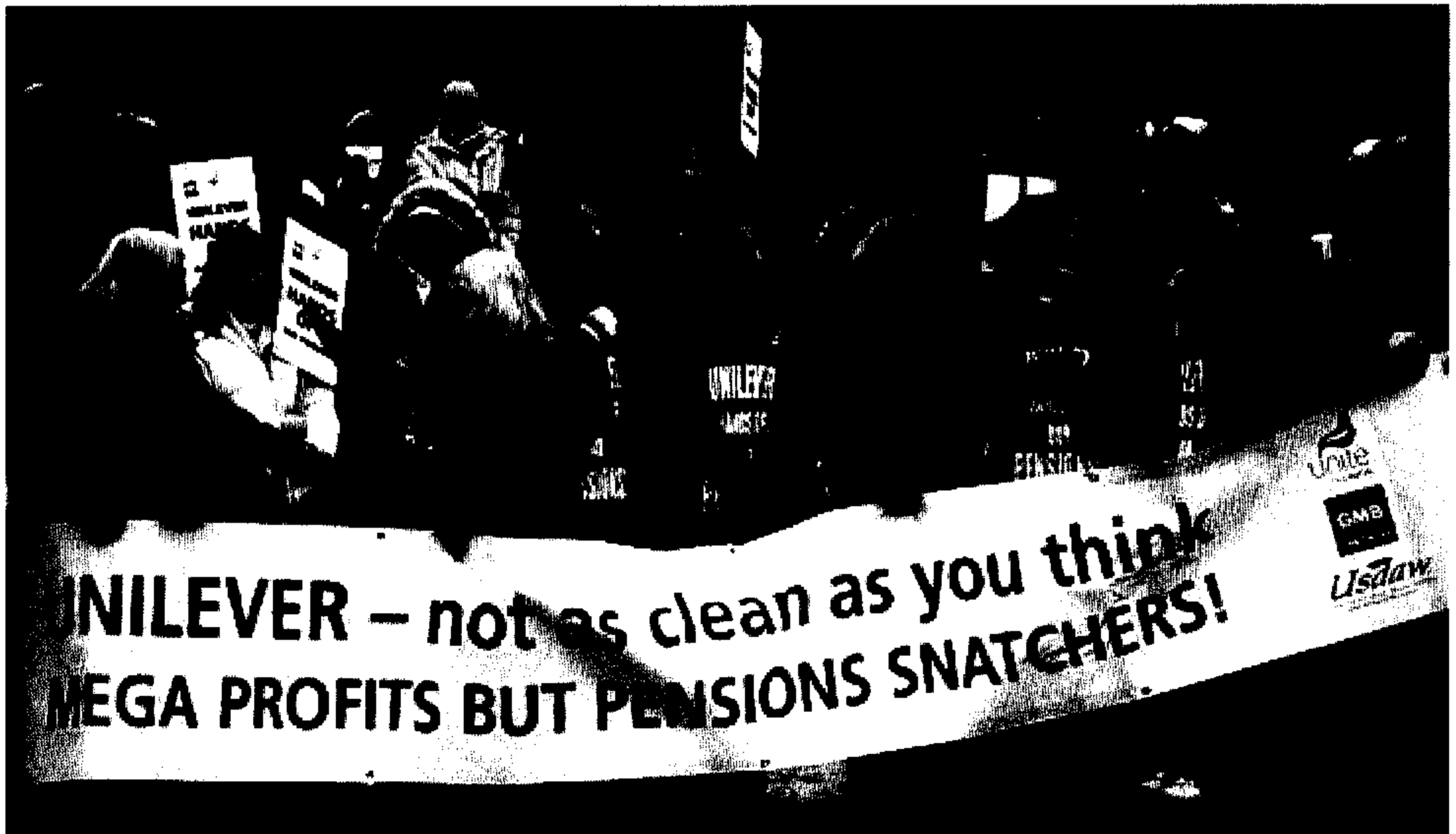


SocialistVoice[★]

Nº 6 February 2012

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST LEAGUE, BRITISH SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS LEAGUE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

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Unite private and public strikes

As the sovereign debt crisis continues across Europe and poverty and unemployment deepens in Britain imperialism is pushing towards further wars in the Middle East. Imposing an oil blockade on Iran and threatening to attack Syria the US and the EU urged on by Israel are intensifying tensions and the spin to legitimate military attack grows daily.

The need for working class internationalism now is critical. New levels of struggle have emerged over recent years with mass movements in the USA, Russia (see middle pages in this issue), the Middle East, Europe and other areas where the working class and youth face tremendous tasks. But

above everything is posed the need to build the struggle on an international basis.

Internationalism is beginning and can be seen in the occupy movement, the campaign for Palestine and the embryonic attempts to link European workers in struggles against the EU. All unions should put internationalism on the agenda, a workers and democratic internationalism, not the internationalism of the banks.

The world's main leaders talk of new wars in the Middle East while deepening the war against the workers in their own countries. Service closures, job losses, benefit and pension cuts in the

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LIFE OF THE LIT

LIT are the Spanish initials of the International Workers' League

Portugal a new party will be born

Ruptura/FER, the IWL-FI's section in Portugal whose cadres were part of the Left Block since its foundation, are now calling for a new party to be formed.

The Left Block is a party that promised much but did very little. Hundreds of thousands of votes and parliamentary reformism turned old revolutionary leaders into mere parliamentarians colluding with the regime and system that rule us. Both the Left Block and the Portuguese Communist Party say the working class must pay the external debt. None of them has the courage to defend the immediate payment suspension of this immoral and unfair debt.

The LB did not dare to drive the FER out, but in practical terms this is what they did. Following the catastrophic election results of June 5 2011 they refused to call an extraordinary convention to review their policies critically and, conversely, they promoted a sectarian and antidemocratic internal operation to stop all critical sectors.

Last year alternative mass movements developed in Portugal like the popular assembly, which on October 15 during the international occupy day, had over 20,000 participants in Lisbon. This arose outside of the Left Block and Communist Party and in opposition to them.

On March 10 in the Voice of Labour building in Lisbon, FER will found a new party and hundreds of comrades and friends of the future movement of socialist alternative will be there.

Argentina party officers attacked

In February thugs attacked the headquarters of the PSTU (United Socialist Workers' Party) in the Comodoro Rivadavia city. Attempts were made to set fire to the premises, and computers and other valuables were stolen, including documentation concerning the legalisation of the party.

The attack was political. The PSTU is known for its constant struggle, waged arm in arm with other fighters and organisations, to be against the looting of oil and mines by the multinationals, it fights for the nationalisation of natural resources, workers' rights, the independence of Argentina from imperialism and for socialism. That is why the attack cannot fail but be closely linked to the oil and mining companies who are out to grab resources. It is unavoidable for workers to resist this offensive.

The PSTU calls on all organisations who defend democratic rights, political parties, trade unions and social organisations to condemn this raid and demand an inquest and punishment for those responsible.



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Editorial

Unite private and public strikes

(continued from the front page)

UK and across Europe are increasing to unsustainable levels and will not end under capitalism.

British workers can see what is happening in Greece after years of cuts. The Troika of the EU, the IMF and European Central Bank now want more cuts in the minimum wage, cuts of between 20% to 30% in private sector wages and more pension cuts. They want profit and demand misery. Greek GDP fell by 11% from a year ago, while over 20% of all adults and 50% of the youth are out of work. The cuts prevent any recovery but the EU is terrified of Greece leaving the Euro. Meanwhile multi-nationals prepare for Greece to exit the Euro.

The EU (led by Germany and France) violates Greek sovereignty by demanding that all the main parties agree to carry out austerity whoever wins the next general election. The Greek parliament has agreed to binding and irreversible spending cuts, yet they admit that the crisis will continue to 2020 and beyond.

Greece and all European countries will only survive by fighting these dictates, by leaving the Euro and European Union and building the struggle for a workers Europe and socialism.

Britain

As this years planned cuts in council services show the cuts will not stop under the current government or under a Labour government. As services are destroyed anger grows against the impunity of the city and its bankers because these are the very people who enriched themselves while helping to crash their system. It is they and their governments who are the ones impoverishing millions across Europe.

Almost 13 million people are living in poverty in the UK including 3.8 million children, 2.2 million pensioners and 7.2 million working age adults with London having the higher proportion of people living in poverty.

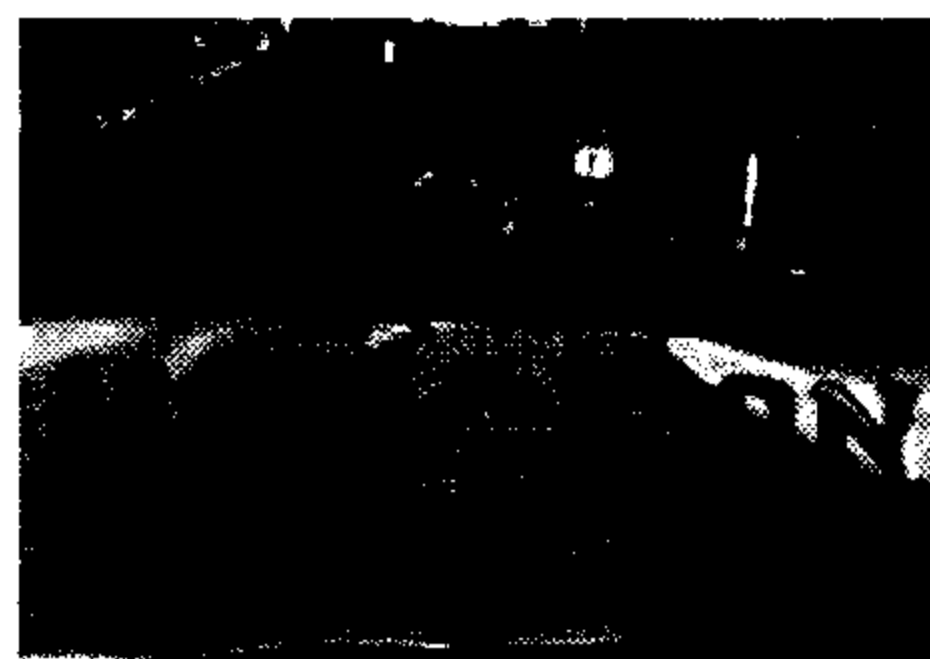
The only thing the bankers are trying to save is their profits and their system. It is in such a fragile state that the British government threatens war abroad and looks to find ways of repressing the movements in Britain. Above all they

attack the youth who occupy areas of cities, lobby city councils against the cuts and take to the streets in protest. They are terrified of a joint struggle of youth, unions and communities against cuts and wars.

This is the background to the sell out by the Unison, GMB and ATL leaderships over the pension robbery since the November 30 strike. They go along with the Labour Party line that cuts are necessary and that there is no alternative, like the government and the bankers they want workers to pay the debt.

Other unions such as the NUT, PCS and the FBU are preparing for strike action to defend pensions in March. They should link up with the private sector unions and the youth. All trade unionists should help build the movement and condemn and fight to remove all the leaders who broke their mandate to strike.

The only response to their betrayal is to fully support further strike action in the public and private sectors, and to support the youth in struggle and help to link together youth and workers and prepare for the construction of a new



Europe that fights together against a system that can only bring misery and destruction to the majority. The debt is not ours.

It is essential that workers do not ignore the build up of war against Syria or Iran. The anti-war movement should be galvanised uniting with the working class across Europe who are already fighting the austerity plans with general strikes, occupations and mobilisations. The fight against debt and austerity and the fight against war should come together, as cuts and war have the same source - capitalism trying save a disintegrating system.

- Don't pay their debt
- Strike to defend pensions in March
- Unite public and private strikes
- Unite across against cuts and war

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK 2012

Monday 20th Feb
7pm Gilmor Bar
Public meeting and Book Launch
'Targeting Israeli Apartheid'

Tuesday 21st Feb
5.30-8.30pm McAusland Lounge
IMPORTANT!
Come and vote for Palestine NUS motions!

Wednes 22nd Feb
6.30pm Gilmor Bar
Boycott, Divest & Sanctions
Practical Solidarity for Palestine

Thurs 23rd Feb
11.45am The HUB
Skype with Birzeit Student Council

Support Israeli Apartheid week

Events are taking place in many cities.

Meetings at University of Liverpool students union.

Supported by Liverpool trade unions.

Looking backwards and looking forwards

Margaret McAdam, Editor Socialist Voice and Canan Sagar member of the ISL



History in 2011 was made by the uprisings of the working class, oppressed and exploited of the world—in the Middle East, Africa and across Europe. In Britain there were more protests, strikes and unrest on the streets than there have been for many years. Workers came out on strike in January and continued throughout the year to December and are now making further plans for action in 2012 because the working class are clear that they should not be forced to pay the debts of the financial institutions and big business who are responsible for the economic crisis.

The Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat coalition, like governments in most European countries, have set in place an austerity programme that will cut basic services, reduce salaries and pensions, and cut jobs—all of which will seriously impact adversely on the lives and conditions of the working class. There is no plan to address the greed and corruption of the bankers, speculators and the rich who continue to collect their huge bonuses, enormous salaries and extortionate profits!

A protest, March for the Alternative, was organised by the TUC in March and 500,000 people took to the streets of London. Following this, on 28 May UK Uncut organised 40 direct actions, with the support of unions and health workers, calling for support of the NHS and against the cuts and privatisations of health services and attacking the banks over their responsibility for the situation we are in. On 30th June, known as J30, a one day strike took place against

the plan to attack pensions—raise retirement age from 60 to 66, increase contributions and lower pensions. That is, work longer, pay more and receive less! Teachers and education workers from the NUT, UCU and other unions formed picket lines, and for many this was their first picket! More than 11,000 schools were affected and more than 3,200 were closed.

In November 2010 tens of thousands of students organised a mass demonstration in London against plans to increase tuition fees and this was followed by a number of occupations. Fees were introduced in 1989/9 at £1,000 a year, in 2006 this was increased to £3,000 a year and in 2012 it will rise to £9,000 a year. With maintenance loans students will leave university with debts of at least £43,000, thus pricing many from the working class out of university. But the government was not prepared to listen to any concerns and set about heavily and brutally attacking the march, resulting in harm and serious injury to many of the students.

Don't pay for their crisis

A year on, 9th November 2011, 5,000 students protested against fees and against the privatisation of university education—for the right to free education for all, which includes those on the minimum wage of £6.08 an hour. And like workers, there was a general awareness that it's the bankers who should be paying for the crisis. The state sees protests as a threat and wants to

stop them, so 4,000 police officers were mobilised with an added threat that plastic bullets would be used if necessary. Also a written warning was sent to students who had attended previous protests, and coaches were stopped and warning fliers given to those travelling to the protest. The police went on to heavily corral the march and forcefully put down attempts to occupy Trafalgar Square.

On the same day 300 out of 2,000 construction electricians, plumbers and engineers who were on strike and had been marching since 7am, with many having travelled overnight, were on their way to join the students in an act of class solidarity. However they were aggressively kettled in Fleet Street for over an hour by the Met's Territorial Support Group and police dogs were used to prevent them reaching the students. On leaving the kettle many were searched and forced to give police their details.

The construction workers have been staging wildcat strikes since August 13 when 500 sparks met in London against the intentions of some employers to scrap their Joint Industry Board contacts which will result in deskilling and pay cut of 35%. Over 100 protests have been organised at major construction sites across the country. Balfour Beatty threatened workers that if they didn't sign for their own pay cut then they had effectively dismissed themselves! Workers compelled their union to take action, so the strike on November 9 was organised by Unite. Balfour Beatty made a profit of £91

million over the previous 6 months and had an order book of £15 billion. On December 9, despite Unite calling off a strike for legal reasons, workers went ahead in the largest national unofficial strike for many years.

The British working class and students are not daunted by the state's heavy-handed repression. On November 30 a large number of unions mobilised 2 million public sector workers to strike against the attack on pensions. This was the largest number on strike in one day since the first general strike in 1926!

Throughout Britain in villages, towns and cities people demonstrated and protested defeating David Cameron's attempt to underplay its success—more than 17,000 schools closed with only 2,700 open, hospitals only responded to emergency calls only and 5000 operations were postponed. With 700,000 jobs under threat, thousands of people are facing homelessness, and the ill and disabled are having their benefits slashed and dignity removed. The working class has nothing to lose, and they can no longer tolerate attacks on their rights and conditions—the fight back has begun.

Private sector strikes

On December 9, 2011, workers at the consumer goods giant Unilever went on strike, the first ever national strike at the company, and 2000 people demonstrated in front of the factory against company plans to remove 5,000 workers from the final salary scheme, which will cut pension income by 40%. Unilever made £2.41 billion profit in 2011. Unite; USDAW and GMB have taken further strike action since January 17.

In December, 35 logistics drivers employed by Norbert Dentressangle, who deliver the Argos Distribution contract at Glasgow Motherwell, struck in defence of their pension rights, which have been under attack for over a decade as constant subcontracting has been eroding their pay, conditions and pension rights. Argos retain control of the pension scheme and the longest serving workers stand to lose tens of thousands of pounds as a result of this latest attack. Argos made £3.6 billion profit in 2011, another act of unacceptable greed!

Other large companies and multi-nationals are seeking to close their final



Greek general strike against cuts in wages, and pensions in February

salary schemes such as Ford, BMW and Shell, one of the world's richest and most powerful corporations. This is part of a deep trend in Britain where only 19% of final salary and average salary schemes are open to new employees. Nine out of 10 private sector-defined benefit schemes are now closed to new workers and four out of 10 prevent existing staff building up further benefits. Workers in the public sector are being told by the government that they must pay more and work longer to receive less. As the majority of British workers face an uncertain and insecure retirement, uniting the private and public sector workers in a fight against undermining the right to a decent income in retirement is essential.

The government is not listening to the unions and is not looking for an alternative to resolve this crisis. It is clear that trade unionists and workers will have to unite and strike in order to defeat the government. However 2011 ended in a betrayal by some of the leaders (supported by TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber) in an attempt to halt the growing movement by calling on all unions to sign up to the government's plan.

But unions remain defiant and the fight continues. In January 2012 a fight began to halt the betrayal by the right wing union leaders—led by the PCS and NUT. Others such as Unison and the GMB have stated that they intend to continue 'negotiations' with the government, but signing up to the "heads of agreement" is an act of collusion with the agenda to make the working class pay for the crisis. PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has correctly pointed out that acceptance of the government's plan represents a total defeat for the trade union movement.

We condemn any sell out of workers' rights and encourage the building of links across all unions. Where betrayal occurs then we must construct alternative leaderships. Across Britain and the world workers have begun fighting back and uniting against an unsustainable and decaying system of capitalist privilege for the rich and exploitation and poverty for the rest. The working class must face up to the tasks ahead of them and take control of their lives and future. Mass movements and revolutions are the real levers of history.

Building internationalism

Brazilian trade unionists visit England



Following meetings with trade unionists in Spain and Portugal, two delegates from the Brazilian trade union federation CSP-Conlutas visited England (Liverpool and London), Spain and Portugal in December to build concrete links between trade unionists in Brazil and Europe. CSP-Conlutas has 200 affiliated unions and popular organisations representing

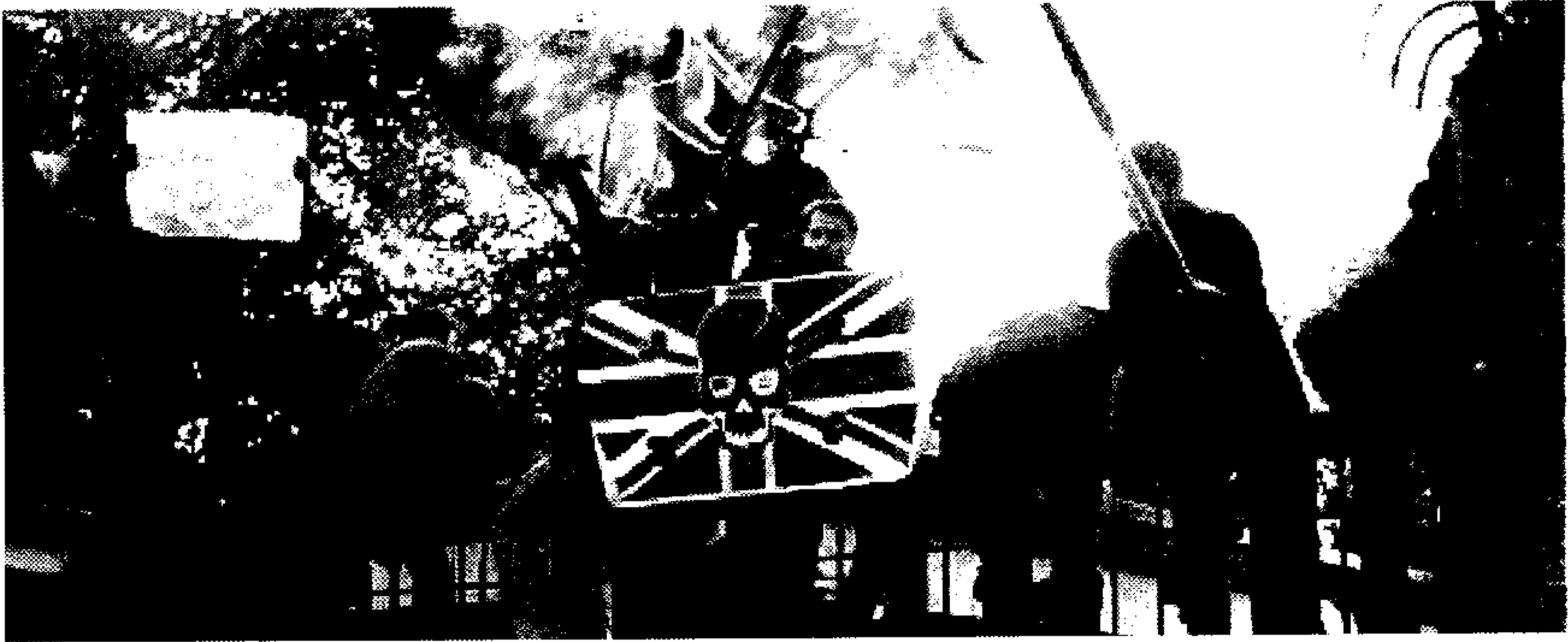
the homeless, Black groups, women's groups and students and represents 3 million workers including teachers, civil servants, bank workers, university workers, General Motors and construction workers.

Altino Prazeres is the President of the Metro Workers Union of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Dirceu Travesso was for many

(continued on 6)

Tension grows between Iran and imperialism

Cecilia Toledo, United Socialist Workers Party, Brazil



Hung upside down. That's how Queen Elizabeth's portrait was displayed by militant Iranians on Britain's embassy in Tehran. This image became a symbol of opposition and shows the increasingly strained relations between British and American imperialism and the Ahmadinejad regime in Iran

In late November, in reaction to the economic sanctions imposed on Iran by British imperialism, a group of Iranians stormed the British embassy and forced Britain to withdraw its diplomatic personnel. The Iranian government's refusal to abandon its nuclear program is intensifying imperialist pressures.

The imperialist pressures

The Iranian government refuses to bow to Israeli pressure, in contrast to the servility to imperialism by other countries. The US supports Israel maintaining its monopoly of nuclear weapons in the region so as to put pressure on Arab and Muslim countries. Iran's position is to stand firm on its nuclear program.

Tensions were heightened when an unmanned US stealth plane landed in Iran and Iran accused the US of spying, which they denied. But the fact remains that stealth planes are used for spying.

Iran is key to imperialist policy in the region, and since the revolution of 1979, imperialism is opposed to any independence of the Iranian regime. G.W. Bush's "war on terror" pushed the US deeper into the mire in the Middle

East and Afghanistan, leaving the Obama administration to attempt negotiations with the region's governments.

The US wants a partner who has no bargaining power and needs Zionism with undisputed military superiority. However, Iran's refusal to abandon its nuclear program presents a real threat to these plans. So far imperialism has been unable to prove any violation of international standards including the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But the US is using diplomatic pressure against Iran in order to calm the Israelis and to maintain control and surveillance on Iran.

Despite this strategy Israel is unhappy and wants a tougher stance to be taken so to intensify the siege they argue that the Iranian nuclear program is for purposes of war and challenges the Iranian government to prove otherwise.

Earlier this month Leon Panetta, US Secretary of Defense, attended a meeting of the Saban Forum, an organisation formed by American and Israeli officials, to discuss the common interests of both countries. The theme of this year's forum was "Strategic Challenges in the New Middle East". Robert Grenier, who worked many years for the CIA, wrote in an article published by Al Jazeera's website that the US defense secretary said at this forum that the Obama administration's determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons was one of the pillars of US policy in the region. He emphasised the importance and effectiveness of

diplomatic and economic sanctions against Iran, and warned that the use of military force was possible but was not the first option.

Where is the real nuclear threat?

This is the key question, who is threatening whom in the Middle East today? The United States has a nuclear arsenal capable of destroying the world and Israel is the only nuclear power in the Middle East and has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty of which Iran is a signatory and so far has not proven to be in violation of any clauses.

One cannot ignore the fact that the Israeli nuclear program receives millions from the Americans, which contradicts talk of "peace" by Obama and the US military. The ability of Iranians to have any nuclear weapons is minimal compared to the real nuclear threat from Israel; a country that does not hesitate to bomb Gaza, murder children and treat the Palestinians as pariahs. That is the real danger to humanity, a country with 300 nuclear bombs and built on the basis of hatred against the Palestinians and Arabs.

The world already knows what the United States is capable of when they feel threatened or need to assert their domination as with the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, at the end of World War II despite Japan being already defeated.

Amid the revolutionary situation throughout the Middle East and North Africa, sanctions against Iran only increase anti-imperialist sentiment among the Iranian masses as was expressed by the invasion of the British Embassy. However Ahmadinejad's contradictory policies represent an obstacle to the great anti-imperialist struggles and prevent Iran from joining the revolutionary upsurge that touches many countries in the region.

Ahmadinejad is increasingly becoming a servant of imperialism. He is open to all kinds of negotiation and is willing to support the most pro-imperialist governments in the region. He was complicit in the occupation of Iraq, helping to support the puppet government of al-Maliki, and advised the radical Shiite sectors, such as those led by Moqtada al-Sadr, to submit to the occupier. Once discussion on the withdrawal of US troops began Iran offered, despite all that imperialism did in Iraq, to give support to the government sponsored by Obama in order to gain even a little of the plunder of Iraq's immense wealth.

To seek a peaceful coexistence with imperialism while suppressing the mass movement ultimately weakens the struggle against imperialism. Whilst Iran has the right of self-defence and to develop its nuclear program to defend itself against a possible military strike by the United States and Israel, we warn the masses against trusting Ahmadinejad's leadership in a struggle against imperialism.

Iran must be understood in relation to 1979 when the working class staged one of the most amazing revolutions of the twentieth century and brought down the government of Reza Pahlavi. However, the lack of a revolutionary party to lead the masses to seize power and establish a workers' government, saw the rise of the bourgeoisie headed by a reactionary Islamic clergy. This bourgeoisie, purportedly populist and anti-imperialist, nationalised oil and foreign trade, but at the same time unleashed violent repression against the masses in order to remain in government and rebuild bourgeois power, stabilise capitalism and to put a nail in the coffin of the revolutionary situation.

The great revolution that overthrew the Shah showed the high quality of



One of many photos taken by Mordechai Vanunu in 1985 that showed Israel to be one of the world's top nuclear powers. He was jailed for releasing these photos

the Iranian labour movement and its ability to fight under severe repression. It is part of the historic memory of the working class and provided a great experience in organisation. Workers' union committees (Shoras) were formed during the 1979 revolution and the workers' organisations were so strong and combative that they continued for a year after the revolution.

Since the end of the 1990s workers have continued their struggle and built independent organisations. Among them are the bus drivers of Tehran and workers at the car factory Khodro [largest vehicle manufacturer in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa, editor], who have always been very combative sectors. The tradition of holding huge May Day demonstrations was resumed and in 2009 there were several strikes because of unpaid wages in the textile industries and starvation wages for teachers, 80% of whom are women. Massive demonstrations have been held against the regime despite the repression and prejudice that exists against women.

The Ahmadinejad government has risen in the midst of huge opposition and now uses the conflict with imperialism to improve its prestige among the population and stay in power. But the Iranian workers cannot trust any measure which is not consistently against the imperialist aggressors. The fight against the government must continue and at the same time there must be a demand that imperialism and its companies withdraw immediately. Only the working class, with its organisations can defend the country's independence and decide on the nuclear program, without any interference by the imperialist countries, the bourgeoisie and the Ayatollahs of Iran.

continued on from 5

Brazilian trade unionists visit England

years a militant leader of a bank workers union and today is part of the executive leadership of CSP-Conlutas (<http://cspconlutas.org.br/>).

In Liverpool CSP-Conlutas met RMT, UCU and NUS leaders and members and addressed the Liverpool Trades council meeting where they received a standing ovation. In London they met Alex Gordon and members of the national executive of the RMT, including Bob Crow, and addressed a meeting of the Latin America Workers Association. They also met with the chair of the Finsbury Park RMT branch of London underground workers and addressed a lobby outside the TUC headquarters against the government pension reforms.

Proposals were made to deepen the relations with Conlutas by exchanging information and to develop international solidarity for the workers' struggle. Attendance to the international conference in Brazil was discussed, which will be followed later in the year by an international conference in France. A joint statement about the conference by CSP-Conlutas (Brazil) and Solidaires (Solidarity, France) union federation was printed in full in the December issue of Socialist Voice, a brief extract is reproduced here "Sharing our union experiences, learning from the strengths of all comrades, building up the unity beyond the borders of the states, and implementing the international workers' solidarity... These are our goals!

We have neither the intention nor the desire to declare the establishment of a new international organisation! We want to strengthen, expand and make more effective a militant union network which must be a democratic, independent, alternative and internationalist.

We want to build up this initiative step by step, together with all fighting trade unions, for whom the capitalist system is not the impenetrable organizational pattern for our society..."

The CSP-Conlutas congress will be held in Brazil April 27 to April 30 immediately followed by an international meeting May 1 to May 2. A second international conference will be held in France later in the year.

A tale of two strikes: Britain and Italy

Longoni Marco and Angelo Saggese from Alessandria, Italy, two Italian workers and trade unionists who brought solidarity from an Italian factory to the November 30 strike

Liverpool



which will have a significant impact on the Local Government Pension Scheme," said a young woman. "Personally it will mean I will pay £570 a year extra in contributions but this won't go into my pension, it will go towards the government deficit." That's the point!

They say that we have to make a great sacrifice in order to help the younger generations. I'm ready to do it but not as the young woman said, to pay the government deficit.

A strike in Liverpool in defence of pensions, jobs and services is not only a Liverpool workers' problem. A strike in Italy about these issues is not only an Italian problem. The point is it is a European problem!

As my comrade says, we have, in a way, the same problems. We just have to communicate in a better way and organise our demonstrations together in order to fight this financial system and capitalism.

We joined the large Liverpool demonstration that went from the Pier Head to St. George's plateau.

I was there, walking together with women, men and lots of children. One of them held in his hands a placard he wrote himself, "hands off my mum's pension!"

I was there with my comrade Angelo Saggese. We worked together but now he has retired after 40 years of work. Now he lives on his pension. We worked together in a tyre factory and belong to the CGIL union (General Confederation Italian Workers).

We wanted to bring our solidarity to the strike in this historic city, which has seen so many struggles in the 20th century.

I'm not good with numbers. I couldn't say how many people I met and saw, but believe me there were many! "The main reason I'm on strike is that the government is making cuts

Back to Italy! After our Liverpool experience on November 30 we returned to Italy, to Alessandria in the North West at the beginning of the Po Valley, one of the most important industrial hubs of the 20th Century.

On December 12, 2011, we participated in the national general strike, a public and private sector strike against Prime Minister Monti's austerity measures.

In December 2011 Italian President Giorgio Napolitano intervened after Silvio Berlusconi's government lost its majority in parliament and after numerous personal and government scandals. Napolitano, as the Italian Constitution allows, chose Mario Monti as new Italy's Prime Minister to "guide" the nation with a technocrat government.

Due to the international crisis the new government has been working on all the things that Europe had asked of past governments.

What can we say of the crisis of capitalism?

They used to repeat to us: "reforms mean we will not come to such a bad end as Greece" and we need "to save the young generations".

Alessandria

Another country, another strike



We will not pay your bill, change the menu

We've been living through the strongest budgetary manoeuvring since the end of the Second World War...and unions called for a three hours strike.

After six years CGIL - CISL - UIL together, called a strike. My union is CGIL and we went on strike many times in these years, twice in 2011 (May and September for eight hours each time).

In my area we organised a united four hour strike and it was well attended: around 70% in Italy and in my factory around 80%. The strike on the December 12 was an attempt to create some new conditions to fight together in the future because unity is the most important condition to combine forces.

Unite the action of the unions.

United action of the working class in Europe and around the world.

(We will publish analysis in the next issue of Socialist Voice from our Italian section PdAC, <http://www.partitodialternativacomunista.org> about the Italian situation and the unions.)



The Russian winter starts to heat up

International Workers Party, section of the IWL



In view of the demonstrations that took place in Russia recently we are reproducing the statement of our Russian section in that country, the POI (Internationalist Workers' Party). It will give readers an insight to the situation in Russia today as protesters again take to the streets.

Everybody was taken by surprise. After years of political stability when demonstrations did not take place, not even for the most elementary economic demands, a huge demonstration with clear political significance, burst forth.

On December 10 about 40,000 people gathered in Bolotnaya Square in Moscow to protest against the shameful fraud in the parliamentary elections to the State Duma. In addition there were 10,000 people in St Petersburg, 5,000 in Novosibirsk and smaller demonstrations in about 80 cities. The United Russia Party of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dimitri Medvedev achieved 49% of the votes and 53% of the seats in the Duma. Several analysts have estimated that United Russia added about 15% fake votes to the

real total. Hundreds of reports were issued saying that those responsible for counting the votes had finalised the count in the evening but the next day the numbers in the official result were completely different.

But the problem did not come out of this crude electoral fraud—the elections as a whole have been a farce right from the beginning. As they say in Russia, there are elections in which “anybody can win as long as he is Putin”. It is impossible to legalise a party in Russia without the blessing of the Kremlin. The government’s United Russia holds the monopoly of the mass media and no debates are held. Apart from the fraud, the situation was further stirred up by the arrogant tone adopted by Putin and Medvedev. When 6,000 people protested in Tchistye Boulevard on December 5, the day after the election, they said, “It looks like somebody is saying something somewhere”, and accused the protesters of being parrots of the USA.

The president of the Electoral Commission, Tchurov, had a similar tone, he issued a statement saying the

“depraved fantasies of this mob casting a shadow of doubt on our honesty do not bother me.” All this represented the last straw and drove thousands of people, who for years have put up with the dirty game of official Russian politics, to end their indifference and to go closer to those European countries that have been shaken by mass demonstrations. Putin had never seen anything like this as he had grown used to popular support. What we can see is just the beginning; however, we can already see that the events of Bolotnaya Square have presented a clear political crisis for the police-mafia regime of Putin’s oil and gas oligarchy.

The demonstrations could not be stopped by the repression of the OMOM (riot troops), or by the summons that same day to hold an exam in all the schools in the country so as to demobilise teachers and youth, nor the ridiculous warning of the Russian head doctor who said that “winter demonstrations were harmful for health”. The government reserved an extremely isolated island for demonstrations but people ignored this restriction and demonstrated in the cities.



The Russian winter starts to heat up



Gates controlling the entrance to the area of demonstration

With tens of thousands of footprints stamped in the new snow, people made it very clear what they thought about this government. People demanded an annulment of the election results, the removal of Tchurov and new elections. Chants of "Russia without Putin" and "Freedom" shook the square. The demoralisation of the police, the regime and the bureaucrats led Putin to appear for the first time as a weakling, who had to resort to shameful falsification in order to appear that he still has the support of the population. In a country that appreciates "strong leaders" so much, it is a major defeat for Putin. The December days put an end to the long years of silence and people lost their fear; now it was the turn of regime to fear. Mobilising across the country young people could sense the spirit of Tahrir Square in the same way as the older generation felt the spirit of the demonstrations in the USSR in the 80s. Putin's official victory turned against him, and it's likely that his great defeat has opened a stage of decline for his regime.

Independently from the falsification of the results, the loss of support for Putin's government is undeniable, as is the predisposition to fight on the part of a sector of the population. Even taking into account the official results, Putin's party, United Russia, lost many votes. They lost the constitutional majority they held, which allowed them to modify the Constitution whenever they wanted to. However, they maintain a small majority, which still empowers them to pass laws even with only their own

votes. At the same time participation in elections dwindled. According to official statistics 40% of the population failed to vote and some analysts say that more than half the population did not vote. The majority of people did not vote or voted for "anything except United Russia". This silent protest, which has always existed, has reached a level that cannot be concealed and even the official results were a slap in Putin's face.

A process that is just beginning

But despite the blow suffered by the regime the situation cannot be overrated. The geography of the electoral results as well as the character and geographic composition of the demonstrations prove that the process is in its early stage. So far demonstrators are mainly from the middle class, university students and the intelligentsia from the big cities. The working class is absent from this process so far. In the more backward rural regions, United Russia – even if losing votes – received more votes than in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other cities. Further, huge demonstrations only took place in the most densely populated cities. It was the youth and middle class who demonstrated at Bolotnaya Square. And so there's a long struggle ahead from this first sign to the last nail in Putin's coffin.

The opposition

As Russians say, "Putin is only half

the problem; the other half is the opposition". The fact is that the parliamentary opposition is a direct accomplice in the fraud. Four parties obtained parliamentary representation. Apart from the pro-government United Russia there is the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) trying hard to be a "civilized" and "constructive" opposition. There is also Just Russia, created by the Kremlin as a left wing for Putin and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), which is xenophobic, right-wing and pro-government. These parties, even if they criticised the fraud, are very happy with the increase in their votes, which increased their representatives, revenue and negotiating power in the government.

The CPRF (biggest party of the opposition) is especially cynical. Their votes doubled (reaching nearly 20% according to official results) and they won most of the anti-Putin votes. Their leader said, "These elections have been illegitimate from a moral and ethical point of view". However, this does not mean that they will boycott the Duma. The contrary is true. Ziuganov said that they would take advantage of their increased "power of control" in the presidential elections in March. Very happy at doubling their votes, the CPRF was conspicuously absent from the Bolotnaya Square demonstration, and merely sent a low-ranking representative.

The situation is different with the Russian liberals. They are direct agents of American and European imperialisms



The Russian winter starts to heat up

and had been partially squeezed out of their legal political space by the regime, which is why they are not represented in the parliament. Imperialism has something to lose and something to gain and that is why they manoeuvre and play with the protests. Today, in order to carry out its plan to colonise Russia and other countries influenced by it, imperialism must negotiate with Putin as he monopolises the entire political space. Putin reaps a large sum for implementing the plans of imperialism. This is the cause of the tension between them. The West would prefer a direct role in Russian politics and that is why now and again they create political problems for Putin using their liberal agents (Nemstsov from the Solidarity Movement, Yavlinsky from the Yabloko Party, Kasparov from The Other Russia, etc.) to take advantage of the electoral fraud and lack of democratic liberties. Now it is the liberals who became the organisers of Bolotnaya Square.

But people went to the Square not "in defence of the liberals" but in defence of democratic liberties. Anti-USA feelings are strong in Russia and it is very difficult for the liberals to win popular trust after the catastrophe of the 1990s, when Russian industry was destroyed in order to import products from imperialist multinationals. It was the policy of the liberals that allowed the Russian oligarchs (the country's big capitalists) to grab state property, natural resources and other wealth of the country. It was the same liberals who opened the gates for foreign capital, which now controls practically all areas of the economy and sends billions of dollars worth of profit abroad while bleeding the country's economy and increasing poverty. They also implemented the "absolute freedom of the market", which led to crisis. All the liberals supported the bombardment of the parliament by Yeltsin in 1993, which was the first step in the increasing repression in the country.

The liberals are fully responsible for the current situation. Today they criticise Putin but they propose the same policy of privatisation, cuts in social expenditure and submission of the country to foreign capital in practically the same way as Putin did.

If anything, they are even more radical about complying with the International Monetary Fund dictates. That is why they never say a word about today's economy or about corruption and fraud. They keep silent where Putin's economic plan of adjustments and privatisations is concerned. That is why their slogans are only "Russia without Putin" or "Down with United Russia, party of wrongdoers and thieves". They too fear that the demonstrations will jeopardise the semi-colonial economic model of the country which is already in serious trouble, especially now that the situation is increasingly explosive.

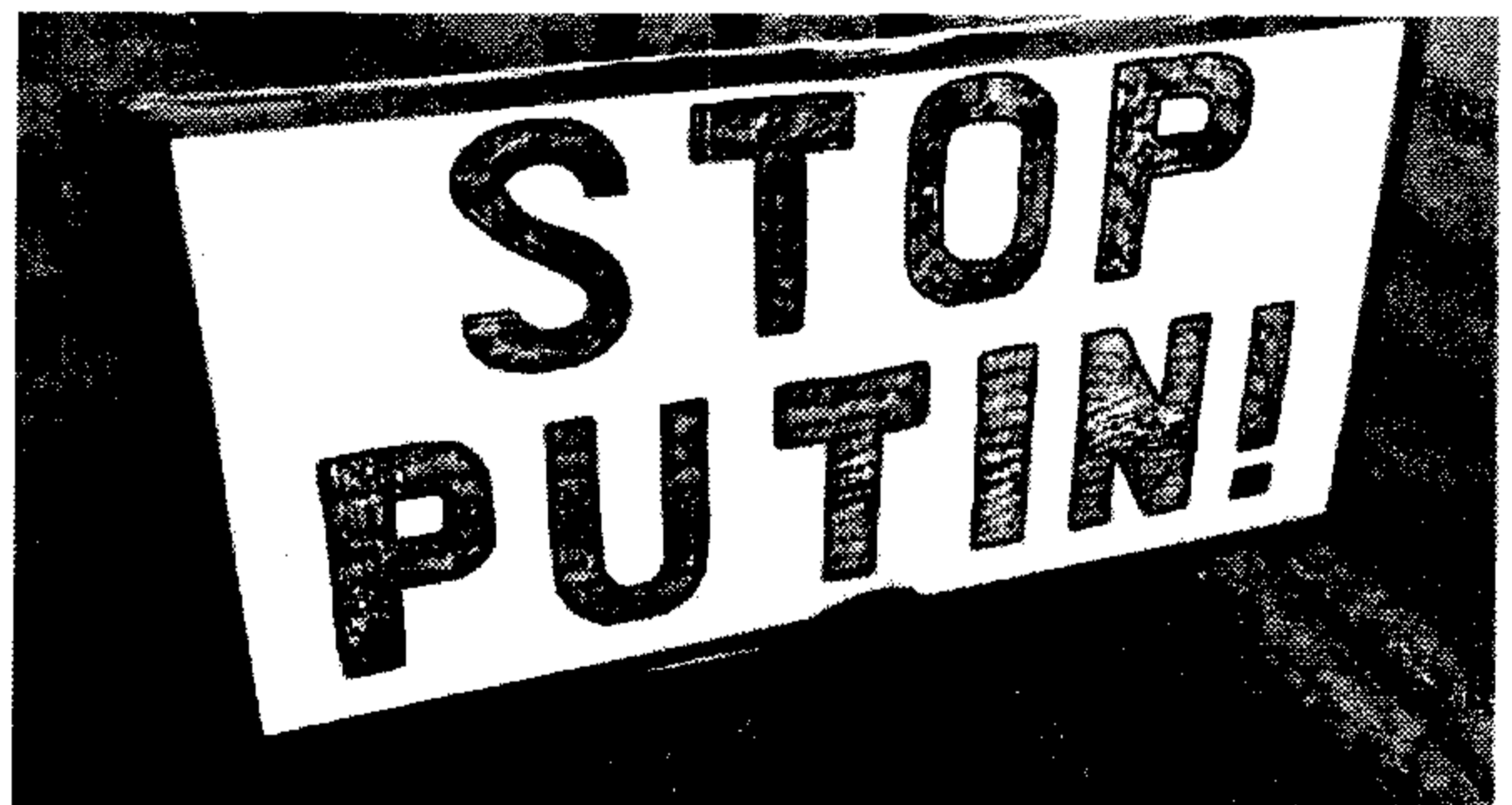
Falsification in the service of the oligarchs

The fraud was the last straw, but the accumulated erosion of the government stems out of much deeper causes: it comes from the application of the adjustment plans and cuts demanded by the IMF and even by the Russian oligarchs themselves to increase their profits. As in all the countries of the world, the government saved the bankers and oligarchs in crisis with public money, driving the state into debt and now is eager to economise, making people pay for it all. In all countries, especially in Europe, governments and employers are applying brutal reforms and adjustments: privatisations, adjustments to wages, layoffs, etc., in order to impose a new level of exploitation on workers. At their international meetings, such as G-20, governments of the world discuss and coordinate their measures against workers in order to save employers

from the crisis they have caused and for which workers are not responsible

Russia and her governments are no exception. They have reformed education, calling it the "modernisation of education". The name requires no explanation. At the same time, due to inflation, working people are increasingly poor. The Russian government has already passed several laws that will be applied after the election and will further burden Russians with the so-called "unpopular measures". Putin gives the country away bit by bit to foreigners even if it is already dependent on foreign investments held by the multinationals, who are taking heaps of money out of the country. He complies unwaveringly with the orientation coming from the IMF, the World Bank and the governments of the dominating countries to reduce social expenditure. A new budget already exists with huge cuts in social services while simultaneously increasing the resources allotted to the police, FSB (former KGB) and the repressive apparatus in general.

All this happens while the oligarchs continue with their record profits. **The fraud of the elections was necessary for Putin to be able to continue with the attacks against the majority of the population and in favour of the oligarchs and foreign capital.** Putin wanted it to look as if "all is in order" and that people totally trust him. That is why he falsified the elections: to surface as strengthened by "popular support" and so continue with his measures against the people. However this time it backfired. Today, Russian people are





The Russian winter starts to heat up

learning from their own experience. They became thoroughly fed up with the hypocrisy for all can see how the oligarchs get richer and richer while people get poorer and poorer and are forced to remain silent.

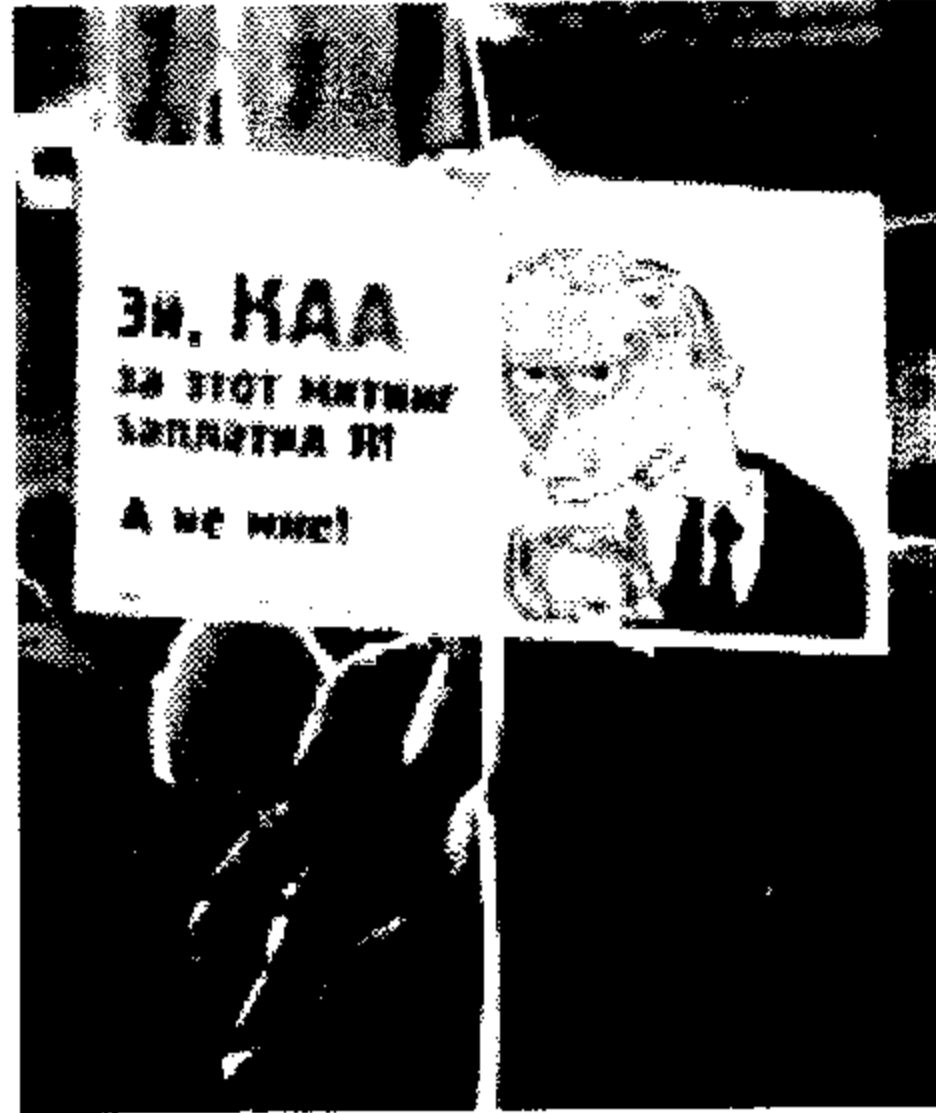
What will happen next

Now it is necessary to widen the protests to annul the election results. All the parties that claim to be opposition (in the first place the CPRF) should fight for the stolen votes and their voters that is, rebuff the elections overtly, boycott the new Duma and together issue a wide summons for massive demonstrations for the liberation of all those who were imprisoned during the demonstrations, annulment of the electoral results and the eviction of the Electoral Commission president, Tchurov. Any other position will be considered as overt or concealed support for fraud.

For joint protests and for the annulment of the election results!

The current position of the CPRF of abstaining from active participation and not calling demonstrations against the fraud while taking their seats in the Duma is wrong! As they were the largest recipient of opposition votes, a simple statement from the CPRF refusing to acknowledge the elections and boycotting the falsified Duma would place the entire system in an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy. Furthermore, if their mobilising power were to be drawn together (used only for electoral campaigns) and added to the 40,000 at Bolotnaya Square, the political situation could be completely altered.

Today many are posing the demand "Clean elections". Considering the current rules according to which there are no democratic liberties and when "anybody can win as long as he is Putin", talking about "clean elections" makes no sense. For real freedom of speech, of publication, of meeting and of organisation! The current law regarding parties and the "anti-terrorism" and "anti-extremism" laws aimed at eliminating different opinions must be abolished. No to repression!



For the freedom of organisation and legalisation of alternative parties! For the freedom of different parties and points of view to access television! For a wide TV campaign of electoral debates! These democratic rights can be the basis for real elections in the country!

No to privatisations and reform of education! Nationalisation without indemnity of all the energy sectors and natural resources! Use all the resources that will be created to boost a new industrialisation boom that would provide jobs for the unemployed! No transferring of profits abroad! Nationalisation and unification of the financial system to prevent speculation, transference of profits and corruption!

Out with the oligarchs, bankers, thieves and evildoers! For a workers'

and popular government that will govern for the majority and carry out a programme of rescuing workers and not bankers and oligarchs! Out with United Russia, party of oligarchs, bankers, Mafiosoes and thieves!

To implement this programme the main problem for Russian workers is still the absence of independent organisations and of a political leadership; this delays the entrance of the working class onto the stage. Today, none of the legal parties represent the interests of the toiling masses nor does they wish to defend them. The CPRF defends some points from the above programme, but only in electoral campaigns, and they have never mobilised people in defence of these demands. The working class has no independent trade unions, parties or other fighting organisations in which they can trust. Having no organisations of their own, workers will continue to be the hostages of employers and bureaucrats. Today it is necessary to organise workers and popular sectors in groups in every workplace, university and neighbourhood and to coordinate a resistance to the unpopular, repressive and pro-oligarchic Putin regime and his electoral farce.

Building a political class and socialist alternative is an urgent need for the Russian working class today!

December 20, 2011

International Workers Party Russia



IWL-FI

International Workers League
Fourth International

There are interesting and important articles that can be read online at www.litci.org/en. These include:

Egypt: Solidarity campaign with the Egyptian Revolution for the right to freedom of speech, assembly, religion and association

Portugal: A new Left wing party - why is it necessary?

Syria: A democratic revolution sliding close to civil war

93rd anniversary of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht

MPs pay soars Workers have to fight

Derek Mortimer Australian journalist and writer

A remarkable thing happened at the end of last year. Federal members of parliament almost unanimously gave their endorsement to a pay rise.

There was no quibbling, no strings attached. It was not for a few per cent spread over years. No trade-off of conditions were demanded. There were no staff cuts or redundancies.

The recipients didn't have to strike. Didn't have to demonstrate. Didn't have to negotiate. In fact they did not even have to ask for it. They just got what a review board assumed they wanted. It was a Christmas present, and way way above what most people could ever hope to get in their stocking.

It went to Australia's federal politicians. The leader of the Opposition coalition, Liberal Party head Tony Abbott, who said following the election of a minority Labor government in 2010, that his job was to *oppose*, and went on to do nothing but, did not say a word against the increase.

The only one to offer any objections was Greens leader, Bob Brown. Senator Brown said because there was no parliamentary debate about the increase the major parties had "removed the embarrassment" of accepting the pay offer and "shed responsibility for a pay grab".

He was reported in the media as saying it was a double standard to debate the Budget, but not pay rises, which had budgetary implications,

"It is our responsibility to justify to the electorate, to the taxpayers, the remuneration for MPs," he said.

Politicians' salaries should be compared with those of ordinary Australians, like police and nurses, not corporate executives who earned millions, he said.

"There will be those who think, like I do, that parliamentarians are very well paid in Australia if you compare us with other countries," Senator Brown said.

The wage hike for politicians saw Prime Minister Julia Gillard's salary soar \$90,000 to about \$470,000 - more than either David Cameron or US President Barack Obama.



Chris Cain West Australia branch secretary, MUA addressing wharfies at a recent meeting

The Speaker of the House, Peter Slipper, will take home an extra \$70,000, an *increase* which is more than the average annual wage for Australian workers. His salary is now at least \$315,000.

Most junior parliamentarian's wages will jump from \$140,000 to at least \$180,000.

All that without even having a stop work meeting, let alone a strike.

Workers not faring as well as MPs

Nurses in the state of Victoria, which has a Liberal government, are battling against cuts in hospital spending - and their own union leaders.

State Premier, Ted Baillieu, is planning a savage cutback in nurse-to-patient ratios and the introduction of low paid nursing assistants. This is alongside a 2.5 per cent wage ceiling being imposed, similar to that in NSW where under another Liberal government under Premier Barry O'Farrell, public sector jobs are being cut and a 2.5 per cent wages cap imposed.

In late November thousands of police marched on the NSW Parliament House in Sydney in protest against plans to slash compensation payouts to injured officers under a death and disability scheme.

A few weeks earlier tens of thousands of public service workers, among them nurses, teachers, also marched on Parliament House in protest at job cuts and salary capping.

Members of the Victorian branch of the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) imposed limited bed closures in November in their fight against cuts.

The Federal Labor Government under

PM Julia Gillard, has backed both Liberal states in their attacks on workers. The government's Fair Work Australia banned industrial action by Victorian nurses.

The ANF and the Health Services Union (HSU) which covers other hospital workers, have enforced government demands on their members. The HSU accepted the 2.5 per cent wage increase. The ANF response to government attacks was to end industrial action and to make the ludicrous threat of a mass resignation of nurses. The next meeting to discuss this will not be held until late February.

Both unions have refused to unite all public sector workers, including teachers, in a campaign to protect jobs and wages in face of a full scale national austerity drive.

A proposed strike by Melbourne waterside workers in early January was called off by the Maritime Union of Australia.

MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin told the *Weekend Financial Review* that the parties had agreed to a complex deal that was "in the ballpark" of union demands for a 15 per cent pay rise over three years, plus improved conditions including superannuation.

The deal with Stevedoring company DP World, would also apply to its five terminals in Australia, Brisbane, Sydney, Fremantle, Melbourne and Adelaide.

Dubai based DP World is the third largest stevedoring company in the world with terminals in six continents. It imposed a 24-hour lock out of 140 wharfies in South Australia on January 4 and threatened similar action if workers did not drop strike plans.

Their proposed action followed a lockout by P&O Automotive and General Stevedoring in a number of ports last month which led to the Labor government's Workplace Relations Minister, Bill Shorten, imposing a month-long "cooling off period."

Anticipating some resistance to the deal from his members, Crumlin said, "the complexity of the yet-to-be-completed deal might prove a sticking point."

Palestine: UK activist's eye witness

Tom Godwin MA Student and Palestine activist

In January 2012 Tom Godwin travelled with a group of students to the Jordan Valley to stay with Jordan Valley Solidarity, an organisation raising awareness of and local resistance to the occupation and slow ethnic cleansing of the Jordan Valley area and works with a network of Palestinian grassroots communities and international supporters.

When we arrived we were given a quick lesson on how to make bricks, afterwards we left our base in Al Jiflik in a two-car convoy, and made our way across the valley. We passed the familiar sight of continuous Israeli settlements on the east side, which form a continuous area blocking Palestinians from the valuable Jordan river.

Halfway toward our destination, we passed a striking monument. Atop a hill, pointing to the sky, sat a 30 foot metal Kalashnikov, a monument to the fallen Israeli soldiers of 1967, and a key stopping point for tourists to the area. We went to the top of the hill, parking alongside the tour bus with "Educational Tourism" written on the side. There is a lot of Zionist sponsored 'educational' tourism which is meant to



Giant Israeli sculpture, Jordan Valley

support the position of the Israeli state. Standing to the side of the "educational tour", we were given an alternative touristic view of the valley. One of our group's leaders pointed towards the natural reserves surrounding us, funded by the Jewish National Fund,



who raise money for environmental and conservation purposes, while using such opportunities to further annex land. He pointed to the Israeli settlements to the left and then in the direction of the demolished village where we were to visit next, only five minutes down the road.

Mutual inquisitiveness led members of both groups to approach one another. We asked the tourists what they thought of the confiscation and annexation of water resources, land and homes in the Valley. The responses were predictable. Regarding the water, the tourists said, "Do not believe what they tell you". However, our members worked and lived with the communities and had seen such things with their own eyes. Another tourist asked us, "What is Palestine? There is no such thing as Palestine. There is no such thing as Palestinians! Twenty years ago this was all desert!" Our two Palestinian friends were present for the conversation. One told me that this encounter was the first time in his life that he had ever met an Israeli who was not a soldier.

We left the monument for the village of Al Fasail in the Southern part of the Valley, recently designated a C area (see the map for location and size of C area). We were silent as the car entered the village.

What was once a village was now nothing more than rubble, scattered bricks and leftover scraps of twisted metal. Between 2000 and 2007, 1,663 homes were demolished in the Jordan

Valley, and the number continues to rise. Mixing with trowels, dirt and sawdust, we made approximately 300 bricks at the end of the day, a small contribution towards the rebuilding of a small house. The impossibility of self-sufficient livelihoods in the Jordan Valley mean 14 year old children are forced to work in Israeli settlement farms for meagre wages, with no job security and few rights. In the mornings, these boys work as cheap backdoor labour in the surrounding settlements and they spend their afternoons rebuilding their homes.

We finished the day with a conception of what Palestine once was, without occupation.

As we left the Jordan Valley the next day for Jericho we passed all the same familiar reminders, booming jets overhead, settlements and high fences, military zones and apartheid walls. As we passed an Israeli-only road, we saw the centre of Jericho five minutes away, a "major concession" made by the Israeli government in the Oslo Accords. This road, like so many others, could not be used by Palestinians.

A little under an hour later, we finally made our way into the city. We saw dried-up Palestinian springs and water ways. Opposite one of these was another familiar sight, an Israeli water pipe system surrounded by high razor wire. Over the last four decades Israel has isolated 162 agricultural wells in the Jordan Valley, prohibiting Palestinians from using them. The al-Auja spring

Area C, Israel has full control over security, planning and construction To BDS Movement

Freedom Justice Equality

Dear Brothers and Sisters

The CSP-Conlutas, a Brazilian new Labour Federation, endorsed your call to join the BDS campaign in the meeting of our national coordination held last year.

We had been always involved in building solidarity with Palestine in the protests against the 2008-2009 Israeli war on Gaza, and the struggle against the Free Trade Agreement between Israel and Mercosur endorsed by the Brazilian government.

After joining the BDS campaign we sent a representative to Palestine for the Education World Forum in 2010 and to the Beirut Anti-Apartheid week in 2011, we joined the protests in solidarity with the Arab Revolutions held in 4 cities in Brazil, and currently, together with Palestinian Solidarity Committees, we are working with the BDS campaign to denounce the Free Trade Agreement and the presence of Israeli companies operating in Brazil like Elbit Systems and Strauss Coffee.

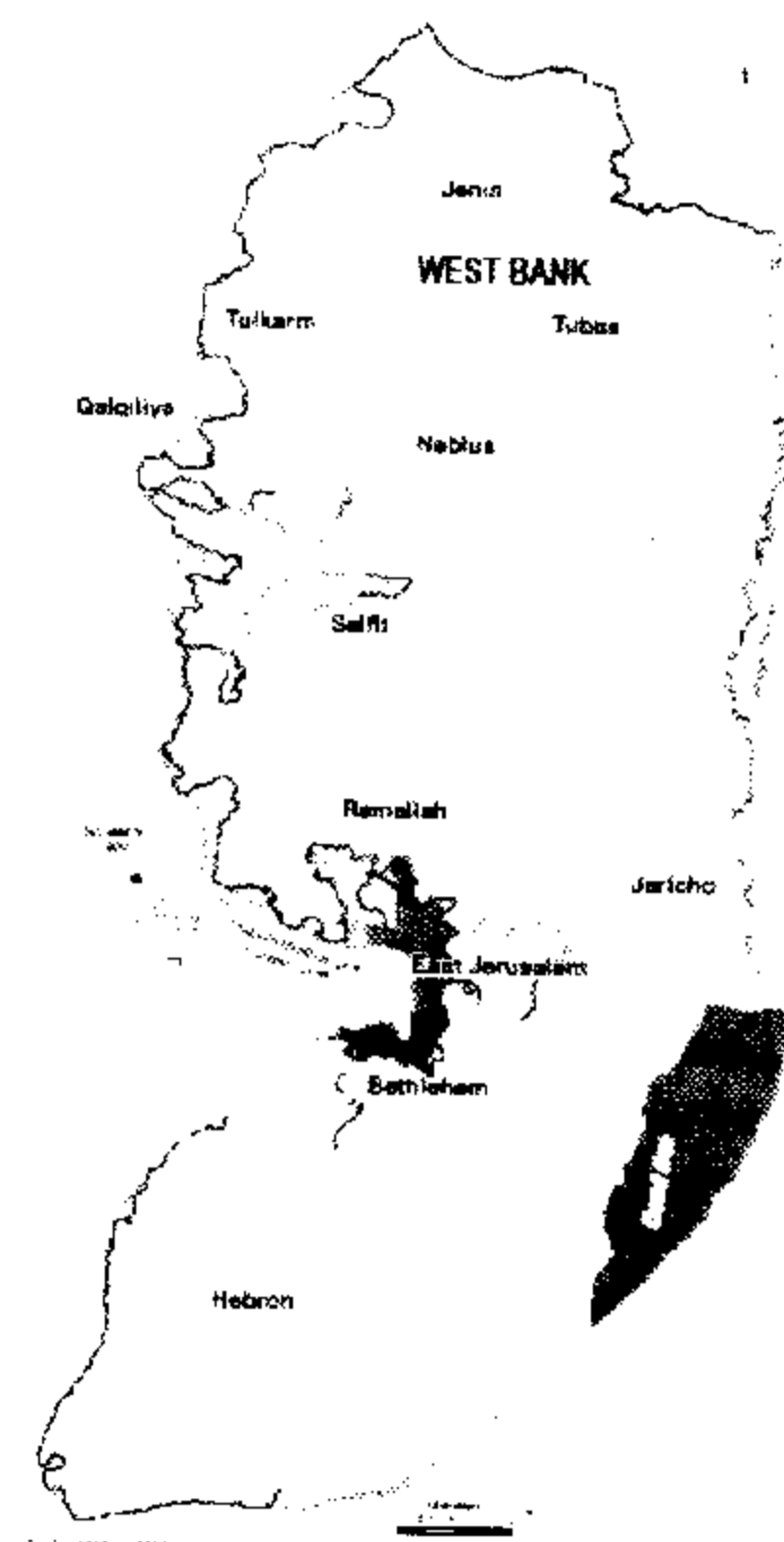
Please keep us informed of all activities to end the occupation of Palestine, for equal rights to the Palestinians and for the right of return for all refugees.

Solidarity,
Dirceu Travesso
CSP-Conlutas Brazil
Sao Paulo, April 8th 2011



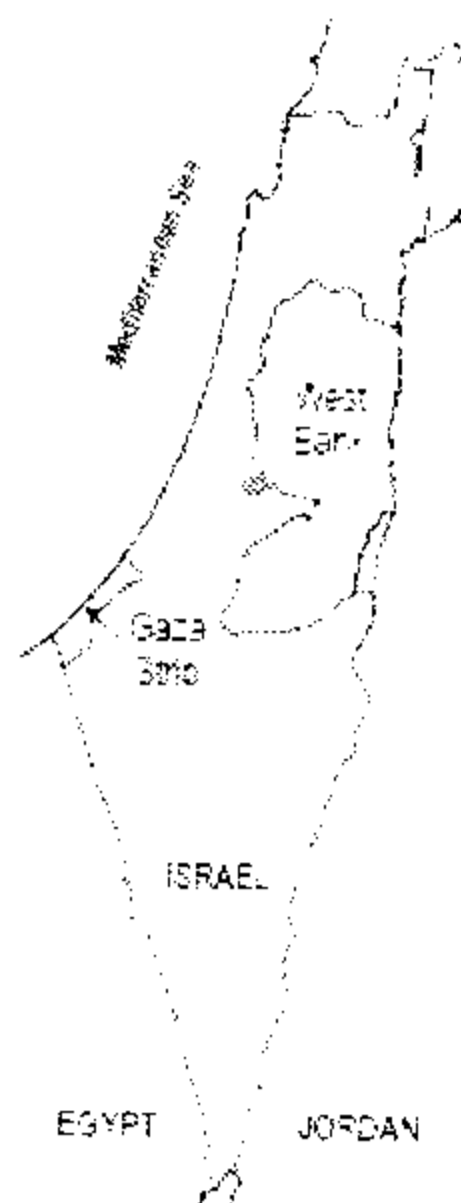
Read more on the IWL's positions on the Middle East and Palestine

<http://www.litci.org/en/>



Dotted blue area is Israeli closed military area in C area

Solid pale blue area is Israeli closed military area.



was once the strongest in the area. It has since become completely dry, following the establishment of Israeli wells alongside.

The few days we spent in the Jordan Valley might be seen as a microcosm of our experience of the West Bank. We saw poverty, destruction, and the ugly colonisation of a land at the expense of families and communities. We also saw incredible beauty, in the landscape and in the wonderful families whom we played and worked with, and who took us into their homes.

Jordan Valley is an Israeli military zone

The Jordan Valley constitutes approximately 28% of the West Bank, gradually annexed since 1967. The area has rich agricultural land, abundant water sources and is vital to the viability of any future Palestinian state, offering the only feasible entry point. 94.37% of the land is controlled by Israel, with 50% under C area designation, including all 36 settlements, and 44.37% for military purposes, including military bases and natural reserves.

It is the combination of military annexation of land and resources for "security" purposes and the prohibition of Palestinians in designated C Areas from building that has allowed for a slow

exodus of the Palestinian population. While the settler population thrives, Palestinians that stay face dependency, poverty, isolation and stagnation as a result of restrictions of movement, confiscation of resources such as water and the demolition of homes. Military expropriation orders are typically used to take land for "security" reasons, which is then handed over for settlement use.

Israel has no intention of leaving

"Israel must have secure and defensible borders to ensure its future. The Jordan Valley communities are an essential element in determining the eastern border of the state. We can maintain these communities only if the residents there are encouraged and helped". Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The securitisation and military expropriation of land has been common place, and was made clear by Netanyahu in 2001:

"They asked me before the election if I'd honour [the Oslo accords]... I said I would, but [that] I'm going to interpret the accords in such a way that would allow me to put an end to this galloping forward to the 1967 borders. How did we do it? Nobody said what defined military zones were. Defined military zones are security zones; as far as I'm concerned, the entire Jordan Valley is a defined military zone. Go argue".

Argentina

Union and users fight 127% increase

Elizabeth Leonidez, member of the PSTU, Argentine section of the IWL

The underground workers' trade union (AGTSyP) informed us that a multi-sector front, consisting of social movements, students, organisations in defence of consumers, trade unions and political parties has been formed to repudiate the increase of the underground fares and are demanding a public audience NOW!

Activists of the "multi-sector" front have been distributing thousands of leaflets and collecting thousands of signatures under a petition of repudiation of the unwarranted increase. They are demanding that a public hearing should be held on this matter in accordance with the Statute of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.



Passengers on strike? Skip the turnstiles!

The Buenos Aires underground workers have been among the first to become reorganised after the privatising craze of the end of last century. The first step they had to take was to unite all the workers in one organisation. At that time if there were thirty people working at a single tube station they would be divided into various trade unions which meant no joint measure could ever be taken. Finally there was an agreement that everybody should



A demo led by AGTSyP union

enrol into UTA (a metro union) which could guarantee best protection. Then, once they were in a sole organisation, they started posing their demands and putting their new union bosses to the test. But instead of help from UTA, their lawful trade union, all they received was harassment, threats and brutality, and a long and nerve wracking battle to get disaffiliated and create their own union.

The details of this fight cannot be told here but briefly, the new leaders of this movement gained the support of the vast majority of the underground workers by giving visible proof of what they meant by being "different". They consulted each step they took with all the grassroots, and they negotiated nothing unless they had the OK from the rank and file. They returned to the old proven stance of being a shop steward means more risks and challenge, requires more conviction and provided no extra privilege. In this way, with the morale



A demo led by AGTSyP union

of the membership high they recovered several rights that privatisation had snatched away from them. At the same time, they exposed the deplorable state that trains were in due to a lack of investments and maintenance which meant that accidents could be expected at any moment.

As soon as the news that Mauricio Macri, newly re-elected Mayor of Buenos Aires, had authorised Metrovías, the private company running the underground, to increase the fares from 1.10 to 2.50 Argentine pesos, Segovia, the head of the new trade union said, "We are not going to sit there waiting for the passengers to blame us for such abuse. We still cannot



Segovia, leader underground rail workers' trade union (AGTSyP)

say whether any increase is justified. We have to see their accounting before we authorise this new attempt to make workers pay for the crisis. And anyhow, until the day when the public transport is nationalised under the control of workers and users, there will be no lasting solution". So they disconnected the turnstiles allowing people to walk through and travel for free for 3 hours in the morning and again in the afternoon.

STOP PRESS

THUGS ATTACK THE IWLfi PARTY (PSTU) IN ARGENTINA, see www.litci.org/en

Portugal

Standing on the EU's dead-end road

André Traça, member of the International Socialist League



FER/Ruptura (IWL) 2011 festival, FER will form a new party in March 2012

If someone had lived in Portugal five years ago, had been absent and were to return, they would find it difficult to recognise the country. The social structures have been destroyed for example the former middle class now struggle on 600 euro (roughly £500) a month in the most precarious work situations. Public services like education and healthcare have been brutally dilapidated and made less and less accessible to the working class. The most qualified generation has had its hopes of a better future destroyed and some are going abroad.

The background to this tragedy is that in recent decades the productive sectors of the economy (fishing, agriculture and industry) have been destroyed as a result of the EU policy of trashing the productive output of countries in the south of Europe and turning them into service-based, dependent states. A significant section of the country's bourgeoisie, involved in banking, construction, tourism, distribution and plundering the former colonies (mainly running businesses in Brazil and Angola), went along with all of this.

Troika attack

In this fragile situation there was a massive bank bail-out in 2009-10 with a simultaneous fall in revenue as a result of the failing economy. According to the Eurozone rules, states must fund themselves by borrowing from private banks. These banks borrow at low interest rates from the European Central Bank (ECB), which means that banks can make fantastic deals on sovereign debt by charging higher interest rates on loans that are arranged with states. Eventually it becomes unsustainable. Hence, after Greece and Ireland, it was Portugal's turn to have a Troika (the EU, European Central Bank,

and IMF team) intervention in order to guarantee that creditors would see earnings from their parasitical activity. The same old package of massive spending cuts, tax hikes and liberal labour laws were applied in return for a so-called "national rescue" plan. In fact the Deutsche Bank, Societe General, Barclays and other creditors, who have been profiting from the debt, are the ones being rescued by preventing an otherwise inevitable default.

Blood sucking

The result of the Troika intervention is an attack on workers' living conditions, especially the youth. Public sector workers have suffered, with their salaries and pensions falling between 3.5% to 10% at the start of 2011. Extra pay months (Christmas and June allowances) have been abolished and careers have been frozen. The classic IMF attack on workers' contracts and rights was repeated here. Compensation for firing, lay-offs and bonus pay for overtime has been slashed and bank holiday pay has gone. The general VAT was increased from 21 to 23% and is now charged on restaurants and most food products. Transport and utility costs have also been effected by a global rise as dictated by the infamous Troika.

Portugal is facing the same tragic scenario as Argentina did at the beginning of the last decade, when they struggled with blood-sucking spiralling foreign debt while under the fist of the IMF. As in Argentina, now in Portugal not to mention Greece, a huge chunk of the middle class is being erased from the social map. Poverty-related issues that were unheard of in previous decades have emerged such as food-distribution charities who are close to collapse due to an unprecedented demand. There is a whole generation of youth on the

scrap heap of unemployment and precarious living, or alternatively they are migrating abroad.

However, as in Argentina, the working class response has been climbing steadily, with many angry protesters regularly filling the streets, reaching levels unheard of since the revolution of 74-75. March 12, 2011, in the wake of the Arab Spring, the *Geração à Rasca* - the "troubled generation" - a facebook called protest, mobilised 300,000 people from a nation of 10 million on to the streets of the main cities. In just one year two widely participated general strikes have taken place which ground the country to a halt.

The EU is a powerful tool of the continent's bourgeoisie - mainly the ruling classes of the central countries Germany and France. It is determined to force southern European countries and Ireland into making endless efforts to pay the debt and its enormous interest rates, a very profitable lifeline that maintains profit for bankers and speculators. The EU will be relentless in trying to keep the single currency, and hence the dependence of the southern countries and Ireland (referred to as PIIGS - Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain).

It is a historical and very challenging task of the mass movement that increases daily, to fight for a better future. There is no realistic solution to be found in the rotten mechanisms of capitalism or in its present administrations. No realistic solution can consider paying the foreign debt and continue in the framework of the Euro. The time has come to kick out the Troika, stop paying the foreign debt and open all the financial books of the EU. The time has come to leave the EU and join forces with the other struggling workers of Europe against the common oppressive enemy, fighting for a socialist future!

Brazil

Military attack on residents We are all Pinheirinho



Please read and support the following appeal that has been supported by many students and trade unionists.

Sra. Presidenta da República,
Dilma Rouseff: sg@planalto.gov.br
Sr, Geraldo Alckmin, Governador de Sao
Paulo: galckmin@sp.gov.br
Sr, Eduardo Cury, Prefeito de São José
dos Campos: gabinete@sjc.sp.gov.br
Judge Márcia Faria M. Loureiro:
sjcampos6cv@tj.sp.jus.br
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The operation went ahead despite a ruling from the Federal Court that the operation should be immediately cancelled. Judge Rodrigo Capez from the São Paulo State Judicial Authority personally accompanied the police operation, and in full knowledge of the federal ruling directed the commander to proceed regardless.

In defence of what has become their home for the last eight years, the residents of Pinheirinho constructed



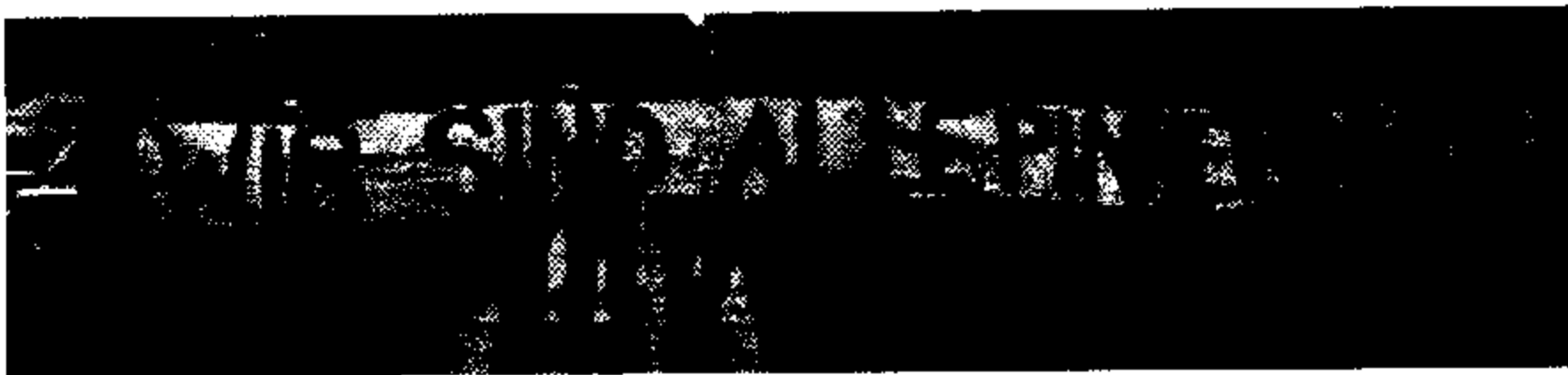
Brazil

forcible repossession of abandoned land belonging to a bankrupt company that remained empty for decades prior to its occupation in 2004.

This will not be the first violent mass-eviction in Brazil's recent history. In April 1996, 22 landless workers lost their lives in Eldorado de Carajás and in 2005 dozens died in clashes with the Military Police during an eviction in Goiânia.

We, the undersigned, reject the unlawful eviction of the residents of Pinheirinho and call upon the federal government to immediately intervene, to prevent any further police brutality and loss of life.

We unreservedly support the right of the residents of Pinheirinho to remain on their land and condemn any further attempts to forcibly remove the residents from what has become their home and community over the last eight years.



Berlin

Pinheirinho is an urban settlement on abandoned land on the impoverished outskirts of São José dos Campos - São Paulo, home to over 2,000 landless families since 2004; residents have built houses, churches, health centres and schools on the land and the settlement has grown to become the largest of its kind in the country.

In the early hours of the January 22, the Military Police attempted a forcible eviction of Pinheirinho in an enormous operation that used tanks, helicopters, tear gas, live rounds, rubber bullets, and more than 2,000 officers from 33 different municipalities.

barricades and makeshift shields to defend themselves and their community from the eviction. The sheer scale and violence of the police operation has sparked a wave of protests across the country.

Early reports suggest that at least seven people have died and many more have wounded in clashes with the police.

Despite Brazil's booming economy, the nation still suffers from a crippling housing deficit; recent government figures put the shanty town population at 11.5 million compared with 4.5 million 20 years ago. Yet, the State Government is still prepared to pursue



Portugal



A New Italian Political Cinema?

William Hope, Lecturer in Italian at the University of Salford

Italy has recently undergone a change of government, with the ex-European Commissioner Mario Monti superseding Silvio Berlusconi whose administration had become paralysed by the myriad of court cases against the ex-prime minister. This was due to an ongoing conflict of interests which centred on Berlusconi's government repeatedly drafting legislation calculated to strengthen the premier's business interests or to provide him with immunity from prosecution, and also by a predictable reluctance to get tough on Italy's perennial problems of tax evasion. Such a clampdown would have harmed the economic interests of Berlusconi and his extended network of associates.

However the country's new administration is very much a continuation of the old regime.

Millions of working families have been hit by soaring fuel and transport costs, the reintroduction of the council tax, and a sharp increase in pensionable age for state employees. There is talk of a further assault on workers' rights in a country where sizeable numbers of young people are either unemployed or on short-term renewable contracts. Also the Monti government is seemingly intent on altering Italy's constitution to enable employers to dismiss workers with legal impunity.

It seems paradoxical that in a country wracked by a serious economic crisis, social unrest continues to be fragmented and sporadic apart from a series of co-ordinated mass demonstrations which were principally aimed at Berlusconi towards the end of his political tenure. This is principally due to the way in which the media – largely under Berlusconi's control – has deliberately underplayed Italy's growing problems. The situation has deteriorated to a point where various investigative journalists, television presenters and even satirists who had been critical of the country's political clique, and of Berlusconi in particular, have had their contracts terminated.

Against such a backdrop of censorship and repression, Italian cinema has arguably been the most consistent platform for the expression of reliable and frequently stark perspectives on issues such as migration to Italy,

unemployment and the erosion of workers' rights, and corruption within Italy's state institutions.

Recognising the role that cinema has played in combating media distortions and untruths in Italy, a research project was elaborated at the University of Salford in 2010. This is a cross-disciplinary project to examine the socio-political themes emerging in Italian cinema in the 21st century, and also to identify the factors affecting (and complicating) the attempts of Italian film-makers to explore societal problems in their work.

The project, entitled *A New Italian Political Cinema?*, <http://italianpoliticalcinema.wordpress.com/> has been based on an interaction between film scholars, trade unionists, journalists, film directors, and representatives of the political party *Partito di Alternativa Comunista (PdAC)*, Italian section of the International



Fabiana Stefanoni, a leader of PdAC, at the London conference

Workers League-Fourth International. Workshops have already been held in the UK, Italy, and Australia, where the authenticity of filmic representations of Italy's political and socio-economic problems have been analysed.

This article is the first in series outlining the initial findings of the project. Using a Marxist methodology, we will consider the ideological and political hegemony of dominant socio-economic groups is realistically depicted and challenged in Italian cinema or whether many of these socio-political films have drifted towards the mainstream and tended to produce imaginary narrative resolutions to the social antagonisms that they portray.

Several recent films have depicted the often inhumane treatment of asylum

seekers on their arrival in Italy and others have explored employment issues such as the growing phenomenon of workplace fatalities, as well as the marginalisation of trade unions and exploitation of workers that is explored in Paolo Virzi's *Tutta la vita davanti/ Her Whole Life Ahead* (2008). Italian state brutality during the G8 protests in Genoa in 2001 formed the basis of Francesca Comencini's documentary *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo/Carlo Giuliani, Boy* (2002) which reconstructed the events leading to the murder of a young protester by a police officer. The role of political corruption and organised crime in causing environmental disasters has been explored in Matteo Garrone's internationally successful film *Gomorra/Gomorrhah* (2008) and, at a macro level, the corrupt, repressive nature of Berlusconi's administrations has been analysed in Nanni Moretti's *Il caimano/The Cayman* (2006). Italian cinema has also vividly represented the global effects of capitalism in films such as Gianni Amelio's *La stella che non c'è/ The Missing Star* (2006), which relates the consequences of an Italian factory's delocalisation to China. The next article will focus on Italian cinema's view of the world, and particularly on capitalism's increasing grip on areas of the developing world.

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Bill Hunter's Opinion

Capitalism's crisis undermines its strength

We are printing a recent statement made by Bill about the stage the world is passing through. We will return to his archives in future issues.

There is a huge insoluble rift as the USA tries to maintain control over the world and prepares for more wars. The centre in 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s was Iraq, shaking imperialist control and around it other divisions occurred. Now Iran has to defend itself but this is also shaking Israel, the US, and the European Union.

It signifies another step towards a deeper war and it is important to recognise that the world crisis and the drive of imperialism is the cause of the increasing tensions.

This poses a problem to the world's working class. The USA and Europe see all the struggles for safe-guarding life and defending small nations as a signal for war, which means the only way to end war is to end capitalism.

We have reached a stage where attacks along a number of fronts are widening - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Palestine. These are particular wars but they can grow and widen because the US is forced to go further with or without victories and the world is facing a major step towards more generalised war.

The preparations for war such as the oil blockade imposed by the EU can at the same time push the protagonists further down. Greece, Italy, Spain, Ireland and Portugal are going through catastrophes for the majority of the

population and a new shock to oil prices will worsen the struggle for life.

Some countries in the Middle East are threatened with war. The popular movements which started need to take note and have to develop as international movements. The preparations against Iran show that there is not much longer to go and that this situation cannot continue without blowing up.

The crisis of capitalism is undermining its strength and hence it is compelled to fight. What is posed over the whole thing is the end of capitalism and its exploitation.

The US and its lesser partner the EU cannot live without an empire, without repressing the whole world, without capitalistic monopoly, and the US will not allow another immense world power. It can't have two capitalist powers of the same size and those nations that develop the slightest political independence face a titanic and vicious opposition.

Conflicting imperialisms are struggling for dominance over the worlds' resources and markets but the only way for capitalism to survive is for the USA to dominate.

The US has to dominate the world so how will it achieve this? Its dilemma is great. The decline of capitalism is undermining its plans, but it is driven to more war which also accelerates its decline.

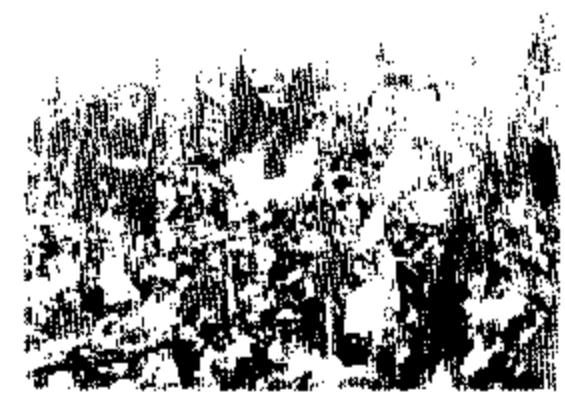
Humanity needs the unity of the whole world but it cannot get this under exploitation because exploiters

cannot grow without the exploited. The floodgates to war are opening wider. This is the death agony of capitalism.

The development of capitalism created the conditions for the development of nationalities and at the same time for its own destruction and the destruction of nationalities. Therefore we must be internationalist, one comes out of the other, the internationalism of the working class is the only answer. Socialism has to grow out of capitalism in its decay. It is the road the class struggle has to take if it is to succeed.

Big questions of perspective and development are coming up. The old ideas are not outlived; Trotskyism has proved itself already, but not as many had expected. A world party of socialism and the struggle for socialist revolution is the only way forward for the world's masses.

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