

# workers power

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

## CLEANERS SHOW THE WAY TO BEAT LOW PAY



### Direct action forces billionaires to back down in dramatic unionisation fight

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- Resisting persecution of Muslims
- Which way forward for the trade unions?
- Palestinian struggle at the crossroads
- Struggles mount in defence of NHS
- Where next for the Mexican revolution?



League for the  
Fifth International

## EDITORIAL

# Make 2007 a year of working class victories

Britain's never had it so good. According to Labour that is. But for the working class - the overwhelming majority - it's just another lie.

Gordon Brown boasts about a 14 year upswing, the "longest period of sustained economic growth since records began". But the brute reality for most workers is that, even in this upswing, 2006 saw living standards fall, not rise. Inflation is outstripping average wage rises for the first time since 1995.

Mortgages have risen by 13 per cent, electricity by 27 per cent, gas bills by 38 per cent. This is expenditure people can't cut back on. For 1.4 million pensioners surviving on less than £5,000 a year, it could mean hypothermia.

Debt - on credit cards and overdrafts - has risen to a staggering £8,592 per household.

At the same time more and more people are losing their jobs; 1.71 million are unemployed. Mortgage failures are up: 34,626 homes were repossessed in the last three months. Nearly 100,000 people are officially homeless, while the charity Crisis reckons a further 380,000 are sleeping rough or "sofa surfing".

The Chief Economist of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Dr John Philpott, said:

"Growth in regular pay... is failing to keep up with the cost of living... the squeeze on living standards will continue into next year."

If this is what Britain is like in "good times", what will it be like when the good times are gone?

Obviously, for a tiny minority, Labour has been benevolent. The banks and finance houses can afford to hand out £8.8 billion in City bonuses this year. This is on top of an average wage rise for FTSE 100 top directors of 28 per cent.

## FIGHTING BACK IN 2006

Not surprisingly, when workers are told that Britain is booming, but they feel wracked by poverty, insecurity and debt - they fight back. Inequality is a powerful motivator. Take three recent examples.

Three one-day strikes, followed

by a two-day walkout secured an extra £1 an hour for 272 GMB union members at JJB Sports Wigan depot last month.

A strike by Metrolink bus drivers in north London also demanded parity. More than 2,000 strikers halted 60 bus routes across north London on two consecutive Mondays last month. As we go to press, the drivers are voting on an improved offer.

The TGWU general union's Justice for Cleaners campaign of direct action has forced the biggest cleaning contractor in the world to recognise the rights of 20,000 London cleaners. (See page 9)

## TGWU cleaners, the day after forcing their employers to back down, demonstrated their support for asylum seekers, because, as their leaflet said, "all human beings deserve dignity and respect"

Bigger battles are looming. All across the country, from Leeds and Huddersfield to Cambridge and Bristol, local protests are mounting against NHS cuts, against ward closures and redundancies. Karen Reissman of the Health Service Group Executive of public sector union Unison says "these local rebellions are like the last months of the Poll Tax".

And the PCS union of civil servants is balloting over pay restraint - the government wants to restrict pay rises to a measly 1.5% - and job losses in January. At the same time all 12 local government unions will ballot up to 1.5 million members over low pay, downgrading of staff and the pensions robbery.

Nor are these struggles taking place in isolation. At last month's Organising for Fighting Unions conference a thousand militants raised the call for workplace action to be linked to the antiwar and antiracist

struggle. At a People's Assembly against Islamophobia in London, Stop the War activists called for self-defence against racist attacks and condemned the government's attacks on Muslims and civil liberties as a sinister attempt to divert attention away from its disastrous occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The TGWU cleaners, the day after hearing that their direct action had forced their employers to back down, gave another inspiring example of how the links can be built. They demonstrated their support for asylum seekers being mistreated at the brutal Harmondsworth detention

centre, because, as their leaflet said, "all human beings deserve dignity and respect".

to continue through boycotting all the supplies of weapons of destruction being sent out to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The main problem is not unwillingness of the mass of working class people to struggle. There are millions of people who would be ready for action - if only they were given a lead. It is the deep crisis of leadership affecting the working class movement - the spinelessness and outright sabotage of the trade union and Labour leaders.

Last spring a million workers struck in defence of local government pensions. They were sold a rotten deal, and now have to strike again. We have marched countless times to stop wars and demand an end to the occupations. Yet British troops are still in Iraq and Afghanistan, and union leaders have flatly refused to organise action to get them home.

To overcome these problems, we need a new direction. That is why Workers Power proposes

- A rank and file movement within the trade unions to hold the leaders to account, and to organise strikes and occupations - with the union leaders where possible, without and against them where necessary

- People's Assemblies in every town and city to unite the forces against war, privatisation, cuts and racism, to hammer out a plan of direct action, and to move onto the offensive

- A new workers' party, based on the trade unions and mass social movements, to take on the government and the bosses, and to fight for the working class to take political power and end the system of privatisation, poverty, racism and war.

Thousands of public sector workers facing redundancy or low pay, thousands fighting to save their local hospitals, thousands of black and Asian workers demanding equality will increasingly see no advantage in holding back our struggles just to keep Labour in office. It is to them that we dedicate our energies, because they have shown their willingness and capacity to fight to win.

## WINNING IN 2007

What is the way forward? It is to combine all these signs of rising discontent into a huge unified campaign of action across the length and breadth of the country.

We need strikes against all closures of services and all job losses, with local people supporting union action through occupations of threatened facilities.

We need a national public sector strike against the 1.5% pay limit - not a pay rise but a pay cut.

We need active non-compliance in the workplaces with any attempt to persecute Muslim women for wearing the veil.

We need to force the government to bring the troops home immediately by making it impossible for the war



Inmates at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre rioted at the end of November against the inhuman conditions they are forced to live in.

The riot was sparked when inmates were watching a news report about the chief inspector of prisons, Anne Owers, condemning the treatment of detainees at Harmondsworth. Prison staff turned off the news report.

The inmates took over the centre for a day and lit fires. Other

inmates at Colnbrook and at Lindholme have also protested.

Specially trained prison officers were drafted in to retake the centre. Police surrounded the building cutting off all access. Even aerial photos, such as the one above, were banned after the police declared the airspace above the centre to be a no fly zone, invoked under anti-terror legislation, thus exposing the real purpose of these laws.

John Reid, true to form as Labour's leading thug, said that

the fire was an attempt to "sabotage the government's immigration policy". Good!

Workers Power unconditionally supports the actions of the inmates. They have exposed the place to be what it really is – a concentration camp where people are beaten and abused, and where the police and authorities can close at will any access to the place.

We demand that all detention centres should be closed and all immigration controls abolished.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MURKY MURDERS?

The British state has excluded Russian president Vladimir Putin from suspicion for poisoning ex-KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko. What if the spy had been an Iranian dissident? We don't think John Reid would have been so quick to absolve the "rogue nation".

Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain at least pointed to the "murky murders" of Putin's enemies. But he was silent when Loyalist paramilitary Michael Stone broke into Stormont, armed with eight bombs. For 25 years the British Army and RUC collaborated with Unionist psychopaths like Stone to murder nearly 1,000 Catholic civilians.

### SAY NO TO NEW NUKES!

The government wants 160 new nuclear warheads and three submarines. Procurement and maintenance will cost £75 billion: enough to employ 120,000 nurses and build 30 hospitals; scrap tuition fees for five years; or save the lives of 1.5 million children in the global south.

### MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR SCROOGE

Who's the biggest scrooge?

Next pays its workers the least: on average £10,306 a year. Next boss Philip Green avoided paying £300 million tax this year by having his £1.2 billion salary paid in Monaco.

Tesco's 368,000 workers earn an average £11,594, giving new meaning to the slogan, "Every little helps".

Tax officials also joined in the spirit of goodwill to all (employers) by exempting waiters from the minimum wage - tips now count as pay.

How much will City whiz-kids get in bonuses? £8.8 billion, did I hear?

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Nottinghamshire police have a new toy: a CCTV camera embedded in the badge of their helmets.

## WOMEN

# Defend abortion rights

MPs and Lords may shortly engineer a vote to further restrict a woman's right to choose an abortion. *Rebecca Anderson* explains the implications for working class women should they succeed

There has been a recent flurry of parliamentary attacks on women's right to choose to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. This summer, an Early Day Motion was circulated, requesting a review of abortion legislation in light of "scientific, medical and cultural developments". It was signed by 144 MPs, including - in complete contradiction to his party's democratically agreed position - Respect's only MP, George Galloway. An EDM is a parliamentary petition to test the water before introducing a Bill.

Encouraged by this, Nadine Dorries MP introduced a 10 Minute Bill on 31 October to request permission to table a Bill that would both reduce the time limit for legal abortion from 24 weeks (from the start of the pregnancy) to 21 weeks, and introduce a "cooling-off period" between seeing a doctor and having a termination. This would mean that a woman would have less time to get an abortion and have to wait longer to get it.

This Bill was defeated by 108 to 187. But Dorries vowed to use the Private Members Ballot to further her campaign. MPs get to vote in this ballot for the right of individual members to propose a Bill on an issue of their choosing. The six or seven MPs with most support get to put a Bill to parliament. It is likely that one of these will propose a Bill to limit a woman's right to choose.

Finally, the government's Tissues and Embryo Authority Bill may also provide the vehicle for an amendment to shorten the time limit for abortions. It was an amendment to a similar Bill in 1990 introduced the 24 week time limit in the first place.

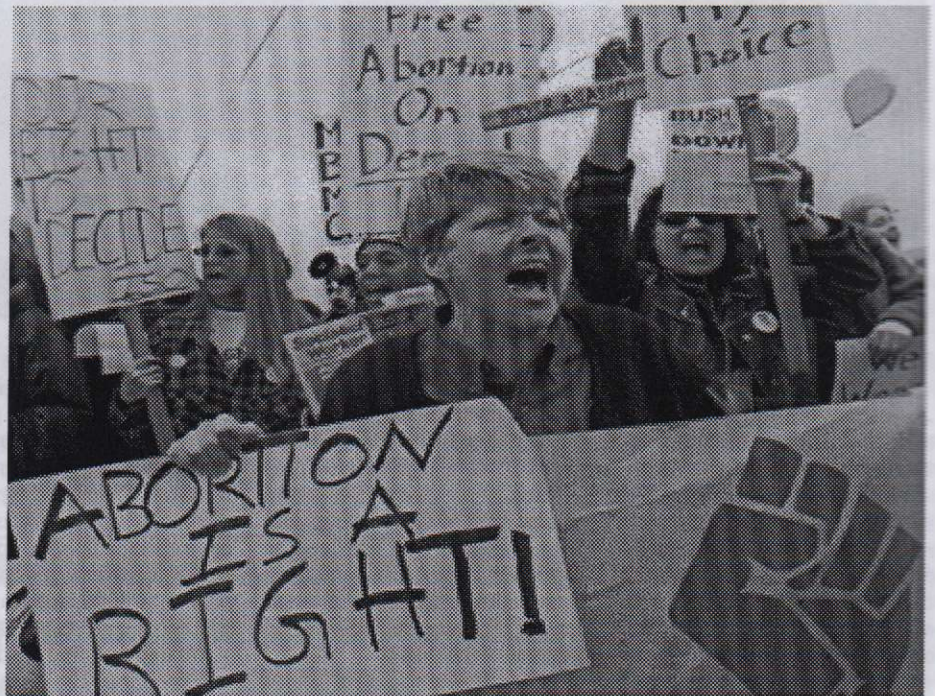
## FOETAL RIGHTS?

Anti-abortionists say that they want to protect the rights of the foetus and so a limit of 21 weeks has been proposed, because at this stage the foetus is "viable", meaning that it could survive for at least a while outside of the woman's body.

Late abortions like this are very rare - almost 90% of abortions take place within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy - and those women that have late abortions usually do so in exceptional circumstances.

There are many reasons for late abortions. A woman can become ill, her circumstances can drastically change, she can discover that the foetus has an abnormality, and some illnesses mean that women don't discover they are pregnant until quite late on. It is for these reasons that we need to fight for abortion on demand, with no time restrictions on a woman's right to choose - as early as possible, as late as necessary.

A time limit on access to abortion means that after a certain number of weeks a woman loses



ownership over a part of her body - her womb. That part of her body from this point onward "belongs to society" and the law says that she must carry the pregnancy to term and give birth to a baby that she doesn't want.

We need to fight for women to have control over their reproductive systems, against the need for consent of two doctors (which suggests that women are incapable of making decisions about their own bodies), and against the introduction of a "cooling off period" which patronisingly suggests that women seek abortions without giving the decision clear, rational thought.

## ANTI-WOMEN AGENDA

This is a sexist attack on a woman's independence. It will force more women to have children, regardless of their circumstances. The support available to single mothers is minimal and they are stigmatised in the media. Needless to say, any parliamentary attack on abortion rights will be accompanied by a campaign in the press against all women who have abortions.

Single women can't win: whether they proceed with the pregnancy or not, they face moral outrage and even physical attacks in the form of anti-abortion pickets outside clinics. In truth, their crime is to have sex outside marriage and threaten this "sacred" institution. That's why almost all anti-abortionists are also against quick divorce on the say-so of one partner, freely available contraception and sex education.

On the other hand, nobody has heard Nadine Dorries stand up and support demands for equal

pay for women workers, or for free childcare and crèche facilities.

Under capitalism the family provides free labour in the form of cooking, cleaning and childcare. If women have to work, society relegates them to "flexible" jobs to fit around their domestic responsibilities, and in jobs associated with women's "traditional" roles. Their lower pay, status and pension rights are justified by the assumption that paid labour is secondary for women.

Working class women suffer most from restrictive abortion laws. It is they who have to risk backstreet abortions, they who can't afford childcare, they who can't afford to pay £350 for an abortion or take the day off work to travel to another town when their local GP refuses permission for the termination.

This is why we need a working class women's movement - not only to fend off the attacks on our right to choose and to fight for abortion on demand, but to take up all the other aspects of women's oppression and link the struggle for women's liberation to the fight for working class emancipation.

The example of George Galloway's betrayal - and the utter silence from the Socialist Workers Party in the face of this - shows that even self-styled revolutionaries and anti-imperialists can relegate "women's issues" to second-rate struggles. A working class women's movement is needed to force the workers' movement as a whole to fight for their rights and, in so doing, release the energies of millions of women for the struggle for socialism.

**FIGHTBACK**

# Unite the rebellions in a national movement to defend the NHS

By Andy Yorke

The breadth of working class anger over NHS cuts, indicate the possibility of building a mass movement - similar in size and depth to the Anti-Poll Tax Movement of the late 1980s.

The scale of the crisis is shown by Britain's biggest NHS trust, Leeds Teaching Hospitals, which is due to announce up to 1,000 job cuts in order to save £50m over the next two years. This is a result of Labour's "payment by results" system forcing the trust's budget into deficit. Hospitals and primary care trusts around the country are forecasting deficits for next year of £1.2bn, with 70 trusts needing to cut up to 22,000 jobs to balance the books. Trusts in Bromley, Kingston and Lewisham face shortfalls of 9-10 per cent, while Hillingdon faces 27 per cent and the PFI-funded Queen Elizabeth Hospital 32 per cent.

The growing fightback offers the opportunity of launching a mass campaign of protests, strikes and occupations, which could challenge the whole neo-liberal agenda of Labour. It could truly be a blow for the millions against the corporate millionaires. So how can we make that happen?

**FOR A NATIONAL STRIKE**

One starting point is the PUSH initiative (People United Saving Hospitals), which is backed by several Keep Our NHS public branches and is campaigning for a national demonstration. Labour-supporting union tops in Unison and other key health service unions have so far avoided any action that might develop into a real challenge to the Labour government. We should support the PUSH initiative and the call from the Respect trade union conference in November for a national demonstration.

But will a national demonstration be enough? After all, Blair and Brown still went ahead with the war on Iraq after two million demonstrated in February 2003.

That is why we need a national strike of the one million health workers against privatisation and



cuts. A strike of this size, backed up by a mass movement on the streets, could break the anti-trade union laws if necessary and their ban on "political" strikes, which includes strikes against privatisation. As one NHS Logistic striker in Maidstone said on the telly, we need to call everyone in the NHS out to defend it.

In addition, we need to launch direct action against the privatisation and cuts. We should occupy wards threatened by closure. There have been factory occupations in the past in Britain and in other countries, so why not here, in this struggle?

**BUILD COUNCILS OF ACTION**

To build an effective national campaign we need to develop structures that can organise mass action. To

make this happen, we need to develop democratic committees of action based on delegates from the many community groups opposed to privatisation, trade unions, users groups, student and youth groups, and political organisations - including dissident Labour party branches, that want to campaign against the government's privatisation of the NHS and confront Blair and Brown.

**FOR WORKERS' CONTROL OF THE NHS**

Such a movement should hold a democratic conference to debate its policy. It should demand that all private contracts ripping off the NHS are revoked without compensation - from the PFI hospital-building operations of construction companies through to the operation quotas given to private hospi-

tals at a guaranteed profit.

The pharmaceutical companies that sell drugs to the health service at inflated prices, along with private health companies, should be nationalised without compensation and merged into the NHS. These parasites have made millions off the NHS, their millionaire shareholders don't deserve any compensation.

The NHS and its component parts should be operated under the control of the workers and consumers who run it and use it, not by managers running it down under the pressure of market forces and commercial debts.

The union leaders would never accept such radical demands but we are confident that we could win such arguments with tens of thousands of workers and working class service users. Such a movement could force the union leaders to comply, or campaign for their replacement by leaders who will fight hard against the government.

**FOR A NEW WORKERS PARTY!**

The movement against NHS privatisation, like similar mass movements against cuts and privatisation in countries such as France, could paralyse the government and bring it down. We could build out of its wreckage a new party to replace Labour.

That is why Workers Power believes that we need to win the hundreds of thousands that have demonstrated against the Labour government to a new workers' party, one that can go on to rally the millions rejecting Labour at the polls.

With democracy and a commitment to organising the working class for mass action - not just for elections - such a party could deal real blows to capitalism. With a programme committing it to the overthrow of capitalism, it could lead the working class from defence of the NHS and fighting back against neo-liberal cuts to the creation of a new socialist society, where we could eliminate war, racism, exploitation and poverty once and for all.

• See page 6 for more on making the unions fight

## WORKERS MOVEMENT

Into 2007 - a year of resistance

# How should the trade union rank and file organise?

In one of the biggest unofficial gatherings for years, more than 750 militants assembled for the Organising Fighting Unions Conference on 11 November. It revealed many of the strengths and weaknesses of the trade unions today. *Richard Brenner* reports

Speaker after speaker at Shoreditch Town Hall revealed the scale and depth of Labour's attacks on union rights, on public ownership, on jobs, pay and services. Calls for strike action against the neoliberal offensive were met with loud applause, as did speeches denouncing Islamophobic witch-hunts, racism and war.

Yet the radical rhetoric from the platform and the floor were not matched by the decisions reached by the conference. The conference failed to discuss any concrete plans to build for unified strike action across the public sector. Speakers gave clear examples of how union leaders are selling out and holding back disputes and struggles – but the conference failed to discuss how to hold union leaders to account or organise action over their heads if necessary.

Almost every speaker pointed to the shameful right-wing policies being pursued by the Labour government and the weakness of the challenge to Blair from within his party. Yet the conference voted against calls for the unions to stop paying millions to Blair's party of privatisation and war and to use the money to set up a new working class party.

Instead the conference adopted a very weak resolution. The only action proposals adopted by the conference, in the form of a Workers' Charter, were:

1. To organise lobbies of MPs in favour of the Trade Union Freedom Bill. To support any group of workers who take action which is in defiance of the anti-union laws and call on their trade unions not to repudiate their action.
2. To organise in support of the Public Services not Private Profit initiative.
3. To campaign in defence of the NHS free of private finance initiatives and contracting out. To demand the TUC name a day for a national demonstration in defence of the NHS to take place early next year and, if they fail to do so, to support initiatives for a national demonstration from grassroots health activists.
4. To organise a trade union solidarity delegation to Venezuela.



Fine, as far as it goes... which is not very far. Because the Trade Union Freedom Bill will not establish full rights for unions to take solidarity and political industrial action, even in the unlikely event that it gets passed. Because defence of the NHS, education and civil service jobs, and the fight to bust the government's 1.5 per cent public sector pay restraint, will take more than the Public Services campaign – it will take strikes and occupations across the public sector, backed by the angry thousands of working class service users in every area. Because the union leaders, right and left, can and probably will sell out our struggles, we need a mechanism – an organised rank and file movement – that can fight with them where possible but against them where necessary, mobilising action despite and against the union leaders when they try to sell us short.

Finally, and most important of all, the conference failed to draw up any plan to move towards a new working class party and so missed another chance to start the job of building a challenge to

Labour and to fight to end the capitalist system of exploitation itself.

### BREAKING THE BUREAUCRACY

The gap between the words of the speakers and the tepid decisions made have a clear political basis – the failure of the main trends on the far left to mount an effective challenge to the mainstays of reformism in Britain – the bureaucratic leaders of the trade unions.

A few examples will illustrate the extent of this gap.

Karen Reissman of the Unison Health Service Group Executive gave a powerful indictment of Blair and Brown's attack on the NHS. Despite the government spending huge sums on the NHS, it has been squandered on PFI schemes and private consultants. All over the country, large demonstrations of health workers and local people are taking place in defence of the NHS. Karen said "these local rebellions are like the last months of the Poll Tax", when every town and city saw a gathering tide of protest that culminated in the great march of 1990.

It was an inspiring speech – but will the Unison leadership as a whole deliver? From the floor later that morning Yunus Bakhsh, branch secretary of Unison in Newcastle and Socialist Workers Party member, explained how he has been suspended for the past six weeks on the basis of an anonymous complaint. His branch has been resisting a £24 million cuts package at his trust and has been refusing to co-operate. Meanwhile managers have been awarded 36 per cent pay rises. But Unison's national response has been to attack Yunus's union branch, freezing it, so it cannot even organise its own meetings. "Our union seems to have forgotten what it came into existence for", Yunus said, to loud applause.

Unfortunately the contribution of Jane Loftus, a member of the CWU communications workers' executive, also in the Socialist Workers Party, illustrated why the SWP cannot mount an effective challenge to the trade union bureaucracy. Jane is on the editorial board of the Postworker rank and file bulletin. She began by saying that when people on the left "get into control" (she meant get onto union executives – but there is an important difference!), "we start to make a difference".

She added, "you cannot divorce the political and the trade union. So the CWU backs the Stop the War Coalition." True, its leader Billy Hayes spoke from its platform in front of more than a million people in February 2003... after which, like all the other union leaders, he did absolutely nothing to organise strike action against the war. But this is what Jane seems to have meant by being political – get your union to affiliate to campaigns and "raise the issues in discussion". In reality, unless we campaign for the unions to take *action* around political issues – in breach of the law if necessary – then we are not "raising politics" in any meaningful way. We are ducking politics, ducking a fight with the union leaders over the kind of political action that we need to take.

That's why for Jane and many other SWP speakers, the question of rank and file organisation was posed without drawing attention to the task of combating the hold of the union bureaucracy. She spoke of the need to build support for action, as Postworker has done in the disputes in Belfast and Exeter, and of the need to "rebuild a shop stewards movement", which is of course urgently required. But what should the movement's tasks be?

#### ALTERNATIVE TO LABOUR

On the critical question of building political representation for the working class movement, the conference was sorely wanting. John McDonnell gave a lacklustre defence of his campaign; when he began one sentence with the words

**The union leaders, right and left, can and probably will sell out our struggles, and we need a mechanism – an organised rank and file movement – that can fight with them where possible but against them where necessary**

"When I am Prime Minister, I will...", the response was so muted as to be almost embarrassing. No wonder. Everyone knows he won't win.

Matt Wrack, leader of the Fire Brigades Union, delivered a fighting speech explaining why the FBU disaffiliated from Labour. But he offered no way forward, despite the fact that, with the FBU and the RMT outside the Labour Party, a bold lead by these unions to form a new party would be met with an enthusiastic response.

John Rees of the SWP and national secretary of Respect referred to the thousands of Labour supporters, among them former councillors, MPs and union officials, who are debating what to do next. He said Respect wants to work with them to rebuild the labour movement. Therefore, he said, Respect was putting its resources at the disposal of building this movement and did not demand of Labour supporters that they must agree with Respect as a precondition for working with them. In a telling phrase he said Respect was promoting "Labour values against the Labour Party". He called for support for the action proposals in the draft Workers' Charter as a way of putting Labour MPs on the spot.

This explained why the organisers were so determined to avoid clear calls for action. Of course it is absolutely correct to propose joint action with the Labour left, and to put no conditions on this. But it is also absolutely necessary to put forward the types of action and organisation that are needed to win. That way, if their leading figures refuse, then anyone still in Labour or supporting it will begin to draw the necessary conclusions. But unity on the basis of agreeing only to a handful of miserable steps that Rees thinks the Labour left MPs and union leaders will be prepared to support – at the expense of advancing a fighting strategy – that is the unity of graveyard. "Labour Values" indeed!

The real uselessness of the SWP's approach was exposed in the one sharp debate that took place at the conference – around the Socialist Party's correct amendment, calling on the conference to appeal to unions to disaffiliate from Labour and spend their political funds on establishing a new party. Without arguing against the idea of a new party, an SWP speaker opposed it on the simple grounds that it would not be acceptable to Labour supporters. The underlying logic of the argument is clear. No calls on the union leaders to break with Labour; no organisational challenge to their control over action; no national campaign for strikes and occupations; in essence, no clear struggle against the caste of overpaid bureaucrats who present the greatest obstacle to turning the tide.

In this sense the conference revealed that the crisis of leadership afflicting the

working class movement extends right through to its far left. The SWP revealed its centrist character, a party that is formally committed to revolutionary policy, but in practice shields the left reformist bureaucracy from the sharp edges of revolutionary criticism, letting them off the hook every time.

There was one organisation that presented an alternative to this mess. Workers Power proposed an addition to the Workers' Charter that included:

- Strike action and occupations against closures of hospitals and wards, against cuts in healthcare facilities, against PFI privatisation in the NHS
- Delegate based co-ordinating committees in every area to link trade unionists and service users in planning action
- A massive recruitment campaign to draw migrant workers, casual and low paid workers in unorganised sectors into the trade unions.

The leaders of many national trade unions will more often than not obstruct the action we need. Therefore we argued the need to:

- Establish a permanent elected national co-ordination of trade unionists to maximise pressure on the union leaders, and to organise for action with the officials where possible, against them where necessary.
- Campaign for the establishment of democratic rank and file strike committees in every dispute to control the action, with a veto over whether action should be called off.
- Campaign for trade union leaders to be paid the average wage of the workers they represent and to be regularly elected and subject to recall.

The proposal also called for the formation of a new workers' party, and to debate what sort of programme is needed to overthrow the system.

The organisers ruled the amendment out of order because it was an "alternative" to the Workers Charter. As if alternative strategies should not be debated out at a democratic conference! An appeal from a delegate from Leeds CWU for the amendment to be heard was voted down.

Nevertheless, the conference revealed the sharp crisis of leadership on the left wing of the movement and the way it can be overcome. There are a succession of major battles ahead, in which workers' traditions, ideas and established ways of organising can, must and will change. Workers Power is committed to speaking the truth openly and directly within the movement, because it is revolutionary and antibureaucratic action that can win the battles ahead.

That will become clearer to ever more workers in the struggles that 2007 will bring – we aim to rally them to a consistently revolutionary organisation and programme.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA

# Racism and repression

Ministers and media pundits blame British Muslims for isolating themselves from the rest of British society. In reality, argues *Kuldip Bajwa*, it is racial oppression that is to blame for segregation

Last month, the People's Assembly against Islamophobia failed utterly to hammer out such a plan of action. Rather than linking the fight against anti-Muslim racism to the struggles against fascism, privatisation and job cuts, it focused on abstract propaganda and a hopeless attempt to get parliament to debate the war. Salma Yacoob of the Muslim Association of Britain was the only platform speaker to mention class unity.

However, Chris Nineham of the Socialist Workers Party did speak in favour of creating local People's Assemblies. Now we must ensure that they take place and become co-ordinating centres of resistance.

In 2007, we must make sure that antiracism is hardwired into the fightback against neoliberalism, just as it has been into the antiwar movement.

## WHAT IS ISLAMOPHOBIA?

Jack Straw's request to a female Muslim constituent to remove her veil and the sacking of classroom assistant Aishah Azmi are the most infamous examples of Islamophobia, facing 1.6 million Muslims living in Britain. But they are not the only examples.

University staff and lecturers are also supposed to report any radical activity among Asian and Arab students. John Reid told Muslim parents to keep a close eye on their children for fear they might fall prey to "fanatics who are looking to groom and brainwash children... for suicide bombings, grooming them to kill themselves in order to murder others."

Reid uses the same phrase, "grooming", that the British National Party used recently to whip up fear against Asian gangs pimping white teenage girls. Insinuating that racial minorities are potential or actual sex offenders has a long history. No wonder Straw and Reid's interventions were both followed up by physical attacks.

Straw and Reid are consummate politicians. Both, as past and present Home Secretaries, have whipped up fear against asylum seekers and immigrants. As former foreign secretary and defence minister respectively, both have Iraqi blood on their hands. They know what they are doing; they are seeking to deflect attention from their failures.

Despite its diversity, the Muslim community is solidly antiwar. If it can be isolated, the working class can be divided and the antiwar movement weakened.

Since the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001, more than 1,000 Muslims have been rounded up under anti-terror legislation and hundreds of homes raided. Yet only 150 people ever faced charges and only nine convicted of any offence whatsoever. Stop and search laws were used against 10,000 black and Asian people in



the two months following the London bombings in 2005, a twelfold increase on previous months.

This massive increase in state repression of British Muslims coincides with the occupation of Afghanistan, a war that has killed 655,000 Iraqis, and UK covert support for Israel's military adventures in southern Lebanon and Gaza. You don't have to have your brain washed to note the symmetry!

## IS THERE SEGREGATION?

Even Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, has accused Muslims of leading parallel lives, concluding that Britain is "sleepwalking to segregation". Ruth Kelly, secretary of state for communities, responded by promoting citizenship tests and dress codes.

But what really separates Muslims is not their

clothes or religion but the conditions in which they live.

- 68 per cent of Muslims in Britain are living below the poverty line (incomes below 60 per cent of the median) compared with 23 per cent of the general population
- 38 per cent of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis live in overcrowded accommodation; 43 per cent in social housing - 50 per cent above the national average
- 40 per cent for young Bangladeshi men are unemployed, compared with 12 per cent for young white men
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi men earn on average £150 per week less than white men
- Only 30 per cent of all Bangladeshi and Pakistani children leave school with 5 or more GCSEs; the national average is 50 per cent

Is it any wonder that immigrant communities look to each other for support or seek solace in their faith?

## LINK THE FIGHTBACK

While the war on terror has intensified racial oppression, it did not cause it. The poor housing, unemployment and bad education all existed before 9/11 and have been experienced by many other immigrant communities in the UK. Increasingly, they are felt by white working people as well.

This is important to stress, because it points the way to launch a fightback by the majority - the working class as a whole. By linking the fight against racism to a fight for better and more council housing and decent schools for all, against job losses and NHS cuts, we can break the isolation of the beleaguered Muslim communities and pull the rug from under the feet of the British National Party and other racists.

Labour is trying not only to divert attention from its disastrous wars, but also rising unemployment, failing hospitals and schools, scandalous housing and inner-city conditions. By calling for a tax on the rich to pay for improvements and for working class control of threatened hospitals, schools and factories, we can focus anger against the people who are really to blame for falling living standards and ghettoising communities - black and white.

At the same time we should fight against each and every manifestation of racism, nor of calling for the British troops to get out of Afghanistan and Iraq now. We should also fight for the abolition of all immigration controls: for free movement of people whether they are fleeing wars or torture, or escaping poverty.

To combat racist attacks by the BNP, thugs and police, Asian people should build self-defence guards. The labour movement should support such activities and build a mass anti-racist movement and confront the BNP whenever they try to meet or march.



## LOW PAY

# Stunning victory for cleaners!

Cleaners have union recognition after a sit-down protest in the London offices of Goldman Sachs on 28 November. *Jeremy Dewar* argues that direct workers action also holds the key to improving pay



Photo Marc Falk

For the best part of two hours, the invisible migrant workers, who normally clean the City's banks in the wee hours of the morning and then disappear, held centre stage. BBC cameras rolled and hacks from *The Times* and *The Guardian* scribbled away. The cops didn't know whether to throw us out or keep us there. Eventually they cautioned us.

*But within 48 hours, we had won!*

ISS, the multinational part owned by Goldman Sachs and the biggest cleaning contractor in the capital, had conceded. They recognised the union.

For the TGWU general union, this was the climax of the *Justice for Cleaners* campaign to get union recognition in the City of London and Canary Wharf. The TGWU has been working closely with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the biggest union in the USA.

ISS pays most of its workers the minimum wage of £5.35 an hour. The campaign, which is mostly staffed by cleaner activists themselves, was highlighting the obscene disparity in living standards. Goldman Sachs pays its employees an average £260,000 a year.

Gaining union recognition and collective bargaining rights is the first step to redressing this imbalance. The union is demanding £7.05 an hour, which the cleaners say represents a living wage for Londoners, along with sick and holiday pay.

## What is ISS?

**ISS is not only the largest cleaning contractor in the City, it is the largest public services group in the world. Globally it enjoys a turnover of £1.5 trillion, employs 135,000 workers and netted profits of £170 million in the first nine months of 2005. The UK accounts for around 15 per cent of its business. Most ISS cleaners are migrant workers, almost all of them on the minimum wage, out of which they have to pay for rent and public transport at inflated London prices.**

It is excellent that the union is using direct action tactics associated with the anticapitalist movement. It is also excellent to see the TGWU recruit a 100 new organisers, collaborate with socialists, and orient towards some of the most oppressed and lowest paid workers in Britain.

No doubt, this is in part due to the influence of the SEIU, which has lent one of its organisers to help run the campaign. The SEIU organ-

ises over 225,000 cleaners – or janitors – in the US, and recently won a 126 per cent pay hike for workers in Houston after a month-long strike.

Workers Power has been arguing in the campaign that union recognition for the cleaners in the City of London is only the beginning. Workers should take the following steps

- Cleaners need to elect their own workplace reps and control their own campaigns for better pay and conditions, including strikes and direct action – don't rely on your union leaders always backing you.
- Students, socialists and union activists, inspired by the *Justice for Cleaners* campaign, should spread the action to other cities and other groups of low-paid workers in McJobs and with insecure contracts.
- Wherever unionisation drives meet with state repression or bosses' intransigence, other workers should take solidarity action, up to and including strike action. If these simple steps can be taken, the newest recruits to the trade unions – low-paid, migrant and insecure workers – could play an important role in transforming the movement. Then Goldman Sachs would not only have to worry about its investment in ISS and the state of its lobby; it could be facing a revival of working class militancy across the UK.

## Cleaners speak out

**Maria Plasas and Dennis Omitogun, both ISS cleaners and activists in *Justice for Cleaners*, spoke to *Workers Power***

**Workers Power: What is it like working for ISS?**

Maria: it is very difficult. £5.35 an hour is nothing; London life is too expensive. I have two jobs so I can live. I work 11 hours a day, nine hour shift and two hours.

Dennis: I work in the tube; Metronet and Tubelines subcontract to ISS. We work six days a week with average pay of nightcleaners £5.39 and daycleaners 10p less.

**WP: But that's less than the minimum wage?**

DO: Exactly! And we get no weekend rates, no bank holiday rates.

**WP: Tell our readers about the campaign.**

MP: I've been in this campaign for two weeks. Back in August, the T&G organised a petition [to ISS] for more money – nothing happened. This campaign is fantastic. I hope all companies go down like ISS.

DO: I've been campaigning since the beginning, February. London is the most expensive city in the world. People make a mistake between the minimum wage and a living wage, cos what you pay for a room here in London – £400 – you'd get a flat elsewhere. All we're asking for is a living wage of £7.05 for all cleaners, about 20,000 people in London.

**WP: What's your next step? Where does the campaign go from here?**

DO: We want all the companies to recognize the union. Second, to give workers a living wage, sick pay and pension, and respect and dignity.

MP: Yes, respect and dignity at work  
DO: And a tube pass like all other tube workers.

MP: I've been in the union for one year now. I used to be in Lodon Region No.1 branch and nothing happened, but this is very different. I'm very happy.

DO: When you are together, you have power!

## LATIN AMERICA

# Mexico: defend the

The Oaxaca commune has been defeated and a wave of repression has been unleashed. *Keith Spencer* argues that while the popular movement has been thrown back, the masses in Mexico must come out on the streets to defend Oaxaca and drive Calderon from office

For over a month the people of Oaxaca in southern Mexico have been putting up heroic resistance to thousands of troops and armed Federal Preventative Police (PFP), who invaded the state and occupied the centre of the city at end of October. The police, and death squads in the service of the state governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, have killed at least 14 people since then.

For months, a huge popular mobilisation has been taking place to remove the governor's corrupt and brutal regime. The striking teachers' union and other rural and urban organisations formed the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). They took over the centre of the city and many of its public buildings and radio stations. They occupied the central square of the city, the Zocalo.

With the governor and his cronies banished from their normal seats of power and a popular militia controlling the city, this remarkable expression of people's power soon became known as the Oaxaca Commune. In fact, there was what Marxists call a situation of dual power: on the one side stood the APPO and its militia and, on the other, the governor and his police and death squads.

In part this was made possible by the simultaneous paralysis of the Mexican state in the aftermath of the presidential elections on July 6, when the right wing neoliberal candidate, Felipe Calderón, stole the election from the populist candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Now, the Mexican ruling class, egged on by the North Americans, are trying to end this paralysis decisively. They desperately need to restore the monopoly of repression that the capitalist state must have to continue its exploitation.

They hope to do this by crushing the Oaxaca Commune and demoralising and dispersing the huge pro-Obrador demonstrations. On 1 December they managed to swear in Calderón as president, despite attempts by Obrador and his supporters, which led to fistfights in parliament, to prevent it.

## Battle for the square

In Oaxaca, the last bastion of popular control, the radio station at the university, was finally closed down at the end of November. Since a five hour battle on the 25 November, when thousands of demonstrators tried to retake the Zocalo from federal forces, the army, police and plain clothes thugs have gone on the rampage in the city. There have been more than

160 arrests (bringing the total to more than 300 since June), a number of "disappearances" and nearly 40 wounded. Prisoners report torture, the rape of women and beatings resulting in three deaths.

Human rights investigators have been arrested and deported. Prisoners have been taken out of the state to a high security prison where they cannot be visited by family or lawyers. Thugs belonging to governor Ruiz Ortiz's party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, plain clothes cops, and the PFP have roamed the streets picking up anyone suspected of being a supporter of the APPO. They have also raided schools, dragging out teachers suspected of being union members and activists in the five-month strike that initiated the Commune.

**While the entire country has been wracked by a revolutionary situation in which the masses time and again mobilised in hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, the political leadership has resolutely kept things at the level of mass demonstrations**

In fact, the month-long battle for control of the city has seen repeated mass mobilisations. At the end of October, the army and the PFP had forced protestors out of the central square. But an attempt by the army to take control of the radio station at the university on 2 November was met by mass resistance as thousands of people from across the city surrounded the soldiers. Three days later, a "mega demonstration" of up to one million people was held in Oaxaca in support of the APPO and called for the ousting of Ortiz.

A few days later, the APPO held its constitutional congress with hundreds of delegates from throughout the state and supporters from across Mexico. Local bodies of a similar type have sprung up, including one created by the indigenous peoples of the state. The APPO also called for popular assemblies throughout Mexico and a general strike in support of it. Marches were held nearly every day including one on Saturday 25 November and barricades were rebuilt whenever they were demolished by the military.

Regular calls went out for support and solidarity throughout Mexico, but the military's job has been made easier by the conciliation of parts of the APPO's leadership, which continued with negotiations with the government while the military was deployed in the city. Some leaders of the teachers' union (which started the struggle) even tried to call off protests and return to work before a mass meeting had decided anything, however, they were run out of the APPO.

## Betrayal of the masses

But the real betrayal has been by the national figurehead of the popular movement, Lopez Obrador, and the corrupt trade union bureaucrats linked to his bourgeois populist party, the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD). These bureaucrats have been busy ingratiating themselves with the PRI and the National Action Party (PAN) of Calderón and Fox.

The PRD, despite fistcuffs with right-wing MPs and an occupation of parliament during the inauguration of Calderón, has promised to work "efficiently" with the other two parties in congress. It has also met with the governors of the other parties, including Ortiz's fellow PRI governors, and promised to work with them. Its "Front to Extend Progress" has played the role of loyal opposition in parliament. Little or nothing has been done to challenge the government's attack on Oaxaca.

Obrador, writing in *La Jornada* (a newspaper linked to the PRD) at the end of October, criticised the military invasion and called for governor Ortiz to resign but did not demand any mobilisations in support of the people of Oaxaca. This is from a man who had more than a million people protesting in his favour in Mexico City in September. His National Democratic Convention, which anointed him as "Legitimate President" in September, has been sidelined while the whole of the Mexican state has been repressing Oaxaca.

Even Obrador's call for a Constituent Assembly rings hollow. He could have made common cause with the APPO, which has also called for an assembly but, instead, he channelled the mass movement into the dead end of parliamentary fireworks. On the 20 November, three weeks after the troops went into Oaxaca, another big demonstration in Mexico City hailed Obrador as president and again he did little to take forward the struggle or offer support to Oaxaca. Members of his own party, such as the leftist historian Adolfo Gilly, have slammed

## LATIN AMERICA

## people of Oaxaca



Massive march in Oaxaca on 5 November

his campaign for not defending Oaxaca.

In fact, while the entire country has been wracked by a revolutionary situation in which the masses time and again mobilised in hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, the political leadership has resolutely kept things at the level of mass demonstrations. It has dodged calling on workers to take all out and indefinite strike action to bring down incumbent president Vicente Fox and the usurper Calderón. The corrupt union leaders tied to the main bosses' parties have kept their workers away from the struggle, despite the neo-liberal offensive on jobs, wages and conditions. Together these misleaders have let Oaxaca bleed.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the populist and anarchist traditions of the Mexican left have done no better, despite their loud cries of support for Oaxaca and condemnations of Lopez Obrador. The "Other Campaign", promoted by the Zapatistas as an alternative to Obrador's presidential bid, has descended into farce as the crisis developed. Given the post-modernist clowning that Sub-Commandante Marcos regularly resorts to, it is even possible that this has been deliberate. After marching northwards, that is, away from the events in Mexico City and Oaxaca, the centres of popular revolt, the Zapatistas arrived on the Mexican/US border where,

as part of the international day of solidarity for Oaxaca on the 2 November, they held a bilingual road blockade on a border highway.

Not satisfied with this earth-shattering success, their self-proclaimed "Intergalactic Commission" called for a mass strike on the 20 November – a public holiday in Mexico. Marcos, now widely known as sub-comedian Marcos, has revealed the bankruptcy of the idea of changing society without taking power. A worldwide hero of the anticapitalist libertarian left since 1995, he recently renamed himself Comrade Zero. In terms of his usefulness to the masses fighting on the streets of Mexico City and Oaxaca this was, indeed, most appropriate.

#### Fight back against right

The repression in Oaxaca represents a serious blow to the popular movement but it has not necessarily defeated it – yet. In any case, the real revolutionary left will always be the last to leave the battlefield. They must never abandon the workers, peasants and youth. They must work all out to build a united front of all those who oppose the repression and are willing to take action to end it.

But Calderón's victory could be short-lived. He has stolen the election and used violence against the popular movement of Oaxaca and

millions know this. He backs murderous and corrupt governors like Ruiz Ortiz. He and the bosses' parties should be prevented from ruling. Mass resistance should meet every attempt to impose his programme of:

- Repression in Oaxaca, which, if it succeeds, will spread to Chiapas and right across Mexico.
- A free trade agenda to allow multinational, particularly US, corporations to exploit Mexican workers even further.
- Flat tax proposals that will boost the incomes of the super rich.
- "Job creation schemes" which will mean slashing wages and imposing precarious job conditions.
- Socially reactionary policies on women, on abortion and contraception.

The past few months has seen huge struggles in Mexico but has also exposed the leadership of the masses has been unable to take the struggles forward. The next few months could see the workers and peasants take their revenge of Calderón and company for stealing the election and repressing Oaxaca. But they urgently need to go beyond the limits of Obrador's populism and the Zapatistas' guerillism and take up revolutionary marxism (see box above).

● For more on Mexico go to:  
[www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?news\\_6kl](http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?news_6kl)

## WHERE NEXT FOR THE STRUGGLE

Workers around the world should continue to take to the streets in solidarity with Oaxaca. We should demand:

- End the repression, all military and police out of Oaxaca! Release all prisoners. Put Ruiz Ortiz and his thugs on trial in front of the masses.
- For a general strike in defence of the APPO. Close down industry and the banks. For mass mobilisations and occupations of cities and towns throughout Mexico. Demand Obrador uses the National Democratic Convention to organise millions in defence of Oaxaca, not for his parliamentary manoeuvres.
- Build popular assemblies in every state of Mexico to resist the repression and to unite and organise the struggle against Calderon.
- For a sovereign Constituent Assembly to end the corruption and vote rigging of bourgeois politics.
- Force the usurper Calderon from office and replace him with a workers' and peasants' government.

The crisis of leadership revealed by the prolonged social upheaval of 2006 shows that the workers and the peasant masses, the urban poor and the youth urgently need their own political party, a mass workers' party, founded on a revolutionary programme, not the leadership of Obrador and the PRD or the corrupt trade union leaders. Such a party could agitate for and help organise strikes, occupations, mobilisations and defence of progressive struggles.

But it could also go further and lead the working class to take power itself and smash the capitalist state and its armed might.

The APPO has bravely shown what can be done in one state and offered a vision of another way of organising society; a revolutionary party can unite the best militants and activists in all of Mexico and set the masses on the road to conquer political and economic power and to build socialism.

USA

# The last days of

On 7 November, US voters massively rejected President George Bush, throwing his Republican Party out of power in both houses of Congress. *Andy Yorke* looks at the dangers and opportunities this presents for the working class

In the run up to the elections Bush vowed he would not change course in Iraq and that victory was the only option. Instead he hit a brick wall of popular rejection. Most voters backed the Democrats, who posed as critics of Bush's Iraq policy without ever opposing it head on, because it seemed the only hope of getting the troops out of Iraq soon and making more invasions less likely.

Of course, given the division of authority between executive and legislature in the US constitution, this still leaves enormous power in Bush's hands, especially over military policy, but the fear of losing the presidency in 2008 has already made the Republican party search for ways of embroiling the Democrats in finding a solution to the mess in Iraq.

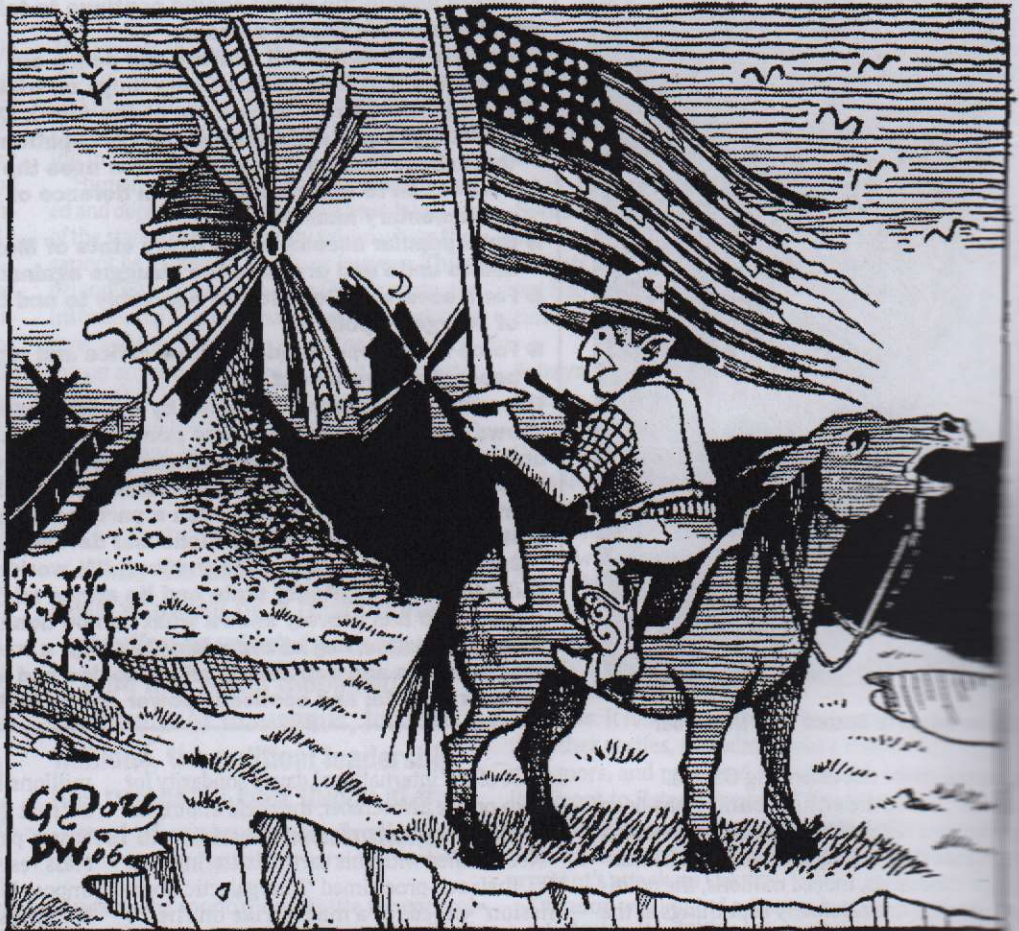
## IT'S THE WAR, STUPID

The election result showed that the spell of patriotic hysteria, whipped up since 11 September and re-enforced by the lightning victory in Iraq in 2003, has finally been dispelled by the mounting casualties and the terrible mess in the Middle East. A tidal wave of anger and disgust has been building up against the lies, under which the war was launched and the occupation maintained.

With over 2,880 US soldiers dead and 21,572 wounded, and with 655,000 Iraqis killed, Iraq has become a bloody nightmare. In the past few months Bush's popularity and support for the occupation have fallen to all-time lows: 60 per cent now disapprove of him and the media debates openly if he is the worst US president ever.

It is not only the working people of America who are disillusioned with Bush. The ruling class too is furious with the Bush team for seriously mishandling its interests. A growing consensus of the military top brass, the political establishment and the billionaires who own America realise the White House strategy is falling apart.

The prospect of "endless" occupation threatens to seriously damage the military's morale and its ability to intervene in other crises. This autumn "neo-conservatives" insiders and the media began to raise the possibility of actual



George Bush and Tony Blair are acting out the roles of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza...

"At this point they came in sight of thirty or forty windmills that are on that plain.

'Fortune,' said Don Quixote to his squire, as soon as he had seen them, 'is arranging matters for us better than we could have hoped. Look there, friend Sancho Panza, where thirty or more monstrous giants rise up, all of whom I mean to engage in battle and slay, and with whose spoils we shall begin to make our fortunes. For this is righteous warfare, and it is God's good service to sweep so evil a breed from off the face of the earth.'" – Miguel de Cervantes: *Don Quixote* (1605)

defeat in Iraq – a disaster for the US capitalists and their global power. They began demanding a major change of policy in the White House.

The neocons in the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) are in dire straits. For six years they represented the dominant faction in the US capitalist class, seeking to get maximum benefits from their unchallenged global hegemony by the unilateral use of America's high-tech military strength, attacking "rogue states" that defy vital US interests. A central issue for them was the tightening of the grip on the world's oil supplies,

at source, on the pipelines and sea lanes needed to transport it, and extending the world network of US bases needed to guard all these "assets". At the same time they kept pushing the neoliberal free-trade agenda and boosting US corporate power through the WTO, IMF and World Bank.

PNAC helped Bush come to power, developed his major policies, and even took top posts in his administration, notably his Vice-President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Now, Rumsfeld has been sacked, the first casualty of the Republican party's 7

# George W Bush

November defeat. Like rats deserting a sinking ship, leading neocon ideologists are distancing themselves from the government. PNAC hawks such as Richard Perle have stated publicly that the Iraq war was a mistake, while Kenneth Adelman – who said invading Iraq would be “a cakewalk” – is now claiming the occupation has been bungled by Bush.

Bush has been forced to promise to take seriously the advice of the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group, chaired by Bush family loyalist James Baker. But he continues to push the idea that the US can send in another 20,000 US troops to make one “last big push” and actually win the war! The Baker report is unlikely to advocate any more than a change of tactics, certainly not an immediate or total withdrawal from Iraq. There is talk of it outlining a four-point “victory strategy” drawn up by Pentagon officials advising the group.

## ARE THE DEMOCRATS AN ALTERNATIVE?

The Democrats hope to stitch together a new “bi-partisan” policy by supporting the findings of the Baker report. The result will inevitably be a repackaging of the occupation, not its end.

The Democrats – having pocketed a huge electoral victory thanks to popular disillusion with the war – are making it clear that they are not in favour of short term or total withdrawal. After all, up to 80 Democrats initially voted for the war, including 2004 Presidential candidate John Kerry and one of the most likely candidates in 2008, Hilary Clinton, who still asserts she has “no regrets”. Most Democrats repeatedly voted to fund the war and backed the Patriot Act, with its raft of repressive security measures attacking civil liberties.

If exit polls indicated that Iraq was the top issue for most voters, other issues that were a source of major discontent were the economy and corruption. In 1994, the Republicans seized control of both houses of Congress, partly on a “clean politics” ticket, but by 2006 have themselves become deeply mired in a series of corruption scandals.

Despite some growth in the past

decade, real wages have begun to stagnate once again, and the federal minimum wage is now worth less in real terms than it was 50 years ago, according to an Oregon State University study. Student fees, debt and the cost of healthcare, with a record number of citizens who have no healthcare plan at all, are also major issues. People are also worried about jobs going overseas to countries like China, where workers can be super-exploited by corporate America to make cheaper goods.

In response, the Democrat's have put forward “Six for ‘06” – a six-point plan of populist measures to cash in on these issues. However, most of these measures are likely to have little affect. Crucially, according to regulations passed by the Democrats themselves, new spending increases need to be met by equivalent tax hikes or spending cuts on other items. Since the Democrats refused to pledge themselves to repealing the Bush tax cuts for the rich or cutting military spending, it is clear that any increases in social spending in one area will be paid for by cutting others. In fact what they have pledged is to cut the budget deficit, as Clinton did in the 1990s, axing social services and introducing “workfare” reforms to benefits.

And the Democrats will continue their “bipartisan” approach on the question of immigration, seeking to divide white workers from their Latino brothers and sisters with racist rhetoric, laws restricting immigrants' rights, and the construction of a 700-mile wall on the US-Mexico border.

The gap between rhetoric and reality, progressive promises and reactionary real policies should come as no surprise. The Democrats are an out-and-out bosses' party – like the Republicans. The only difference is that they represent those capitalists and the upper middle classes, who actively seek collaborators among the trade union leaders and the Black and Latino community leaders in a subordinate role. With their help, the Democrats want to sugar the pill of neoliberalism with a few inadequate social programmes at home and “multilateral” agreements to wage war abroad.

Corporate donations and lobbyists predominate in the Democrats' finances and in the development of its policy – the one it will actually carry out when in office. The new wave of victorious Democrat candidates entering Congress is stuffed full of well-off careerist politicians and millionaires.

Thus the will of the electorate will be thwarted once again by the dead end strategy of voting for the Democrats as the “lesser evil” alternative to the Republicans.

## FOR A WORKERS PARTY!

The US working class will need a new party in order to achieve the aims of fighting war, poverty and racism. Yet both the leaderships of the antiwar movement and trade unions once again backed the Democrats in the elections.

The liberal leaders of the antiwar and anti-globalisation movements – the United for Peace and Justice leadership, high profile antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan and Medea Benjamen of Global Exchange – backed Kerry in 2004 and, as part of the “Progressive Democrats of America”, voted Democrat again in 2006. They claim this is the way to defeat or slow the Bush agenda, though most Democrat candidates have in practice supported the war.

Similarly, the union leaders boasted they were spending more than \$100 million on the election and mobilising more than 100,000 volunteers to get out the Democrat vote. Like the Progressives, they claim that support for the Democrats is the way workers can push their own demands and exercise political power, getting through laws to regulate “outsourcing” American jobs abroad, the minimum wage and healthcare.

AFL-CIO president John Sweeney claimed, “we knew that our challenge at the AFL-CIO was to provide the organising to transform the frustration and anger into political power. We responded with the biggest, most energetic grassroots programme in our history, and it worked.”

The Change to Win union federation broke with the AFL-CIO last year in part because they claimed that Sweeney and co. spent too much money on the Democrats,

and not enough on organising drives. Yet they too threw enormous resources behind the Democrats. As a result, union volunteers knocked on the doors of 8.25 million union voters, made 30 million phone calls to union voters, posted 20 million mail-shots to union homes and distributed 14 million worksite fliers.

The endorsement by prominent antiwar figures and the massive union mobilisation were necessary for the Democrats' victory. Yet even their modest demands are unlikely to be fulfilled.

As long as their trade unions are under the leadership of a pro-Democratic Party bureaucracy, American workers will be condemned to political impotence, not power. They will be unable to establish basic reforms like a national free healthcare system, or a living pension. They will be unable to get rid of the laws that cripple union organising and protect union busting, unable to tackle racism and discrimination against Black and Latino Americans, unable to challenge the Patriot Act and the whole raft of attacks on civil liberties. Wages and union density will continue to decline. Working class young Americans will be “conscripted” by poverty and lack of a future into the wars of their masters.

In short without a working class political party – a labor party rooted in the trade unions – many of the basic rights won long ago by European workers will never see the light of day. Revolutionaries in the USA need to fight alongside the multitude of those resisting neoliberal and racist attacks while struggling for these rights. But they must also connect these to the long term, historic and international interests of the working class by fighting to break the working class from the Democrats and building a party of struggle that stands on a revolutionary socialist programme.

The American workers have in the past built mighty trade unions and turned to revolutionary socialist politics, before 1914 and in the 1930's. They can – and must – do it again if the terrible reverses of the last 25 years are to be overcome and the complete liberation of the working class won.

## MIDDLE EAST

# Israel's "peace plan" for shattering Palestinian resistance

With the stick of brutal attacks on the civilian population of Gaza and the carrot of negotiations with a national unity government, Israel is trying to divide and conquer the Palestinian resistance. *Marcus Chamoun* argues that only a major change of strategy can avoid Hamas following the road of compromise and split trodden by the PLO of Arafat and Abbas

After its defeat in Lebanon, the Israel Defence Force (IDF) acted as all humiliated armies do: it took its revenge against a weak and unarmed civilian population; the Palestinian civilians in Gaza. These atrocities, in contrast to those in Lebanon, have gone largely unreported. The last five months have seen the deaths of 479 Palestinians (of whom 80% were civilians), with 4,200 injured. Israel's casualties have consisted of two soldiers and one civilian.

The single bloodiest incident occurred on 8 November in Beit Hanoun, when a "misdirected" Israeli artillery barrage killed 20 people, 13 of them from one family, of whom 2 were women and 6 were children. Days before, the same town saw Israeli troops fire into a crowd of about 500 unarmed women protestors, who had surrounded a mosque to protect 60 Hamas militants – sons, brothers and husbands – trapped there when Israel invaded the town. Beit Hanoun lies at the north-east edge of the Gaza Strip, about 3 miles from the Israeli town of Sderot, and has been blamed by Israel for Palestinian rocket attacks on Sderot and nearby Ashkelon.

The Palestinians, for their part, point to their crude homemade Qassam rockets as one of their few means of deterrence against the hi-tech might of the IDF.

This has happened against the backdrop of an ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the cutting of international aid packages, and Israel's refusal to remit tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority (PA) since the election of a Hamas-led government in January. In this way the "Quartet" of big powers (the US, EU, Russia and the United Nations) have shown that their commitment to "democracy" breaks down the minute it delivers a result

they do not like. A society forced to live on charity and UN rations for 50 years has seen even those rations taken away when it elected the "wrong" government.

What are Israel's objectives in this war? Ehud Olmert's government has continued the policy of "unilateral disengagement" from Gaza begun by his predecessor, Ariel Sharon. It cannot want to resume the burden of reoccupying and administering the Gaza Strip – even though it can, and does, make regular punitive incursions there. Rather, its objectives are threefold.

Firstly, to improve Israeli morale following the failure to defeat Hezbollah in Lebanon, by taming the Palestinians in advance of any resumption of negotiations.

Secondly, to politically disconnect Gaza's status from that of the West Bank, so that Israel can reap the expected rewards from its withdrawal from Gaza – namely, the expansion of the West Bank Jewish settlements and the completion of the apartheid wall.

Thirdly, to weaken the Palestinians by dividing them amongst themselves, using Fatah as a counterweight to Hamas, at least until Hamas "sees sense" by recognising Israel and "renouncing terrorism".

This is what lies behind Israel's own assertion that the constantly demanded ceasefire does not apply to the West Bank, and its insistence that the formation of a "national unity" government including Fatah is a precondition for any new talks. The "best-case" scenario for Israel is that it can split the Palestinians into 3 or 4 competing fiefdoms (Gaza, Jenin-Nablus, Hebron and Ramallah-Bethlehem) each with its own political and security apparatus, negotiating separately for the basics of their existence.

The demand for the release of Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier captured by

militants in June, is a smokescreen, and especially hypocritical given that Israel holds 9,500 Palestinian prisoners, including 350 women and 150 children. Israel would be waging this war without him.

Similarly, the demand for a "unity government" is really aimed at fostering Palestinian disunity. In this way, Israel hopes to undermine the results of an election in which Hamas would have a large enough vote to form a majority government. Just in case it cannot get this done peacefully and "legally", Israel is already making preparations for an effective coup against Hamas.

It has allowed weapons transfers to the praetorian guard of PA president Mahmoud Abbas, has approved the deployment to Gaza of the Badr Brigade (a part of the Fatah-controlled Palestine Liberation Army currently stationed in Jordan), in preparation for a confrontation with Hamas, and has allowed the Jordanian and Egyptian intelligence services to upgrade their longstanding and major, though understated, involvement in "keeping order" in the Palestinian territories.

A unity government with Fatah, if one can be stitched together, might give Hamas' political wing the cover that it needs to excuse the compromises that it will be forced to make once Israel resumes negotiations.

The politicians could always settle for a mini-state in Gaza in exchange for being allowed to "Islamicise" Palestinian public life there. This, of course, will not be without opposition from elements in the armed wing who joined Hamas to fight the occupation, not to impose their religious beliefs on their co-nationals. But, without turning to a strategy based on mass methods of struggle, in which the working class and urban poor are organised on the basis of class interest and play the leading role, no other road is open.

**The demand for a "unity government" is really aimed at fostering Palestinian disunity. Israel hopes to undermine the results of an election in which Hamas won a large enough vote to form a majority government**

## BEIRUT ANTI-IMPERIALIST CONFERENCE

# Unite the worldwide resistance!

By Michael Proebsting

In mid-November, 400 delegates from every continent met in Beirut to demonstrate their solidarity with resistance against US imperialism and Israel and to discuss future perspectives for the anti-imperialist struggle.

The conference attracted activists not only from the Middle East and Europe but also from the Philippines, South Korea, Australia, Congo, Canada. Among the many political currents, in addition to Hezbollah, were the Lebanese Communist Party, the Lebanese Democratic People's Party, the National Committee for Unification of Communists in Syria, the PFLP and the DFLP.

Opening the conference, the deputy general secretary of Hezbollah, Sheikh Naim Qassem, emphasised the need for an alliance between the Islamist resistance and the secular left and quoted Lenin, "the unity of this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed classes for a paradise on earth is more important to us than the unity of workers' ideas about the paradise in heaven". He ended his appeal for cooperation with the slogan "Poor and oppressed of all countries, unite!"

The general debate was dominated by expressions of solidarity with the resistance and the great enthusiasm that the success of Hezbollah against the Israeli invasion in July and August has evoked in the antiwar movement around the world.

Naturally the conference also revealed problems in the movement. Some organisations were noticeable by their absence and these included the European

Left Party and the Fourth International, both major players in the European Social Forum (ESF). In the case of the ELP this was not surprising because member parties have entered imperialist coalition governments, for example, Bertinotti's Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, and supported the dispatch of imperialist troops to Lebanon. Also notable by their absence were many Islamist organisations. It seems the Sunni Islamists are as opposed to the Shi'ites as they are to imperialism and so refused to extend solidarity to Hezbollah.

Although the discussions at the conference were lively and the organisers ensured all participants were able to speak, they also adopted many of the techniques of the ESF so that the working group which formulated the final declaration, for example, was self-selected, in fact, conference was never even told who was on this group.

The International Socialist Tendency (SWP in Britain) played its now customary role as the right wing of the movement. Its representatives limited themselves to general denunciations of imperialism and Islamophobia, using the need for the "broadest possible unity" to duck many of the burning questions facing the movement. Unity is of course a good thing – providing it is unity in action on just these issues and not the unity of wordy declarations that cover up inaction.

Unfortunately, the IST favoured the latter. For example, in contrast to the anti-imperialist stance of most delegates, IST speakers argued that slogans should not be too radical because that would drive away pacifist allies in the West. Against

the League for the Fifth International and others who called for the immediate withdrawal of imperialist troops from Lebanon, the IST argued that this would divide us from those (like Rifondazione) who supported the UN mission and it would be quite sufficient to demand that UN soldiers should not disarm Hezbollah.

Against our arguments for increased international coordination of the solidarity movement, the IST replied that local work was more important – an argument that makes about as much sense as suggesting that one wing of an aeroplane is more important than the other. What lies behind their approach is their accommodation to liberal Islamist or Social Democratic forces and their sectarian attitude towards more radical groups.

These problems however cannot outweigh the overwhelmingly positive character of the conference. The final declaration emphasised opposition to imperialist and Zionist aggression and solidarity with the Lebanese, Palestinian and Iraqi resistance. It called for three international days of solidarity action in the coming year, March 20 (Iraq) July 12 (Lebanon) and September 28 (Palestine). Cooperation between anti-imperialist Islamists and the secular left will also be taken forward.

There will be an international commission to organise a war crimes tribunal against Israel. Similarly, journalists will form a media commission to counter imperialist falsifications. Lastly, there will be a coordination committee that will plan future activities. This will include representatives of Hezbollah, the Lebanese Communist Party and Nahla Chahal of the CCIPPP, a prominent activist in the Pales-

tinian solidarity movement in Europe and in the ESF.

The conference could hardly have been held at a better time. The contradictions in imperialist policy in the Middle East are becoming ever more obvious. Israel has suffered the first military defeat, the collapse of US occupation policy is clearer than ever, the resistance in Afghanistan is causing increasing losses among NATO troops and recent electoral results show the rejection of Bush's government by the American people.

These growing contradictions, however, will not lead to a more peaceful policy. On the contrary, we can expect further aggression. The building of a militant anti-imperialist movement with effective co-ordination structures is more necessary than ever. It is precisely here that the League for the Fifth International sees its principal task and it will continue to combine argument for a revolutionary communist programme and the building of the Fifth International with active participation in the building of the international solidarity movement.

In proposals distributed to all delegates we argued that the conference should:

- Call for a global economic and political boycott of Israel.
- Organise an international solidarity tour of representatives from Lebanon and other countries.
- Call for a global mass protest in the event of any aggression by Israel against Lebanon, Syria or Iran.
- Elect an international coordinating committee of delegates from all countries which should meet several times each year and maintain regular contact.



## ITALY

# One and a half million strike – despite timid union leaders

Mass demonstrations and strikes have taken place across Italy to protest against the first budget of the l'Unione coalition. *Dave Stockton* on the first crisis for the popular front government

“No to the budget: we have no friends in the Government” This was the rallying cry of an 80,000 strong demonstration in Rome on 17 November. Impressive protests took place in 27 major towns and cities. One and a half million workers took strike action and more than 300,000 took to the street. In addition, half the schools were closed, with many students joining the demonstrations.

Reminiscent of various general strikes mounted against the right wing government of Silvio Berlusconi in recent years, this was the first mass protest against the l'Unione coalition, which includes not only Democratica di Sinistra (DS) but also Rifondazione Comunista (RC), which had, until it entered government, supported the mass anticapitalist and antiwar movements.

The strike disrupted flights, and bus and rail schedules. Students and teachers from secondary and higher education protested against cuts and demanded the repeal of the “Moratti education reform”, which last year had provoked a major movement by university and school students against the previous prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi.

The reasons for new premier Romano Prodi's attack on workers, the young and the poor are straightforward enough – if you accept, as he does, the logic of neoliberal capitalism and the project of building a strong European bloc able to compete with the United States. After all, Prodi was a key architect of the Lisbon Agenda, adopted in 2000, which set itself precisely this goal. His budget aims to cut 15 billion euros from state expenditure.

The major Italian union federations – Cgil, Cisl and Uil – have been mildly critical of the new budget. But Guglielmo Epifani, the leader of the biggest federation, Cgil, said that Prodi's is the “only possible” budget. Leaders of Rifondazione even claimed that it is a left-wing “redistributive” budget.

But the demonstrations and general strike proved that many workers are not fooled by such spin. They were a triumph for the radical left wing of the Italian workers and social movement. The strike was organised by Cobas and other radical unions, without the official support of the big federations. Nevertheless, many mainstream union members joined the protests.

The big union leaders present Prodi and his allies as “our friends in government”. It is noteworthy that one of the major slogans of the demonstrators was, “We have no friends in



government!”

The budget will not be the last attack either. Francesco Rutelli, Minister of Welfare and leader of Prodi's party, has outlined an even harder hitting “phase two of neoliberal reforms”. This will include raising the retirement age, introducing the market into the health service, cutting public sector jobs, and privatising local transport, energy and other public services.

The Prodi government has finally withdrawn Italian troops from Iraq, as it promised in the elections. However, its troops continue to play an important role in the occupation of Afghanistan. Also Prodi enthusiastically sent a considerably bigger force to Lebanon in order to prevent Hezbollah from renewing any armed action against the Zionist occupiers.

The l'Unione coalition contains openly bourgeois parties, such as Prodi's party Margherita, alongside parties linked to the workers' movement, like the DS and Rifondazione, led by Fausto Bertinotti. In office it is carrying out precisely the pro-capitalist policies, which revolutionaries predicted that it would.

This is the fate of all “popular fronts”. They deceitfully promise to carry out reforms in the interest of the workers, to block the road to the reactionary right wing, by uniting with the “progressive wing of the bourgeoisie”. In reality they bring about the complete opposite. By using the influence of the reformist workers parties and their bureaucrats who lead the major unions, they hamper and divert resistance, claiming the government is “ours” or at least is “friendly to us”. This is a downright lie.

The main danger facing Italian workers is that this government will sell them out, confuse and break up their resistance and, through spreading disillusionment with the official labour move-

ment, open the road to a new right wing government.

A major test is looming for the left opponents of the Prodi budget within Rifondazione Comunista, including Sinistra Critica (Critical Left), the Fourth Internationalist current. The budget must be approved by the Senate – in which Prodi has a majority of only one or two – before the end of the year. Will the left forces in l'Unione dare to vote no against the cuts? Past actions do not give any grounds for confidence.

However, on the streets and in the workplaces, important sections of the larger federations, like the FIOM metalworkers, can be won to resistance. So too can rank and file Rifondazione members. What is needed is clear and decisive political leadership.

Workers and youth have built local organisations to take up the struggle. They need to be brought together in co-ordinations – united fronts for militant action. They also need to set themselves the political goal of an all out general strike to stop the neoliberal reforms and go on to force the concession of a series of anticapitalist measures aimed at meeting the burning needs of workers, youth and pensioners.

They need not merely a “friendly” government, but a workers' government, which will take state power out of the hands of the bosses for good, which will smash the repressive machinery, putting power in the hands of the workers organised in councils.

To achieve this, the working class needs a revolutionary party, equal to the militancy Italian workers have shown time and again. In the meanwhile, socialists across Europe should turn their attention to Italy in the months to come where, once again, many vital lessons of the class struggle can be learned.



## LABOUR PARTY

# 100 years of collaboration

Faced with Tony Blair's wars, from the Balkans to Iraq, some people think, "Things were different under Old Labour." But, as *Joy Maccready* shows, Labour has always supported British imperialism

Lenin called Labour a bourgeois workers party, meaning that it defends the interests of the capitalist ruling class, even though it had been formed by and rested on workers' organisations, the trade unions and socialist propaganda societies. In Britain – an imperialist country – such a party must be an imperialist one.

The beginning of the 20th century saw the opening years of imperialism: "the highest stage of capitalism" as Lenin called it. One aspect of imperialism is the super-exploitation of workers in colonies, as well as in formally independent states under imperialist domination (semi-colonies). The reason for this domination is to repatriate profits back to the imperialist countries. Some of these enormous profits were used to buy off a layer of skilled workers in the home country, in an attempt to secure social peace.

Before 1914 the Labour Party, led by trade union leaders like Arthur Henderson and reformist socialists like Kier Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, adopted a pacifist position, opposing all wars. The Labour Party joined the Second International and at its congresses in 1907 and 1912 solemnly pledged itself to oppose the approaching world war, which it characterised in advance as an imperialist war: one in which the workers must not take sides but use the political crisis which it would engender to bring about the downfall of capitalism.

Yet in August 1914 Labour MPs voted for war credits. Indeed, within a year Arthur Henderson became a minister in the war cabinet, taking co-responsibility for the shooting of the Irish socialist leader James Connolly in 1916.

The Labour Party used the excuse that they were defending "little Belgium" against German militarism, defending the homes of British workers. But after this defining act of betrayal – when it proved its loyalty to imperialism – Labour never looked back. In countless wars against rebellions in the colonies, which the pretext of "defending the homeland" could hardly serve to excuse, they defended the British Empire all along the line.

The first Labour government in 1924 used the RAF to bomb and gas Kurdish tribes in Iraq who were in revolt against the King who was a puppet of British imperialism. It did not lift a finger to free India – the prize possession of the British Empire. Viceroy Lord Curzon expressed its importance bluntly, in 1901, "As long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall drop straightaway to a third rate power."

The mass movement to free India from British rule erupted in March 1918, with strikes for rights and decent conditions. The Amritsar Massacre, on April 13 1919 saw British troops open fire on an unarmed gathering, killing over a

thousand men, women and children, but this did not end the movement. The first half of 1920 saw around one and a half million workers taking part in more than 200 strikes.

This working class rebellion fused with the nationalist movement and, in July 1920, Mohandas Gandhi launched a campaign of non-cooperation with the British. The British had ruled India by a divide and rule policy, which categorised its inhabitants by religious community. They made concessions to the minority communities,

state of emergency. Hundreds were shot dead by the police and army and demonstrators were publicly flogged. Over 100,000 arrests were made.

But India's resistance against British rule could no longer be suppressed. So Labour adopted a plan to partition India and entrusted its carrying out to Lord Mountbatten, a junior member of the Royal Family. They had planned to transfer sovereignty in June 1948, but were forced out by August 1947. The bitter fruits of the British policy of division were then seen in the ferocious communal riots in which over a million perished and the displacement of over 15 million people.

After the war everything started to unravel for British imperialism. At home, workers were demanding radical change. Abroad, Britain was losing its grip on its colonies in Africa and Asia. But Labour was not going to let them go without a fight.

It was elected in 1945 with an overwhelming majority but still proved itself to be the loyal servant of imperialism.

It supported the return of African colonies back to Italy so returning the nascent liberation movements in Libya and the Horn of Africa back to their wartime oppressors.

In Southeast Asia, the Labour government oversaw the restoration of colonial rule, not only in Britain's colony Malaya, where it crushed a growing trade union movement as well as waging a long war against Communist guerrillas, but also in French Indo-China (Vietnam) and Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), where its troops helped the old colonialists to recover "their possessions".

The list of Labour's imperialist crimes continued in subsequent terms of office: from its oppression of the Nationalist population in Ulster to its support of the Vietnam war. Even though Harold Wilson did not send troops to Vietnam – because of the growing antiwar movement – he did everything short of this to support the US war effort.

These examples show that Labour in government consistently upholds British imperialism's interests. Marxists understand that the political characterisation of a party is ultimately determined by which class interests it objectively defends, irrespective of the subjective ideas, aspirations or social origins of the party leaders or members. By these criteria Labour was and is what Lenin called a social imperialist party – socialist in name and imperialist in its actions.

The "socialist" mask has well and truly slipped off under Blair, especially over the Iraq war. The task of revolutionaries is to use this to replace Labour with a new workers party that fights for our class interests nationally and internationally.

## Labour's record

- 1914 Votes for and supports WWI
- 1924 Uses the RAF to bomb Kurdish fighters in Iraq, a British "protectorate"
- 1929 Refuses independence to India
- 1940 Joins wartime coalition
- 1945 Uses British troops to restore French rule in Vietnam and Dutch rule in Indonesia
- 1946 Uses British troops in Greece against Communist-led ELAS
- 1948 Sends 35,000 British troops to Malaya to crush national liberation struggle
- 1949 Supports foundation of Nato Alliance as instrument of the Cold War
- 1950 Sends British troops to support the USA in the Korean War
- 1951 Blockades Iran and prepares a coup with CIA
- 1964 Wages war against liberation forces in Aden including torturing
- 1966 Gives material and logistical support to the US in Vietnam
- 1960s and 1970s
  - Blocks calls for sanctions against South Africa
  - 1965 Does nothing against the white settlers in Zimbabwe when it declares independence to escape ceding power to the black majority
  - 1969 Sends troops into Ireland to contain the Civil Rights Movement and from 1974 to 1979 wages brutal war against IRA
  - 1974 Sends arms to the Shah of Iran; sells Hawk aircraft to Indonesia during its genocidal war in East Timor
  - 1982 Supports Thatcher's war to recover the Malvinas from Argentina
  - 1991 Supports the First Gulf War
  - 1997 onwards
    - Uses of British troops and aircraft in Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003)

particularly "traditional rulers", playing their representatives off against one another.

Twenty years later, in 1942, the All India National Congress launched the Quit India movement. Attlee, deputy prime minister in the war-time coalition with Churchill, authorised a

## CLASS WAR PRISONERS

# Free Mario Bango

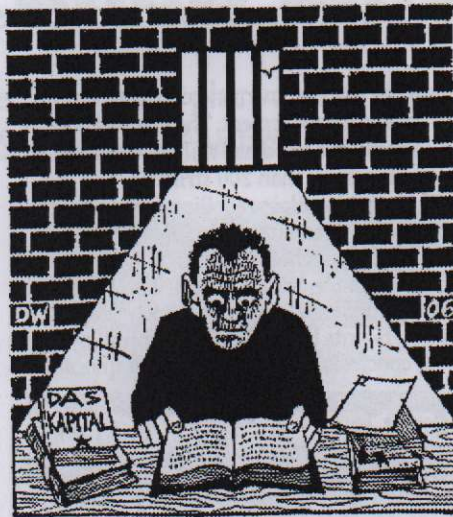
By Kam Kumar

Our thoughts go out to Mario Bango this Christmas, our young comrade imprisoned and convicted under racist Slovakian laws. In 2001 Mario, age 19, was convicted of defending his brother from a violent racist attack in Slovakia. Mario defended his brother and wounded Branislav Slamka, a well-known fascist, he then phoned an ambulance and waited for the police to arrive.

Several weeks later Slamka died in hospital, which evidence presented in court showed to be unrelated to the wound he received from Mario.

So racist is Slovakia against Roma that Slamka was given a two-minute silence in parliament and the courts sentenced Mario to 12 yrs (reduced to 10 on appeal). Mario and his family had been victims to multiple racist attacks – and as a result Mario, like many other Roma carried a knife to protect himself.

Roma in eastern Europe face widespread violence. Roma make up 8 million across Europe and are one of the most persecuted minority groups. Roma face apartheid-like policies in housing, education, and health. Violent, forced evictions of Roma settlements are common par-



ticularly in Slovenia, Hungary and Romania. The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) report that these evictions are not punished by law and in some cases, the police either assist or stand and watch. The ERRC also reports many cases of skinhead gang violence and arson attacks on homes, leading to Roma being killed.

Doctors in Hungary and the Czech republic

carry out forced sterilisation of Roma women without their consent. Recently, the minister of health in Bulgaria proposed compulsory abortions and criminalisation for pregnant girls under 18 years old from "minority groups", clearly targeted at Roma women.

The UK Home Office in agreement with the Czech authorities, stations British immigration officers in Prague airport to screen certain immigrants from reaching the UK to claim asylum: it is no surprise that from the Czech republic most of these will be Roma.

All these examples make it necessary to defend Roma from the attacks they face. We argue that self defence is no offence. When Roma are being attacked – sometimes killed as a result – then Roma have the right to protect their own lives. We demand his immediate release.

- Please write to Mario and give him your words of solidarity – this keeps his spirits up and is a small comfort to him whilst he suffers alone in prison.

Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982

PS41

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Slovensko/Slovakia

- For more information on the case and what you can do go to [www.freemario.org](http://www.freemario.org)

## Omar Deghayes: a Guantanamo detainee from Brighton

By Joy Macready

“We are dying a slow death in here. And you have to remember that we have not been charged with any crime. I do not understand what America is doing.”

*Omar Deghayes, Guantanamo Bay, Camp V, declassified 7 September 2005*

Omar Deghayes, 37, has been held in Guantanamo Bay for almost five years. He does not know the evidence that is held against him as secret evidence has been presented to “Combatant Status Review Tribunals” but detainees are not allowed to see and therefore challenge it.

He has been tortured while he was imprisoned in Pakistan, Bagram air base and at Guantanamo Bay. He has been subjected to torture, suffocation, solitary confinement for 8 months and repeated use of pepper spray. He is now completely blind in one eye.

Omar was arrested in Lahore in early 2002

after he and his friend went travelling and looking for work; they visited Malaysia, Pakistan and Afghanistan where Omar Deghayes got married.

He was told he was being held at the behest of the United States, taken back to Afghanistan and held at Bagram air base until September 2002 when he was transferred to Guantanamo Bay.

He has been categorised as an “enemy combatant” despite being picked up hundreds of miles from a war zone and in a country that was not at war with the US. Other Guantanamo detainees, including released British citizens, arrived there through similar routes, subject to arbitrary arrest and removal rather than extradition processes, simply lifted from one country and imprisoned in another.

Omar fled Libya in 1987 following the assassination of his father, a trade unionist and political opponent of Gaddafi’s regime. He attended school in Brighton, went on to study law at university and planned to become a human rights lawyer. His son is now four years old.

The arrest, transportation, internment and

torture of Omar Deghayes are all breaches of human rights. The British government is complicit in the torture. Recently two British men lost their fight against extradition to the US because the High Court judge believed that the US would “stick to the letter of the law” even though it is known that torture happens. The judge also said it was “speculative” to say that they may be held indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay - yet that is exactly Omar’s situation.

The Save Omar Campaign is arguing for the release of Omar Deghayes and his safe return to his home and family in Britain. For more information check [www.save-omar.org.uk](http://www.save-omar.org.uk) and find out what you can do to help contact the Save Omar campaign by emailing [info@save-omar.org.uk](mailto:info@save-omar.org.uk)

- Write to Omar Deghayes, Prisoner 720, 381 Camp Delta, Washington DC, 20053 USA. Send gifts to Omar Deghayes, c/o Brighton Peace and Environment Centre, 39-41 Surrey St, Brighton BN1 3PB. His lawyer will deliver them to Camp Delta.

# WHAT WE STAND FOR

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We fight to:

- Abolish capitalism and create a world without exploitation, class divisions and oppression
- Break the resistance of the exploiters by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution smashing the repressive capitalist state
- Place power in the hands of councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry, the poor - elected and recallable by the masses
- Transform large-scale production and distribution, at present in the hands of a tiny elite, into a socially owned economy, democratically planned
- Plan the use of humanity's labour, materials and technology to eradicate social inequality and poverty.

This is communism - a society without classes and without state repression. To achieve this, the working class must take power from the capitalists.

We fight imperialism: the handful of great capitalist powers and their corporations, who exploit billions and crush all states and peoples, who resist them. We support resistance to their blockades, sanctions, invasions and occupations by countries like Venezuela, Iraq or Iran. We demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. We support unconditionally the armed resistance.

We fight racism and national oppres-

sion. We defend refugees and asylum seekers from the racist actions of the media, the state and the fascists. We oppose all immigration controls. When racists physically threaten refugees and immigrants, we take physical action to defend them. We fight for no platform for fascism.

We fight for women's liberation: from physical and mental abuse, domestic drudgery, sexual exploitation and discrimination at work. We fight for free abortion and contraception on demand. We fight for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men and against their harassment by the state, religious bodies and reactionaries.

We fight youth oppression in the family and society: for their sexual freedom, for an end to super-exploitation, for the right to vote at sixteen, for free, universal education with a living grant.

We fight bureaucracy in the unions. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice, and earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. Rank and file trade unionists must organise to dissolve the bureaucracy. We fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers control.

We fight reformism: the policy of Labour, Socialist, Social-Democratic and the misnamed Communist parties. Capitalism cannot be reformed through peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by force. Though

these parties still have roots in the working class, politically they defend capitalism. We fight for the unions to break from Labour and form for a new workers party. We fight for such a party to adopt a revolutionary programme and a Leninist combat form of organization.

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

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

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

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

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

## ★ Fighting Fund ★

Workers Power has launched a fighting fund to raise money for our political work over the next year. We have set ourselves the initial target at £1,000 that we hope to meet by February.

Last month has got us off to a flying start. We raised £200 from donations at the Anti-Imperialism event. As we go to press, the fund stands at £340.60.

Two Workers Power branches have benefits planned for the Christmas period to raise more funds. A brave (or foolish) team of comrades are also planning a sponsored swimathon.

If you want to contribute please send a cheque made out to 'Workers Power' to BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX.

## Anti-Imperialism a great success

Workers Power's Anti-Imperialism event attracted over 50 participants. While the audience was overwhelmingly composed of young workers, students and school students, a number of older workers and immigrants also came and joined in the lively debates.

The event started with a discussion on how the US and Britain are losing the "war on terror" around the world. A number of contributors, as well as the top-table speakers, warned, however, that this does not mean that there will be a progressive outcome to the conflicts. We had to fight for that by campaigning for working class goals and methods of struggle.

The first day ended with an international rally. Marc Lassalle from France talked about the recent uprisings of youth and students, and other members talked about the situation in the USA and around

the world in the struggle against imperialism.

Sunday resumed with more debates. The discussion on Leninism threw up disagreements on whether democratic centralism was applicable in small, fighting propaganda groups. The session on Latin America led to a debate over the nature of Hugo Chávez' government and the tasks of workers in Venezuela. One SWP member commented afterwards that such discussions were much better than his party's annual *Marxism* event.

The weekend closed with Jeremy Dewar presenting our draft action programme for Britain. He emphasised that it was only a draft programme and we welcomed comment and amendment.

The event showed that *Workers Power* has every reason to be optimistic about growing in the coming months.

## CONTACT

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

## FIGHTING FUND

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# The Leninist Party

By Richard Brenner

Faced with systematic exploitation in the workplace, all over the world workers have combined into trade unions to fight to improve their pay and conditions and to resist the persistent attacks of the employers. Yet trade unionism on its own is quickly obliged to confront the fact that the employers exert control not only through management of individual companies and enterprises, but through government. The most determined and far-sighted of the workers therefore turn their attention to politics.

In the earliest days of capitalism, the trade unions pursued politics by striking agreements and alliances with capitalist political parties. This primitive form of trade union political activity has unfortunately not disappeared and persists in some countries to this day. In the USA, for example, where class consciousness is held back by the strength of the capitalists and the enormous superprofits that they generate from the exploitation of the globe, the trade unions organise millions of workers but have not established a working class party of their own.

The first task of communists, since the days of Marx, has been to fight for the political independence of the working class. This means breaking all political ties with the capitalists and constituting a workers' party - a party entirely different from the capitalist parties in its goals, means of struggle and structure. It means establishing a party on the model of the Bolsheviks, led by V.I. Lenin.

Lenin explained that when the workers of a single factory or of a single branch of industry engage in struggle against their employers, this is only a "weak embryo of class struggle". The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle in the strict sense only when the leading representatives of the working class of a country are conscious of themselves as a class and launch a struggle that is directed, not just against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and its government.

This means turning it into the struggle of a definite political party for definite political goals - the forcible overthrow of the capitalist state, the establishment of working class power, the suppression of the bourgeoisie, the confiscation of the property of the great capitalist corporations and the institution of a democratic plan of production. Only this outcome opens the road to the systematic dissolution of class divisions, the abolition of all forms of exploitation and the

creation of a new, higher, associated mode of production (socialism), and ultimately a society without the need for any form of mandatory division of labour or state coercion (communism).

No one has ever demonstrated how a revolutionary class can come to power other than through the organisation of a party. As with every human endeavour, the collective struggle of the proletariat requires leadership. The communist party's organisation must therefore be based on its fundamental task - leading a workers' revolution.

The preconditions of success are that the party is based upon and advances a revolutionary programme, that it trains and develops a range of party groups operating under the direction of these leading bodies in distinct spheres of struggle, that it can knit

## A workers' party's structure and programme must be based on its fundamental task - leading a social revolution

these groups together in common action, that it is adaptable and flexible in the face of the ever changing conditions of struggle, and that it seeks out and establishes the closest possible ties with the working masses.

The form of organisation suited to the successful performance of these tasks is democratic centralism.

Ninety years of calumny has been heaped on the concept of democratic centralism from all sides - from the bourgeoisie, the reformists, anarchists, opportunists and sectarians of every stripe. That they have had success in inoculating significant sections of the proletarian vanguard against democratic centralism is due to two main factors:

- The class-determined disposition of the middle class to personal 'independence' at the expense of collective discipline, itself a product of the middle layers' whole way of life. This intermediate stratum has enormous influence on the top layers of the working class.
- The criminal abuse of the term democratic centralism by the 'Communist' rulers of the collapsed USSR and in contemporary capitalist China, to excuse a totalitarian

regime of bureaucratic centralism in which all democratic rights, all attempts to subordinate the actions of the leadership to the interests of the workers is choked off through police terror.

By contrast with this perversion, democratic centralism involves both the fullest internal democracy and debating of disputed questions and disciplined common action in the implementation of party decisions. These two elements must be fused together. The only way that this can be achieved is by continual collective activity.

Bourgeois political parties typically adopt a form of organisation based on a division between a top layer of functionaries and a passive membership base. This keeps the members under control, and the leadership free from control. It suits a party that needs members only for their money and to knock on doors every few years in elections. It is useless for a party that wants to make a revolution.

Thus the Communist International stated unambiguously: "in its effort to have only really active members, a communist party must demand of every member in its ranks that he devote his time and energy, insofar as they are at his own disposal under the given conditions, to his party and that he always give it his best service." Conditions of party membership were commitment to communism (acceptance of the party programme), formal admission (perhaps first as a candidate member), regular payment of subscriptions to the party, taking the party press and, "most important", participation of every member in daily party work.

Only in this way can the efforts of the membership be directed towards drawing ever more workers and youth into the revolutionary movement while maintaining leadership "not by virtue of power but by virtue of authority, i.e. by virtue of energy, greater experience, greater versatility, greater ability."

In Britain today, there is widespread discussion on the left wing of the unions of the need to break with Blair's New Labour. Two major unions, the RMT and the FBU, are outside Labour and three trade union conferences this year have discussed the question of political representation. It is becoming clearer to ever more workers that we need a new party. If it is to be truly a workers' party and not a re-run of the capitalist model adopted by the Labour Party, then the lessons of the past will need to be rediscovered and applied to contemporary conditions.

*We will need to build a 21st century Leninist party.*