workplace meetings.

These local strike committees should elect delegates to regional and then national level. These strike committees should have the final say on all negotiations and major decisions – especially about whether to call the strike off and what form the strike should take.

Officials should of course provide experience and work hard. But it is indispensable that the people whose jobs are on the line and who are taking the risk of striking – the members – have day to day control of the strike and the final say.

This is especially important in the light of recent pensions strikes where unions repeatedly called off action or imposed crap deals without the membership having a say.

Branches shouldn't wait. We should go onto a war footing, convene emergency meetings to start agitating and setting up strike committees. They should demand that the steering groups that Dave Ward advocates are not bureaucratic bodies, but genuine strike committees, made up of rank and file delegates.

If postal militants can learn the lessons from the bureaucratic sell outs imposed on workers in recent struggles and control the campaign, if they can prepare every postal worker in every region for the strike action that will be needed to win, if they can strengthen and extend the workplace organisation already in place in cities like Oxford, Belfast and Wolverhampton – we can win!

## CWU leaders: still backing Labour

The Conference debated on its first day how to respond to Labour. We fund the Party and its MPs to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds, but in return we get a government that has masterminded the drive to privatise the post. Blairite ministers from the beginning set up Postcomm, appointed Allan Leighton, opened up the postal market, approved massive cuts and repeatedly floated the idea of an employee share scheme.

Even Billy Hayes has stopped talking about the 2004 Warwick Agreement between the unions and Labour. As sacked Rolls Royce convenor, Jerry Hicks, quipped at a conference fringe meeting, "Alas, poor Warwick, I knew him well..."

Last year the National Executive wrecked a resolution to stop all funding for Labour if they

didn't give an immediate pledge on privatisation. Instead, they agreed to review the issue in 2006. One year on, and with the privatisation bandwagon in full swing, we can see where such toothless resolutions get us!

So this year the union took a step forward when the overwhelming majority of delegates backed a motion to suspend all funding for Labour if any measures are proposed for privatisation or go ahead.

But motions proposing that the union campaign for a new workers party or allow branches and regions to support candidates other than Labour in elections as long as they backed union policy on privatisation and the anti-trade union laws were defeated. Yet another year of our money will be spent supporting MPs, who fight Blair or privatisation. The CWU even

sponsors Peter Hain, the secretary of state for Northern Ireland. Where was he during the Belfast strike?

The Edinburgh No. 2 branch has shown the way, supporting the Scottish Socialist Party for three years in a row and funding the candidacy of local rep, Gary Clark, in the general election. Billy Hayes even told Gary that if he lived in Scotland, he'd vote SSP. So why does the CWU have to continue supporting Labour in England and Wales, Billy?

Branches must pass resolutions in support of the Campaign for a New Workers Party and demand a union-backed conference to push that forward. If the RMT recalls its conference on the crisis of working class politics, branches should send delegates and fight for the unions to take the lead: break from Labour and form a new party.

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# The contradict

China is undergoing tremendous economic and social change and, therefore, the society is wracked with contradictions. *Peter Main* reports on what he saw during his month long tour around the country and how the Chinese state bureaucracy is trying to control the rate of political change

At first I thought the difficulty we had trying to get into the carriage on the Shanghai metro was just more evidence of what a cosmopolitan, 21st century "world-city" Shanghai had become, rather like the traffic jams we had already fought our way through. It was only after we finally got in that the real picture became clear.

Sat on the floor between the main sets of doors were four peasants, each accompanied by a great bail of produce. It is difficult to be sure, but from their greying hair and weatherbeaten faces I would guess they were in their fifties. Their clothes were old and patched and their complexions far darker than those of the commuters milling around them.

Despite the very obvious obstruction that they were causing, no one said a word. Although one or two other passengers gave each other meaningful looks, the great majority simply picked their way past and found themselves a place. Meanwhile, those on the floor stared resolutely into the middle distance.

Yes, Shanghai is a world city but it's a Chinese world city and this little, everyday episode on the metro is as good a symbol as any of what that means. Except that, in the country as a whole, the proportions are reversed: it's the smartly dressed urbanites who are the minority. While these two Chinas certainly appear to have very little in common, they are jammed together and, in a very fundamental sense, they depend on each other.

China is full of such contrasts; a group of Chinese women, straight off their air-conditioned tourist bus, use their 3G phones to take videos of another group of Chinese women, washing clothes in a river; in a temple, a Buddhist monk slowly sounds a gong while a pilgrim bows in prayer – and with his other hand he sends a text message on his mobile. (Odd, you would think, that with all that astral travelling telecommunications would be unnecessary, perhaps he was a novice.) Of course, such things can be seen all around the world, wherever globalisation has brought prosperity to a minority against a background of social conditions inherited from the past.

## THE PARTY

What is different in China is that the past was not a traditional, pre-capitalist society but a Maoist planned economy, and

perhaps the single most important relic that continues to dominate the country is the Communist Party. As a result, what is still very striking is that alongside the billboards advertising Siemens, Audi, Microsoft, B&Q, McDonald's and Carrefour fly the party banners exhorting the people of China to achieve the "Four Modernisations". It is true that, as we travelled through both coastal provinces and the interior, most sizeable towns that we passed had at least one or two "Western" shops, but there wasn't a single hamlet that didn't have its party office, spic and span with its red flag flying above it.

The party is everywhere. Like a cross between the Catholic Church and the Gestapo, it reaches down throughout the population and into every institution in society. Its flag, despite its colour, is a symbol of class collaboration: one large star dominates over four smaller stars, expressing the party's leadership of the block of four classes the peasantry, the working class, the urban petty bourgeois and the "patriotic" bourgeoisie.

This ideology of the popular front, imposed on the Party by Mao in the Thirties, is still crucial to an understanding of party strategy today. Because the revolution of 1949 is held to have removed all fundamental contradictions among the people by expelling the unpatriotic bourgeois clique around Chiang Kai-shek, the interests of the four classes can now all be accommodated within society. Constitutionally, the party is the "leading element" in society and therefore entitled to assume leadership of all social organisations.

With the development of "socialism with Chinese characteristics", that is, the restoration of capitalism, the party has only had to shift the emphasis of how this "national interest" is to be achieved. Where, after the civil war and occupation, planned industrialisation was essential, now allocation of resources via the market, under the leadership of the party, is the way forward. To ensure that the social changes resulting from this are properly "coordinated" within the party, it has changed its statutes so that membership can be extended to entrepreneurs and managers. "Business people" now make up some 20 per cent of the membership.

Equally, the definition of legitimacy for any organisation within China is that it accepts "the

leading role of the party". This issue was in the news during our stay because the appointment of some new bishops for the Catholic Church of China had been announced, much to the annoyance of the Vatican which thinks that only the Pope can consecrate bishops. In China, however, that would be unconstitutional because it would be denying the leading role of the party. From the point of view of the Chinese working-class, the dispute hardly matters, but the issue itself is crucially important.

The same rule would apply – and has always applied – to any independent organisation such as a trade union, not to mention a workers' party. The assertion that the working class has an independent, class interest is itself unconstitutional, and this guarantees that working class political and organisational independence can only be achieved through the destruction of the party dictatorship.

Because the party is so all-pervasive, it can be an extremely efficient transmission belt for government policy. Within two days of Hu Jintao's meeting with Bill Gates on his recent trip to the US, there were banners flying from public buildings throughout China proclaiming the need for everyone to protect "intellectual property rights" in the national interest. Interestingly, in the same week, the English-language press was reporting that German engineers were accusing Chinese engineers of having broken into their offices to steal blueprints related to the high-speed magnetic levitation transport system due to be extended from Shanghai to Hankou.

At the same time, because you can be sure that very little happens without the party's knowledge and approval, lots of things take on a political significance that you might not expect them to have. For example, 40 years after the "cultural revolution", considerable sums of money are being spent by the state to restore the Buddhist temples which were often ransacked and trashed by the Red Guards.

On a visit to one, the Bao Guo monastery on Mount Emai in the province of Sichuan, our guide went to great lengths to explain how the place had got its name. "Bao Guo" means, approximately, "protect the nation" and it was the name adopted by the monastery during the Tang dynasty after the emperor had decided that Mount Emai should



Chengdu, capital city of Sichuan province

be given to the Buddhists, rather than the Daoists, as a spiritual centre. In gratitude, the monks vowed always to honour and defend the state. No prizes for guessing the moral of that story.

Similarly, but on a more modern note, visitors were also shown an inscription over the main gate which was written by the then chairman of the Nationalist Party, the Guomindang, when he stayed at the temple during the anti-Japanese war. Further on, we were shown the room where Chiang Kai-shek himself had stayed when taking a break from the campaign against the Japanese. In the past, emphasis has always been placed on Chiang's failure to conduct any campaigns against the Japanese occupation and his continuation of the struggle against the Communist Party's guerrilla forces.

This change is a pointer towards Beijing's long-term strategy of incorporating Taiwan into China via a possible rapprochement with the Guomindang. Today, the Guomindang is the main opposition party in Taiwan, supporting reunification as a long-term strategy rather than the independence, which the governing party claims to support.

## SICHUAN PROVINCE

Sichuan itself is one of the bigger provinces with a population of some 87 million and a long established reputation as one of the most fertile areas of China. We wanted to visit it because it is an inland province, approximately as far from the coast of Bangladesh as from that of China. It remains an overwhelmingly rural province, only about a quarter of its population

live in towns and half of them are in the capital city, Chengdu.

Around the city itself there are all the signs of rapid economic development: new industrial estates, new housing blocks, new university buildings, high-rise hotels, new roads and demolition sites on the edges of obviously much older quarters. What was noticeable, however, was that many of these buildings were empty and several building sites



Hu Jintao meets with Bill Gates in the US



# tions of China



were deserted. At the same time, the streets and shops were busy and there were no overt signs of any economic difficulties. Our guide said that the peak of the building boom had passed and that there had been "many scandals", but the city's main industries had not been affected.

Away from the city, what is most striking, apart from the scenery, is the prevalence of the "national minorities" and of Buddhism. Farms and villages display prayer flags and temples and shrines are clearly in everyday use. In the more mountainous areas, the place looks like Tibet, indeed the mountains are part of the same geological structure as the Himalayas. According to official statistics there are 53 minority peoples in Sichuan and their different "national costumes" are on display in provincial museums, but on the ground the impression is much more uniform.



Peasant tills land downstream from nuclear plant

Despite its importance in China's agricultural economy, most farming seemed to be on a very small scale. Most fields were about the size of a British allotment and water buffalo were the only visible source of power. The exception to this was in a tea-growing district where large-scale production, centred on processing factories, predominated. However in China, a family's land is not normally consolidated into one territory, but rather divided into several separate plots so it would be impossible to estimate how big the average landholding might be. Overcoming such fragmentation and consolidating land into more "economic" units is one of the objectives of the current five-year plan – the 11th – which has just come into operation.

Since joining the WTO at the end of 2001, Chinese agriculture has gone from being a net export

earner of some US \$5 billion per year into a net importer, particularly of cereals and oilseeds, to the tune of \$11 billion. Government plans accept that Chinese agriculture should concentrate on the labour-intensive production of vegetables, fruit and livestock which would exploit the availability of cheap labour and, at the

## The Chinese state, and its party, knows better than most the potentially destabilising effect of widespread rural opposition

same time, represent greater added value than would be possible with, for example, large-scale cereal production. However, all of this would entail the abolition of the existing system of property rights in the countryside and, on top of that, it would swell even further the existing "surplus" rural labour force of perhaps 200 million people.

The Chinese state, and its party, knows better than most the potentially destabilising effect of widespread rural opposition. In order to lubricate the huge changes that it is proposing, it is also planning a massive investment programme to introduce free education and health care and some basic social security provision for the rural population which at present has no such provision. On paper, the legacy of state planning and continued centralised direction of investment puts Beijing in a better position to undertake such a policy than probably any other semi-colonial or "developing economy", but this does not guarantee its success.

Funding the programme through taxation of the highly productive coastal provinces would not only cause serious political tensions, but also threaten the all-important foreign investment and low production costs which have fuelled their development until now. On the other hand, simply allocating

funding through the banks, as has been done in the past, would risk both inflation and undermining those banks as commercial operations.

Whatever strategy it adopts, Beijing has to maintain high rates of growth, in GDP terms, for the foreseeable future. Returning to the coast from the interior, it is easy to see why such growth might be taken for granted. In the three main economic development areas, the Pearl River delta in Guangdong, around the Min River in Fujian province and in the Yangzi River delta centred on Shanghai, mile after mile of new factories, warehouses and offices line the newly-built motorways connecting cities with populations of millions – and all of this has been built within the last 20 years.

New construction is clearly continuing in and around Shanghai itself but here, too, there is a downside to economic development. Within the city, demolition to make way for new tower blocks is concentrated on the poorer areas, away from what were the

American, British and, especially, the French, settlements which are now very expensive residential areas. There are reports of attempts to resist these clearances which echo the more widely reported and far more numerous examples of confrontations between peasant communities and developers backed by city and provincial governments.

The building sites themselves also highlight another feature of China's economic boom. Construction techniques are still very labour intensive and hundreds of labourers are housed on the sites themselves in flimsy, temporary accommodation, rather like Portakabins, two or even three storeys high. Through the open doors, the beds in these dormitories can be seen, which are also stacked three high.

The workers themselves are much darker than the rest of the population and many of the food stalls set up close to the sites advertise halal food. These are the migrant workers from as far away as Xinjiang who have fled to the coastal provinces from rural poverty. They provided the workforce for the economic boom, but their very existence has only recently been officially recognised and they still do not have any of the rights, for example to education and social services for themselves and their families, which other urban workers have.

Despite the number of buildings, both commercial and residential, still being built, it was again obvious that a lot of completed projects were still empty. This was even true in the financial district of Pudong, across the river from Shanghai itself, where new skyscrapers are going up directly alongside others which are empty and boarded-up. This pattern was repeated outside the city itself in the industrial development zones where the trademarks and logos of both Chinese and multinational corporations dominate the buildings and, alongside those that are obviously in full operation, there are others which are equally obviously empty and beginning to look quite dilapidated as well as new sites where foundations are just being laid.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

These signs of a property boom that is beginning to outstrip demand should not be taken to mean that economic catastrophe is on the horizon. At the heart of China's economic development is the export trade and that is still benefiting from the new markets opened up by China's membership of the WTO. Nonetheless, real estate speculation and over-investment are problems that have moved quickly up the government's agenda. In his "government work report" presented in March of this year, China's premier, Wen Jiabao, identified overcoming "excessive fixed capital investment and overcapacity" as second only to the

need for economic development in the interior as a priority for the coming year.

Achieving either of these objectives, never mind both of them, will be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Quite apart from any changes in the world market that could threaten the export trade, there is a developing structural contradiction at the heart of the Chinese political and economic system. Despite the legacy of state planning and control of important economic levers, above all the banking system, Beijing and the Communist Party itself are no longer omnipotent. Since 1992, when the decision to dismantle economic planning and restore capitalism was made, provincial governments have been encouraged to stimulate economic development and have been allowed a high degree of autonomy in deciding how to do this. It is precisely their success which now threatens the central government's objectives.

As each provincial government strives to attract more foreign investment by offering incentives such as state-funded transport and energy infrastructure, the ability of the central government to maintain a coherent and rational development programme diminishes. To the extent that foreign and, increasingly, domestic, capital does establish itself and expand its operations, this automatically creates a magnet for further investment and a social pressure counterposed to any government inspired transfer of resources. Because of the policy of opening the party itself to capitalists these pressures are even transmitted into the heart of the political system.

It is impossible to predict how these contradictions will unfold, certainly not on the basis of a relatively brief visit. Nonetheless, the dynamism, the pace and the scale of change in China are clear to see wherever one travels. The economic and social changes that they have created cannot be contained within the political dictatorship which was originally based on a bureaucratically planned economy. However, the contradictions in conflicts developing within Chinese society express themselves, at the heart of future social conflicts will be a struggle against that dictatorship.

From the experience in the states dominated by the former Soviet Union, it is not difficult to see the range of political currents which will emerge or the danger that bureaucratic dictatorship will be replaced by an unholy alliance of multinational capital and home-grown speculators.

The only defence against such an outcome will be a politically independent working class party and democratically organised workers' organisations, such as trade unions and workers' councils, which can draw in the support of the majority of the peasantry and enforce their own class control against both the bureaucrats and the capitalists.

# Germany: crisis in WASG - the left organise

Martin Schushenk, of Arbeitermacht, reports on the crisis within the fusion process of the PDS and WASG

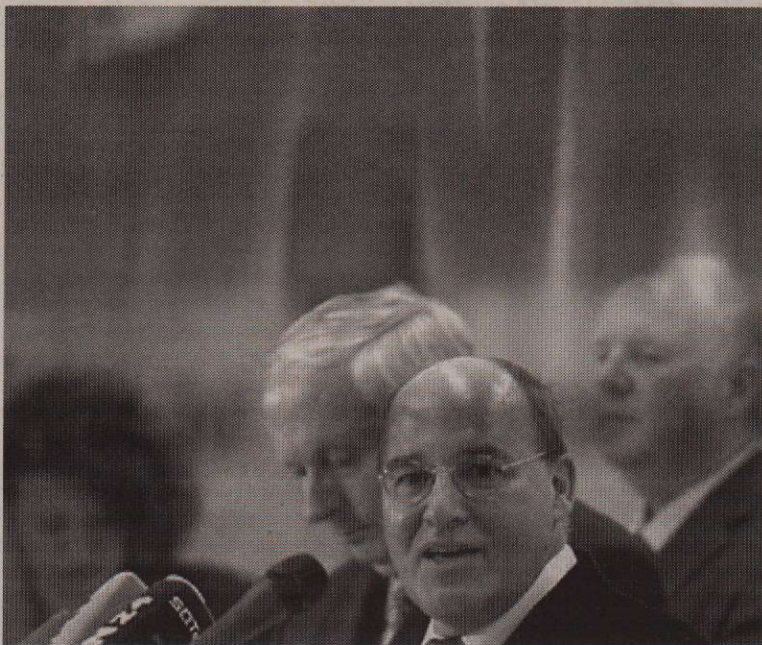
Major problems have erupted between the WASG and the PDS in Berlin. The PDS is in coalition with the SPD in the federal provinces of Berlin, and in Mecklenburg Vorpommern. These coalitions are carrying out programmes of neoliberal cuts, the policies that led the members of the WASG to leave the SPD. Many WASG militants are heavily involved in campaigns against the cuts and are hoping to give the resistance an electoral voice. For this reason, Berlin WASG decided to stand candidates of their own and not vote for the PDS. The Berlin membership decided this democratically in a ballot and at two party conventions. This has led to a head on clash with the national WASG leadership.

On 14 May, the leadership dissolved the elected leadership of the Berlin district of the WASG and installed Hüseyin Aydin, Linkspartei-MP, former SPD member and trade union secretary in North Rhine-Westphalia, as the "commissar" to lead the WASG in Berlin. Aydin not only comes from the labour bureaucracy, he is also a fierce advocate of its politics and close ally of the most right-wing reformist sections in the WASG leadership.

Aydin's aim was clear, he could withdraw the slate of the Wahlalternative Berlin if he wanted to. The PDS has openly declared that it wants to continue the coalition with the SPD and continue to support the city government's neo-liberal attacks. To prove this, it was revealed a few days ago, that the Berlin Council has outsourced all its postal business to a private company. Most of the postal workforce in the private company are on casual contracts and earn a gross wage of only 5.80 euros an hour! (less than half that of the lowest wage groups in the state postal service!)

The right-wing minority in the Berlin Wahlalternative around former PDS-members, middle ranking trade union bureaucrats has been joined by an unlikely ally, the sister organisation of the British SWP, Linksruck. It refused to support a demonstration in front of the city council, aimed at exposing this low-wage company and demanding a minimum wage of 10 euros per hour.

According to Christine Buchholz, a leading member of Linksruck and a member of the Wahlalternative national leadership, now working for the parliamentary fraction of the Linkspartei,



Oskar Lafontaine (centre rear) and Gregor Gysi (front)

this would be a provocation - to the PDS. Obviously, it is a "provocation" to demand that the PDS implements a decent minimum wage where it governs. The reason for this outrageous attitude, from an organisation that calls itself revolutionary, is that the fusion between the PDS and the WASG is the big prize: evidently it is worth sacrificing one's principles for, plus workers wages and job security thrown in for good measure.

Buchholz claimed that a rise to 10 euros would be "utopian". Maybe she forgot that this is a central demand of the national demonstration planned for 3 June, supported by the WASG; maybe she forgot too, that this "utopian" demand is to be found in the founding programme of the WASG.

Unlike Buchholz and Aydin and others, the majority of the WASG membership in Berlin is determined to stand by its principles and by workers under attack. Only a day after the dissolution of the Berlin leadership, an extraordinary party conference re-elected the old leadership and upheld the previous decisions. There is a widespread opposition to the bureaucratic administrative attack on the Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern regions within the WASG.

The aim of the party leadership is clear. It wants to destroy the Berlin section and all potential opposition to its right-wing course. Oscar Lafontaine, Klaus Ernst, Gregor Gysi - most of

the WASG and PDS leaderships - want to form a reformist party, which will be prepared to enter government with the SPD and Greens after the next elections. There can be no doubt, based on the experience of Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern regional coalitions, that this would be a social liberal government ("social" in name: neoliberal in practice).

The betrayals and anti-working class measures of the Berlin SPD-PDS coalition will be child's play compared to this coalition. One has only to look at Romano Prodi's new government in Italy, to see where Lafontaine, Ernst, Gysi and others are heading.

To seal this pact, the leadership has to "prepare" the party by purging it now. Klaus Ernst is reported to have said at the last leadership meeting: "I am well aware, that these measures will lead to a mass loss of membership, maybe of thousands. And this is exactly what I want."

Indeed. And it is a danger the left need to fight tooth and nail. The most progressive and positive element of the Wahlalternative - the recruitment of thousands of unemployed workers who have been (re) activated by the Monday demos or of shop stewards and ordinary workers looking for a political alternative - is deliberately targeted by the reformist national leadership. The danger is that this important section of the working class vanguard, open to serious debate on

what a socialist programme means, will become deeply disillusioned and scattered. Astonishingly, this treacherous policy is being supported all the way by the "revolutionaries" of Linksruck.

## The left plan resistance

On 21 May, a national meeting of the WASG Linke (WASG left) took place in Kassel, to discuss how to fight the reformist leadership. Members and supporters of Arbeitermacht, German Section of the League for the Fifth International, put forward a set of proposals for the formation of an organised left opposition in the WASG - since only this will allow militants to:

- Challenge the leadership of WASG and enable them to successfully fight for a new one.
- Fight for an emergency conference of the WASG, on the basis of newly elected delegates, representing the actual membership (rather than the 2000 one year ago).
- Put the struggle against the capitalists, the government (and the local governments) attacks into the centre of the WASG policies.
- Fight for a new mass workers party on the basis of an open political discussion of its programme, tasks and structures (which is not confined to a top-down fusion by the PDS and WASG leaders).
- Encourage forces from the unions, the social movements, the immigrant communities, the students and youth, and from the left, who are not yet in the WASG to join in this struggle and also to encourage the development of an opposition within the PDS.
- Open a debate on the programme of such a new left opposition where revolutionaries can fight for their programme to become the programme of the party.

Nowadays, most of the oppositional forces in the WASG - including the SAV (CWI section) put the defence of the WASG founding consensus and programme as their central aim. This is false, even though the WASG leaders are now turning their back on the most progressive demands in the programme. We can and should defend these demands but the WASG programme as a whole is utterly reformist.

In order to build up a real political alternative to this leadership, the opposition also needs to break with the

party's programme and replace it with an action programme, linking the struggles against the generalised attack of the ruling class and the forging of a strengthened German and European imperialism to the fight for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist, imperialist system itself.

The meeting in Kassel was well attended, with more than 250 members from all over Germany. Apart from Arbeitermacht, the major political forces present were the Sozialistische Alternative (SAV), the CWI section in Germany, DKP (Deutsche Kommunistische Partei), a grouping around some left, semi-syndicalist members of the leadership in North Rhine-Westphalia, the ISL (internationale sozialistische linke, one of the two USFI-groups in Germany), left trade unionists, former Brandlerites, plus activists coming from the unemployed movement.

While some of the left did not agree with supporting the WASG standing in Berlin, all were united in the need a) to support the Berlin district against the dissolution by the WASG-leadership, b) to create a left oppositional framework in order to be able to fight the bureaucratic leadership in the WASG and the PDS.

Also the discussions in the work groups - particularly the one on anti-capitalism and programme - marked a clear left-ward shift compared to previous meetings.

The conference decided to discuss programme and policy and also collaboration with an emerging opposition in the Linkspartei.PDS.

The supporters of the left Opposition also agreed to campaign against the bureaucratic measures taken against Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and also build the campaigns decided by the national convention - for a minimum wage of 10 euros, against privatisation and other aspects of the capitalists attacks.

The meeting also agreed to build a national conference to prepare for the next national convention of the WASG in Autumn 2006.

While the conference fell short of what could have achieved - it was nevertheless a step forward, one that raised the fighting morale and political determination of the left and the newly politicised activists whom it is attracting. If anyone doubted this - one could hear it on way back to Berlin, when the whole coach enthusiastically sang the Internationale.

# Nepal: the revolution stalled

On 2 June, tens of thousands of people attended a Maoist (CPN-ML) rally in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu. They were there to protest at the stalling of the revolutionary movement that saw the ending of the King's rule in April.

Despite negotiations at the end of May that produced a 25-point accord and moves towards establishing human rights. No actual date has been agreed for the constitutional assembly.

The seven-party coalition that had organised the 19-day general strike that brought an end to the King's rule was supposedly meant to bring about a constitutional assembly. But since then, the Congress party has put its people in power and reconvened the House of Representatives (i.e. the old parliament).

Speakers at the 2 June rally declared the convening of the House of Representatives as a "betrayal" and that the Maoists

demand for a constitutional assembly expressed the wishes of the people.

Since the stepping down of the King, many of his powers over parliament have been removed and hundreds of political prisoners have been released. Nepal saw its biggest May Day for a very long time with workers demanding the freeing of labour activists and more workplace rights.

But since the euphoria of late April the traditional capitalist parties of Nepal have begun to reassert their control.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepalese Congress Party appointed his own cabinet including sections of the CP-M, which had previously stated that it was in favour of a constitutional assembly.

Another debate emerged in early May over the role of the army, which had proved itself as the loyal tool of the King, beating and killing protesters in May. At first this took the form of the

CP-M (the main reformist party) demanding the removal of the word "Royal" from the title and putting the army under the control of parliament. There are also complaints that leading generals refused to attend the swearing in ceremony of the House of Representatives. This resulted in the army being re-titled the National Army and its chief of staff General Pyar Jung Thapa saying that "Nepali Army is committed to following the directives of Nepal government which is moving ahead with the objective of creating a prosperous Nepal by strengthening multi-party democracy and lasting peace."

The revolution in Nepal was the brave act of tens of thousands that won the beginnings of freedom. They have cut down the powers of the King and his clique. But they must go further and challenge the poverty and oppression that ruin the lives of the workers

and peasants.

- Demand a Constitutional Assembly now. Build committees to elect delegates from the workplaces, shanty towns and peasant communities. For a revolutionary Constitutional Assembly not a talking shop.
- Give land to the peasants. The peasants should break up the landed estates and own their own land. The Maoists in the countryside must support this and encourage it by handing weapons to the peasants and helping them defend themselves and build peasant committees.
- Disband the army. Despite its name change, it is still the tool of the ruling class to oppress the masses. Put it under the control of the armed people. For a workers and peasants militia.
- Organise the workers and peasants into committees of action that can link up and co-ordinate action.

These committees can challenge the power and legitimacy of the capitalist state and lay the basis of a new workers state.

In Russia, between the democratic revolution in February and the socialist revolution of October 1917 the Bolsheviks argued for such a programme: all power to the soviets; land to the peasants; down with the capitalist ministers; for a workers militia. Lenin and the Bolsheviks followed the line in practice outlined by Trotsky in 1905's "Results and Prospects", the bourgeoisie are the grave diggers of the revolution, only the workers supported by the peasants can go further and make the revolution permanent by taking power.

All this means patiently explaining the need to challenge the system of private property - capitalism - and the building of a revolutionary party in Nepal that fights for permanent revolution.

# East Timor: another success for 'nation building'

By Stuart King

The small island of East Timor, which is sandwiched between Australia and Indonesia, is in chaos. The army has fallen apart, the police have fled, there are armed gangs roaming the streets attacking civilians, an 100,000 people have fled their homes in a population of just one million.

Yet this was a country that the UN administered for two years, declaring its occupation a great success when it left an independent East Timor in 2002. Now thousands of Australian, Portuguese and Malaysian troops are pouring back in. The immediate cause of the current crisis was divisions in the army, which had their roots in the East Timorese struggle for independence from Indonesian occupation.

East Timor had won independence from Portugal in 1975 under the leadership of a left-wing nationalist party Fretilin. Within months, it was invaded and occupied by the right-wing government of Indonesia, with a nod of approval from Washington. In the ensuing crushing of the Fretilin guerrilla movement an estimated 200,000 died.

When the right-wing dictatorship of President Suharto of Indonesia was

finally overthrown in 1998, East Timor, as a result of decades of struggle and countless massacres, was finally given the right to vote on independence. When in 1999 nearly 80 per cent of the electorate voted in a UN supervised referendum for independence, in revenge the Indonesian army and pro-Indonesian settlers and militias razed the country to the ground before being forced to withdraw and let the UN take control.

So it is little wonder that a small country left ravaged, dependent largely on subsistence agriculture and with huge illiteracy rates, was riven with problems and rivalries. The guerrilla movement had regional differences, especially between the east and the west, and some commanders in the west of the country had little loyalty to Fretilin or Falintil, its guerrilla force.

When a unified army was created under UN supervision, Fretilin/Falintil under the leadership of President Xanana Gusmoa took most of the leadership positions. This led to growing resentment from the western forces. This February, 400 soldiers went on strike protesting at supposed discrimination in promotion and over pay and conditions. The government responded by sacking 600 soldiers who then rioted.

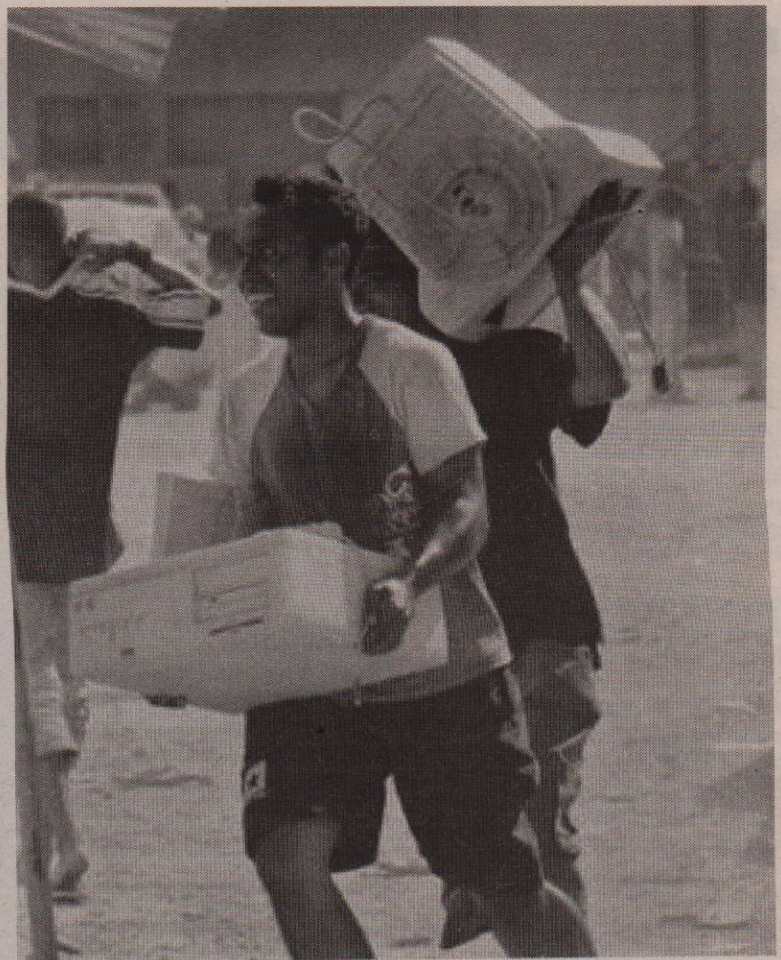
To make things worse the interior minister, on bad terms with Gusmoa and other army commanders had been building up a para-military police force. The police have been accused of torture and rape by the US Human Rights Watch and are deeply discredited among the population. The country had become a tinder-box waiting for a spark.

But the underlying reasons for the deep discontent in the country is the appalling poverty. A recent UN report pointed out that 40 per cent of the population was below the poverty line and 40 per cent were unemployed, with much higher rates among the young. It concluded that the poor were getting poorer.

Yet East Timor sits next to one of the largest untapped oil and gas fields in the world, the Greater Sunrise field in the Timor Sea. Why hasn't it been able to exploit this or borrow on its future earnings?

Because Australia claims large parts of it under an agreement it made on territorial boundaries with Indonesia in 1972, boundaries that East Timor disputes. This dispute was only finally put aside early this year and agreement reached on how to share the income. Now desperately needed finance from this field is still years away.

Australia considers that East Timor



Looters in downtown Dili

exists in its "sphere of influence"; it is treated like any other semi colony. It is bullied on oil and gas, Australia is always the first country to send in its troops on "humanitarian peacekeeping" missions, and it is the first to demand that its soldiers quickly swap to the blue helmets of the UN, the collective arm of the imperialists in the area.

East Timor is once again about to be put under UN supervision. No doubt the imperialists will be using the intervention as another example of how a failed state cannot be left to run its own

affairs - like Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iraq - of how the imperialists have to shoulder once again "the white man's burden" of nation building in these states.

East Timor, like Iraq, proves the opposite. It shows that the imperialists and their system of rapacious exploitation of these nations for profit, is the root cause of "failed states". Far from being nation builders, the imperialist powers and their military-economic system of exploitation, are nation destroyers.

# Australia: all out against Howard's law

Prime minister John Howard's Work Choices legislation contains some of the harshest anti-union measures in the world. *Carlene Wilson* argues that a general strike is necessary to smash them

Workers in Australia will be coming out in their hundreds of thousands on 28 June to fight against anti-union laws that are crippling effective trade unionism and giving bosses the legal right to intimidate workers.

Days of action last year showed that there is mass opposition to the laws, but so far the militancy and anger of workers have been squandered and corralled into one-day protests by the union leaders.

The 28 June protest is an opportunity for workers and young people to fight for effective action to defeat the government offensive as workers and young people did recently in France.

The last of Prime Minister Howard's Work Choices anti-union laws came into force in Australia at the end of March. The laws give employers far greater powers to sack workers and cut their wages.

Within a week of the laws coming into place several bosses had dismissed their entire workforces and then offered to re-employ some of them but on much lower wages and conditions. At the Cowra Abattoir in New South Wales 29 workers were sacked and only 20 offered new contracts. And some of these paid \$180 less a week. The bosses were eventually made to back down by the Office of Workplace Services, with the result that the government appeared to be the reasonable mediators.

In April, 70 field technicians were

sacked at Optus in Melbourne for "operational reasons". The employees were told to attend a seminar to write CVs and reapply for their old jobs. This time they would have to buy their own vans and pay their own insurance, pension and other expenses leaving them \$200-300 worse off a week. Optus made \$500 million last year.

Perhaps the most bizarre case so far is the Melbourne worker fired for "smirking" at his boss. His termination form says he was fired for "being disrespectful". Two other workers were also fired for supporting the first. Their union did not respond but a 200-strong picket organised by the local community did win the men their jobs back.

The response from the union movement has been uneven. While there have been community assemblies, solidarity BBQs and pickets such as at Optus where workers have been sacked, none of these have yet turned into strikes or solidarity action, despite promises by union leaders to do so at the two large rallies last year.

On 28 June, there will be a third national day of action with unions, workplaces and individuals taking some form of industrial action. Many individuals will also take unofficial action by calling in sick or taking a morning off or long lunchtime to attend.

The two days of action last year were real shows of strength. There were good turnouts for the TV cameras and some union leaders and politicians spoke against the bill. But none of the speeches outlined a plan of action

that could fight the new laws and challenge Howard's government and the bosses.

Some unions have decided that the way to survive these laws is to try and ride them out without a fight. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union for instance has been desperately trying to re-negotiate all its contracts before the final legislation is in place. That did not prevent Qantas proposing to sack 480 workers and cut wages. The union has been able to pressure the Australian Industrial Relations Council into telling the airline to withdraw the proposals. And while the union's lawyer said that under Work Choices the union could not have challenged the airline's actions, the union has still entered into negotiations rather than fight the cuts.

Other unions, like the National Tertiary Education Union, have stated publicly that it is more important to defend the union than its members.

From the very first time the new laws were announced Workers Power has argued that such a class-wide attack can only be met by a class-wide response. We've argued consistently for a general strike and for how this can be organised. Of course, a growing number of workers are casualised, part-time or not even union members and in some workplaces and industries where there is still high unionisation, there are not the networks or structures of union democracy. All this makes calling for a general strike difficult.

However France has only one in

10 workers in unions (less than half the Australian number), but with the enthusiasm and dynamism of the students acting as a catalyst, French workers were able to stop their government's CPE contracts. In the US, unionisation is as bad as France, but earlier this year more than a million workers and migrants have demonstrated and gone on strike against racist immigration laws.

Inspired by the French events, the left-group Resistance has called on Australian students and young workers to strike on 1 June, with the aim of getting the ball rolling before the ACTU national day of action.

The national day of action on the 28 June, part of a week of action, is the perfect place to kick off a general strike.

In the run up, unions must call meetings of delegates to hammer out a strategy to defeat the bill. New South Wales unions have called for a series of workplace meetings for the 15 May to build for the day of action.

But in Western Australia, white collar unions have refused to support the day of action leaving the main blue collar unions, maritime workers, plumbers and electricians, manufacturing workers and construction and mining, to go it alone.

That is why meetings are needed in all union branches and workplaces to build for the 28 June and force unions to back the day of action.

Inter union co-ordinating committees should also be built to unify the struggles and prevent any white/blue

collar division such as in Western Australia and to run the week of action and the 28 June stoppage in local areas democratically but with strength.

In the meantime, every job really must be defended with strikes, pickets and solidarity actions.

But to build and generalise action from these disputes will mean challenging the current union leaderships, even those that appear to be more militant. Workers must guard against any tendency for the union leaders to "wait for a Labour government". Labour has already said it will not get rid of all of Howard's anti-worker laws.

When it comes to arguing for the general strike, we have to be clear - this is the only way to stop the laws and bring the whole Howard government crashing down. And if we get a general strike, then it poses the question of who rules society?

Workers must have an answer. We need a different type of workers' party, one that will fight for workers' interests against the bosses and Howard and won't betray like labour. We need a workers' party that will stand up for immigrants and oppose Howard's military adventures in Iraq, Afghanistan, Solomon Islands and now East Timor. And we need a workers' party to fight for socialism and bring about the end of capitalism - a revolutionary party of the working class.

- All out on 28 June
- For a general strike to bring down Howard
- For a new workers' party

# The return of nuclear power?

By Pete Ashby

“What is unbelievably depressing about the government’s response is that they see in the evidence about greenhouse gases not an opportunity to promote environmental concern, but a chance to make the case for nuclear power,” said Tony Blair, shadow Energy Secretary, speaking of the Tory government in 1988.

How times change! Ahead of the findings of the government’s Energy Review, Blair recently delighted a CBI dinner by telling them that “nuclear power is back on the agenda with a vengeance”. He aims to double the proportion of the electricity produced by nuclear power in the future, citing CO<sub>2</sub> emission targets and gas import dependencies as the main reasons to resort to nuclear power.

Currently the proportions of electricity produced from gas is 40 per cent, from coal 33 per cent, nuclear 19 per cent and renewables, e.g. wind and hydro-electricity, a mere 4 per cent. Gas supplies are running out rapidly and coal is considered a “dirty energy”, compared to so called “clean” low carbon emitting nuclear power.

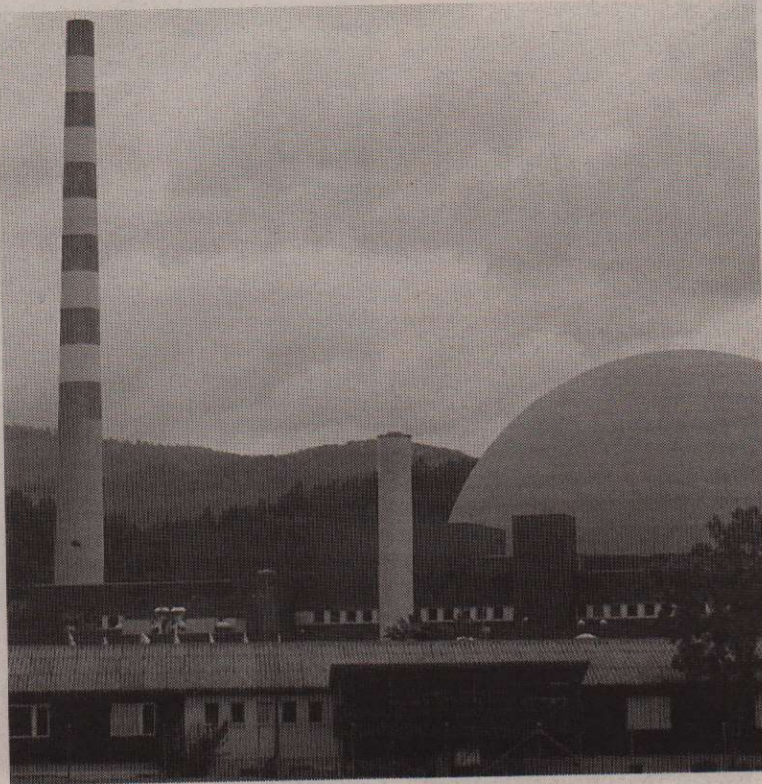
Is it therefore sensible and “green” to advocate a new generation of nuclear power stations?

## Safety Concerns

Firstly, the safety of nuclear power remains paramount. A threat of a Chernobyl-style meltdown haunts everyone, but it is nuclear waste and its safe disposal that causes most concern.

There is still no agreed method for long-term safe storage of waste in Britain, 95 per cent of which has high-level radioactivity, yet a wave of new power stations will produce much more.

Blair’s plan would see 6 to 10 nuclear power plants built and opened in a decade. All the existing plants will be closed by 2023. Who will pay the



massive costs of decommissioning, which according to Gordon Brown may add up to over £90 billion? The suggestion is that the funding will come solely from private companies.

However, it is generally accepted that the government will be forced to make guarantees, give soft loans or rig the energy market to crowd out the case for renewable energy technology – no wonder the CBI was so pleased.

But will nuclear power really help tackle climate change? The power stations themselves produce relatively little carbon emissions, but the dismantling and decommissioning of the old stations and building new ones produces a lot of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as does the mining and transport of uranium from around the world.

## Britain’s carbon polluters

At a time when climate experts have increased their estimates for future

global warming by a further 2°C, a recent survey by The Guardian revealed the impact of British industry on climate. Five companies combined produce more CO<sub>2</sub> pollution than all the motorists in the UK.

EON UK, the electricity generator which owns Powergen, is the worst culprit, producing 26.4 million tonnes of carbon a year, slightly more than the whole of Croatia.

The Drax power station in north Yorkshire alone produced over 20 million tonnes of this, making it the biggest carbon polluter in Britain. A mere 1 per cent increase in its efficiency would save the typical carbon emissions of 21,000 households.

In addition, European Commission figures published last month revealed that British sites operated by big companies, such as Tesco, Walkers, Ford, Unilever, Kellogg’s, Allied Bakers, Nestle and Cadbury’s, all produced

more than 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2004.

These and other big industrial polluters across Europe are covered by the European Emissions trading scheme. In theory this works by capping the amount of carbon the polluter can emit. If they fail to meet their target they can buy permits to pollute from rivals who have successfully cut their emissions.

But giving European companies more permits than they needed has made global warming even worse.

## Alternatives

Renewable sources are a growing part of the energy mix in Britain. These include wind, solar, biomass, hydro-electric, landfill gas and tidal power.

The Welsh Assembly has recently agreed to investigate the construction of a 10-mile barrage across the Severn estuary. With its 216 tidal-powered turbines, this would produce the equivalent output of two nuclear power stations and would last over 150 years.

Under the guise of “making a massive contribution to tackling climate change”, according to Welsh secretary Peter Ham, it seems likely to go ahead. While many environmental groups are opposed, they seem likely to be ignored in the rush to give the £15 billion contract to the private sector.

While “clean coal” energy sounds like a contradiction in terms, the technology exists and is getting more efficient. Primarily this works by “carbon capture” and its burial underground. Two prototype clean coal fired power stations are to be built in Britain.

Coal remains by far the most abundant and cheapest fuel on the planet. Many power stations in the United States already use this technology (the US plans to increase its coal burning by 40 per cent by 2023).

In the battle against global climate change, this will be a particularly important technology for developing nations such as China and India, where most electricity is produced from coal burning stations with the subsequent high carbon emissions.

## Emergency Energy Plan

We are witnessing the rapidly increasing impact of climate change globally. Given that energy production plays a major role in emissions of the greenhouse gases which cause global warming, we need to develop an emergency plan right now.

The energy industry should not be run for profit but should all be re-nationalised. Nuclear power should be put under workers’ control, with workers’ inspection of all aspects of the industry and unsafe plants closed.

There must be a massive investment in alternative technologies, such as wind, solar, tidal and wave power. Cleaner coal power stations, and carbon capture should be fully funded. Energy conservation needs to be taken seriously by government.

Apart from increasing recycling, the government should tax the producers and supermarkets on all forms of environmentally damaging packaging, and force them to produce goods such as cars, computers and fridges which are efficient and long lasting. Air travel should be reduced and rail services across continents rapidly improved and subsidised.

The fiasco of trading carbon permits shows once again that we cannot trust the capitalists to safeguard the environment. We need to fight all the way to impose our action plan on governments globally. But it is only mass action by workers, poor peasants and environmentalists around the world that will force them to listen to our demands.

In the end it is only by getting rid of all these pro-capitalist politicians and the system they defend that we can really begin to save our planet from the environmental catastrophe which looms closer every day they remain in power.

“The government’s position has been characterised by a malign reluctance to have anything to do with the notion of energy conservation,” said Tony Blair in 1988 about the Tories – what a fitting description of his own legacy.

# Review: Bradford & Brixton riots

By James Roberts & Kam Kumar

A recent Channel 4 dramatisation looked at the events in Bradford on 7 July 2001. This was the day when members of the National Front and British National Party came to town seeking to attack and intimidate the Asian community. They got more than they bargained for; Bradford youth fought back both against the fascists and the police who protected them.

After the “riot” events were manipulated so that the role the NF and BNP played in stoking up trouble was erased, and the criminal actions of the police passed off as heroic. By the time those involved in the rioting were bought to trial in September 2001, they never stood a chance. What had been a defiant stand against the racist violence of the police and the fascists was painted as simply an outbreak of meaningless violence by Asian youth. Guilty verdicts on the charges of riot and affray were handed out to dozens of innocent young men, many were sent to prison, some for up to eight years.

Expecting a programme which came down on the side of those who distorted what happened, I was surprised to see a quite accurate portrayal of what

took place. Whilst the makers didn’t really seek to make any political points out of what happened, they did at least completely distance themselves from the popular media portrayal.

Having lived in Bradford at the time of the riots, one of things I remember very clearly was the feeling of tension that built up in the city during the week running up to 7 July. The docudrama was particularly apt in the way that it showed this tension prior to the riots.

The National Front had their march banned by the police two weeks earlier but word quickly spread that they intended to break the ban and turn up anyway. Tension was further ratcheted up when the police “even handedly” banned not only the NF demo, but also the annual Mela in Lister Park, the highlight of the Bradford Festival and a showcase of Asian culture from around Yorkshire.

The most shocking part of the programme covered events outside the Empress pub in the city centre. At 2pm on 7 July police drove Asian youth and ANL activists out of Centenary Square. As an isolated group of young Asian men passed the Empress, a group of NF stormed out, kicking one man to the floor and attacked him with broken bottles. Nearby police officers held back the other Asian men from defending their friend, and then stepped in to

arrest the victim.

It was this attack that triggered the violence. Defence of the community was met with a full-scale police attack, attempting to wrestle control of the lower part of Manningham. The police got the worst of it and came up against two nights of Molotovs, rocks and burning cars... not simply in anger, but in defence of the area.

The second half of the programme went on to show how the local mullahs, Asian elders and business owners became complicit in ‘Operation Wheel’, a sweep of the city in the weeks after 7 July, using police photographs to track down anyone and everyone who had the slightest thing to do with the riots.

These events showed how misleading it is to view the Asian or Muslim “community” as a unified bloc. The small business-owning middle classes, along with the religious leaders, poured scorn on those involved with the fighting, and sought to win credit with the police by handing in family members, friends and people who they recognised. The youth had to be supported against their elders and the sections of the community closest to the police and authorities.

Five years on from the riots, we have seen the same sort of uprisings against police and state racism in France with three weeks of street fighting in the suburbs of Paris last November.

As long as racist police and fascists continue to attack black youth, we should continue to shout: “Self-defence is no offence!”

## Brixton - 1981

The Bradford riots were not the only time Britain has seen oppressed groups battle on the streets with the cops. In 1981 poverty, racism and police brutality sparked major riots in Brixton. It turned into one of the most serious riots of the century, with 300 police injured, over a hundred vehicles burned, 150 buildings damaged and 30 burned out. A recent documentary on BBC2 went over the events of April 1981.

The reasons for the riot were clear. Over 13,000 were unemployed in Brixton – the majority were black – and they faced rampant racist discrimination when applying for jobs and daily police harassment. Police brutality was infamous and many black people had died in police custody. On the streets they were constantly harassed by the police using “stop and search” powers. In 1975, for example, 14,000 stop and searches took place in a two-month period.

By the spring of 1981 the black community in Brixton had had enough. In February even Lambeth Council had produced a report describing local policing as like “an army occupation”. In

April an attempt at a violent arrest led to an explosion. Three days of rioting followed and the government was forced to set up a public enquiry under Lord Scarman. That summer rioting broke out in 25 other cities in Britain, the most serious at Toxteth in Liverpool.

The Brixton riots were a cry of desperation by a group of people harassed, criminalised, and impoverished – a group bearing the brunt of the racism in Thatcher’s Britain. Today, too, we see racism rife in Britain. The Asian community is harassed by police stop and search, targeted with ‘anti terror’ laws and segregated by housing and education policies. Add to this the poverty suffered by this group in Britain, the insecurity faced by young people in work, and the racist hysteria that fascist groups like the BNP try to whip up – and it is no surprise that some young people despair.

The task of socialists is to turn the despair into hope – and struggle. We have to fight for organised self-defence against racist police and fascists. Whilst riots won’t win the class struggle, they are signs that the misery meted out by capitalist society will be met with resistance. We must turn that anger into conscious struggle for the overthrow of the capitalist system, which produces the conditions that leads to such explosions.

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## Unions must unite to fight bosses

While Hugo Chavez was touring Europe, workers in Venezuela were preparing for the second conference of the National Workers Union (UNT). *Keith Sellick* reports on what happened

Nearly 3,000 delegates attended the second conference of the Venezuelan National Workers Union (UNT) at the end of the May. Delegates representing some 1.2 million workers organised in 700 local unions and 16 national unions queued for hours to get in – some up to 12 hours on Thursday 25 May. But by Saturday the conference had broken up in acrimony with different tendencies within the federation holding separate meetings.

The UNT was formed out of the struggle both within and outside the old federation, the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CVT). The CVT pursued class collaboration with the bosses and supported the coup and oil lock out against President Chavez. The UNT has taken advantage of new labour laws to unionise workers and its success was marked by this year's Mayday rallies where the UNT had half a million workers and the CVT less than a 1,000.

The opening of the conference was addressed by a series of international speakers from Brazil, Argentina and Britain – represented by the NUJ's general secretary Jeremy Dear. But, as soon as the UNT general secretary Marcelo Maspero started to speak, chants of "elections, elections, we want elections" went up and this soon became the key demand of the majority in the conference and one which precipitated its premature end. But the demand for elections is an expression of deeper divisions over the direction the UNT should take.

The leader of the majority grouping, Orlando Chirino, who is from the oil industry and had the support of about 70 per cent of the delegates, is in favour of defending Chavez against imperialism but remaining independent of his movement. The Chirinos grouping is organised as the Class Struggle Current and was calling for the election of an UNT leadership at the conference – since its inception in August 2003 the leadership has been self-appointed.

The minority grouping, the Bolivarian Workers Force (FBT), grew out of the struggles against the involvement of the old corrupt trade union, the CVT, and is more supportive of Chavez and his Bolivarian project. The minority wanted to postpone elections to concentrate on re-electing Chavez later



UNT conference

this year; the cry in the hall from this section was for "10 million votes for Chavez".

In letting the young union federation fall apart on this issue, the leaders of both sides did a disservice to the workers of Venezuela.

### Dangers

Despite Chavez's popularity in Venezuela and abroad, the working class is under attack and, in some cases, still weighed down with the traditions of bureaucratism and class-collaboration associated with the CVT (many CVT bureaucrats jumped ship when the UNT was formed to join it).

Bosses at the Droguería Race pharmacy company have denied recognition to the local union, while management at the steel contractor Orimalca have ripped up their collective agreement with the local steel union. Workers at Sel-fex, which makes textiles, have occupied the factory for six months and have just been told by the bosses that the company is bank-

rupt. So far there have been no moves by union leaders to support or call for its nationalisation or workers control. In Carabobo state, workers are fighting moves to privatise health care.

Furthermore, there are still laws that undermine workers rights and conditions inherited by Chavez from the old Fourth Republic. They are still on the statute books and, along with some laws against unions passed in the early days of his presidency, need to be scrapped.

### The left at the Congress

A small current at the conference was the Revolutionary Marxist Current (RMC) linked to the International Marxist Tendency (the main force behind the Hands Off Venezuela campaign). This group argues that the conference should have discussed a programme for the UNT and an action plan to put the working class at the centre of the revolutionary process in Venezuela. Such a programme, it says, needs to fight for workers con-

trol of the factories, nationalise industry under democratic control with the participation of the working class, and the abolition of the capitalist state and its replacement with a revolutionary workers state.

This is certainly true but the RMC counterposed this to the need for electing a democratic leadership, which it argued was not the priority. On priorities, they sided with the Chavistas' emphasis on campaigning to re-elect the president. As they put it: "The battle to re-elect the President is inseparable from the struggle to resolve the grave problems that the workers and the vast majority of the population continue to suffer, and from the need to build socialism..." Far from it, the real battle is for working class independence and to build a revolutionary workers party that can take power. This, not Colonel Chavez, is the only force that can resolve the "grave problems" that the workers and poor of Venezuela face.

Indeed the RMC made accusations of "ultraleftism" at those who "want to split the UNT away from the Bolivarian movement". This is no doubt a veiled reference to the Party of Revolution and Socialism, which is critical of the UNT's connections to the government and is linked to the Chirino grouping. While stating that it is the duty of socialists to stand shoulder to shoulder with the masses to defend Chavez from imperialist attack, it also calls for the formation of a "mass revolutionary party" to end capitalism and fight for socialism. There is even talk of it standing candidates against the Bolivarian movement in local elections to expose the state bureaucrats or "capitalists who wear red berets".

The UNT conference was a missed opportunity and the damage must be repaired immediately. But if the UNT is to succeed then it must develop a bold programme to challenge the right of the bosses to manage and to own property – and it must be willing to defend itself. Already there are occupations and experiments in workers control, which are being debated nationally and on live TV. At Alcasa aluminium plant workers are even having weapons training behind the factory. The working class is learning in the heat of struggle what needs to be done to take the revolution

forward. We must develop and generalise the best elements of workers organisation and politics.

- Put the UNT leaders on the average wage of the workers and make them recallable delegates.
- Organise the unorganised – unionise the informal sector and the unemployed.
- For militant class struggle unionism – defend any workers attacked by the bosses with industrial action. For solidarity strikes including all out state wide or national strikes. No cuts in jobs or pay.
- Build a strong national federation linked to the peasants and the poor in the barrios. Make the working class the leader of the revolution.
- Occupy the factories and fight for workers control of production.
- Fight for the nationalisation of industry and a democratic planned economy.
- Unions must arm and train workers to defend themselves from imperialist attacks, and military provocations. Take the weapons promised by Chavez and give them to the workers and peasants.

A militant federation such as the UNT can make an enormous contribution in taking the revolution forward. But it also must have a political weapon against the reformists and timeservers that inhabit positions of power in the state and Bolivarian movement. The trade unions must launch their own mass party, which can appeal to workers and the poor on the land and in the shanty towns.

It can win support from the many good elements in the Bolivarian movement who want to take the revolution forward but are frustrated by the reformists and inertia of the state. Revolutionaries in the UNT must campaign for the federation to launch such a party as an urgent necessity.

A mass workers party committed to workers control, nationalisation and overthrowing the existing state, can defend the gains already made by going further and making them permanent with a socialist revolution against capitalism.

It must create a new far more democratic state than the Bolivarian Fifth Republic: a revolutionary workers state based on workers councils.

## Workers control and co-management

The occupation of factories is one of the key developments of the Venezuelan revolution. Through it workers learn how to manage their own factory and exert their power against that of the bosses. The struggle can also provide a school for socialism with discussions and debates about the way forward. The factory committee can provide a political and organisational centre for workers and links with other factories. But it takes various forms, and sometimes can take the working class down the wrong road of managing capitalism.

One of the most well known takeovers is the paper manufacturer Venepal (now known as Invepal). The company went bankrupt putting 900 workers out of work. After along legal fight the government took over the company with the state having 51 per cent of shares and the rest going to the workforce; a workplace assembly makes decisions about the company.

There is no longer a union at the plant, rather workers are represented by a co-

operative. Profits or benefits go to individual workers as opposed to being put back into the national plan. The leadership of the plant was recalled in a mass meeting in November last year by 260 votes to 20 and a new leadership was elected. But this democratic decision by a mass assembly was not recognised by the Minister of Popular Economy, which also demands a majority say on the management board because "the state owns 51 per cent". This just shows the dangers of this type of "co-management".

Another takeover has occurred at the aluminium company Alcasa, which had been losing money for years, where a similar split between workers and state ownership has taken place. The 2,700 workers now elect their own managers – Carlos Lanz, a former guerrilla, now heads the company. In less than a year productivity has increased by 10 per cent.

Rafael Rodriguez, who is in charge of economic development, highlights the differences between Alcasa and the

tradition of social democratic co-management in Germany. For him co-management is a transition towards self-management and building socialism in a "practical manner". The plant also provides schools, health care and weapons training.

By contrast at the state electricity company, Cadafe workers have two representatives on the five person co-ordinating committee, which can only recommend action. Workers at the plant, including Fetraleac (a union federation which co-ordinates power workers), have demonstrated about the lack of workers involvement in running the plant.

There was a wave of occupations during the bosses' lockout but it receded shortly after. Now, however, the example of Venepal has put workers control back on the political agenda with numerous occupations and demands for nationalisations throughout the country. It has even gained support from Chavez himself who sees it has a particular form of

a reformist "socialism for the 21st Century".

Earlier this year the Revolutionary Front of Occupied Factories was set up, arising out last year's conference that brought together examples of occupations and workers control throughout Latin America. The front's main aim is the "extension of expropriation and nationalisation of Venezuelan industry under workers control". But the obstruction by state officials also shows that whatever Chavez has said about workers running factories there is still much opposition to the idea within the Bolivarian movement and the Labour Ministry.

Without a national strategy based on seizing state power, such factories remain only islands of co-operatives in a sea of capitalism. It is necessary to fight for workers control alongside nationalisation and for a democratic national plan and that means challenging the reformists and the ownership of private property.

# The Hunger Strikes: 25 years on

In 1981, IRA prisoners went on hunger strike for political status, with widespread support throughout Ireland. *Bernie McAdam* looks at their struggle and what it means for the struggle today

**T**his year marks the 25th Anniversary of the Irish Hunger Strikes. In 1981, 10 Irish Republican prisoners fasted to death in order to win political status for themselves and their comrades in British jails.

Their struggle was an attempt to smash Britain's criminalisation policy. They refused to accept criminal status and demanded they be recognised as prisoners of war. The fact that they were prisoners of war had been accepted by the Tory Government of 1972 when they were forced to concede special category status in the face of mass demonstrations and riots in the six counties of northern Ireland. This allowed republican prisoners to wear their own clothes and organise their own education and recreation.

It was a Labour Government that withdrew special category status in 1976. The Tories enthusiastically followed this as Thatcher quickly stepped up the attempt to drive a wedge between the republican movement and the predominantly Catholic anti-Unionist population. Increased repression ensued and Catholic estates became saturated with British troops.

Britain's criminalisation policy had also involved a massive restructuring of the legal system in Northern Ireland. Juries were abolished, as the notorious Diplock Courts were established, and rules of evidence were diluted to make it easier to gain convictions. By 1980, the British state had escalated its war on the anti-Unionist community; a war that has its origins in Britain's age-old occupation of Ireland.

## HUNGER STRIKES

This then was the backdrop to the Hunger Strikes of 1981. The withdrawal of special category status in 1976 had already seen blanket and dirty protests, a first hunger strike that had apparently secured a deal only to be broken by Thatcher. The subsequent Hunger Strike led by Bobby Sands knew full well what was at stake and issued a clear call for political status. They had been convicted by special courts, under emergency legislation, which specifically recognised the political nature of their offences, so why couldn't they have special category status? The prisoners' 5 demands were:

- The right to wear their own clothes
- The right to abstain from penal labour
- The right to free association within ones area
- The right to organise education and recreation
- Full restoration of remission

But Thatcher faced the strikers down and from March to October successive prisoners were let to die. Even Labour Party representative Don Concannon flew over to the dying Sands just to say he could expect no support from Labour!

The National H-Block Campaign was formed in Ireland to support the prisoners. Worldwide support was also forthcoming. The Hunger Strikers had massive support throughout Ireland. On his deathbed, Bobby Sands won a by-election in the north; Bobby Sands MP!

However, as Workers Power and the comrades of the Irish Workers Group active in the H-Block Campaign stated at that time, the campaign also had serious weaknesses. First, the Campaign pleaded on humanitarian grounds rather than explicitly for political status. IWG publication *Class Struggle* 8/9 July '81 said: "While we are not opposed to people taking part for humanitarian



Bobby Sands

reasons, it must be understood that the fight to defend republican fighters, whatever the criticisms socialists and trade unionists have of their tactics and methods, is above all a working class fight against imperialism and its creation - Partition." A victory for political status would also be recognition

of the continued existence and legitimacy of the struggle of the anti-Unionist working class.

Second, the H-Block Campaign appealed to the hypocritical pacifism of the Catholic Church and Fianna Fail. The latter with its long history of jailing republicans would only be too happy

to be wrapped in fake republican colours against a background of rising anger in Ireland.

Third, there was a refusal to develop a strategy for working class action to win political status. The IWG argued for a General Strike to win the prisoners' demands and they called for an anti-imperialist united front that could mobilise against the whole array of repression that put the prisoners there in the first place. After Bobby Sands died there were massive demonstrations, 100,000 at his funeral and street fighting in many areas of the north. But no one was calling for strikes, aside from the IWG, the National Campaign failed in this regard despite a groundswell of anger throughout Ireland.

The Hunger Strikes failed to win their demands but equally the British were not able to criminalise the men in the eyes of the great majority of the nationalist population. But the system of emergency laws, arbitrary arrests, beatings and torture to extract confessions, trial by no-jury courts all remained intact.

## PEACE WITH NO JUSTICE

One of the results of the Hunger Strikes was for Sinn Fein to embrace the electoral road at least to Stormont and Dublin. The realisation that their military strategy was not working made them sue for peace in the 1990's. The last of their ceasefires in 1997 and the subsequent Good Friday Agreement in 1998 was recognition that the war was over. The dumping of arms in 2005 was also an historic statement but was done with no deal on policing even.

## IS THE PEACE DEAL A SELL-OUT?

As socialists we always accepted that the Republican struggle was based on a real injustice, the denial of the right to self-determination of the Irish people. That

denial accounts for a section of the Irish people being imprisoned against their will in the northern state. That's why we supported the IRA's goal and defended their right to fight British imperialism. But the GFA moves us towards that goal of self-determination not one jot; acceptance of the GFA formalises the Unionist veto over the future of Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein accepts this; they have accepted the Unionist veto.

Furthermore despite some alleviation of Catholic discrimination, the police and security services are all still Unionist controlled. Britain and its loyalist accomplices hold the monopoly of violence. No significant disarming of loyalists has taken place.

As the power sharing experiment is attempted again, let us not forget it is based on a sectarian head count - an attempt to stitch a compromise together between two distinct communities within the context of a united Northern Ireland. A pipedream that can only hold back the development of cross community working class politics.

Sinn Fein obviously see sectarianism as rampant in the north but believe "progress within the peace process will create opportunity, wealth, improve our standard of living and contribute to further progress. It will usher in equality and remove the causes of sectarianism." (Gerry Adams). Apart from a naive view of how capitalism works for us all, this statement fails to address the roots of sectarianism in the north. The state itself is sectarian; no amount of Sinn Fein involvement in a power-sharing Executive will change that.

Indeed after nearly 10 years of peace sectarian attacks against Catholics are as common today as before the GFA. Whilst the Orange state remains intact no significant change will take place. The DUP will defend that state to the last and every concession Sinn Fein grant will never be enough. As Paisley and co continue to ward off Adams' advances, time runs out for Sinn Fein's strategy.

## A WORKERS' REPUBLIC

A new strategy is required. The national question will not go away nor resolve itself through hopes of peaceful co-existence. We need to campaign for a constituent assembly where a socialist solution to the national question which appeals to Catholic and Protestant workers alike can be hammered out.

The recent postal strike in Belfast uniting both Catholic and Protestant workers is key to forging such unity in action. But lasting unity requires more than a just a militant fight for common economic goals.

A fight for a secular Workers' Republic is a fight against sectarianism. A united socialist Ireland can dig out the roots of sectarianism and privilege in the north. That means a concerted struggle against any new Stormont style state, the withdrawal of British troops that guarantee that state's existence and the formation of workers'/popular militias. It involves a struggle against the southern state and bosses, ensuring that the means of production and the state are in the hands of democratically elected workers organisations throughout the island.

A revolutionary workers party must be built in Ireland to ensure that the Irish working class is the agent that deals a double whammy to both the British imperialists and the southern bosses on the road to a Workers' Republic thereby ensuring that Bobby Sands and the Hunger Strikers deaths were not in vain!

## THE CREATION OF A SECTARIAN STATE

This year also marks the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising. In 1916 a few hundred Irish nationalists and socialists staged an armed rebellion in Dublin against Britain and declared an Irish Republic (See *Workers Power*, 304).

The rebellion was defeated and its leaders were executed. The aftermath of this opened up a revolutionary phase in Irish history that saw an overwhelming victory for Sinn Fein in a general election, massive strikes for example against conscription and transport of army munitions, and a guerrilla war waged by the IRA against British occupation. Sinn Fein set up a Parliament, *Dial Eireann*, that was promptly outlawed by the British.

The result of this struggle was, a Treaty that drew up the present borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Partition divided Ireland but also the IRA. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic 1916 never envisaged a divided Ireland. No wonder many in the IRA cried "sell-out" on hearing the terms of the Treaty!

A civil war followed, whereby the British backed the new Free State Government of the south against the anti-Treaty forces of the IRA. The IRA was defeated and suffered heavier losses and repression to equal anything the British had levelled at them. The national revolution had been smashed and two vicious, reactionary, clerical states had been formed.

James Connolly, one of the executed socialist leaders of the Easter Rebellion, had earlier predicted quite accurately "a carnival of reaction" if Partition occurred. Meanwhile in the north the minority Catholic population had been stranded and imprisoned under the jackboot of the fully armed pro-British Loyalists.

The aims of the Irish national revolution had not been fulfilled. Ireland was divided. The artificial states that had been created were a constant reminder to Irish people of an injustice needing to be righted. The northern state was to become a prison house for a third of its Catholic population. Discrimination in jobs and allocation of houses, repression by draconian laws like the Special Powers Act and suppression of all things republican and Irish ensured that struggle around the unfinished tasks of the national question would break out again.

And break out it did again with a vengeance! In 1968 the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement took to the streets demanding equality for Catholics, drawing on the experience of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. It protested against the discrimination in housing and jobs, against gerrymandering, and for one man, one vote in local elections. The mass demonstrations drew the predictable violent response from the Royal Ulster Constabulary and other loyalists. Not only demos were

attacked but in parts of Belfast Catholics were driven out of their areas in pogroms.

Catholics fought back with no-go areas; rent and rates strikes were declared. Defence Committees were established. A reorganised Provisional IRA was formed in response to the burning need for defence of Catholic areas; their credibility was thus gained. Britain's credibility diminished as they reacted to justified Catholic resistance with internment without trial, torture, supporting a demoralised, battered and sectarian RUC and to cap it all paratroopers murdering 13 unarmed demonstrators in Derry in 1972.

Catholics' original perception that the RUC was bigoted rapidly grew over into the perception that the troops were no better. Indeed both forces defended the state, a state that was seen to be irreformable in the eyes of Catholics and one that was deliberately designed with an inbuilt majority guaranteeing institutionalised sectarianism, or as NI Prime Minister Craig put it in 1934 'we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state'. Only its destruction and replacement with a united Ireland would justifiably satisfy the republican led Catholic population. The Civil Rights Movement having hit the sectarian brick wall of the northern state grew over into an unfinished national war of liberation.

# Save Peugeot jobs

For 18 long, hard and proud years I have been a track-worker at the Peugeot Ryton plant in Coventry and a member of the Transport and General Workers Union. Although the work is very hard (40 cars an hour equates to 75 seconds to build a Peugeot 206) it is the only decent well paid job I've had in my 43 years.

The announcement that the plant will close next year is a disaster for me and for the people of the Midlands region. When the fourth D shift was taken on, Peugeot had 15,000 applications for 400 jobs. Every one of those applicants hoped to have a good job with good pay, good conditions and a good future. So that's 15,000 hopes, dreams and aspirations shattered.

Ryton is today one of the world's most profitable and productive car plants in the history of car manufacturing. I received in my April pay packet £400 profit-related pay, so how can Mr Foltz, the Peugeot/Citroen president, claim the Ryton plant is not profitable?

A study by Garel Rhys, head of Cardiff University Business School's automotive centre, showed that in 2003, the busiest year, Ryton produced 210,000 cars and, in 2005, 129,000 cars were made.

There were four shifts working in 2003 but only two shifts in 2005. So that is equivalent to an increase of either 12,000 cars per shift in 2005, a 24,000 increase over two shifts or if there had been four shifts working in 2005 there

would have been 48,000 more cars produced in 2005 than in 2003.

Join us in our struggle to save and defend British manufacturing. Start by writing to Tony Blair calling on him to prevent the closure of the Ryton plant. Then contact Mr Foltz at [www.peugeot.fr](http://www.peugeot.fr) telling him what we think of his decision.

We really do need to think of our children's future. I have a seven-month-old son called Harry.

If he came to me in 18 years time and says: "Dad, I've got a job at Peugeot Ryton working on the track" I would be proud to say "my son is a track-worker, builder of automobiles."

**Eddie Adkins  
Ryton**

# How to stop the BNP

I read your article in Workers Power 305 entitled "How to stop the rise of the BNP" with interest as it is certainly an alarming development in British politics and something every working class person in the country should be concerned about. The article did contain many interesting points regarding the betrayals of the working class by New Labour and the competition between politicians from all the major parliamentary parties to talk tough on immigration and the threat of Islamic terror both of which are important contributing factors to the growth of the BNP and the acceptance of its ideology within certain sections of the working class.

What I was surprised to note however that nowhere in the article was the tactic of no platform explained or put forward as the immediate necessity of the antifascist movement to stop them in their tracks in the here and now. If the sentence "The way to stop the BNP on the streets is to challenge them wherever they try to organise" is intended to explain the no platform tactic then I would suggest it is seriously inadequate for the purpose.

How should they be "challenged" and with what? This could easily be interpreted in different ways by different people. Should we challenge them to a debate? Should we challenge their leaflets with ones of our own? If they hold a meeting or demonstration, should we organise one of our own? The article does not say, but more worryingly goes on to say that this is not even the most important task facing the antifascist movement today. The task

of building a "new mass party" is apparently more important.

One that fights for "a radical working class solution." Do you mean socialist? revolutionary? or maybe old Labour? The end of the article states that only a revolutionary party can defeat the threat of fascism "once and for all." Very true but what do we do now, in the absence of such a party? Surely a revolutionary party is built in the course of the struggle and is not more important than the struggle itself. Instead of berating the UAF's glossy leaflet as futile for attempting to persuade potential BNP voters not to vote BNP (something which in fact it doesn't say, it actually encourages antifascists not to abstain to keep out the BNP) we should be calling on the UAF to adopt a militant no platform position.

One that denies fascists any opportunity to organise whatsoever by occupying their meeting places, preventing them leafleting, dispersing their demonstrations by physical force if necessary. We should be attempting to convince the membership of UAF of the urgent necessity of implementing this strategy even if their leaders refuse to adopt it. Only in this way can we stop the BNP now and build the revolutionary party of the future.

**James Deer,  
Wrexham**

**We reply:**

**We have never argued for debating the fascists. We have always argued for counter-demonstrations, marches and physical confrontation where necessary.**

**Workers Power 304 states: "In short, it (the BNP) is the party of civil war - against the working class. That's why we argue for a workers united front to deny the fascists any platform. Instead of providing canvassers for Labour, the unions should be boycotting the delivery of BNP electoral material in the post, refusing to count or announce the votes, unless the BNP thugs are ejected from the halls, organising antifascist meetings on all the estates and in all the workplaces, targeted by the BNP.**

**Confrontation with the fascists is as necessary today as it's ever been, whether that be on their public demonstrations, at their election hustings, or when they are leafleting local areas. Whether or not the BNP are wearing Armani suits, they're still a fascist organisation."** ([www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=123,1035,0,0,1,0](http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=123,1035,0,0,1,0))

**Last month, we reported on the work done by our comrades in Yorkshire, including trying to convince the UAF of such a militant strategy to defeat the BNP.**

**We do not counterpose this campaigning to building a revolutionary party. The campaign is necessary in the short-term to confront and defeat the fascists, the party is important both in the short-term to ensure the campaign has the correct politics and in the long-term to ensure that fascism and the system that breeds it - capitalism - are defeated once and for all.**

**As Leon Trotsky pointed out, the answer to fascism is not liberal antifascism but revolutionary Marxism.**

# Murder in a sectarian state

A 15-year-old Catholic was murdered in Ballymena on 8 May. Michael McIlveen was savagely beaten by a Unionist mob and died in hospital less than two days after the sectarian attack. The murder is one of a number of attacks on Catholics in the Ballymena area recently including paint, petrol and pipe bomb attacks on Catholic homes, schools and churches.

Ballymena is a notorious centre for sectarianism and it is the political heartland of the DUP. DUP council leader in Ballymena Roy Gillespie commented to the media "As a Catholic Michael McIlveen won't get into heaven unless he's been saved. If he did not repent before he died he will not get into heaven. Catholics are not acceptable in heaven."

Such sectarian nonsense permeates Ballymena. A fifth of the town's population, around 10,000, are Catholic. Sectarian intimidation is rampant and large parts of the town centre are effectively a no-go area for Catholics. Within the past month two other Catholics were attacked - one was held down by a gang attempting to carve a union jack on his stomach. The DUP have refused to accept Michael's murder as sectarian, telling the media of parents' concerns 'that a Protestant child will be killed!' The Police Service Northern Ireland accepts it was sectarian but it was tit for tat. Typically ignoring the fact that Catholics are overwhelmingly victimised.

The sectarian state that the DUP and PSNI defend wouldn't have it any other way!

# ACTIVISTS DIARY

**Birmingham: Workers Power Open Forum**  
**FIGHT RACISM: FIGHT THE CAUSES OF RACISM**  
Wednesday 28 June at 7.30pm  
Bennetts Bar, Bennetts Hill  
Birmingham City Centre

**London Workers Power public meeting**  
**EYEWITNESS REPORT: CONTRADICTIONS OF CHINA**  
Tuesday 20 June  
Conway Hall  
Red Lion Square,  
London Wc2

**Campaign for New Workers Party**  
South west London  
**DEFEND PUBLIC SERVICES**  
17 June  
Stockwell Community Resource Centre, 1 Studley Road, SW2  
Behind Stockwell tube station

# WHAT WE STAND FOR

## CAPITALISM

Long ago capitalism developed the material and human resources to end poverty and inequality on a world scale. Yet it will not do this. It cannot because of its fundamental features: private ownership of production and the division of the world into competing nation states. The factories, the land, the mines, oil fields and banks are all owned by a tiny handful of billionaires, whose power and wealth is defended by national armies, police forces and security services.

To liberate humanity from hunger, insecurity, war and disease this tiny ruling class must be overthrown. Only the working class has the strength, the centrality to production and the interest to carry this through. Capitalism must be abolished by a workers' revolution, and a society without class divisions, without bureaucratic, military and police repression, must be created. Only in such a society will the last traces of national and racial oppression, the oppression of women, youth, lesbians and gays finally disappear.

The exploiters will resist this revolution with savage ferocity. But their resistance can be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution, disintegrating the forces of repression, the capitalist state.

The capitalist politicians, top civil servants, judges, the police and army chiefs must be swept away - the army and the police force must be smashed and replaced with a militia of the armed working people.

All power must pass into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, directly elected by the workers and poor farmers and subject to instant recall by them. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat. For the exploiters it will certainly seem oppressive, indeed they will lose all their wealth and power. But for the all the formerly exploited classes it will be the most democratic society ever seen. And even this state will only be a transitional form on the road to a completely classless and stateless society: communism.

To achieve this, all large-scale production and distribution must be taken into social ownership and be democratically planned. Under workers' control, we could share the work between all able people and every improvement in productivity could be used to reduce the length of the working week. Poverty, social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents could be systematically overcome.

## IMPERIALISM

Imperialism is the highest and most violent stage of capitalism. In the imperialist system a few great capitalist powers and corporations exploit billions in all countries and use their vast military machines to crush anyone who resists them.

For this reasons we support all resistance to their invasions and occupations. We demand an end to the occupation of the Iraq and we support the Iraqi people's armed resistance. We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland of Zionist occupation. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all other imperialist pacts.

## SOCIAL OPPRESSION

We fight all racism and national oppression and defend refugees and asylum seekers. We demand the opening of the borders, giving all migrants the right to work, social security and full citizenship rights. We fight to deny the fascists any platform for their views and support organised self defence against fascist gangs and racial attacks.

We fight for women's liberation from physical and mental abuse, from bearing the sole or main burden of domestic labour, from suffering sexual exploitation, unequal pay and discrimination at work. Women must have control over their own fertility, including the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians and gay men must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We must fight the oppression of young people. We demand an end to the harassment of young people by government, state and press. Young workers should get equal pay and the same rights as other workers. Schools and colleges must be run by the representatives of school students, education workers and local working people. We fight for independent revolutionary youth organisations linked to a revolutionary youth international.

## DEMOCRACY

We must fight for the abolition of all the many undemocratic elements in Britain today: the monarchy, the House of Lords, the unelected judiciary, the state church. There should be no privilege for any one religion. The rights of all faith groups to practice their religion must be protected but all religious schools must be abolished. All blasphemy laws must be abolished and restrictions on the right to criticise religion opposed.

## TRADE UNIONS

We must fight the privileged officials in the trade unions who sell out our struggles. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice and earn the no more than average pay of their members. Rank and file unionists must form a movement in and across all unions to dissolve the trade union bureaucracy.

## REFORM AND REVOLUTION

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist actions of the Labour Party in government and in opposition. Labour, for all its organised links to the trade unions, is a capitalist party in its programme, and leadership. It is a bourgeois workers party.

To lead a social revolution the working class needs a new type of party which unites its most conscious and active militants, giving a lead in the trade unions and other mass organisations in their day to day struggles and directing them towards the social revolution. For this purpose an action programme of transitional demands is essential.

## STALINISM

For decades Stalinism was wrongly described as Communism, has betrayed the working class. It established a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite. It blocked the road to democratic planning and socialism. This led eventually to the collapse of the USSR and other so-called socialist states.

Where Stalinist states survive - such as Cuba and North Korea - they must still be defended unconditionally against imperialist blockade, attack and the restoration of capitalism. But without a political revolution of the workers and the establishment of workers' council democracy they too will eventually collapse. The theory that you can build 'socialism in one country' has been plainly falsified by collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states.

We must reject the strategic legacy of Stalinism: 'democratic alliances', 'popular fronts' with capitalist parties or a 'democratic stage' which obliges the working class to renounce the struggle for power in the here and now. In every country, the workers must organise independently and fight to come to the head of the struggle. In the age of imperialism and globalisation only an international, global revolution and permanent (i.e. uninterrupted) revolution can consign capitalism to history.

## THE INTERNATIONAL

With the goal of revolution and communism, advancing along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International - a workers' party organised across national boundaries to fight for world revolution.

If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist - join us!

## BNP: stop these fascists in their tracks

The British National Party (BNP) scored major gains in the 4 May local council elections, doubling its number of council seats from 20 to 48. This should cause every working class and anti-racist militant to double, treble and quadruple their efforts to smash the fascist threat.

Across England, the BNP's tally approached 239,000 votes, marking nearly an 80-fold increase in just six years. With more than 88,000 votes in Yorkshire and Humberside, the BNP's share of the poll rose by eight per cent from 2004 in the wards it contested. The fascists captured their first seat on Leeds City Council and gained three on Kirklees Council, although they lost seats in Bradford and Calderdale.

Elsewhere, the BNP vote across the West Midlands increased to more than 64,000, with nearly 30,000 in Birmingham alone. It has a total of 11 seats across the region, while in the North West the BNP added two seats for a total of eight, despite seeing a drop in its popular vote. Seven of the BNP councillors are in Burnley, where it first gained a foothold in the council chamber in 2002. Another pack of far right racists, England First, picked up two seats in Jack Straw's Blackburn constituency.

The BNP's big breakthrough came on the eastern edge of London, winning three additional seats to double its presence on Epping Forest council, capturing one seat in both Havering and Redbridge, and taking 11 seats with only 13 candidates in the one-time Labour stronghold of Barking and Dagenham. Where they stood, BNP candidates attracted some 20 per cent of the vote in a borough where turnout was relatively high, topping 38 per cent. The fascists are now the official opposition in a London local authority for the first time ever.

On Wednesday 17 May, the night of the first Barking and Dagenham council meeting after the election, an Afghani man in his early 30s suffered critical injuries in a vicious knife attack at the local train station by four white males who had shouted racist abuse at the vic-

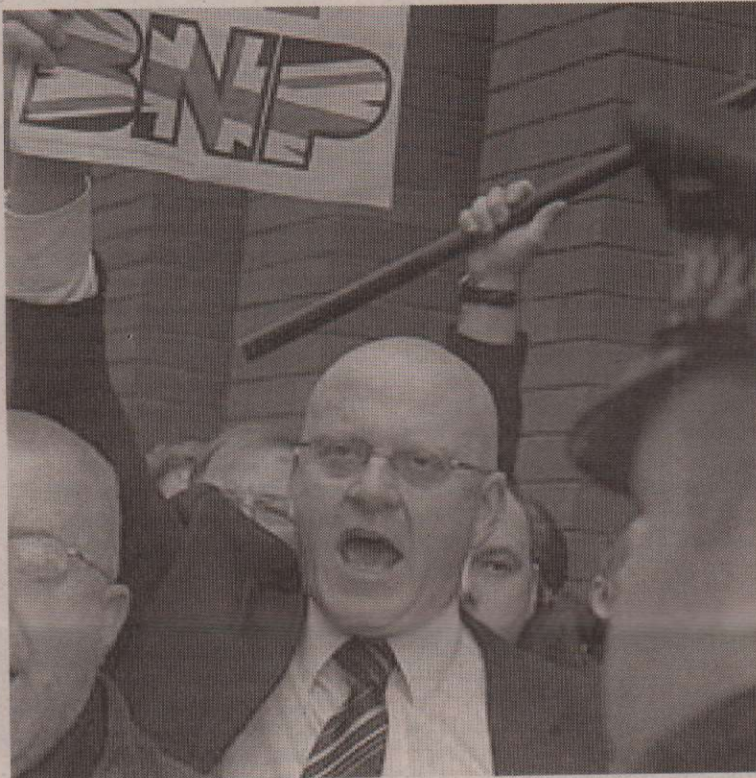
tim. As in other areas where the BNP has won elections, Barking and Dagenham is likely to see a sharp rise in racist attacks.

Past successful campaigns to isolate and drive out the BNP in places like Oldham and Tower Hamlets have valuable lessons for defeating them now. But the results in Barking and Dagenham point to a danger of a new magnitude, which must sound the alarm for the labour movement generally, not only the African, Asian and East European migrant communities in the area.

Undoubtedly, there were specific local factors that contributed to the BNP's success, not least the widely quoted Sunday Telegraph interview with arch Blairite minister and local MP, Margaret Hodge, who gave the fascists free publicity and their potential voters increased confidence when she suggested that 80 per cent of her white constituents were thinking of voting BNP.

Although Barking is only 25 minutes by underground from the capitalist casino of the City of London, it seems a world away. Unemployment in the area, which had been key to London's manufacturing industry, has risen with the loss of thousands of jobs, especially at Ford's Dagenham factory. Life expectancy is below the national average, while nearly 20 per cent of the population has a long-term limiting illness or other serious disability. Two in five residents aged 16 and up have no formal qualifications - the highest figure for any London borough. Crucially, at a time when the area's black and minority population has risen from a relatively small base, the council's housing stock has continued to shrink.

Labour's claims of improving the NHS and educational achievement ring hollow in areas like Barking and Dagenham. Meanwhile, the party's routine pandering to the racism and xenophobia of the tabloid press has given added credence to the BNP's rumour mill that asylum seekers have received preferential treatment in allocating social housing. The fascists proclaimed the English local elections "a referendum on Islam", and Labour's stirring of anti-Muslim



prejudices amid the imperialist "war on terror" aided the BNP in promoting this outlandish claim.

The question remains of how to beat the fascists where the vast majority are white British. An anti-fascist campaign such as "Barking and Dagenham United", which simply ties itself to the election of Labour councillors, is now doomed from the outset, since it is precisely Labour's policies that are directly responsible for the appalling conditions in the area. At the same time it is entirely appropriate to place demands on the Labour members who still hold the bulk of council seats. Labour candidates in the one Tower Hamlets ward the BNP contested in May said 'no' to a BNP presence at election hustings. For those who retain any kind of commitment to working class interests, there should be no question of sharing platforms with BNP members or sitting in committee or full council meetings with them.

In addition to organising regular protests at council meetings and other functions, anti-fascists need to argue for and build to implement a policy of "no platform" for the BNP with workers and minority communities mobilised to physically stop any fascist demonstrations and meetings from taking place in the area. At the same time, properly organised self-defence by black and minority ethnic communities will be increasingly a necessity as well as a right, which must command the active support of the trade unions.

In the wake of Derek Beackon's election on the Isle of Dogs in September 1993 many council workers in Tower Hamlets walked out the next day in disgust. This did not happen on 5 May in Barking and Dagenham. Union activists in the GMB and Unison branches must start putting the arguments about why union members should not work with the fascists and refuse to co-operate with them.

The labour movement across London and nationally must also respond urgently. Union activists should be organising workplace meetings to expose the BNP as a fascist party that is a mortal enemy of independent working class organisation, at the same time as countering the racist myths that have gained currency in the press.

Union leaders, such as Dave Prentis of Unison, the T&G's Tony Woodley and the GMB's Paul Kenny, should come to address meetings of council, health and other workers over the coming weeks to reinforce the argument that the BNP is no friend of the white working class. The unions should also foot the bill for mass leafleting of the borough's estates to combat poisonous lies about asylum seekers and other migrants.

Ultimately it is capitalism itself that breeds fascist organisations with mounting inequality, declining public services and state racism providing a rich diet for vermin such as Nick Griffin. Eliminating the spectre of fascism means overthrowing capitalism itself. This demands the creation of a revolutionary party with deep roots within the working class and oppressed communities. Such a party seeks to create a socialist society through taking wealth and control from the bosses and smashing their state.

In contrast, the rise of the BNP is directly linked to the betrayals of Labour. Every time Labour transfers council housing to the private sector, thus pushing up rents, closes down hospitals and schools, whips up racist hysteria against migrant workers and refugees seeking asylum from Tony Blair's wars - more workers get desperate enough to give the fascists' false radicalism a hearing.

That's why we must demand the union leaders decisively break from Labour and take steps to form a new working class party that governs in the interests of the workers. As socialists, we need to argue within it for the revolutionary politics that will bring the working class to power, overthrow capitalism and end the fascist threat.

### 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 L5I, which is represented at 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 020-7407 2907 or email us at [workerspower@btopenworld.com](mailto:workerspower@btopenworld.com)

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