

workers power

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



**WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!
DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM AND ITS WARS!
FORWARD TO THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL!**

INSIDE:

- **FOR ALL-OUT PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE TO SMASH LABOUR'S PAY CUTS !**
- **Socialist solutions to climate change**
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**League for the
Fifth International**

EDITORIAL

Smash the 2 per cent pay limit

STRIKE TOGETHER - WE CAN WIN!

This years mayday sees a massive strike by a quarter of a million workers. Civil service workers and public servants struck against paycuts, privatisation and more than 100,000-job losses.

MayDay was great timing. It is the day of workers solidarity – and millions of other workers are straining at the leash to join them in action.

Hospital staff, postal workers, council employees are all facing the same insult: in other words a 3 per cent pay cut.

This is just one of a series of attacks on low paid workers. Gordon Browns abolition of the 10 per cent tax bracket will cut take home pay for everyone earning under £18,000 as admitted by the Treasury last month. Interest rates are also rising, likely to force mortgage repayments up by an extra £120 a month for first time buyers. Public sector workers can no longer afford to buy homes in 70 per cent of towns.

Even the government's own statistics reveal that 7.2 million adults live in poverty - five million of them in absolute poverty.

And this in a "boom"! Companies are making record profits and city financiers handed out £19 billion in bonuses to executives who produce no useful goods or services.

Tesco, Britain's lowest paying employer, recently announced £2.5 billion profits, while the High Street banks raked in over £37.8 billion between them.

Yet, in the same budget that Gordon Brown raised *our* taxes, he cuts *corporate* tax by 2 per cent.

The "Iron Chancellor" has spent 10 years showing the bosses and the bankers that he will do their bidding should he become prime minister. Having forced public services to be run on "market principles", regardless of need, having put as many of them as possible into the hands of private profiteers, having stolen workers' pension funds, and having cut basic services to the bone – now he wants to cut our pay.

Momentum is gathering for united action across many unions - and that is what the government



Workers demonstrate to save health service

fears the most.

The biggest healthworkers' union, Unison voted overwhelmingly for industrial action against the cuts. Even members of the Royal College of Nursing, which claims it's not a union, voted by 97 per cent for strike action. The CWU's postal union has told members to prepare for strikes. Conferences of both teachers' unions recently voted for action.

Who can doubt that a clear call from the union leaders for a united all out strike to bust the 2 per cent would meet with an enthusiastic response? And that is exactly what we need to smash New Labours low pay plan and punch a hole through their whole anti working class agenda.

That is why the trade union leaders should immediately ballot for all-out indefinite strike action until the demands of every section are met.

- Drop the 2 percent limit
 - Real pay rises for all
 - A minimum wage of £9 an hour.
- Who should fund it? The rich. Raise taxes for the companies and the billionaires, not the low paid.

The PCS civil servants union balloted for strike action to defend jobs, pay levels and services at the same time. The leaders of all the public sector unions should do the same thing now and launch a campaign for a "Yes" vote and for all-out and indefinite strike action.

All recent examples of joint union action – over pensions in

2004-05, local government pay in 2002 – reveal that the more unions involved, the more confident workers feel about striking.

There is no point in limiting action to a few days, or bringing out only a few sections at a time. The surest and shortest way to victory is to strike together and tell the government and employers: "We're not going back until we've won. You can't replace us all."

Such a strike would win enormous public support. Millions of us depend on the services the strikers would be defending. Action committees should be set up in every locality to pressure the union leaders into calling action, to win workers to taking action, to organise solidarity.

We could extend action to the private sector. After all, real wages are falling and jobs are disappearing in private companies, too.

What if the government or the employers use the anti-union laws to break the strike? Their strongest weapons is to declare a united strike "political" and therefore illegal. But these laws only work because we obey them. If we all broke them together we could make them unworkable forever.

It can be done - just look at what happened in France last year.

When the French government attacked young workers' employment rights last spring, the youth set up co-ordinations to unite the struggles and plan the action. They occupied colleges, picketed

out workers and blocked roads and railways. Massive strikes and demonstrations forced the government to back down. We should follow their example.

New leadership in struggle

Can we rely on our union leaders to take this path? We can't.

Even left wing PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka has made a terrible mess of fighting the cuts. A one day strike on 30 January was not followed up until three months later on 1 May, rendering the effect of the first strike meaningless.

So rank and file union members will have to organise independently of the union leaders. In every workplace, strike committees must be elected to run the campaign, and take action independently of the union leaders if necessary, should they hold us back or sell out. A national co-ordination, representing all the unions and sectors in dispute, should control negotiations, report back and refuse to call off action or settle without a vote by all the members.

This points to a long-term problem with the unions. They are all controlled by officials, some unelected, none recallable when they sell out struggles. Most of them are paid far more than the workers they claim to represent. A rank and file movement is needed to transform the unions by making all officials elected, instantly replaceable, and paid the average wage of the members.

A union reform movement would also fight to stop the unions paying for the Labour Party. Last month's Unison health conference narrowly voted down a motion to suspend payments to the Labour party. Activists should take the fight to cut the link to Labour to all the union conferences in May and June.

Instead of wasting our political fund on the party that attacks our wages and services, we should use our money to found a new workers' party for the millions who are learning by bitter experience that Labour is for the few and not the many. Its aim should be to get rid not only of New Labours low pay policy, but the capitalist system that Blair and Brown serve.

OUT NOW!

After 10 years of Blair and Brown in power, the longest period of Labour government ever, what have we got to show for it?

More than seven million people live in poverty. Even at a time of economic “boom”, unemployment has risen to over 1.5 million and the public sector faces job losses this year of more than 100,000. Pay is being held down to below the rate of inflation – and tax rates have doubled for lowest paid.

Rising inequality, the steady selling off of the NHS and the education system to big business and, of course, a bloody war in Iraq, based on a pack of lies.

In this pamphlet, Workers Power argues that there is an alternative. Two million took to the streets against Blair’s war in 2003. Last year’s strike against the pensions robbery brought over 1.5 million people out. And this year hundreds of thousands are set to strike on 1 May against cuts and privatisation.

This anger needs to be turned into political action. The working class will be exploited, oppressed, lied to, marched off to fight in wars for profit again and again until the capitalist system of profit before people is done away with once and for all.

The greatest obstacle to this happening is that the working class movement – our unions and our parties – is led by people who are not fighting for the working class to take power. They could have used mass anger against the war, or the pensions robbery, or the NHS cuts to drive Blair from office and open up a fight to transform Britain. They failed. They didn’t

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British section of the League for the Fifth International



THE ROAD TO WORKING CLASS POWER

An Action Programme for Britain

www.workerspower.com

£2.00

have the vision and they didn’t have the nerve. There is a crisis of leadership for the working class.

This programme sets out the alternative to the policies of despair that have misled our class for so long. It links the struggles of today to the fight to turn the working class from an oppressed class into the ruling class of society; it sets out a road from resistance to revolution. Available from Workers Power for only £2.00!

NEWS IN BRIEF

G8 SUMMIT PROTESTS

The G8 world leaders are meeting again, this time in Heiligendamm in Germany. There will be a series of protests on 2–8 June. The G8 summit is the annual conference, where the leaders of the world’s eight most powerful countries meet and plan out their strategic goals for the next year.

Since the late 1990s, most summits have been with huge demonstrations by workers, youth, immigrants and everyone else who suffers under the free market policies of the rich and the guns of imperialism. There will be marches, blockades of the conference itself, and a counter summit. *Workers Power* will be going, along with *Revolution*, the socialist youth group. If you want to come and join us, then get in touch!

JOHN 4 LEADER

John McDonnell, one of the few lefts still in the Labour Party, will launch his leadership bid against Gordon Brown. If he manages to get 44 MPs to support him, his campaign will give workers an opportunity to declare the contest a referendum on neoliberalism and war.

Trade unionists should organise rokplace and town centre meetings to debate the alternative to Blairism and mobilise support. The campaign should be closely linked to organising resistance to the pay cuts, the destruction of the NHS and the occupation of Iraq.

But we should demand of McDonnell: if Brown does win, rally your supporters behind the call for a new workers’ party.

JOHN McDONNELL AND UNISON

John McDonnell’s campaign for Labour leadership has been getting a boost in the media lately with stories of him getting nearly enough MPs to stand against Gordon Brown.

One place where he won’t be getting support is from the union that sponsors him: Unison. Its leadership has decided, over the heads of its million members, to back Brown, despite the Chancellor imposing a 2 per cent pay limit on public sector workers and selling off the NHS to private companies.

Unison members – and all trade unionists – should demand the right to vote in the leadership election and use it to deny Brown his coronation.

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MIGRANT WORKERS

Abolish modern slavery

By James Roberts

An investigation by BBC News has exposed a new form of bonded labour or slavery. Lithuanian journalist Audrius Lelkaitis posed for one month as a migrant worker with a hidden camera recording the lives of migrant labour for the BBC.

Lelkaitis found:

- Migrants lured by deception to work for wages lower than the minimum wage.
- Crowded living conditions where a dozen men and women slept in one room, which cost them each £50 a week.
- Lelkaitis was promised a full-time job in Hull but had to pay two different people £340 before arriving in the town. When he reached Hull he contacted Focus, the company who had hired him. They told him they had never heard of him despite paying all that money.
- In Hull there was no job. He waited 6 days before being moved to Richmond in Yorkshire at 20 minutes notice.
- The company he worked for Focus Ltd withheld two weeks money and paid two weeks in arrears. After working for 128 hours he was paid £47 at £4.80 an hour.

Many of the workers the BBC spoke to said this was commonplace.

Paul Whitehouse, who chairs the government's toothless Gangmasters' Licensing Authority, told the BBC: "It's 200 years since slavery was abolished. We mustn't allow it to continue now."

And what is the government's response? Employment minister Jim Fitzpatrick said he took the findings "most seriously" and would take action against any breaches of the laws. But there are only 30 inspectors in the whole country to search out these "breaches" and only in the farming, forestry, fishing and fresh food packing industries where 500,000 migrants work. Construction, warehousing, hotels, catering all use cheap labour, are outside the remit of the licensing authority

The way to end this super-exploitation is for the labour

movement to organise migrant labour, fight for equal pay and rights and campaign against racist immigration controls.

The GMB union has run a campaign on London's Isle of Dogs to organise the cleaning staff in the multi-billion pound banks in the area. The T&G union has been organising Polish workers in the north west on building sites and has been running its Justice for Cleaners campaign in London. This has successfully targeted some of the most profitable companies in the world such as Goldman Sachs (see the article at www.workerspower.com for more on Justice for Cleaners).

The unions need to launch a national campaign for organising migrant workers and link up with other activists such as anti-racist campaigners. They must use the methods of direct action that has brought success in the city of London and elsewhere.

Such a campaign also needs to campaign against immigration controls.

All immigration controls are racist: they divide migrants from workers in the host country, and target them, along with asylum seekers, using harassment, imprisonment, arrest and immiseration. By isolating them and marginalising them from the bulk of society they create an underclass subject to super-exploitation and which ultimately undermines the wages and conditions of all workers and their ability to fight.

Lastly the unionisation of the low paid and migrants offers the possibility of transforming the trade union movement itself. Tens of thousands of workers from around the world pouring into the UK unions will force the bureaucracy to listen to the concerns of migrants: poor wages and conditions, but also issues of racism, immigration and international issues such as the destructive policies of the IMF and World Bank or imperialist wars such as Iraq.

The migrants and low paid have the potential of challenging the hold of the bureaucracy and transforming the unions into fighting organisations for the whole working class, including the lowest paid and most insecure sections of the workforce, in particular migrants.



Demonstration in defence of migrants

7 May - a day for migrants

A coalition of migrant activists and campaigners has named 7 May as a national day of action in support of migrant workers.

Our inspiration and aim must be the US "Day without Migrants", which last year mobilised millions to take strike action to demand citizenship rights. With between 500,000 and two million unregistered migrant workers in Britain, such a strike, backed up by action from all workers, would have a tremendous impact on the status of the workers concerned, but on the trade unions themselves.

In London, however, the main organisers of the demo are the Catholic-inspired London Citizens, who are campaigning their Strangers into Citizens initiative that proposes that "Irregular migrants... be granted

a two-year work permit. At the end of those two years, subject to employer and character references, they should be given leave to remain."

London Citizens also defends border controls and attack amnesties that are "too generous". This is completely inadequate and concedes far too much to the racists and their immigration controls.

Antiracist and migrant organisations should not be marching with Union Jacks, as London Citizens would like us to, on 7 May. Instead, Workers Power and other activists are making a big banner with the slogan "Abolish all Immigration controls".

JUSTICE FOR MIGRANTS

Monday 7 May,

Assemble 11:30

Westminster Cathedral Piazza

Victoria Street London WC1

Organising migrant workers

A hundred trade unionists, anti-deportation campaigners and left-wing activists come together in Liverpool at the end of March to discuss how to organise migrant workers and challenge racist immigration controls. TGWU organiser of the Justice for Cleaners campaign, Javier Ruiz, explained its importance in fighting for better pay and conditions for migrant workers and challenging immigration controls.

The conference also discussed the "anti-trafficking" legislation being introduced across the Euro-

pean Union under the guise of "protecting women". Camille Paglia of the International Union of Sex Workers highlighted the need for international workers' self-organisation to combat unsafe conditions and to seize control from the gang masters responsible for trafficking.

A priority for the campaign in the future must be the creation of an organisation to forge of links with other sections of the workers movement, in particular the TGWU, GMB and Amicus and campaign for rights for all and no to immigration controls.

ENVIRONMENT

As the climate crisis mounts, what is the socialist solution?

All serious scientific and government studies agree – climate change is happening and is set to cause havoc across the globe.

World leaders will be debating it at the G8 summit in Germany in June. But will this lead to urgent action to prevent catastrophe?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has provided the shocking background of climate change for the world's leaders. Its recent report confirmed evidence from 29,000 pieces of data that the world is heating up fast. It says "hundreds of millions of people "will be at risk of floods, heat waves, storms, droughts, food and water shortages.

A further 200 million people face living on uninhabitable land by 2050. If the world heats up by 1.5 to 2.5 degrees, as the report predicts is likely, it would create serious economic and social problems for millions of people.

Limiting the impact of climate change is a question of life and death for millions. The Campaign against Climate Change conference on 12 and 13 May is an opportunity to discuss these problems and come up with solutions that will work.

Almost everyone agrees that the cause of climate change is carbon emissions – the burning of fossil fuels and the destruction of forest that absorb CO₂. So the answer should be clear: a worldwide shift away from reliance on burning fossil fuels. This has to mean massive reductions in burning coal, oil and petrol, a huge investment in alternative energy, a halt to deforestation and the vast expansion of public transport to massively reduce the use of the private car.

The answer only needs to be stated in this way for the problem to become obvious. This would all be bad for the profits of the global corporations.

Green pressure groups try to avoid this by putting the emphasis on changing "individual choices". We are supposed to make "greener" lifestyle choices.

But, it is large scale production and big business that accounts for the majority of fossil fuel burning – in industry and agriculture, in the

Kam Kumar looks at the role of capitalism and the market in creating global warming



Market Madness

The EU carbon Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) has become a license for UK companies to print money - another example of how the capitalists will try and make a buck, even when the planet is being killed by their system.

ETS, or carbon trading, allows companies to buy carbon credits from other companies in other countries. If you under pollute you can sell the pollution credits to another capitalist.

Moneyweek magazine in January 2007 published an article called 'how to profit from carbon trading' in which it called carbon trading 'big business' and gave advice on how to benefit from it!

- £940m UK companies profit in first year of carbon trading
- £1bn - profit windfall for UK energy companies under the ETS
- £2.7bn - profit for aviation companies trading in emissions

promotion of oil and the private car.

Environmental groups have argued that it possible to get governments to introduce green reforms, yet we have seen how these demands are ignored. From the USA's refusal to sign the Kyoto climate change treaty, the UK government's plan to double air traffic through British airports by 2030, to the invasion of Iraq to conquer oil reserves, it is clear that the leaders of the most powerful nations put profits before people and planet.

G8 leaders will parade the issue of climate change and make empty promises to reduce emissions while knowing full well that it is energy giants like BP and Shell who drive their economies.

The German minister heading the G8 environment ministers' meeting even said "we need a greening of globalisation", but what

does this mean? Already half of the world's population lives without regular electricity and clean water. To lift billions out of poverty in the third world they need a massive industrialisation programme to raise their standards of living. The question that ecologists cannot answer is how to do this without further damaging the environment – the answer is that it can only be done by breaking with the logic of the market.

Capitalism is built on competition, meaning that there can be no agreement to fairly distribute the world's energy resources. That's why the agreed response of the governments of rich G8 countries to climate change was emission trading, a cynical way for capitalists to make money out of pollution. This allows the big polluters to carry on by buying up the carbon rations allocat-

ed to poorer developing countries. The rich get richer and carry on polluting; poor countries see their development plans restricted even further in the name of fighting climate change. What a disgrace.

Climate change is a global threat therefore there can be no solution in a single country or by passing policies that the rest of the world ignores. The market needs to be supplanted by rational and planned allocation of production and distribution that takes the climate crisis into account and aims to overcome it.

At the Climate Change Conference, the protests against the G8 summit in Germany in June and beyond, Workers Power will argue that we need a global planned economy that takes production out of the hands of the capitalists under the ownership and control of working people. Workers in industries that needed to be reduced in scale or closed would be reallocated to equivalent socially useful work with no loss of pay or benefits. Under workers control this could be done systematically, regulating industries democratically, including managing the shift towards renewable energy. Without the drive for private profit and the anarchy of the market, the workers could decide what to produce to meet society's needs and to preserve the planet.

The damage we are too late to stop can still be minimised through planning, for instance to evacuate people from areas that suffer flooding and drought. The massive movements of refugees from countries affected by climate change will be a huge crisis in the 21st century. People need to be allowed to live and work in other countries freely; we must fight for open borders so that governments do not leave millions to suffer.

Finally, we must build a working class party that puts forward a coherent socialist strategy for saving the environment. This is a new task – revolutionary theory itself needs to be developed further to analyse and understand climate change and how to stop it. But one thing is already clear: only a revolutionary struggle against global capitalism can allow us to build a future for generations to come.

FIGHTBACK

Teachers' strike can win

By Bernie McAdam, NUT rep

After years of teachers' pay slipping behind inflation, the National Union of Teachers and the more conservative NASUWT schools union have both moved towards balloting for a one-day national strike against the government's measly 2 per cent pay award. It would be the first national teachers' strike for 40 years!

The NUT leadership has finally admitted that some form of industrial action is needed after years of slipping pay rates. At the conference in Harrogate last month, the executive motion calling for a strike ballot was unanimously passed.

But, beyond a one-day strike, the officials have no strategy to fight against the three-year deal, based on 2 per cent each year till 2011. Margaret Thatcher took away teachers' right to free collective bargaining and neither the union bureaucrats nor the Labour government has done anything to reverse this infringement.

Rising inflation and mortgages expose the danger of long-term pay deals. They should be scrapped and the right for rank and file teachers to negotiate their pay each year - and to strike.

The NUT has a conference policy of seeking a £3,000 or 10 per cent pay rise with industrial action only as an option. The leadership believes that NUT members shouldn't strike on their own. Even left-wing Socialist Teachers Association national executive leader Kevin Courtney opposed a motion - narrowly defeated - for strike action against performance management pay.

They forget that teachers have a range of



Gordon Brown: pay cuts for workers, tax cuts for bosses

issues fuelling their anger at present. Attacks are coming thick and fast

- Escalating workloads
- Constant management monitoring
- Growth of unaccountable academies and trust schools
- Rising stress levels.

These attacks can only be resisted by national campaigns of action, not leaving isolated schools to fight alone.

Drawing strength from the outrage felt by other public sector unions over the pay freeze, the NUT will meet with other public sector unions on 14 May to explore possibilities for joint action. The NUT leaders should be giving a national fighting lead on pay: this means an all out indefinite strike.

What we say

Workers in the public sector must demand a ballot for united strike action to break the 2 per cent pay limit, and defend jobs and conditions.

We must unite the struggles in a co-ordinated fight.

At their meeting 14 May, union leaders in the public sector should immediately agree to ballot for all-out indefinite strike action until the demands of every section are met. We must set up committees to unite the workers and link up with other struggles in the private sector, NHS defence campaigns and the struggles over pensions.

Together we can win, so why fight alone?

This is great opportunity to defeat the government over pay and cuts but it will mean a struggle against the union leaders.

Turn to page 2 for a more detailed strategy to break the 2 per cent pay limit.

Union leaders hold back health workers' action

By Mark Booth

The Labour government's continued attacks on the NHS, alongside its derisory pay "rise" for this year, has triggered mass anger from NHS workers.

The anger crystallised in a motion at the Unison health workers' conference to stop funding the Labour Party while the government's attacks on the NHS continued - a vote that was just narrowly lost with the chair refusing to allow a recount or card vote.

The Royal College of Nursing voted 97% in favour of industrial

action against the pay cut. The Unison executive has said that, if the government refuses to make a better offer, then it will be forced to ballot members for action.

Forced is the right word as the Unison bureaucrats have been doing everything they can to avoid a struggle with Labour. Their ties to the Labour Party have served to hold back struggles against NHS privatisation. They have again pushed back the call for a national demonstration against NHS privatisation, finally agreeing the date of 13 October - over a year after this call was first raised in 2006 and only after massive pressure from rank and file trade unionists in the

health service.

Unison officials have also been persecuting those trade unionists who have taken up the fight against the government. Yunus Bakhsh, a nurse and long-time Unison activist from Newcastle, has been subject to a witchhunt by NHS management, which has been trying to sack him for his efforts in organising resistance to privatisation and exposing management's actions. Instead of backing him, the Unison executive has suspended Yunus from his union post for three months without any concrete allegations against him!

It is actions like these that are

holding back workers' struggles in the NHS, not the mood of the workforce. They also point directly to the need for a rank and file organisation and a national campaign to unite health workers across different areas and unions and circumvent the dead hand of the bureaucracy that is holding back the struggles.

The coming strikes in the NHS are an opportunity for activists to link up the struggles in the NHS and have the debate out over what is the best way forward for the different campaigns.

- For more on the struggle to defend the NHS, go to workerspower.com

FIGHTBACK

Royal Mail throws down the gauntlet

By a CWU postal rep

Seventy Post Offices are being transferred to WH Smith in a privatisation move that threatens up to 3,000 jobs. Meanwhile Royal Mail's offer to postal workers in this year's annual spring pay round is an insult.

First the pay. There will be no increase in basic pay at all, just a "lump sum" of £250-£550 per person – worth as little as £4.80 a week! And even this is contingent on Royal Mail "saving" £350 million over the next year – by making us work even harder!

We've already had a year of huge cuts to create "savings", which the 2006 Efficiency Agreement was supposed to consolidate into basic pay. For the past six months, workers "consolidated" a measly 92p extra into our basic pay! Royal Mail will "consolidate" its huge productivity gains for good.

But it gets worst. Wages will be paid monthly, not weekly. We will lose bonuses for door-to-door junkmail and election materials. People on sick will be harassed by managers, and workmates made to cover for them while they are off.

Post Office workers, facing privatisation, and sorting and delivery staff need to unite their two struggles with a co-

ordinated ballot against this attack.

As we go to press, the secretary of Leeds CWU branch, Dave Walden, has been sacked on trumped up charges of bullying and harassment towards a manager, while reports from delivery offices reveal management unilaterally imposing changes and cuts without union agreement. Royal Mail is already on the offensive.

The leaders of the postal workers' union, the CWU, have told members to "prepare for the strong possibility of a national industrial action ballot", but we must watch our leaders like hawks to ensure there is no "compromise" deal – as happened last year – that would mean major concessions to the bosses. Only a strike can win postal workers' full and necessary demands and prepare for a confrontation on privatisation, jobs and conditions. Strike committees of delegates accountable to workplace mass meetings need to control the strike and all negotiations to ensure there is no sell-out.

Postal workers have had a year of restructuring and are fed up. Royal Mail's proposals are a full-blown challenge to their working conditions and the union. The anger is there for a successful strike that can achieve real gains. Let's do it!

Stop the BNP

By a Leeds antifascist

While we go to press before election, day, we can expect significant BNP gains in the elections. We should use any Nazi win as an alarm to wake up the movement. Wherever support for the BNP grows, racist attacks increase. Anti-fascists need to flypost and leaflet such areas, call public meetings and organise community self defence teams.

Local government workers should refuse to work for BNP councillors. We should demand that Labour representatives refuse to sit on committees with them. Shop stewards need to call full members' meetings to organise protest action, including walk-outs, and a campaign of non-cooperation.

Campaigns to defend council housing and the NHS should be connected with the fight to stop the BNP. We need to show that there are working class solutions to these attacks.

Many BNP voters are protesting against Labour's betrayals or - worse - because they believe the BNP has the answers.

Labour's racism also helps drive BNP growth. Tony Blair's wars abroad and the "war on terror" at home have been justified by a barely concealed anti-Muslim racism. Labour has introduced racist asylum and immigration policies.

We need to expose the BNP's lies.

BNP myth: there is no council housing available because asylum seekers have taken been prioritised over "native" British people. Truth: Labour encourages selling off stops the housing stock and stops councils from spending the returns on repairs or new homes.

BNP myth: there are no NHS beds available because migrants have taken them. Truth: without the huge number of migrants working in our hospitals, the NHS wouldn't be able to function.

BNP myth: council taxes are on the rise because of asylum seekers scrounging off the system. Truth: income tax from migrant workers more than pays for the entire immigration and asylum system.

Such a campaign is contrary to Unite Against Fascism's strategy of not confronting the failures the major parties. This liberal "antifascism" cannot defeat the BNP. Workers need socialist solutions to the real social ills that the BNP thrives on. If trade unions and anti-racists take this message out, we can drive the fascists back into the gutter.

Fight for workers' control of new technology

By Keith Sellick, NUJ rep

New technology is being used as a battering ram against journalists' terms and conditions. The introduction of websites, podcasts and digital cameras has led to attacks on journalists' rights at work in national and regional papers and in magazines, as employers merge print and web functions, with more job losses being forecast.

The key question is: who controls new technology, the bosses or workers? Media workers must demand: no loss of jobs or pay; no attack on hours and conditions; and training, paid for by the bosses and held in

worktime. We should also demand extra money for using new technology.

Action at the *Telegraph* and *Guardian* newspapers has delivered victories but last month's National Union of Journalists conference missed an opportunity to develop a national strategy.

Rather, the NUJ leadership has gone for a series of regional meetings, developing the *Journalism Matters* campaign and a global day of action on 5 November with support from the US Guild of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists.

Another important debate was on the RMT national shop stewards'

conference and Respect's Organising for Fighting Unions initiative. A motion was, in debate, gutted of the OFFU's Workers Charter and ended up just supporting the two initiatives. While Workers Power has criticised the Charter, nevertheless, to delete all reference to it without replacing it with something clearer was a step backwards.

The lost ballot two years ago to set up a political fund is still being felt. Delegates felt reluctant to affiliate to political campaigns. This is an accommodation to the craft prejudices of NUJ members as, for years, the union prided itself on being "above politics".

Our millionaire employers are

political all the time. The disgusting Rupert Murdoch is in regular contact with Blair and Brown. BBC witch-hunted Andrew Gilligan for exposing the lies that took us to war.

We need to be political, too. When journalists at the *Daily Star* refused to print a racist "Daily Patwa" page, the owners had to give in or lose their "right" to have their rag printed at all.

By fighting to control the new technology and exercising veto over the content of the mass media, journalists can begin to encroach on the bosses' power to exploit its workers at will and to poison the minds of millions.

EUROPEAN WORKERS STRUGGLES

European workers

As the anti-capitalist movement prepares to protest at the G8 summit in Germany in June, *Joy Macready* looks at workers' struggle across the continent against the free market policies

The mass protests that will take place against the G8 summit coincide with the end of Germany's EU presidency term. In the past six months, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel has used her position of strength to push forward the concept of a Europe for the bosses. Agenda 2010 - the plan developed in Lisbon to make Europe as competitive as the US through attacking workers rights and privatising public services - is back on the table, with Blair, in his last days, doing as much damage as possible to a "social" Europe.

Blair is on the warpath to re-launch the European constitution process without public referendums - after the French and Dutch people rejected the constitution in 2005. He is hoping for a presidential victory in France of the right winger Nicholas Sarkozy because that would increase his chances to ditch plans for a new constitution and pave the way to a minimalist model treaty not greatly binding on member states so that the national leaderships would not have to open up the process to a democratic vote.

He is also attempting to garner support to scrap the Green Paper on "modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century" which has formed the basis of a public consultation in the first part of 2007. The emphasis of the document is on the commercial drive for the labour market in Europe to be flexible. The Commission refers to the possibility of a two-tier labour market, divided between the permanently employed "insiders", and the flexibly employed "outsiders" whose security and rights may be more precarious.

Blair's response to the Green Paper is an outright rejection of any need for further EU-level legislation. Why? Of the 25 EU member states, the UK offers the lowest level of protection for agency workers; currently in the UK temporary employees are earning 38% less than their counterparts in permanent positions. Fundamentally, Blair is against "levelling up" or being forced to implement better working conditions in accords with European legislation. And it shows - the UK has less than half the workplace safety regulations it had 35 years ago, according to the TUC.

On the eve of the biggest bank merger in history between Barclays and ABN Amro with the banks shouting about their biggest profits ever, Blair says that labour costs need to be lowered and workers need to work longer so that Europe stays "competitive".

But the workers across Europe are not taking these attacks lying down - they are building a fight back, taking strike action and challenging the rights of the bosses to do what they want. Looking at the struggles that are happening over the next few months, you see the bosses ideas of Europe is one of cutbacks and job losses in many sectors. In the age of globalisation, multinational firms are operating across borders, attacking workers conditions or destroying jobs as they move to low cost locations where working conditions are even worse.

Britain

The PCS announced an escalation in a dispute over job cuts, pay and privatisation. The one day strike on 1 May involving up to 270,000 civil and public servants working across 200 plus government departments, agencies and non-departmental bodies is evidence of the growing desire for a fight back.

NHS workers are threatening a summer strike. The union voted down the government's 2.5 per cent pay increase offer in an emergency motion. With inflation running at 4.8 per



cent, this is actually a pay cut. In 2006, in an attempt to eliminate a £570 million deficit, the NHS scrapped over 17,000 jobs.

The postal workers union CWU has raised the threat of industrial action after Royal Mail announced it was switching 70 crown post offices to WH Smith. Over 1300 people will lose their jobs following this privatisation move. In the Netherlands, the experience of changes in the Dutch postal operator TNT Post showed that 7,000 jobs were chopped through privatisation.

At an EU level, the European Commission is proposing total de-regulation from 1 January, 2009, but without any specific measures to fund the universal postal service that guarantees citizens delivery and collection wherever they live and at a fixed price. Europe's postal workers will be on their way to Berlin on 30 May to protest at moves to take away protection from European postal systems. There will also be a day of action on 6 June.

FRANCE

Postal workers in Paris have won a major victory against management cutbacks. In addition to the dispute over payment for extra work during the election period, French posties are also threatened by the Facteurs d'avenir (Postmen of the future) plan. Staff in one area went on a 100% solid indefinite strike action and management quickly gave into their demands.

In action reminiscent of the strike at Heathrow in 2005, Gate-Gourmet workers in France demonstrated in April against management plans to make them redundant and wind the company up. The 850 workers facing the sack protested outside the company offices before moving to Roissy airport where they protested at the Lufthansa check-in desks - Lufthansa is the former owner of Gate-Gourmet's parent company. They were joined by more than 1,000 workers from other unions who held a march in solidarity with Gate-Gourmet workers and other workers who were sacked for taking solidarity strike action.

The 10,000 job losses at Airbus through



a restructuring plan have sparked off a European-wide struggle. The restructuring plan Power8 would see 4,300 jobs go in France and 3,700 in Germany, 1,600 in the UK and another 400 in Spain, out of a total workforce of 57,000. Workers throughout Europe have launched walkout protests and demonstrations since was unveiled in February... including a walkout by several thousand workers near Airbus' Toulouse headquarters. At the Airbus UK factory in north Wales workers took unofficial strike action.

GERMANY

Verdi has launched action against plans by Deutsche Telekom and leading private equity group Blackstone that would cut 32,000 jobs and outsource more than 50,000 staff on worse conditions than they currently have. Some 12,000 workers at Deutsche Telekom walked off the job. The pay of many long serving employees will be cut by 15 per cent and new workers will be taken on at pay rates 40 per cent below existing levels and

fighting back

lower than European minimum wage levels. All this from a company paying the highest dividend in its history.

IG Metall union is set to stage brief work stoppages for a 6.5 per cent pay rise for as many as 3.4 million workers. The group is offering a 2.5 per cent increase plus a one-off bonus. IG Metall said the offer was inadequate after Europe's largest economy expanded at its fastest pace since 2000 last year - 2.3 per cent. The profits of public companies, such as Daimler-Chrysler and Siemens, surged 30

per cent in 2006 while worker's pay grew no more than 3.2 per cent.

ITALY

Italian trade unions agreed a public sector pay deal with the government, easing the threat of strikes from more than three million workers employed in the sector. CGIL union has said a national one-day strike planned for April 16 would not be cancelled until the government had put the pay rise into law.

This is a snapshot of the workers struggles happening in Europe, but it shows that the labour markets in Europe are changing. Not only are multinationals getting bigger but national labour boundaries are also breaking down to create a European super-state controlled by the bosses. We as workers must also to go beyond our nation states and team up with workers across Europe that are fighting against super-exploitation, worsening



working conditions and precarité, and the selling off of our public services.

We must make the links with workers across the world that are fighting for decent wages, decent conditions and decent lives - it is the likes of the G8, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation that are forcing open every nation's economy for the multinationals and the private equity funds to do as they wish, destroying communities and the environment in the search for profits. We must challenge the right of this minority to condemn the majority of the world to poverty and misery. Join us in protesting at the G8 in Heiligendamm June 2 - 8. Shut down the G8!

• For more on the G8 and how to get there: go to www.Workerspower/shutdowntheG8



Solidarity with the Venezuelan revolution!

By Simon Hardy and Keith Spencer

Workers at the occupied Sanitarios Maracay factory in Venezuela were attacked with tear gas and buckshot last month by police and national guards. The workers were protesting against police attempts to prevent them joining a demonstration in support of occupied factories called by the Revolutionary Front of Workers in Occupied Factories.

The state governor who sent in the troops is Didalco Bolivar, a member of the party Podemos, which is still part of the Hugo Chavez Bolivarian movement!

The leader of the Bolivarian movement, President Hugo Chavez supports Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution and his revolutionary Transitional Programme of 1938.

Workers in Venezuela have occupied factories (more than a 1,000), while the masses are setting up councils of their own in the shanty towns and villages to organise and manage their local areas and services such as schools.

The masses have fought of legal

attempts to overthrow Chavez and coup attempts - backed by the US - and a two-month bosses' strike.

But as the experience of the workers at Sanitarios Maracay shows, the workers and peasants face sabotage from the capitalists on a daily basis.

Therefore Venezuelan revolution must be defended against its enemies within and the imperialists without.

This should include winning trade union support through tours and delegations - the NUJ last month reaffirmed its support for Venezuela revolution and the work of Hands of Venezuela. Also it should include direct action in the UK in support of the revolution or against those linked to the right, and practical help. The 20 workers arrested at Sanitarios Maracay have been released thanks in part to solidarity from around the world.

But another task of solidarity is to help the revolutionary forces go forward against those such as Podemos who are undermining the movement from within.

This should also include pointing to the limits of Chavez's politics. For example he has also made

alliance with president Nestor Kirchner in Argentina, who has imprisoned about 5,000 activists and demobilised the mass resistance movements of 2002. Chávez's socialism is a mixture of different ideas and practices: co-management, workers' management, co-operatives, small-scale businesses and so on. He has also failed to expropriate the bulk of industry into state ownership and workers control or redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, relying for his reforms on oil revenues. He is still the head of a bourgeois state with parts of the army and police opposed to him and the revolution, as the workers at Sanitarios Maracay know too well.

Socialists should support every step that undermines capitalism and takes Venezuela further on the road to socialism, but we must criticise leaders such as Chavez, or refuse to say what is necessary such as fighting for workers control, a militia and a workers' state.

Workers Power has affiliated to Hands Off Venezuela and will work to build the campaign. The inspirational films from HOV about the

country show that the working class is grappling with complex issues as it moves along the road to socialism.

We believe it is the duty of every socialist, trade unionist and youth to rally to the defence of Venezuela against the corrupt oligarchy and their backers in the US.

The League for the Fifth International fights for the creation of a revolutionary party in Venezuela, as part of a new fifth international. A revolutionary party must fight for the independence of the working class, it must counter pose the genuine revolutionary programme of socialism to Bolivarianism - including taking up Chavez support for the Transitional programme.

Only internationalism, solidarity and revolutionary socialism can provide the real solutions to the poverty and misery that capitalism inflicts on us. It is the workers, youth and poor of Venezuela who will make the revolution, not presidents and parliament.

• More about Hands of Venezuela at www.handsoffvenezuela.org/
• More analysis of Venezuela at www.fifthinternational.org

FRENCH ELECTIONS

Organise a third round of anticapitalist resistance!

Right wing hardliner Nicolas Sarkozy is through to the second round of the French presidential elections against Blairite Segolene Royal of the Socialist Party. How should the working class respond, *Marc Lasalle* of the League for the Fifth International in France looks at what's in store for the workers and how they can turn the tide

In a huge turn out, 84% of the French people voted on 22 April in the first round of the presidential elections.

As expected, Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal, candidates of the major parties, obtained big enough number of votes to go on to the second round.

All the major contenders openly espoused a neo-liberal "solution" to France's economic problems. Both Royal and Sarkozy insisted that they intend to break with the past and to move towards a new social model. The buzzword of change and reform came to mean more attacks on the working class, the youth and the immigrants. No wonder the traditional left electorate voted for Royal only because they consider her a lesser evil than Sarkozy.

Nicolas Sarkozy, neo-liberal hardliner who dreams of becoming France's Thatcher, campaigned on the slogan "work more to earn more." He threatened further attacks on the public services and workers rights. He tried to rally more votes by adopting extreme reactionary and racist slogans from Le Pen's Front National. After serving many years as Minister of Interior, continually tub thumping about "law and order"; he is now proposing to create a Ministry of National Identity and Immigration, hoping to pile blame on immigrant workers for the capitalist plagues of unemployment, low salaries, lack of decent housing etc.

Segolene Royal of the Socialist Party, whose political heroes include Tony Blair, was particularly unconvincing, proposing a blend of a few weak social reforms in an overwhelmingly neo-liberal programme. One of her major themes was to "reconcile the French with the private companies"! She also added a strong pinch of nationalism, encouraging her supporters to sing the Marseillaise and to keep a tricolour in their homes, i.e. to espouse the anthem and banner of French Imperialism.

In this climate of consensus on the major political and economical questions, François Bayrou, politically close to Sarkozy, denounced the establishment from the point of view of the middle classes, winning 18%. His voters wanted to forget that he has been part and parcel of the right-wing politics since the 1970s and served several times as a minister. He could play king maker in the second round if he decided to rally to Sarkozy or Royal.

Despite his historically low score of 11%, Le Pen, leading the reactionary Front National, represents a clear danger for the workers. While his campaign was less

visible and vibrant than in the past his racist ideas have gained both an audience and additional credibility through Sarkozy's adhesion to them. The danger is that the bosses and the capitalist state will be able to divide the working class using racist slander, in order to push forward the attacks the bourgeoisie has been waiting for years.

The forces to the left of the Socialist Party, despite their resounding victory in the referendum on the EU constitution of May 2005, despite the waves of class struggle that rocked the country since then, proved unable to build on this base electorally. Indeed most of these parties, the French Communist Party (PCF), Attac – the antiglobalisation campaign, plus the Greens, the two sizable Trotskyist organisations, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) and Luttes Ouvriere (LO) approached the election with low expectations.

Only the campaign of Olivier Besancenot, candidate of the LCR, though based on a radical reformist programme, was combative and related to the recent struggles of workers, youth and anti-racists. Besancenot was compelled to take this bold move, against the LCR's more opportunist approach to the recent protests. For two years, the LCR had tried to put together a "united candidate" with the PCF and the rest of the anti-EU constitution alliance – a futile endeavour.

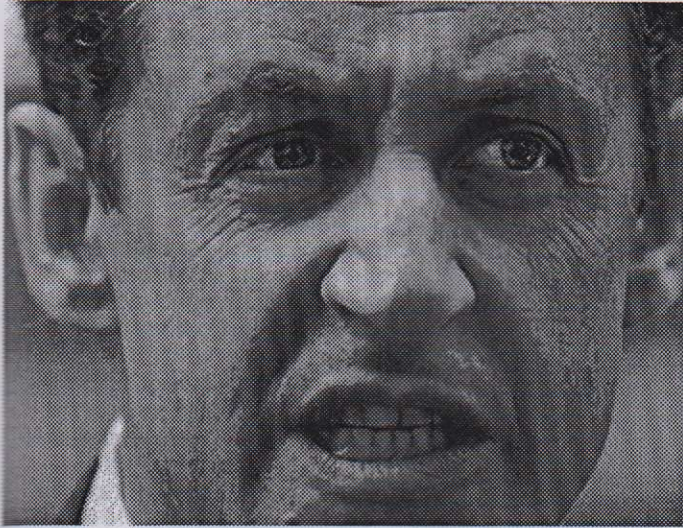
The LCR was even willing to withdraw Besancenot and unite behind a PCF candidate if the latter would promise not to take office in a neoliberal Socialist Party coalition. The PCF refused any such undertaking so the LCR was forced to stand on its own. Clearly this was a blessing in disguise for the LCR. Besancenot's meetings were extremely well attended, attracting thousands of combative youth.

The PCF candidate Marie-Georges Buffet even avoided open reference to the party she was representing, claiming that she was standing for the popular and anti-neoliberal left. The score of the PCF – 1.9 per cent – was pathetic given its large bureaucratic apparatus, its support in the trade unions, its still considerable numbers of mayors and councillors. It is a warning of its approaching death.

The substantial score for Olivier Besancenot – 4.06 per cent and 1.46 million voters, indicates that a large section of the workers and youth active in last years struggles against the Right are looking for a lead and an organisation.

Nicolas Sarkozy, neo-liberal hardliner who dreams of becoming France's Thatcher, campaigned on the slogan "work more to earn more".

This is an edited version of a longer article which is available online at <http://www.fifthinternational.org>



Nicolas Sarkozy – in the running to be France's next president

The decline of the PCF, the Blairism of the SP and the hard battles ahead, opens up the space for a new workers party.

A third round of struggle

However, the most encouraging signal from this campaign did not come from the meetings or the results at the ballot box but from the streets, the working class districts, and the workplaces. In the past few months the class struggle has been intense, despite attempts from the TU bureaucrats to enforce the usual reformist "social truce" before elections.

The class struggle erupted in Gare du Nord, in the centre of Paris, where thousands of young people reacted against a brutal and racist arrest by the police and confronted the riot forces in a new urban riot. When police approached a primary school in Paris to arrest the grandfather of a child there, parents and teachers spontaneously reacted to stop what could have ended in another deportation. A few days later, 2,000 teachers went on strike in Paris in solidarity with their colleagues and to protest against the police brutal attacks.

All over the country, workers went on strike to defend their jobs and to demand wage increase. EADS (Airbus) workers, threatened throughout Europe by the bosses' Power-8 plan to close several plants went out on strike. The Citroen Aulnay workers went on a marvellous strike lasting six weeks and demanding 300 euros more a month in wages. While they have not won, their strike, with the creation of active strike pickets, a strike committee, a strike newspaper, repeated action towards other workers, showed the level of combativity of the working class. All this con-

tributed to put class struggle and social demands at the centre of the campaign. The fact that these strikes couldn't unify in a single campaign is due to the deliberate passivity of the TU bureaucrats and the political inadequacy of the centrists.

This combativity represents an excellent basis to organize the resistance against the attacks that will follow the second round. Both Sarkozy and Royal have clearly indicated that they will attack the working class, the public sector workers, workers rights. For instance, one of the measures proposed by Royal is a new type of contract for young workers. One year after the mighty struggle against CPE, this sounds like a provocation and shows, together with the rest of the Royal program, that she will obediently follow the bosses wishes.

Royal no "lesser evil"

We should not share the illusions that Royal will be a lesser evil than Sarkozy. Certainly the latter's outspokenness has rung the alarm bells for workers, youth and the inhabitants of the banlieues. One banlieue youth was reported in Libération as saying, "If it's Sarko on the 6 May it will be war." The Royal campaign is, on the contrary, geared to obtaining the maximum consensus from workers to best impose on them her neo-liberal program. Her attacks on the public services are more disguised but in delivering them she will have the support of the trade union bureaucracy, or at the least no effective opposition from them.

All the left candidates are now calling for a vote for Royal. They are wrongly holding out hopes that she will turn left or that friendly criticism will make her do so. Most

workers will vote for her at the ballot box in order to stop Sarkozy, though few have illusions that an SP government will substantially improve their conditions. Since the reactionary constitution of the Fifth Republic prevents the vanguard from maintaining a candidate in the second round, revolutionaries should call for a critical vote for her.

The SP remains, despite its rightwards neoliberal evolution, what Lenin called a bourgeois workers party: with a bourgeois programme but with roots in the organised workers movement. Workers should put clear demands to her and the Socialist Party during the campaigning for the second round, focusing on all the key issues: defence of public services, the 35 hour week, citizenship rights for immigrants, unemployment, housing the immediate abolition of the CPE and all cheap labour schemes. That way her real intentions may be more clearly exposed and the need to fight her neoliberalism more quickly recognised.

Revolutionaries should say to the overwhelming majority of workers: we have no political confidence in Royal whatsoever but we will vote together with you in the second round to put her to the test of office, precisely to expose her as no better than Sarkozy, to convince you that a new, revolutionary party is needed in France as elsewhere. At the same time we warn the workers of the impending attacks – whether

One of Segolene's major themes was to "reconcile the French with the private companies"

from Sarkozy or Royal – and help prepare the resistance against it.

The best way to do this is to argue for all workers organisations to adopt an action programme, with simple and urgent demands linked to the most effective ways to organise, including they way to prevent the union bureaucrats' sabotage. In short the self-organisation and democratic control by coordination's of workers and young people over the own movement of resistance is a vital part of this program.

The traditional reformist parties are increasingly becoming discredited in the eyes of the workers. As the numerous strike waves by public sector workers, as the revolt in

the banlieues and the anti-CPE movement showed, there is a great willingness to fight back. Workers want to defend the health service and the other social services, public education and transport as well as the 35 hour week. But in addition they want to rid France of the scourge of double figure unemployment which hits the young and immigrants the hardest.

At the same time the outcome of most of the struggles of the past few years showed there is no decisive leadership either from the parties or the trade unions. All too often the leaders betray and demobilise the struggle at the critical moment, usually because they believe the question of power can only be decided at the ballot box, not on the streets or in the workplaces.

There is a terrific crisis of political leadership that can only be resolved by creating a new, revolutionary party. None of the larger far left groups are responding to this challenge. They either mark time as a sect on the sidelines of the class struggle or, like the LCR, they try to stitch together opportunist blocks on a reformist platform. Such was the ill-fated "unitary candidacy" of last year.

Yet there is an alternative to these bankrupt methods. It is to rally forces in the trade unions, the youth and immigrant organisations, to the project of a new mass working class party – one which will give leadership in the factories and on the streets first and foremost. The LCR with 1.49 million votes and its PCF and far left rivals behind, are well placed to launch such a call. It should involve meetings in every town and city to discuss what sort of party we need. It could act straightaway as a rallying point for resistance to Sarkozy or Royal. They should do so now! The response could be massive from the militants who took part in the struggles of the last years, many of whom will have voted for Olivier Besancenot.

We believe that this campaign must not make the same mistakes as were made in the campaign for a unitary candidate last year, negotiating with the leaders of the parties and seeking out the lowest common denominator to unite the left. We believe that revolutionaries should fight for a new party to be founded on a revolutionary programme and for the new party to be a section of a new international party of socialist revolution. We believe that this must be a Fifth International to fight capitalist globalisation and imperialist war.

WORKERS' MOVEMENT

Crisis of leadership

The 21st century has seen mass struggles across all continents against capitalist globalisation and imperialist war. But the working class has not yet built a new political organisation to take the power itself. **Dave Stockton** explains why we need to forge a new, Fifth International, and how we can do it

For more on the first four internationals go to www.fifthinternational.org and www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?trotskystinternational

The European anti-neoliberal left, which formed at the European Social Forum in November 2002, has, over the past year, entered into a real crisis. The reasons for this lie in the political trajectory of its major component – the parties which compose the European Left Party (ELP), the former or reformed Communist Parties.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC) in Italy was at the centre of the Florence ESF (2002), the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) at the Paris Social Forum (2003), Synaspismos at the Athens Social Forum (2006) and the Party of Democratic Socialism-Left Party (PDS-LP) will be central to the anti-G8 protests at Rostock in Germany in June.

Italy

The degree to which the wheel of the ELP's sections has come full circle can be seen in the case of Rifondazione. At Florence in 2002, its leader, Fausto Bertinotti, drew thunderous applause when he criticised himself for having supported the Olive Tree

Coalition government of Romano Prodi in 1996-98. Prodi went on to design the Lisbon agenda, the series of neoliberal reforms adopted by the European Union in 2000.

"Never again!" cried Bertinotti. RC representatives attended all the international meetings of the ESF, advocating an anti-neoliberal alternative to Lisbon.

So when Rifondazione entered another neoliberal Romano Prodi government a year ago, the Italian No Global and antiwar movements went into decline. Prodi has survived two major crises over the occupation of Afghanistan and the expansion of the huge American airbase at Vicenza. He survived both, thanks to Rifondazione support in votes of confidence.

Indeed, he extracted a promise from RC's parliamentarians not to vote against the government again. Fearful of the return of the corrupt Silvio Berlusconi even Rifondazione's left wing – including Franco Turigliatto, a member of the Fourth International – did not dare to reject his blackmail.

Rifondazione and the Democrats of the Left have ceased mobilising on the streets, supported sending Italian troops to Lebanon and tolerated their supposed humanitarian role in Afghanistan. Only 30,000 answered the call of the ESF to demonstrate against the war in March.

France, Germany and Britain

In France in the second half of 2006, the powerful No of the Left bloc, which mobilised to reject the neoliberal European Constitution in the referendum in May 2005, shattered over the issue of the 2007 presidential elections. The uprising of the oppressed youth in the suburbs – banlieues – that November and the mass revolt against anti-youth employment laws – the CPE – the following spring weakened the government.

Yet, when it came to the elections, the attempt to mount a "unity" candidate shattered. The PCF refused to renounce participation in a neoliberal Socialist Party government. The pathetic 1.5 per cent vote for its

Forward to the Fifth International

Among the topics, which regularly crop up in the anticapitalist movement, is the formation of a new, Fifth International.

Belgian writer François Houtart posed it ironically at the World Social Forum in 2003 as "Fifth International or activists Woodstock". The reformist leadership of the WSF uses the idea to silence talk of making the Social Forum a centre for initiating struggle against neoliberalism and war.

Four years ago Bernard Cassen, then honorary president of Attac, declared himself firmly opposed to the "nagging temptation of the Fifth International".

The "left" in the WSF and ESF has been forced by these attacks to take up the issue, albeit to deny the charge. Michael Löwy noted that a

French newspaper had spoken recently of "the danger of a Fifth International" but insisted he preferred a new International "without name or number". Odd, you might think, for a member of the Fourth International.

In the anthology, *The Politics of Empire*, South African author Patrick Bond has a section of his essay called "Next steps: towards a 'fifth international'". He argues: "The time may well arise for a formalisation of the movement's character in explicitly political terms, such as within the traditions of international socialism – for which the four internationals provide a host of lessons".

More strikingly still, in August 2006, Samir Amin, a celebrated anti-imperialist author since the 1950s, wrote an article entitled

Towards a Fifth International? In it he posed the question, "Should we conclude that a new International is needed to assure the convergence of the struggles of the people against capital?" and answers thus:

"I do not hesitate to give a positive answer to this question, on the condition that the envisioned new International is conceived in the same way as the First, but not as the Second, the Third, or the Fourth Internationals. It should be a socialist/communist International open to all who want to act together to create convergence in diversity."

We believe the time has come to debate this vital question. The time for an "activists' Woodstock", celebrating diversity rather than achieving unity, is over. The deadly serious struggles since the murder of

Carlo Giuliani in Florence in 2001 pose time and again the need to unite in action across a range of issues: war, privatisation, debt and poverty, climate change, racism, etc.

The WSF slogan "In our diversity is our strength" is at best only a half-truth.

Of course we must bring together and learn from all the ongoing struggles. But it is equally true that in the divisions between lies our weakness.

The dead grasp the living

Each of the four Internationals represented a great gain for the anticapitalism. In their heyday they represented a deadly threat to the exploiters. Capitalists used every possible means to divert them from their goals and break them up.

By means of direct pressure from

in the European left

candidate, Marie-Georges Buffet, as fair punishment.

In Germany too, the movement to create a new working class party was shipwrecked by the WASG (Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative). Rather than representing the militant resistance to Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV (Germany's implementation of the Lisbon agenda), they fused with the PDS-LP, already in coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and carrying out cuts and privatisations. The Socialist Workers Party's sister organisation, Linksrück, support this line.

As in France and Italy, the lure of office, even at the cost of signing up to neoliberal reforms, exposes these parties' "anti-neoliberalism" as a fraud.

The European Anticapitalist Left – a supposed far left alternative to the ELP – has also failed to rise to the challenges of leadership. Its parties too have been seduced into seeing the question primarily electoral terms (see page 10, for example). In Britain both Respect and the

WHAT IS NEOLIBERALISM?

Neoliberalism is a set of policies that promote the free market. It advocates privatisation and the marketing of every aspect of life (education, healthcare, etc.). It attacks welfare services and benefits, trade union rights, the regulation of wages and conditions. It seeks to control the economies of poorer nations. In short, it does everything to maximise profit.

It is the policy of Labour and "socialist" governments, the European Union, the G8, International Monetary Fund/World Bank and World Trade Organisation. The anti-capitalist movement grew in opposition to neoliberalism.

leadership of the railworkers' union, RMT, have in different ways aborted the moves to create a new working class party.

The former have created a cross-class bloc with Islamists and Mus-

lim businessmen in the chase for parliamentary and council seats. The latter, despite hosting a promising conference to discuss political representation to the left of Labour, has relied on left Labour, Welsh Nationalist and Scottish Socialist representatives. Add to this the self-destruction of the Scottish Socialist Party and it is clear that in Britain the wishes of vanguard fighters to build an alternative to Labour have been badly let down by these "leaders".

Consistent anti-capitalism

All in all, this represents a criminal frittering away of the enormous 2003-06 upsurge in anti-neoliberal and anti-war struggles. The ELP is totally unfit to lead the anticapitalist movement; the European Anticapitalist Left offers no alternative to it.

Yet there are repeated signs that mass resistance to imperialist war and neoliberalism has not disappeared. Time and again it is regenerated by the bosses' attacks, by the threat of new wars, by EU and government legislation.

The 1.5 million votes for Olivier

Besancenot of the LCR shows that militants preferred him to the PCF, Lutte Ouvrière or Attac, which were marginal to these fights. In Spain, this March, 400,000 demonstrated against war.

In Greece there have been large-scale, sustained and militant student demonstrations against the educational "reform". In Austria, in January youth and trade unionists protested against the social democrats' sell-out of its own election programme in order to enter a coalition with the right.

The regular setbacks in Europe, their failure to result in new organisations are a direct result of the crisis of leadership, in particular the left reformist and post Stalinist parties centred on the European Left Party.

The "far left" forces regularly demonstrate their unwillingness and inability to present a principled opposition or practical alternative to them. The urgent task of revolutionaries is to combat reformism and centrism and fight for political and organisational forms for consistent anticapitalism: revolutionary communism.

without and from bourgeois agencies within, these Internationals collapsed as an effective instruments of social revolution. What remains of them today represents their period of degeneration and betrayal.

Anarchists – with their prejudices against mass organisation, phobias about politics, leadership, decision-making – represent the degeneration of the First International. Attac and the Workers Party in Brazil continue the class collaboration of the Second International after 1914, just as Rifondazione Comunista and the Parti Communiste Française do the Stalinised Third International.

Today, the Fourth International and its fragments – from the LCR to the SWP – continue the unprincipled policy adopted in 1951 of systematically adapting to reformism, nationalism and populism, hoping that they will spontaneously evolve towards revolution.

These forces of the dead grip the living at crucial moments.

We need a new leadership, a new instrument of revolution, a new world party.

Towards the Fifth International

So how can the forces struggling against corporate globalisation and the imperialism create such a new leadership? How can they decide on and coordinate effective action on the worldwide battle front? Certainly gatherings, like that due to take place in Rostock in early June, present opportunities to do this. The Assemblies of the Social Movements at the WSF and ESF present a forum in which to begin such a process if we can use it. We must place before such bodies clear calls to action, proposals to create democratic decision making bodies to decide our programmatic goals.

The left wing groups in the social forums have demanded a radical change from the "open space" approach. Writers,

Arundhati Roy and Samir Amin, activists, like Trevor Ngwane, have stigmatised the paralysis and called for a new organisation, even a new International. These organisations and individuals need to progress beyond appeals for change. Appeals like those launched in Porto Alegre in 2005 and Bamako in 2006, for all their mildness, were rudely rejected by the WSF "leaders".

These reformist bureaucrats and privileged executives of NGOs hold the WSF franchise and mobilise funds from the likes of the Ford Foundation to mount these giant events. These servants of big capital on will never willingly relax their grip. Nor will their anarchist supporters stop trying to block any political decision making, content with playing the role of jesters at the court of capital. Their grip on the world anti-capitalist movement must be broken.

Therefore the genuinely anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist left needs to gather its forces and plan how to do this. We should start this process in Rostock and take it into the ESF. However, we must look beyond Europe. The forces calling for such a change today are varied. But those, who base themselves on the working class, who are really active in its struggles, who see the need for a socialism based on destroying capitalism and replacing it with a democratically planned economy, have a lot to discuss.

We can take real steps together to win the mass forces to the project of a new, fighting International. In the process they can achieve greater programmatic clarity, hammering out a strategy for world working class power, the communism of the 21st century. Along this road a Fifth International must be created to make this a reality.

IRAQ

US divide and rule tactics can unite Iraqis

When the US troops started building an “Apartheid wall” through Baghdad, both Sunni and Shia protested. *Andy Yorke* looks at attempts to unite Iraqi resistance to imperialism

American soldiers have been venturing out, under cover of night and after curfew, to build a five kilometre long, four metre high wall around Adhamiya, a Sunni enclave in east Baghdad. Once built, residents will need biometric ID cards to get in or out; no one else will be allowed in.

Thousands of Sunnis protested in the streets, and radical Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr called for unity to “defend Adhamiya and other districts where [the Americans] want to segregate us”. The Iraqi press likened it to the Israeli wall in Palestine, a symbol of Muslim oppression. The wall is also a symbol of US failure. George Bush’s “surge” of 21,500 extra troops, which began on 10 January, has neither gained Iraqi support nor pacified the country.

A recent BBC/USA Today poll showed that seven out of 10 Shias and almost all Sunnis say the US military presence makes security worse. More than half the population considered attacks on coalition forces “acceptable”.

Despite the initial flood of US and Iraqi government forces into Baghdad, casualties have started to rise again. April has been one of the costliest months for US and UK casualties since the war began.

Iraqi civilians, of course, bore the brunt of the violence: 312 killed and 305 wounded on one day, 18 April, including over 148 massacred by a single bomb in a Shia district of Baghdad, leading to even more outrage and disenchantment with the US occupation.

Mahdi army

A million people demonstrated in Najaf on 9 April against the occupation. While peaceful and overseen by Iraqi police and troops, the crowds chanted “Death to America” and burned US flags. Sunni and Shia clerics headed the march together, and Iraqi flags were prominent.

The protest was organised by



Demonstrations in Baghdad against the wall, below Sunnis march in Adhamiya



Moqtada al-Sadr and his militia, the Mahdi army. The Sadrists have accused Maliki of “ignoring the will of the people” and have demanded he produce a timetable for US withdrawal. When Maliki refused to do so, Sadr took a major step away from the government by withdrawing his six ministers on 16 April.

But Sadr is an inconsistent anti-imperialist. After a showdown with the US in Najaf and Sadr City in 2004, he called a halt to offensives against the occupation and eventually his representatives entered Maliki’s government. This allowed the occupation forces to concentrate on taking on the Sunni insurgency. He has used his ministers and militia to extend his base and impose Sharia law in the areas he controls. While Sadr has condemned sectarian cleansing, his militia has been accused of forcing Sunnis out of “Shia areas”.

Crisis of leadership

If the US wants to try and destroy the Mahdi army, it will have to crush

the Sunni resistance first. Sadr is trying to counter the US by calling for a united front with Sunnis.

Indeed Sunnis joined the mil-

lion-strong march in Najaf and there was a spontaneous call for united opposition to the Baghdad wall.

This shows that a new mass anti-occupation movement can be built. But if this unity is to endure and find a way to combine military and mass action to end the occupation, then Iraqis will have to forge a new leadership. Sadr cannot be trusted to remain hostile to imperialism. He has cut and run before. More to the point, neither Sunni nor Shia Islamists, nor Ba’athists can provide the political basis for such unity.

The rival islamisms demand privileges for their sects in a confessional state. Arab and Kurdish nationalists demand privileges for their nationality.

Neither can unite the vast majority of the working people of Iraq, regardless of sect or nationality. That is why Iraqi workers and the poor must build their own party and hammer out a programme of permanent revolution if they are to oust the Americans and the British once and for all.

Democrats and Generals

George W Bush is under pressure from all sides. The US Senate voted on 26 April for a timetable for withdrawing troops, starting in October. The House of Representatives wants most troops out by spring 2008. As president, Bush can veto their positions for a while but the opposition is serious.

A “shadow pentagon” of former generals, alongside serving top brass, is pressuring Bush to seek an exit strategy, while urging the Democrats to not withdraw too many troops. John Sheehan, a retired Marine Corps general, has said, “there is no agreed-upon strategic view of the Iraq problem or the region”. He wants to move to a less visible, though still significantly sized US presence.

Another retired general, Anthony Zinni, has entered the debate. He thinks US interests in the region are too great to allow an unrestrained civil war, and calls on the Democrats to use diplomacy (i.e. threats and bribes to neighbouring countries) to create a new security regime for the region that would defend US power and profits.

The Democrats, being a capitalist party, are more than happy to go along with this. The US ruling class has no intention of withdrawing all its troops from Iraq, let alone allowing self-determination. The narrow neo-conservative clique around Bush may be isolated. But the bourgeois opposition wants to retain US bases, ready for the next imperialist strike.

NIGERIA

Reject election farce

What does the Nigerian opposition plan to fight the stolen election? Keith Spencer reports

“We need a revolution like in Ukraine or the Philippines” was the call made by the opposition in the aftermath of the corrupt presidential elections last month.

The so-called 70 per cent vote for presidential candidate Umaru Musa Yar'Adua exposed Nigerian politics to be rotten.

Yar'Adua won by a landslide, gaining 24.6m votes, against 6.6m for his closest challenger, Muhammadu Buhari and 2.6m for vice-president turned opposition candidate Atiku Abubakar.

But the vast majority of people in Nigeria know the election was stolen. There are stories of shortages of ballot papers or papers already filled out, people being paid to vote for Yar'Adua, failure to register the 98 million eligible voters (only 60 million were registered by the election council) polling stations in opposition areas only opening for a few hours or running out of ballot papers, and ballot stuffing.

In Akwa state, the winning PDP candidate Andy Uba won 1.9m votes despite the total electorate being only 1.8 million. The supposed “Independent National Election Committee” later claimed he had won by only 1.09 million votes.

Yar'Adua and his Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which has been in power for eight years, stole the elections using bribery, police and army intimidation and every trick of state at their disposal. The previous week's state elections ended with 50 demonstrators being killed.

The opposition, backed by the Catholic church and international observers, is now calling for either a legal challenge or a interim government to oversee new elections.

But for the workers and peasants this is a danger!

The 70 per cent of Nigerians living on less than a dollar a day do not need to exchange one set of capitalist robbers for another - either Buhari or ex-vice president Abubakar. Buhari is an ex-general who has enriched himself and is head of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). Abubakar



Nigerians queue up - but corruption won the vote

is the former vice president under Obasanjo and had been a member of the PDP. Accusations of corruption and a near disqualification in the presidential elections forced him over to the Action Congress party at the end of last year.

The Nigerian elite will come to an agreement because they are more worried about the masses than each other. And despite both these capitalist parties having given the go ahead to mass protests on 1 May they fear that it may get out of hand. Good, it should get out of hand.

Workers and peasants

The Nigerian Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress have called for joint protests on 1 May. These protests need to link up with other civil society organisations and relaunch the labour and civil society organisations (Lascos) that helped organise the seven general strikes this decade. A mass general strike of workers, peasants and their supporters on the 1 May and continuing will pose question of political power.

Rather than legal challenges or an interim government workers must demand a sovereign constituent assembly as the way forward for Nigeria. The CA must debate a new constitution to end the cycle of coups and corrupt democratic governments, and nationalise the oil multinationals, and the holdings of the ruling elite and use the wealth for mass of

the population.

The unions must also launch a campaign for an independent workers party. The campaign can be built among workers, Lascos, and the militant youth organisations in the Delta who face multinational and government violence. There have already been stalled attempts by the Nigeria Labour Congress: the stolen elections show that the working class needs its own alternative.

Such a party must involve the widest possible layers of workers, youth and poor in a discussion of strategy, in which revolutionaries must advance a programme that can link the

demands around the CA and transference of wealth to those of a workers' state, won through revolution.

We believe the party should fight for:

- A living wage, jobs for all, free education and health care
- Give the land to the peasants. Expropriate the big landowners without compensation
- For democratic rights for national minorities and ethnic groups - for a constituent assembly, a new constitution and the right of minorities to secede if they choose
- Against communal violence, separation of church and state.
- Against corruption - open the books to workers investigation
- For nationalisation of the oil industry and big companies and workers control without compensation
- For a workers' militia to defend the masses against the army, police and “private security” of the oil firms and big companies
- Repudiate Nigeria's foreign debt
- For a democratic plan to organise the economy for need not greed.

Imperialism's president

Umaru Musa Yar'Adua is a little known political figure. His brother, General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was President Obasanjo's deputy when he was Nigeria's military ruler between 1976 and 1979.

Obasanjo failed to win his fight to run for election for the third time (Nigerian presidents have a two-term limit), but Yar'Adua was chosen to be the former president's yes-man after Obasanjo fell out with Abubakar.

Obasanjo eight years in office is the longest period of democratic rule in post-colonial Nigeria. He has close links with Western governments and has implemented strict

fiscal discipline and privatisation of much of Nigeria's economic life. The effect on the economy has been disastrous with rising unemployment, spiralling food prices, higher rents and the near collapse of the energy sector.

The economic policies of the People's Democratic Party may have made them a darling of the West, but the cost has been the embedding of corruption into day to day life. And the policies of the other major parties are no different.

The key thing for the West is that there is a president in Nigeria, which is the eighth biggest oil exporter in the world, that rules for the West and keeps the oil flowing.

RUSSIA

Putin clamps down

This year has seen increasing repression in Russia, with demonstrators being attacked and laws coming into force banning the government's opponents. Russia is flexing its muscles over US plans to site missiles in Poland. *Natalie Sedley* analyses Putin's bonapartist regime

Russia's president Putin has warned the United States over posting a new missile system in Europe.

Harking back to the tactics of the cold war Vladimir Putin said: "The threat of causing mutual damage and even destruction increases many times with this system."

The system will base 10 missile interceptors in Poland, with a radar base in the Czech Republic.

Putin has suggested Russia will suspend its co-operation with the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty if the system goes ahead.

Despite Bush's loyal ally Tony Blair saying in Poland that he is "absolutely sure myself that it is not in any shape or form aimed at Russia or as a consequence of issues to do with America or Europe's relations with Russia", Putin correctly pointed out that the so-called missile defence system is part of a US nuclear weapons arsenal directed at Russia.

Putin was addressing the National Assembly where he outlined his plans for Russian development for the next five years. His foreign policy comments included ultimatums over the missile system, threats to the West to stop interfering in Russian affairs, and warnings to Nato.

They come at a time when Putin has used Russia's military and economic muscle to intimidate former USSR states such as Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and latterly Estonia, while continuing his war in Chechnya.

The Putin regime is re-asserting Russian imperialism in Europe, challenging the dominance of the US and Nato over countries such as Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic.

Hand-in-hand with this goes a tight and brutal clampdown on the internal opposition.

Protests by the anti-Putin coalition Other Russia met harsh state



Gary Kasparov, leader of Other Russia coalition is arrested by the police

repression last month.

On 14 April, around 3,000 demonstrators attended the "March of the Discontented" which was held in Moscow. It was followed by a similar-sized protest the next day in St Petersburg. The protesters were united in opposition to Putin's government but the opposition varied significantly. While liberal participants limited their calls to purely democratic demands, workers at the march were angry about rising prices for housing, transport and communication, brought about by a neo-liberal economic programme. Despite their relatively small size, the protests were violently attacked by some 9,000 riot police and hundreds of people were detained.

Liberal opposition

Other Russia was set up during the G8 summit with the aim of putting a candidate to the 2008 Presidential election. This is also the main purpose of one of its main component groups, the former chess grandmaster Gary Kasparov's United Civil Front. This right wing movement has the stated aim "to dismantle the currently existing system... and preserve the Russians' right to elect a responsible government, both in presidential and parliamentary elections". In the protests of 14 April Kasparov was held for 10 hours and fined on suspicion of violating Russia's new

"anti-extremism laws".

The repression was similar to last summer's when protests against the G8 in Russia were subject to a crackdown on dissent by security services with arrests, the theft of travel documents and intimidation. Similarly, before the protest in March, the St Petersburg governor appeared on television warning people not to join "the extremists". As one young activist pointed out, "I live in a country where the city governor calls civil protest an act of extremism. This is a scary sign."

Other Russia also includes the People's Patriotic Union led by Mikhail Kasyanov and the Republican Party – recently banned under the new anti-extremism laws and the fascist National Bolshevik party. This is one of the most peculiar and disgusting legacies of 20th century Stalinism, an organisation that voices support for Hitler and Stalin, and is ferociously racist and anti-Semitic. Another of the supposedly "leftist" forces in the coalition, the Communist Workers' Party, led by Viktor Tyulkin, is also a reactionary right wing party based on Great Russian chauvinism and anti-semitism.

But some genuine leftists have supported the coalition, like the Stalinist Red Youth Vanguard and social movement activist and academic Boris Kagarlitsky, both of whom took part in last year's anti-G8 protests.

The weaknesses of a movement assembling such varied forces are all too obvious. Kagarlitsky has argued, "Even though they have different goals and motivation, all discrepancies are insignificant in comparison with the common goal - to resist the regime" (ZNET, 19 March 2007). He also said it was positive that, despite their hesitation, the new independent trade unions agreed to participate in the protests "under their own banner and with their own slogans".

Given the fiercely pro-rich leadership of the coalition it is no surprise that it fails to address the poverty and economic chaos that capitalism has created. 20 per cent of Russians are currently living below the official poverty line with the average pension only £50 per month. Workers' wages cannot keep up with massive inflation in the cost of basic goods, such as food and utilities. In some sectors, such as postal work, they have even decreased. Income tax is deeply regressive with the same rate charged across all levels of income, so that billionaire tycoons pay the same proportion as street cleaners.

However, workers' have fought back against poor conditions with a wave of strikes over the past few months, particularly in St Petersburg and central Russia, in the car, rubber and food manufacturing industries and in the postal service.

There have also been unionisation drives and union recognition campaigns at several workplaces, such as the Heineken factory. These have been led by the new independent unions, which have broken with the state controlled unions inherited from the Soviet era. But it is an uphill struggle, as trade unionists are often physically threatened, intimidated by managers, transferred to lower paying jobs and threatened with firing.

on dissent

There has been a sharp increase in racist, xenophobic and anti-semitic attacks. On 16 April, Khairullo Sadykov, a street cleaner from Tajikistan, was stabbed 35 times by skinheads and died immediately. This kind of violence against migrants, particularly from former USSR countries, is a common occurrence. In fact the situation is so severe that on 20 April – Hitler's birthday – foreign students at the Medical School in Moscow were told to stay inside their dormitories for fear of attacks.

Given the composition of Other Russia it is no surprise that the independent trade unionists would reluctantly join its protests. The coalition purports to want a return to the relatively liberal system of the Yeltsin era – but this was also an era of terrible corruption, patronage and disgusting economic inequality and injustice. No gangster capitalists – whether of the Yeltsin or Putin era – offer any political alter-

Other Russia is a popular front, seeking to build support among the masses for the so-called democratic bourgeoisie.

It is only the working class combining the fight for workplace rights, economic and social justice, and for democracy, that can show any way forward.

Workers must break with the multi-millionaires and fascists in Other Russia, and build a mass campaign in defence of democratic rights, including the right to demonstrate, an end to control over the media by either the Kremlin or super-rich oligarchs. This should include a call for free and fair elections, monitored by the workers' movement. It should link these democratic demands with ones for measures to meet the urgent social and economic needs of workers, pensioners, the victims of racism and young people.

It should demand the withdrawal of all Russian forces from Chech-

No gangster capitalists – whether of the Yeltsin or Putin era – offer any political alternative to Russian working class. For the working class movement to strike an alliance with multi-millionaires is to embrace our most bitter enemies

native to the Russian working class. For the working class movement to strike an alliance with multi-millionaires is to strike an alliance with its most bitter enemies. The liberal anti-Putin oligarchy will never accept the necessary measures to tackle inequality, such as steeply progressive taxation on income and business transactions, and nationalisation of industry under workers' control.

Where next for the left?

In his article on the current protests, Kagarlitsky recognises all the intrinsic dangers in such an alliance but argues that there must be some unity against the regime. But unity on what basis? Unity around what goals? The last thing the Russian workers need is to be rallied around the demands of the liberal, anti-Putin bosses election campaign.

nya, so that its inhabitants can decide for themselves without coercion whether they want complete independence or self-government within a federation.

The workers must also organise self-defence against the state and fascist attacks. Faced with Putin's ever more dictatorial bonapartist regime the working class should demand a sovereign Constituent Assembly with full powers to sweep away the presidency, the provincial governors, the secret police, and expropriate the corrupt crony capitalists opening the way to a democratic planned economy.

To fight for such a programme of action the new unions should support the creation of a new working class party and revolutionaries should try to win it to an anti-capitalist, revolutionary communist programme.

Putin's Bonapartism

The Other Russia protesters were opposing the new authoritarianism in Putin's Russia. When Putin came to power in 1999 he sought to re-establish the power of the state and put an end to the cowboy capitalism that had marked much of the Yeltsin era. The big businessmen close to the west with no loyalty to Putin, such as Boris Berezovsky, found themselves under investigation and later exiled abroad. Putin has established an extensive network of patronage in the Russian oligarchy. For example, the billionaire Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich is one of his closest political allies.

Putin's "reforms" of the state have included the abolition of elections for the powerful regional governorships, which are now centrally appointed by the Kremlin. He has re-established complete state control of the country's television networks, which now report a 100% pro-Kremlin line. Add to this accusations of creating a "stage managed election process", the passing of new legislation to ban "extremist" parties, i.e. those that oppose the Kremlin, and the beating and jailing of opposition activists by the state – and the true scale of the new authoritarianism in Russia becomes clear.

In economic terms Putin's policies have sought to re-establish a strong state hold on the country's vast oil and gas reserves, expanding the control of the state energy giant Gazprom, and seizing the assets of anti-Putin sectors of the Russian super rich. In his most high profile so-called anti-corruption drive the billionaire boss of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, has had his assets seized by the state and been thrown into jail for nine years. Far from using the energy wealth to lift the some 120 million Russian's out of poverty, Putin has accumulated vast sums in the Kremlin's treasury to stabilise the capitalist economy.

This year has seen what many allege to be the state-sponsored murders of Anna Politkovskaya and Alexander Litvinenko, two of the Kremlin's most fervent opponents. Putin is anxious to ensure that when he steps down next year (as required by the Russian constitution) he will be followed by his own chosen successor. Those being touted are close to the FSB, the Federal Security Service, and direct successor of the Soviet era KGB in which Putin made his career. Under Putin its power has grown. In addition his near total control of the media means that all three major television channels will enthusiastically support his successor.

All this shows that Putin is at the head of a Bonapartist regime. The clash between the different capitalists and the threat of the workers movement has allowed the state a degree of autonomy to act. Putin has therefore moved against the cowboy capitalists of the Yeltsin era, while keeping others on board. The FSB and army have become increasingly powerful and now occupy a greater proportion of key government jobs since the downfall of Stalinism. We therefore have a right-wing Bonapartist regime that is trying to marginalise any opposition while asserting itself as an imperialist country.



SOUTH ASIA

South Asia and the fight

Simon Hardy looks at the major issues facing the workers and peasants of South Asia

The South Asian region is a crucial area in the period of globalisation, with countries like Bangladesh among the first to introduce Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and other neo-liberal concessions to foreign capitalists, encouraging sweatshop work conditions, anti-union laws, abuse and poverty in return for investment.

Over 1.5 bn people live in south Asia, including more than half of the world's poor. Across the region three factors are dramatically shaping its future: the militarisation of whole societies; increasing religious and communal violence; and the economic impact of globalisation and the struggles it has unleashed.

South Asia is increasingly a second front in the imperialists' "war on terror". Pakistan's military dictatorship, brought to power in a coup in 1999 and supported by the US, has given its support for Bush's war in Afghanistan, using it to justify repression at home.

The Sri Lankan government has renewed its offensive against Tamil separatists, killing thousands and creating tens of thousands of refugees. Much as in Palestine, the so called peace process has broken down, because it failed to deal with the fundamental issue of self determination for the Tamils.

A notable feature is the increasing contrast between town and village. The incredible poverty in rural areas has forced peo-

ple into the big cities to find work, concentrating unemployment there. In the countryside relics of feudalism like the Indian caste systems still exist, with groups like the Dalits ("untouchables") stigmatised.

India – the regional power

Massive population growth in India has run alongside a striking GDP growth of around 8% a year, causing many to think India will play a similar role to China in the near future. Billions of dollars in foreign investment have been pumped into India, which exports massively to the rest of the world. The political agenda of Prime Minister Singh is to open up India's markets to the West, in return for being armed with the latest military equipment. The country is a major market for western arms dealers, spending \$19 billion a year on its military.

Inflation in India, caused by rapid economic growth, and Sri Lanka, by massive military spending, has also caused discontent.

Inflation reached over 17% at the end of 2006 in Sri Lanka, while in India the cost of basic foodstuffs like lentils, a staple part of the diet in much of the country, has rocketed. This adversely affects the rural poor, who spend around 90% of their income on food.

Growing discontent with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), an extreme right Hindu

chauvinist party, led to the election in 2004 of a coalition led by the openly capitalist Indian Congress party, and including the two main working class parties, the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI) and the CPI-Marxist (CPI(M)).

However this "Left Front" coalition has pursued an aggressive neo-liberal agenda of rampant privatisation and attacks on the working class. The growth of the economy has not brought much improvement in living standards for the majority of the working class and rural masses.

Around 400 million of the one billion inhabitants of India live below the poverty line, and three quarters of these live in rural areas. This has a huge impact on education, with more than a third of Indians illiterate, many of them leaving school young to work to support their families. Globalisation has used India as a cheap resource for service sector industries, like call centres and IT support, but failed to lift millions out of economic and social deprivation.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, with endemic political and economic corruption. Written off as a "basket case" by Henry Kissinger when it declared independence from Pakistan in 1971, it has suffered years of military coups and political instability.

Since the crushing of mass anti-government protests led by the opposition Awami League in January 2007, the country has been ruled by a puppet administration controlled by the army. Political opponents and trouble makers have been rounded up and imprisoned, and for a brief period in April 2007 the military refused to allow Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League, to return to the country.

They also threatened to send the Bangladesh National Party leader Khaleda Zia into exile, effectively cutting the heads off the two main parties. This decision was reversed, but demonstrates that the army retains its grip on power. Bangladesh has suffered over 15 military coups since independence.

Religious violence against minority Hindus has worryingly increased over the last decade, alongside a series of disgusting attacks in which women have acid thrown in their faces by men that they refused to marry.

Religion

Religious violence is not limited to Bangladesh, or to the oppression of Tamil speaking Hindus in Sri Lanka by the Bud-



A march during the 2005 Indian general strike

against globalisation

dhist Sinhalese majority. In India the Hindu BJP, in power from 1998 to 2002, inspires and organises barbaric acts of violence against Christians and Muslims across the country. BJP members were involved in an attack on a 400 year old mosque in Ayodhya. Other acts of Hindu chauvinist violence orchestrated against Muslims have left tens of thousands dead. They appeal to some of the most dispossessed sections of society, in states like Uttar Pradesh, using populist demagoguery to scapegoat others for the misfortunes of the Hindu poor.

Pakistan

In Pakistan a renewed protest movement spearheaded by the lawyers is now making efforts to reach out to sections of the working class and to draw them into the pro-democracy struggles, showing that sections of the population are willing to take action against the military regime. Across South Asia the rise of communalism and religious fundamentalism is a crucial factor in national politics, and creates the space for intervention by the imperialists.

The fight against "Talibanisation" in a country like Pakistan or Bangladesh allows the imperialists, or the slavishly pro-imperialist ruling classes, to use the "war on terror" as a means to clamp down on dissent. In March 2007 the Democrat-controlled US senate urged Bush to carry out military strikes in Pakistan against Al-Qaeda training grounds.

The increasing social and political tensions in the region illustrate the pre-revolutionary character of the world period. Globalisation, which has led to growth in the national economies in many countries in South Asia, has not led to more stability or to a more complacent working class. The massive general strikes in India in 2002-2003, where over 50 million people were on strike at one point against privatisation, demonstrate the depth of workers' feeling against neo-liberalism.

Even in countries like Bangladesh, where the working class has not played an independent role in the protest movements, the instability of governmental politics is compounded and reinforced by the poverty and deprivation that

so many suffer from. The growing division across the region between the overflowing cities, some rapidly expanding due to globalisation, and the impoverished villages and rural areas is a source of friction.

What kind of leadership?

In this context the rise of political Islam in the region is a result of some of the poorest wanting to find a political weapon with which to fight back, not only against their own compromised governments but also against capitalism and neo-liberalism. It demonstrates a real crisis of leadership for the masses because even the most radical Islamists have no programme to challenge imperialism economically, proposing only a military struggle against it.

The cause of this lies in the fact that no religion supports the expropriation of the capitalists on the basis of the workers and peasants taking power, removing the market mechanisms that allow foreign imperialism to plunder the region's resources. Where they have taken power, as in Iran, the Islamists continue to rule for the capitalists, oppressing their own people, including the working class Muslims, and attacking secular and democratic movements. Only a revolutionary struggle for socialism can really begin to eradicate poverty, create democracy and ameliorate the worst effects of imperialist globalisation on the region.

The workers, women, youth and peasants of south Asia will be unable to lift themselves out of the poverty trap unless a socialist organisation can be built across the region which can win the workers and youth to revolutionary methods of struggle. It is also impossible to unite the poorest sections of society by using religion when they themselves are divided by religion.

The national capitalists are unable to break the cycle of poverty because they are tied to the imperialists in the West; even basic democracy is beyond many of them. Instead the working class across the continent can fight to take power themselves, and through a planned economy and redistribution of wealth, lift billions out of the daily misery of capitalism.



West Bengal: Stalinists massacre peasants

By Kuldip Bajwa

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) controlled Left Front government of West Bengal has vowed to press ahead with plans to allow the building of an Indonesian owned chemical plant in the state following the massacre of Nandigram peasants opposed to its development.

Officials put the death toll at 14 but many eye witness accounts say up to 100 people were slaughtered as police opened fire on demonstrators in March of this year. Stories have since emerged of women being gang raped and bullet riddled bodies being dumped in local rivers.

Nandigram had been earmarked as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), where foreign investment would be encouraged by exemption from local taxes, duties and red tape. But local peasants and activists objected, resisting the forced acquisition of 14,000 acres of agricultural land which is home to 29 villages and a population of 40,000 people.

For two months villagers manned barricades and dug up roads to prevent the state government forces advancing, but 4,000 heavily armed police backed by party activists from the ruling CPI(M) eventually smashed their way through, taking control of villages and brutally suppressing any signs of resistance.

The Stalinist CPI(M) controlled

government, which ordered the attack, has been in power in West Bengal for some 30 years. However, while it retains the support and loyalty of workers, the urban poor and peasants, it has privatised, deregulated and dismantled public services and social programs. It has reduced agricultural subsidies.

In 2002 West Bengal became the first Indian state to effectively outlaw strikes in information technology and information technology-enabled industries. In central Indian politics the CPI(M) are valuable supporters of the ruling Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition - a government committed to neo-liberal "reform" and a "strategic partnership" with the US. The SEZs are currently key to its plans to attract foreign capital and promote export-led growth.

Since 2005 the government had approved 60 sites for SEZs around India but a huge outcry following the events in Nandigram massacre has led to another 300 applications being put on hold.

The incident has been a huge setback for the Stalinists in India. The building of a new chemical plant in West Bengal may well bring some new money into the region, but it is highly unlikely to benefit the workers or masses of poor peasants, who are witnessing at first hand the true nature of CPI(M) market reforms.

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1917

Workers control - dual

In this, the fourth in our series on the 90th anniversary of the Russian revolution, we examine how Russian workers set up factory committees.

This experience is important today, when we see a new an broad factory occupation movement in Venezuela. Connecting the fight for workers control to the struggle for working class political power is a key task for communists today, a task that demands careful study of the victorious revolution of 1917.

*This article was written by Dave Hughes, a founder member of Workers Power, who died in 1991, aged 43. Dave wrote much of our material on Russia, both historical articles such as this one, and much of the book **The Degenerated Revolution** (1982), available online at www.fifthinternational.org We reprint it this month in his memory*

In February 1917 the Russian workers overthrew the Tsarist regime, only then to accept a government of the bourgeois parties, the Cadets and the Octobrists. They ceded state power to the bourgeoisie while maintaining their soviets (councils) to oversee and pressure the government. A similar process took place in the factories and mines. The dual power that existed at state level was mirrored in the workplaces.

The Petrograd workers returned to work after the February revolution, determined to destroy the old tyrannical regime with which the management and police ran the factories. They rapidly imposed the eight-hour working day on the employers by simply leaving work once eight hours were up. They demanded, and often secured, full pay for the “work” they had done on the streets toppling the old regime in February. But most importantly they had accounts to settle with those who had cruelly exploited and humiliated them in the old days.

Government appointees had run large sections of Russian industry. Once the power of their chief patrons was broken many of the directors and managers simply fled. Some workers, for example those at the Okhta explosives plant, returned to find themselves without a factory administration at all. Elsewhere the workers kicked out those with a record of brutality who dared to return.

A veritable festival of “carting out” hated bosses in wheel barrows accompanied the return to work. The director of the giant Putilov Works and his aide were dumped into a canal. In the Thornton textile mill the women workers chased out thirty factory police who had dared to show their faces. Mass meetings of the workforce discussed and decided on lists of undesirables. At the Cartridge plant workers expelled 80% of the technical staff. At the first power station, workers voted to bar all the directors from the premises as “henchmen of the old regime and recognising their harmfulness from the economic point of view and their



Delegates to the first conference of factory committees

uselessness from the technical”.

In all the major industrial centres the workers elected factory committees to represent them in the new order.

The factory committees should not be confused with shop stewards committees on the British model where each section or “shop” elects their own steward. They were elected by the entire workforce at general meetings. In certain plants factory committees existed alongside shop stewards committees with sharply differing tasks.

In many state run plants, the factory committees initially had to take responsibility for running the factory, because their management had disappeared. In the factories, just as at the state level, they handed power back to bourgeois managers and directors when the latter put in an appearance.

Inspection and control

The parallels with the soviets’ relationship to the government do not end there. While the factory committees in general recognised the employers and managements’ technical and economic responsibilities, they reserved for themselves the right to observe and inspect the carrying out of these functions. This mirrored the soviets’ insistence that they were overseeing the Provisional Government’s work.

Crucially, the factory committees demanded and effected “control over internal order”. In plants throughout Russia the committees raised very similar demands;

that they should control the length of the working day, the level of the minimum wage, the length and times of rest and all hiring and firing. In this most fundamental way they challenged the right of the employers and their representatives to manage their factories and mines.

Workers’ control at this stage meant asserting factory committee authority over these matters of “internal order”. And it meant working class vigilance over the workings of management. It was a highly unstable and contradictory situation, prolonged only because the bosses had no alternative but to accept it, since after the February revolution they could not hope to call in the police or the army to “restore their rights.”

In general the workers held back from taking responsibility for the management of their plants. At the Patronnyi Works they did not constitute themselves as an alternative management. Nevertheless the factory committee purged the entire administration and then retained for itself an “observing” function. This method was codified at a conference of state sector worker representatives on 15 April, which resolved that:

“Not desiring to take upon ourselves the responsibility for the technical and administrative organisation of production in the given conditions until the full socialisation of the economy, the representatives of the general factory committee enter the administration with a consultative voice.”

power in the factories

A situation, within which workers' representatives daily transgressed rights that managements traditionally hold sacred, could never have become permanent. As at the state level, so in the factory, one class or the other would have to prevail eventually. For the most advanced sections of the proletariat workers' control was only a transitional phase on the road to socialism. As the Putilov workers declared of their workers' control regime:

"The workers are preparing themselves for the time when private ownership of the factories and mills will be abolished and the means of production, along with the buildings erected by the workers' hands, will be transferred to the working class. Therefore, in doing this small matter one must continually keep in mind the great and principal aim towards which the people are aspiring."

For the employers this situation was viewed as a mere passing phase, an irksome but temporary concession, until they could re-establish the full use of their state to restore their traditional prerogatives and their unfettered rule in the factory.

Dangers of class collaboration

During April and May there was mounting evidence, of both a dramatic deterioration in the performance of Russian capitalism, and of the fact that the capitalist class looked to the mounting economic chaos to break the strength of the workers. Often, for initially patriotic motives, workers were becoming increasingly suspicious that the employers and state managers were deliberately obstructing war production.

With supplies running out, factory committees frequently took upon themselves the job of procurement, through workers' delegations to the coal, iron and timber producing areas. To this extent the factory committees were in danger of becoming an accomplice to a more effective capitalist management. Yet at the very same time they were proving that only the organisations of the working class could effectively avert an economic catastrophe.

Once again, however, the instability of dual power was demonstrated. Either the factory committees would become class collaborationist participation bodies or they would have to go beyond their "observing" role towards the socialist revolution.

As shortages mounted and management threatened closures so the concept of workers' control did go beyond "overseeing" the bosses. Having seen what the bosses were doing, it had to mean struggle against their plans for shutdown. In Petrograd, the capital city, the main centre of heavy industry and thus of the revolutionary proletariat, this took an especially sharp form, as the bosses prepared to "relocate" production by moving their factories out of the city and thus disperse the vanguard of the Russian working class. Dual power in the factories, as in the state, had to be resolved one way or another.

A good example of this reality was the Langezipen machine factory in Petrograd. At the end of April there were severe shortages and rumours of closure were rife. The factory committee posted guards at the factory entrance in order to prevent the administration leaving. As expected management announced plans to keep the plant going!

A similar pattern of further encroachment on management rights was being established throughout the major plants during May. As management and employers recovered confidence after the February and March revolutionary mobilisations subsided and the pro-capitalist policies of the Provisional Government took effect, they increasingly used the authority workers had ceded back to them to shut down or run down the plants.

The employers and managers



Kerensky, dressed in white, arrives Petrograd, August 1917

were prepared to disorganise production in pursuit of their class goals - the weakening of the power of the workers. The struggle for control over production now took on a sharper form.

Of the workers' parties only the Bolsheviks were prepared to take up and lead the fight for workers' control. The party clearly saw this fight as part of the struggle for proletarian revolution. The Mensheviks were strongly opposed to any such struggle against capitalism. As their paper Rabochaya Gazeta put it: "Our revolution is a political one. We destroy the bastions of political authority, but the bases of capitalism remain in place. A battle on two fronts against the Tsar and against capital is beyond the forces of the proletariat."

Centrality of workers' control

In the face of mounting sabotage the struggle for workers' control played a central role in the Bolsheviks' programme for the transition to a socialist revolution. In his Resolution on Economic Disorganisation of late May Lenin argued:

"The only way to avert disaster is to establish effective workers' control over the production and distribution of goods. For the purpose of such control it is necessary, first of all, that the workers should have a majority of not less than three quarters of all the votes in all the decisive institutions and that the owners who have not withdrawn from their business and the engineering staffs should be enlisted without fail."

That control was to be exercised by the factory committees, the unions and the soviets. It was to be made possible by opening the books of the companies to workers' inspection and it was to be extended to financial and banking operations. It was, however, not possible for workers to exercise effective control simply at the level of individual enterprises. For the system of control to "be developed into the full regulation of the production and distribution of goods by the workers" it had to embrace control over the economy exercised at a state level through a state responsible directly to the workers' own

organisations.

Revolutionary rupture

Lenin returned to this theme and placed it at the centre of his programme in *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it*, a pamphlet produced in September. Again he argued: "There is no way of effectively combating financial collapse except that of revolutionary rupture with the interests of capital and that of the organisation of really democratic control, i.e. control from 'below', control by the workers and the poor peasants over the capitalists."

Given the clarity of the Bolsheviks' call for workers' control at plant and state level it was not surprising that their growing strength in the workers' movement was first evident in the factory committees. The first conference of Petrograd factory committees, meeting in late May, endorsed the Bolshevik programme. So too did all subsequent factory committee conferences.

The factory committees maintained their own central council of committee delegates. As such they brought together the best-organised plants in citywide coordination. They were more immediately responsible for the day-to-day concerns of workers than were the soviets. They were responsible directly to general meetings. It was not surprising, therefore, that the mounting Bolshevik tide amongst the workers should be initially reflected in the committees rather than in the Soviet leadership.

However, the very strength of the committees, as exclusively proletarian, workplace organisations, meant they were not able to play the role of mobilisers of all the exploited and oppressed. By their nature, unlike the soviets, their coordination excluded the soldiers and beyond them, the mass of the peasantry.

On 3 and 4 July the Soviet leadership did not lift a finger when troops loyal to the Provisional Government fired on workers and sailors opposing that government in Petrograd - the July Days. The Bolsheviks' headquarters were a sacked, party leaders arrested and

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Lenin forced into exile just across the border in Finland.

In the aftermath of these events Lenin temporarily argued for the dropping the slogan "All power to the Soviets" which he had won the party to in April. He urged his fellow Bolshevik Sergo Ordzhonikidze: "We must swing over the centre of gravity in the factory and shop committees. The factory and shop committees must become the organs of insurrection."

Accomplices of the regime

Lenin argued that the soviets, as then constituted and under the leadership of the right wing Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), had become organs of class collaboration and the accomplices of the regime and its savage repression. They were no longer organising the masses for struggle. In that context he believed the call for all power to the soviets was wrong because military repression made a peaceful transfer of power to the soviets impossible. It was also wrong because, in Lenin's words: "The revolution has in fact been completely betrayed by the SRs and Mensheviks."

For Lenin it followed that: "The slogan calling for the transfer of state power to the soviets would now sound quixotic or mocking."

While Lenin turned his attention sharply to the factory committees after the July Day, he was also at pains to explain that this did not mean that the building of real soviets had ceased to be central to the Bolshevik programme. As Lenin put it in his article arguing for dropping the "All power to the Soviets" slogan: "Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but not the present soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle with the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the soviets. It is not a question of soviets in general but combating the present counter-revolution and the treachery of the present soviets."

While factory committees kept proletarian democracy alive and maintained working class morale and combativity it, they could not play the historical role of soviets as organisers of the mass of exploited and oppressed and as embryos of the proletarian state itself.

However in September the Bolsheviks were to return to raising the call "All power to the Soviets". This was after the abortive putsch by the reactionary general Kornilov, during which the Kerensky government, with the Menshevik and SR ministers, were obliged to turn to the Bolsheviks in order to mobilise the workers of Petrograd against the coup. They had to agree to



Demonstration July 1917. Bolshevik banner reads: "Down with the 10 capitalist ministers, All power to the soviets"

the arming of the workers' Red Guards, which the Bolsheviks had demanded.

As a result Bolshevik support mounted inside the soviets, with every new election, bringing more and more delegates to their side. First in Petrograd and then in other cities, it was soon clear they were well on the way to gaining a majority. Now, Lenin argued for using the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" once again, but this time as a call for an insurrection to get rid of the Provisional Government and replace it with one based on soviets with a Bolshevik majority.

First in Petrograd and then in other cities, the Bolsheviks were gaining a majority. Now, Lenin argued for using the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" once again, but this time as a call for an insurrection

Meanwhile the mounting economic chaos in the autumn, with unemployment growing, gave the employers the opportunity to step up their offensive against the factory committees. Now they set out to stop them meeting in work time, to put an end their control of hiring and firing and also to allow them to ship valuable plant and machinery out of Petrograd.

Under Bolshevik leadership the committees replied with determined resistance. Most committees now had their own armed militia to defend the plant and the workers against counter-revolution. A Moscow worker, Postavshchik, described what happened when the Bolsheviks won leadership in his plant: "On 1 June as soon as the new factory committee was elected with a Bolshevik majority... a detachment of 80 men was formed, which in the absence of weapons drilled with sticks, under the leadership of an old soldier, Comrade Levakov."

At the time of Kornilov's attempted coup it was the Central Council of Factory Committees that played a key role in distributing arms to the various plant militias. When the employers launched their autumn offensive they were taking on committees that were armed with

guns and ammunition as well as with Bolshevik leadership.

The sharpening polarisation in the plants could not be resolved except at the level of state power. As more factory committees resisted management plans so more employers pulled out. Production became increasingly disorganised while the committees became the de facto power in the plants.

Their power extended beyond the struggle to maintain production. Certain factory committees ran their own farms, canteens, shops and maintained procurement squads to go into the countryside to buy food from the peasants. As well as drilling young workers in the military arts the committees often maintained their own educational and cultural commissions.

The Putilov Committee, for example, took the latter task very seriously urging their fellow workers: "Comrades, do not let slip the opportunity of gaining scientific knowledge. Do not waste a single hour fruitlessly. Every hour is dear to us. We need not only to catch up with the classes with whom we are fighting, but to overtake them."

Resolution of the crisis

The seizure of power in October resolved the crisis of dual power to the advantage of the working class. With the passing of undivided state power into the hands of the soviets, the state could now at last play its part as an executive organ of workers' control of production and distribution. The factory committees could take their place as overseers of production with the full backing of state power.

In turn that state power legalised the control of workers' committees elected by all employees at general meetings. It gave them the right to inspect all books, documents and stocks. Their decisions were now to be binding on those owners who remained.

The struggle for workers' control in the plants was an indispensable component of the Russian workers' onslaught against "management's right to manage". They learned to control industry and inspect accounts for themselves. And from that control and inspection came an immeasurably strengthened will and ability to resist the plans of the bosses. Such a situation could only have been transitory. Either the bosses could have rolled back the gains of the workers and reasserted their old authority, or the workers would have to break the power of the bosses in its entirety. Under the leadership of the Bolshevik party the Russian workers ensured that the old regime of the bosses in the factories, as well as in the state, was smashed.

• For more on the Russian Revolution go to www.fifthinternational.org

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.

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Guns, crime and revolution

By Jeremy Dewar

On 16 April Cho Seung-hui shot dead 32 students and teachers at Virginia Tech, before turning a gun on himself. In between the first two murders and the rest, he sent a tape to NBC television. On the video he ranted against "brats", snobs and "rich kids" and spoke respectfully of Columbine students, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, who committed a similar act of mass murder in 1999. Even by US standards, this was a chilling tragedy: two hours of gun-crazed madness. Once again, calls for gun controls have gone up.

In Britain the story struck a chord. Several murders marked the opening of 2007. Billy Cox and Michael Dosunmu, both 15, and 16-year-old James Andre Smartt-Ford were all shot dead in south London in February. Last month a boy of 13 was arrested over the fatal stabbing of 14-year-old Paul Erhahon of east London.

Media pundits have asked whether Britain is drawing closer to the USA, with a gun culture emerging on the streets of London, Manchester and Glasgow. Politicians have been quick to draw conclusions and propose solutions.

What do communists say? Should citizens have the right to bear arms? And, if so, how does society protect itself against killers? What causes some young people to take up violence? Is family breakdown to blame or is there another underlying cause?

Crime and the causes of crime

Columnists and would-be sociologists make a great deal about the constant depiction of violence in popular culture. From Hollywood films to gangsta rap, guns are promoted as status symbols. Black youth, in particular, are prone to see extreme violence as something to aspire to. Or so they say.

Cue David Cameron and Tony Blair to call on black parents to take responsibility for curbing gun crime.

Cameron cynically latched onto the death of Billy Cox on Valentine's Day to attack absent fathers and call for tax breaks for married couples - as if locking people into unhappy relationships would benefit children.

Initially, Tony Blair condemned this Tory nonsense. He soon changed his tune.

In an disgusting outburst of racist stereotyping, Blair announced, "We won't stop this by pretending it isn't young black kids doing it. The black community" he went on, "need to be mobilised in denunciation of this gang culture that is killing young black kids." With no sense of irony, he parodied movie gangsters, saying he wanted the gangleaders "taken out of circulation".

Communists look at the disease, not simply the symptoms. Guns, knives and certain dogs can be a problem in some working class communities. We don't want criminals destroying young lives, but the police are incapable of protecting youth precisely because they are outsiders, part of the capitalist state. Racism and anti-working class prejudice is rife in their ranks.

Fighting back

Communists fight for working class self defence, democratically accountable to workplace and community organisations, to combat organised crime. They should be properly armed and trained. They would also protect communities from police attacks and racist thugs.

Because they would not stand above and

Across the world, the bourgeoisie and the capitalist states have a near monopoly of weapons. And look what they do with it! We do need controls, but working class control

against the people, but would be part of the working class movement, they would be able to gather information, nip problems in the bud, and discourage guns from entering the community. Rather than simply sticking Asbos on youth they would focus on real anti-social behaviour.

Such guards have emerged in the working class before, at high points of class struggle: in general strikes, revolutions. The working class is not hostile to discipline; it is hostile to oppression, be that from the capitalist state, or criminals who feed off their communities.

Poverty, overcrowded accommodation, underfunded schools, closed down youth centres, low wages and pockets of high unemployment all contribute to the alienation and criminalisation of youth. ITV's London Tonight asked a friend of Billy Cox whether the murdered teenager dealt drugs. "A bit," he replied, "but everyone round here does. You have to."

A massive programme of investment, under the control of the communities themselves, is needed to transform housing estates. Students, teachers and parents must be in charge of the schools, we need unionised jobs with decent wages and college courses and student grants available for all leavers.

Blair is not wrong that black youths are victims of gun culture. They are also victims

of racism. Black boys are three times more likely to be excluded from schools; one in three black students, compared with one in two whites attain five GCSE passes. They are also far more likely to be unemployed, stopped and searched by the cops, arrested and imprisoned. A mass antiracist movement, actively supported by the unions, needs to attack every instant of racism.

Capitalism tears working class families apart - then demands that the nuclear household "takes responsibility". Mothers are forced to work or have their benefits cut; yet they are supposed to look out for their children. If young people want to leave home, drugs and prostitution are among the few routes out.

We demand free quality childcare, benefits for mothers who prefer or need to stay at home. We fight for maintenance grants for 16-year-olds, safe houses for youth who want to escape unhappy homes, and an end to the persecution of desperate young people driven into drugs and prostitution.

Is this a utopian vision? Not at all. Young people can and must organise and take a leading role in resisting their own oppression. A mass revolutionary youth movement can sink roots in every housing estate, school and college, and channel the anger and fighting spirit into the struggle for a better world, for socialism.

Gun control? Whose control?

The communist call for workers defence means we oppose capitalist gun controls. But what about killers like Cho? Surely we can't be in favour of everyone having guns?

We do need controls, but working class control. Across the world, the bourgeoisie and the capitalist states have a near monopoly of weapons. And look what they do with it! Between two-thirds and one million dead in Iraq, police shooting peaceful protesters in India, the CIA managing a secret network of torture camps.

We are in favour of trade unions and working class organisations campaigning for the formation of a workers' and popular militia. The armed people is not a mad idea... it is one the capitalists fought for in their revolution against the feudal overlords. Later they realised that they could themselves see overthrown by the working class - and that is why they don't like us having our own armed defence.

And this is the main reason why we support the arming of the working class - because they will need to resist violent reaction during the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist class, which is necessary if we are to rid the world of the alienating social relations and poverty that are inherent in the system.