

workers power

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

As tanker drivers' strike wins 14%...

We can all win inflation busting pay rises!



For united strike action against pay restraint

Inside:

- Fuel price protests spread
- Bob Crow calls for a new party
- Supplement: EU in crisis
- Zimbabwe - what now?
- Why does Obama back Israel?



**League for the
Fifth International**

EDITORIAL

As inflation hots up and Brown melts down It's time to fight back!

The Daily Mirror's cost of living index shows inflation for most people is soaring by 11.6 percent a year and not the official 3.3 percent of the government's consumer prices index. Food is up 15 percent, fuel up 22 percent and utility bills up 3 percent (after two years of double digit rises). A weekly basket of 25 items taken from retailers magazine The Grocer now costs £2,067 a year - £263 more than last June.

Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, has warned "the nice decade is behind us" and that families must brace themselves for a further "squeeze" on household finances. King said inflation was set to reach almost double the official target and that for homeowners, property prices would continue to fall with the scale of this impossible to predict. In addition motorists have suffered a run of almost 30 days of record fuel prices. The national price of unleaded petrol rose 4.1p in the past month and diesel 6p a litre.

The global economic crisis is starting to hit Britain hard. We are seeing rising food prices, dearer energy bills, more expensive mortgages, rent rises on flats and the first signs of a pick up in unemployment.

The economy grew only 0.3 percent in the first quarter, less than the 0.4 percent estimated, as the service sector slowed to the lowest pace in more than 10 years, the Office for National Statistics reported. Growth was 0.6 percent in the previous quarter.

Some 40 percent of the electorate believe Labour is wholly or mainly to blame for Britain's economic problems and a further 46 percent say it is partly to blame. With the strong probability that things are going to get a lot worse before they get better, this is a doomsday poll for the government.

Brown and Darling are trying to blame global factors beyond their control - the US sub-prime mortgage crisis and the oil cartel Opec for failing to stop crude doubling to almost \$140 a barrel in just one year.

On the other hand they claim

Britain is "well placed to come through the current global financial turbulence." Do they believe this? No-one else does.

Britain's boom in 2004-06 was based on credit and now it is turning into its opposite. It experienced its fizz and feel good factor, thanks to the City's role as one of the main centres of the global ballooning of credit and dodgy finance. That's why it has been hard hit hard by the credit crunch. The well being of the middle classes was based on soar-away house prices but the housing market is now in freefall. No wonder 'Middle England' is deserting Labour in droves. And even the source of Labour's increased spending on education and health was based on expensive government borrowing, via the hated Private Finance Initiative.

Nor are the fundamentals of the economy sound, as Brown and Darling claim. Official figures show Britain's manufacturing industry entering recession. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that manufacturing output is contracting for the first time since March 1992. The strong pound and the credit crunch have created severe financial problems for British industry. The fall in manufacturing output during May was much worse than economists feared. The ONS reports that British manufacturing output fell by 0.4 percent during that month and industrial output, a broader measure that also includes the energy sector, shrank 1.2 percent.

This could be a foretaste for the economy as a whole, according to Adrian Schmidt of Chase Investment Bank: "industrial production was also weaker and suggests that not only manufacturing might be in recession, we may even see GDP in recession before too long."

The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, which like the US Federal Reserve tried lowering interest rates to stimulate the economy, is caught in a vice: to limit inflation it wants to raise interest rates. But that would deepen the trend towards recession. We are only at the very beginning of the recessionary phase of the economic cycle

- with the US still afraid to raise rates because of the upcoming presidential elections. By November the political reasons for delaying the bosses' only real answer to inflation - raising rates and letting recession rip - will have gone. This means that 2009 is unlikely to be a year of recovery - quite the opposite.

On June 27 2007 Brown took over from Tony Blair as Prime Minister with a considerable fund of goodwill - he had for ten years taken the credit for long years without much of a recession.

Yet on 14 September the Northern Rock crisis triggered the first run on a major British bank in more than a century and began the destruction of the former Iron Chancellor. He dithered for months seeking a buyer rather than be accused of socialism for nationalising it. As a result the Bank of England had to loan the shipwrecked bank £26bn. But finally on Feb 17 2008 Northern Rock had to be taken into public ownership anyway. But the real collapse of Brown's reputation centred on a monumentally inept manoeuvre, on the eve of the Tory conference.

Brown's collapse

Brown's aides floated the rumour that he was going to call a snap election. Then when local labour activist warned of a sudden sagging of support - connected with the coming into force of abolition of 10p tax rate in the previous budget he "called it off" on Oct 7 sparking accusations of weakness and indecision. Then throughout the autumn and winter Brown toughed out the issue of the 10 p tax rate, ignoring the desperate signals from Labour MPs that this issue more than any other has massively alienated traditional Labour voters. As a consequence on May 1 Labour suffered its worst local election defeat in 40 years, plus the loss of the London mayoralty to the reactionary buffoon Boris Johnson.

Then on May 22 Labour lost the Labour stronghold of Crewe and Nantwich to the Conservatives. Labour canvassers reported massive disillusion with the party because of the abolition of the 10p

tax rate.

Undeterred on June 11, Brown carried on with his losing streak by forcing through his plan to extend the time terrorism suspects can be held from 28 days to 42. The government majority of 9 was achieved only because the Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party were bought with an extra £1.2bn for Northern Ireland.

Reactionary laws

How reactionary Brown's violation of habeas corpus - the right to be charged before a court, not simply "detained at her majesty's pleasure" - can be seen from the fact that apart from Guantanamo Bay (not in the USA and therefore not subject to US law) in America suspects can be detained without charge for only two days. The police in Britain can already hold suspects for 28 days without charging them, far longer than any other country claiming to be a democracy: in Germany the limit is two days, in Spain 5 days, in France 6. Even in Turkey the limit is 7.5 days.

Brown's determination to push for the 42 days is clearly related to the belief that via the most reactionary tabloid press he can recover some popularity with the electorate for being "tough on terrorism". Kelvin Mackenzie, former editor of Rupert Murdoch's Sun said the paper's readers would support four hundred and forty two days. In fact the whole witch hunt on this issue depends on confusing the population as to the difference between some one the police suspects but cannot prove is a terrorist and a convicted terrorist. The history of false confessions, and false convictions throughout the Irish war (the Birmingham six) and the large number of Muslims whose charges have been dropped since 2001 should make one pause before accepting the idea that if the police have arrested them there must be some thing in it.

On June 27 Labour fell to fifth place in the Henley by-election behind the Green Party and the BNP, losing its deposit - getting less than five per cent, only 1,066 votes. Opinion polls show Labour 18-24



Inflation is what is on everyone's mind, especially Mervyn King from the Bank of England

Continued from page 2

points behind the Tories, figures that would give Cameron a landslide.

As we show in this issue of Workers Power, the rise in prices is spurring workers and poor people around the world into militant protests, from strikes to street demonstrations and massive riots. Britain has not been entirely immune from this. The united strikes of 24 February were driven by anger over pay rises below the rate of inflation – even union leaders who have desperately tried to restrict the scale of the fightback are coming under pressure to call action for inflation-busting pay deals. And now the Shell drivers in a magnificent four day strike have driven an oil tanker through the government's real wage cutting

policy and won 14 per cent.

A united strike across the public and private sectors can smash through the pay limit. But we also need a sliding scale of wages that links our pay to a real cost of living index calculated by the workers' own organisations. That way we can stop the capitalists making working people pay the cost of their economic crisis.

Our union leaders, though, are holding back. They are terrified of undermining Brown because they know that the main political beneficiary of that would be Cameron. But that is only because we have no working class political alternative to Labour! That's why we need not only united strikes and protests against pay restraint and inflation, but for our unions to break with Labour and form a new party.

IN THIS ISSUE

4 As inflation eats into wages by driving up prices, workers are moving into the struggle. We analyse the **Shell drivers' victory** and point to how others can follow them

5 **Unison council workers** are due to **strike** on 16-17 July. Civil servants will join them. *Andy Young* reports on the **CWU postal workers' conference** and possible strikes at Royal Mail

6 From Indonesia, Korea and Latin America through to Spain and France, the **hike in oil prices** is causing protests, strikes and riots. *Andy Yorke* surveys the **global resistance**

8 *Jeremy Dewar* and *Andy Young* report on the **National Shop Stewards Network** and the **Campaign for a New Workers Party** conferences, where moves towards a new party were outlined

9 **Young people** face poverty, racism and harassment. *John Bowman* looks at the plight of young people under New Labour and how they can fight back

10 The **Chinese Communist Party** hopes the **Olympics** will earn it praise and acceptance. But rising class conflict points to a different future, writes *Peter Main*

11 *Bernie Mcadam* and *Dave Stockton* look at the crisis now facing the **EU** after the Irish no vote

15 Millions are looking to **Barack Obama** to end US aggression in the Middle East. *Mark Booth* asks why Obama publicly backed America's puppet Israel?

16 *Keith Spencer* charts the history of **Mugabe's regime** in Zimbabwe and argues that he can be defeated through the struggle of the masses

20 When **Hugo Chávez** called on the **FARC guerrillas** to lay down their guns he struck a devastating blow to the Colombian resistance, argues *Tim West*

22 *Kam Kumar* reports on the **G8 meeting** in Japan this month and *Joy Macready* explains why people should attend this years **ESF**

24 Spotlight on communist policy: the **rank and file movement**

NEWS IN BRIEF

RESPECT DEFECTS ON TO LABOUR

The already split Respect project is now in its death throes. In June three Tower Hamlets councillors from the Socialist Workers Party's version and one from George Galloway's, joined the Labour Party. Respect was established by the SWP and various forces from the anti-war movement to provide an alternative to the war mongering racist Labour party.

After initially gaining a handful of council seats and getting George Galloway elected as an MP in east London, it broke in two. The SWP aimed to build an alliance with the Muslim community, by which they meant not just Asian workers and youth but also religious leaders and businessmen. The property owners and place seekers were bound to jump ship when a mainstream party finally bought them off.

But the movement for a new party still goes on and former Respect members should take part in it. Only this time they should help build it on a solid working class foundation, not on a short-cut populist road to the electoral big time.

IF IRAN IS ATTACKED...

Reports are mounting of the threat of a US backed Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Recent manoeuvres over the Mediterranean by 100 Israel war planes show that Tel Aviv is preparing for a strike against Iran, something that will dramatically escalate the conflict in the Middle East.

Barack Obama, who became the Democratic presidential candidate on the basis of antiwar feeling, has declared his support for Israel and has joined in threatening Iran.

Iran has the right to develop nuclear power. It is the US and Israel that are threatening to use nuclear weapons and Obama is warning Iran not to retaliate. The US and Israel have also threatened first strike use of nuclear weapons on several occasions.

Despite the reactionary regime in Tehran, it is the people of Iran that must overthrow it not Israel or the US. Socialists must work for the victory of Iran if it is attacked and for the defeat of the aggressors.

WORKERS POWER SUMMER CAMP

We will be holding our annual summer camp near South London on 11-15 July. It will focus on the Fourth International, Marxist political economy and the events of 1968. Contact us for more details.

UK

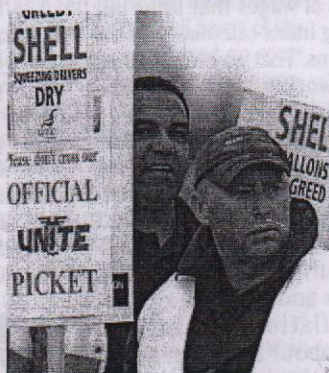
As inflation bites across the UK United strike action can bust the pay limit!

As prices of basic goods and services sky rocket workers fight back to preserve the value of their wages. Here we provide a round up of recent and coming struggles as Britain moves into recession

Shell strike wins 14% pay rise – Tanker drivers show the way!

Across the country tanker drivers, members of the Unite trade union, won a brilliant four-day strike as they took on oil giant Shell and its haulage contractors Hoyer UK and Suckling. They won a stunning victory - a 14 per cent increase over two years: 9 per cent this year and 5 per cent next. Drivers' basic pay will be lifted to £36,000 for a 48-hour week.

The strike targeted 14 depots with picket lines, causing massive disruption to Shell's petrol stations, some running dry after the first couple of days. Outside the Grangemouth refinery, scene of a major strike by 1,200 of its workers in April, drivers working for other companies refused to cross picket lines, in defiance of the anti-



union laws. They even joined the Hoyer and Suckling workers on the picket line. This proves that 'unlawful' solidarity action and picketing can win.

The speed with which petrol stations began to run dry - around 15 per cent of stations in Britain

were reportedly empty by 16 July - put the wind up the employers and the government. The bosses' initial claim that they could face down the threat of weekly four-day strikes, with the aid of the government's "contingency plans" of army scabs, quickly fell apart. As the first strike ended the bosses were desperate to give in to the tanker drivers demands, and awarded them the full claim.

The billionaire press launched a slander campaign aimed at the strike, harping on the tanker drivers' current pay levels to suggest that they already got more than enough. Of course no mention is made in such propaganda of the soaring profits of Shell, some £13.9 billion last year. It is rank hypocrisy that the wages of these skilled work-

ers should be held up to public criticism whilst salaries of professionals like the editors who commission these anti-union stories go unexposed. Their obvious aim is to make low-paid workers unsympathetic to the tanker drivers.

But underpaid nurses and teachers, local authority workers and call centre staff should be encouraged by the tanker drivers' victory. It shows that if they step up their own struggles and launch all-out strikes they too can break the 2 per cent pay limit. We all deserve similar rises, not only to cover inflation, but to make up for 10 years of below inflation pay deals - which are pay cuts in all but name.

Let's learn the lessons from the tanker drivers: all out action can win.

How workers can beat inflation

The tanker drivers victory had government ministers rushing to urge other workers not to follow their example.

"There needs to be discipline in public and private sector pay if we are to keep inflation under control," said business secretary John Hutton.

Chancellor Alistair Darling claimed that "from the boardroom to the shop floor" people must keep pay rises "consistent" with the government's 2 per cent inflation target. He means by this the Consumer Prices Index, the government's preferred inflation measure, which grossly underestimates real inflation for working class people.

But even this rigged index rose

to 3.3 per cent in May, with the Bank of England warning it will soon reach 4 per cent. In fact the slightly more accurate Retail Prices Index is already at 4.3 per cent. Thus it is plain, even with these figures, the government is asking workers to take a wage cut. In the past year, food prices have risen by 6.6 per cent, gas and electricity by 11.2 per cent, petrol and diesel by 16.8 and 26 per cent respectively. These rises are set to continue - utility companies warning of a 40 per cent hike in energy costs by next year.

Goods leaving UK factories have risen in price over the past 12 months, while raw materials - steel, copper, crude oil - are up 27.9 per cent. Add to this the fact that the

cost of imports from China and India are also rising and it is easy to see why Bank of England governor Mervyn King has warned that inflation will get worse not better.

The Tory tabloids, for their own purposes, are calculating the monthly rises in food prices, fuel and housing costs for the average family. These show rises of between 12 and 20 percent in the main constituents of ordinary people's income - food, fuel, rent or mortgage payments. It is about time that the unions worked out and published their own working class cost of living index - and refused to base their pay claims on anything else.

Hutton and Darling claim they are urging companies and public sector

bosses to restrain their pay awards to fight inflation. But, as we have shown, today's inflation is not caused by higher wages but by higher prices for essential goods and services. After all, the average persons wage has only risen by 2.9 per cent since last year. So wages have had a downward effect on inflation and Labour's ministers want this trend to continue for years to come.

Instead, wages must keep pace with inflation. This is why it is important for unions to fight for wages to catch up with prices, i.e. real pay rises, and impose a sliding scale of wages linked to inflation, as calculated not by the government, but by the unions themselves.

Council workers strikes can beat Brown's 2 per cent limit

Pressure is mounting on union leaders to put forward serious claims and bust the 2 per cent limit.

Local government workers - members of Unison - have just voted by 55 per cent in favour of a strike. Unison says 250,000 council workers - most of them women - earn less than £6.50 an hour. They are demanding a 6 per cent pay rise or 50p an hour extra, whichever is greater. A two-day strike is planned for 16 and 17 July.

Local council workers who belong to Unite, formerly the T&G and Amicus, have also been balloted and the result of their poll is due. Unite sources expect a "yes" vote. The GMB general union has indicated that it will tell its members not to cross picket lines,

despite previously encouraging their members to accept the offer.

Indeed, the backtracking of union officials, who have signed below inflation pay deals, is becoming a trend. They sense that the Shell tanker drivers' victory raises the stakes - and they are under ever greater pressure to act.

So when gas and electricity companies announced a planned 40 per cent price hike this year, Unison's general secretary Dave Prentis went on TV and said he may reopen negotiations on the NHS deal he signed just weeks ago giving workers just 8 per cent over three years.

And a ballot of Unite's health service workers gave the union a strong mandate for industrial action over their three year offer of just 7.99 per cent - which would mean a signifi-

cant pay cut. On the 18 July Unite members will demonstrate at hospitals across the country - Unison members should support them.

Other disputes may be on the way, which together could form what the media is calling a "summer of discontent". Unions representing 250,000 staff at further education colleges have resumed talks with ministers, while the civil servants' Public and Commercial Services Union is planning a strike ballot of 280,000 members in the civil service.

Dropping the "Mr Nice Guy" mask, Tory leader David Cameron demanded that the government had to be "extremely tough" on the unions to head off a wave of strikes, but warned that Labour's financial dependency on the unions made

this unlikely. He is obviously trying to herd the hapless Brown into a full-scale confrontation with the unions on the model of 1978-79.

Across the public and private sectors workers need to meet the challenge of New Labour head-on. This means a united strike that's not limited to a day here and a day there, but which brings out as many sectors as possible at the same time and stays out until the government and the bosses give in.

To any union leader that squeals this could fatally wound the Labour government, we have but one reply. Now is the time for the unions break with this anti-working class Labour government and form a new party that defends the workers' interests: at the expense of the bosses' profits, property and system.

Postal workers - unanimous call for strike action from conference

Andy Young CWU rep (pc)

In June postal delegates at the Communications Workers Union conference voted unanimously for strike action against pension cuts, post office and mail centre closures, and up to 40,000 job losses.

No one spoke against the Postal Executive Committee's emergency motion for a strike ballot against cuts and campaign against privatisation, put forward in the last two weeks before conference under pressure from below.

From Deputy General Secretary Dave Ward down to reps speaking from the floor, all condemned Royal Mail's plans and stressed that we faced job losses on "an unprecedented scale" and it was truly "make or break" time, with the next six months determining the future of the industry and the union.

While Dave Ward repeatedly warned delegates to be realistic, delegate after delegate got up to stress unity, with some rejecting the leadership's compromise positions on pensions and closures. The mood

was determined, that there was no choice but to enter into a fight or "they'll just keep coming back for more". Several disagreed with how last year's strike was conducted by the leadership.

Mail centre massacre

The prospect of mass mail centre closures in particular has pushed sections of the local and regional officials to a more militant stance, demanding action so that their members are not left for the chop.

One delegate stressed this was an opportunity to build unity that had been missed so far - instead of separate isolated fights up and down the country we needed to rouse the membership to the threat and make this a central issue. One speaker said that Royal Mail was going for TNT's model of a majority part-time workers.

One rep told a tale of a typical "consultation" for the Coventry Mail Centre. Management had just days before notified him by email that they had rejected CWU proposals and instead opted for closure after a token consideration. The implica-

tion was these consultations and negotiations are just a stage show and mean nothing, as was proven by the pension "consultation". Royal Mail makes a plan, pretends to consult, and imposes the changes anyway. A delegate from Northamptonshire accused Royal Mail of closing Oxford mail centre due to its record of militancy.

Several speakers raised worries linked to the leadership's strategy in the last strike. A speaker from Newcastle raised the fear that the leadership would "decouple" issues, like in last year's strike, where an agreement on a below inflation pay rise and flexibility agreement left out pensions and other issues for future negotiations. How would the leadership deal with this? Another speaker raised the issue of the high court's intervention last year when they used the law to force the CWU to back down and asked how this could be avoided so that we could "go to war and win".

In response to a previous speaker who had suggested we lobby every Labour constituency party meeting, a speaker from London said it would

be far better to strike on the day of the Labour Party conference and have a mass protest at it! Even Dave Ward warmed to this idea in his summing up speech.

Posties will need to keep the pressure on as the timing of the ballot remains in the hands of the Postal Executive Committee. The emergency motion for the ballot was only the result of pressure from some branches which called an "emergency meeting" on 28 May and forced the PEC to hurry forward with the proposal for a ballot. Now we must fight for a yes vote in the ballot and a serious strike we need to develop a whole series of such initiatives from below - rank and file meetings, strike committees, local demonstrations and strikes that lead the way, action committees connecting our struggle to those of other public sector workers fighting on pay.

Postal workers proved their mettle in the magnificent strike last year. Now it's time to strike a final blow against Royal Mail's rotten business plan and blow Brown's privatisation project to pieces.

WORLDWIDE PROTESTS

Oil price hike sparks global

From Indonesia, Korea and Latin America through to Spain and France, the hike in oil prices is causing protests, strikes and riots. *Andy Yorke* surveys the global resistance

Just after skyrocketing global food prices drove a wave of protests involving people in up to 30 countries in March-April, a second round of worldwide protests has kicked off sparked by the rise in oil prices to historic highs.

The food crisis threatened to increase the number of hungry to more than 850 million, the fuel crisis threatens millions more with more poverty and unemployment, while dragging semi-colonial countries deeper into crisis.

Oil prices started to rise after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. From a price of US\$66 a barrel in September 2006 they have continued upwards, passing \$100 for the first time on 2 January 2008 and reaching the latest high point of more than \$140 a barrel. Even adjusted for inflation this is the highest oil price ever and threatens to engulf many industries and third world countries in economic crises. What's more, it shows no sign of abating; some are predicting rises as high as \$200 a barrel.

Last month, after a meeting demanded by the US, the major Asian oil-importing economies including China, India and South Korea agreed to end fuel subsidies. Other countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand were already forced to slash subsidies.

The Bush government's hypocrisy knows no bounds, considering the US consumes more than all these countries combined, with a fraction of their population!

Yet it is blaming these countries' fuel subsidies for boosting demand – the poor must be made to pay for reducing inflation, whether in Britain or Bangladesh.

The response has been protests around the globe, from strikes by unionised drivers and oil workers in South Korea to a rash of protest convoys and blockades by lorry drivers, fishermen and taxi drivers across Latin America, the Mediterranean and Asia.

Korean general strike

On 8 June, the South Korean government announced a \$10 billion stimulus package to ease higher oil prices – it is the fifth largest importing country in the world.

The next day, truckers slammed the inadequate subsidy and voted to strike with 5,000 blockading the country's ports and cargo terminals, demanding that the government introduce a minimum wage. Though few drivers were unionised, the mass of non-unionised drivers took part in the strike, grinding ports to a halt, hitting much of industry and electrifying the workers movement. Truckers said that the Government must lower fuel costs and force employers to increase wages.

Fearing losses of up to 128 billion won (\$123



Students in Jakarta protest against the rising fuel prices

million) in export losses a day, the government threatened to punish striking truckers, use police to break picket lines, and the army to scab. In face of such provocation, Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) threat-

ened to call all its members out.

This strike movement is connecting with a larger radicalisation against the government's caving in to US demands for Korea to open its markets to US-produced beef, which has sparked daily demonstrations of the youth and the largest demo in Korean history on 10 June of one million people in Seoul.

The KCTU announced that its members had voted for a general strike on 2 July. President Lee Seok-haeng stated: "We will walk out like the baseball batting order goes; the first batter is the Korea Cargo Transport Workers' Union, the second batter is the constructors' and machinery workers, followed by the metal workers and the railway workers."

The Korean workers are showing how to knock their own bosses out of the ballpark.

World protests

Similar protests took place across Asia. In May, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia announced plans to cut subsidies or liberalise government-set fuel prices.

In Indonesia youth and students responded to the 30% cut in subsidies by taking to the streets and throwing rocks and petrol bombs. Immediately after, Sri Lanka raised fuel prices and the Bangladesh government announced plans to hike prices to limit losses at the state-owned distributor.

The Land Transport Federation of Thailand has threatened to gridlock Bangkok with 100,000 trucks if the government did not subsidise fuel for lorries. In June even China raised petrol and diesel prices by 18 per cent to avoid greater losses by its state-owned refiners.

Millions in these countries live on less than \$2 a day and are already squeezed by food rises.

In Managua, Nicaragua, a two-week strike by public transport workers and taxi drivers brought the capital to a standstill, with blockades closing neighbourhoods and stoning scab taxis, forced the "leftwing" Ortega government to raise its oil subsidy from 30 cents to \$1.30. Thousands of Chilean truckers struck, blockaded roads, until President Bachelet announced a \$1 billion subsidy to help offset the rising costs of fuel and taxes.

Militant action in Europe

French fishermen spearheaded the movement with blockades of ports, blocking channel ferries from Dunkirk and an oil depot near Marseilles. French farmers and lorry drivers joined in, blocking oil depots and staging a go-slow on the Charles de Gaulle airport road.

Fishermen in Spain, Portugal and Italy followed, the Cepesca fishermen's federation in

G8 threatens Opec

Gordon Brown has condemned the OPEC group of oil producing countries including Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Iraq and Iran. Brown stated it was "a scandal that 40 per cent of the oil is controlled by Opec... and that at a time when oil is desperately needed and supply needs to expand, that Opec can withhold supply from the market."

He called for a dialogue with the oil producers while Kevin Rudd, Australian PM, called for the G8 to "apply a blowtorch" to OPEC – does he want to do blow it up?

The US made it clear that this dialogue would be more of a threat as its congress passed a resolution seeking to sue OPEC for fixing oil prices and keeping down production. This prompted Saudi Arabia to pledge to pump more oil, though not enough to lower the oil price.

• For more on G8 go to p22

protest

Spain called an indefinite strike. It mounted a demonstration in Madrid giving away 20 tonnes of free fish to point out that they were working at a loss. Spanish and Portuguese lorry drivers began their own indefinite strike with thousands in convoys blocking several major cities and fuel depots. Supermarkets shelves emptied, petrol stations went dry, and three car manufacturers suspended production for lack of parts.

In Britain lorry protests were accompanied by striking oil workers and tanker drivers demanding a pay rise out of the enormous profits of Shell, a record £13.9bn.

Who will lead?

At the Madrid demonstration the president of the Tarragona fishing association in Catalonia said "Until recently, staff salaries amounted to our biggest overhead cost. Now it's fuel." This clearly shows the cross class nature of these protests, they are a mixture of the staff and self-employed mobilised by the petty-bourgeoisie or "little bosses" of the commercial boats, farms, and trucking firms. Similarly many road haulage companies have supported the protests in Britain.

The question is how the working class can come to the head of this movement and lead the poorer, working and more desperate sections of the petty-bourgeoisie – there were reports that the drivers leading the Spanish strike were the mostly self-employed, non-unionised drivers – in a fight against inflation.

The danger is that the not-so-little bosses organise sections of the petit bourgeoisie and their own workers behind them with demands that make the working class pay with higher food prices. The working class must move decisively to show that it has the muscle and social power to win real victories.

For this we need a programme that can defeat the oil multinationals and the speculators.

- Nationalise the oil, gas and electricity companies under workers' control.
- Cheap oil and gas to peasants, workers and poor truck and taxi drivers.
- Nationalise the distribution networks. No profits for the "middlemen".
- Set up price committees under trade union control to publish real inflation figures rather than government lies and to enforce fair prices. These committees of workers and peasants can also distribute food and fuel to those in need.
- Swingeing taxes on the speculators and the profits of the multinational to fund cheap subsidised oil, gas and fuel for the poor.
- For a sliding scale of wages, every per cent on inflation put a per cent on the wages.

These measures should be fought for both nationally and internationally. Global inflation is an attack on us all and has the potential to unite us all against the capitalists. International gatherings such as the Malmo ESF (See p22) and meetings of the WSF must be used to coordinate action.

Why the price rise?

Keith Spencer explains how the oil price rise is the latest stage in the global economic crisis

Most commentators argue the reason for inflation especially the rocketing prices of oil - is just a question of demand outstripping supply. The cyclical boom, reaching its peak in 2005-06 sucked in more and more oil - especially to China and the south asian economies this driving up prices. Further restrictions in supply with the Iraq war, which has effectively reduced oil production in that country, unrest in Nigeria and the constant threat that Hugo Chavez may turn off the supply to the US, also add to the price rises.

But in fact, oil supply has actually been greater than demand in the past few years.

Recently, the US Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration said that the existing surplus oil production of 3 to 5 million barrels a day will continue to grow up to 2 010 "substantially thickening the surplus capacity cushion".

In June 2006 US Senate report said: "There is substantial evidence supporting the conclusion that the large amount of speculation in the current market has significantly increased prices." (permanent sub committee on investigations "The Role of Market Speculation in rising oil and gas prices")

Of the \$60 a barrel price of oil in June 2006 about \$25 was speculation, said the report. So that would account for about 40-45 per cent of today's price of \$140, if all other things are equal.

But there has been massive increase in trading of oil futures.

The Economist said recently: "The number of transactions involving oil futures on the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX), the biggest market for oil, has almost tripled since 2004. That neatly mirrors a tripling of the price of oil over the same period." (*The Economist*, 29 May).

Last month, OPEC's Secretary General said that "oil consumption in the world at 87 million barrels per a day is exceeded by the paper market for oil, which equals about 1.36 billion barrels per a day, or more than 15 times the actual market demand." (*Reuters*, 10 June).

While the Opec general secretary may have an interest in blaming the speculators, the US congress has not. It started hearings last month to find ways to "tighten restrictions on pension funds, investment banks and other investors that they say are driving up fuel prices."

(*The New York Times*, 24 June.)

This decade has seen a huge increase in futures trading (the buying and selling of commodities on the expectation of their future price not at the current price). Oil has been at the forefront of this with the creation of several new futures exchanges.

The result is what we are now seeing is commodities changing hands so quickly and so many deals being made that the amount of money being traded far exceeds the value of the actual commodities. All this increased speculation chasing commodities is driving up the price of oil, and earlier this year food.

The speculation is caused by too much capital in the world in the hands of the rich, who are trying to find a sector or product that they can put their money into to gain profits. But because the returns are declining they are jumping from one market to the next, damaging and ruining economies and plunging people into ever greater poverty.

This is what Marx called a crisis of overaccumulation – too much capital finding too low returns.

That it appears first in the realm of credit and not the production of real things or commodities did not bother him; it was after all only the first appearance of a far greater problem.

"The credit crisis, while appearing as a function of exchange, really originates in the overproduction of commodities, not in the realm of trade but in the process of production itself. It appears at first as a crisis in the credit system as this is the main lever of "over-production and over-speculation" (Marx, *Capital Volume three*, chapter 27).

Rather than the current oil and food price rises being simply a product of demand outstripping supply, lack of investment, or too much subsidy, it is really a stage in the unfolding of a capitalist crisis – one where there are 'too many' commodities and 'too much' capital.

It is only capitalism with its exploitative relations of productions that can have a crisis of "too much". It is up to socialists to speed the day where the super abundance in the hands of the rich and powerful can be taken from them and used to free the world from poverty for ever.

• For more on credit and speculation go to <http://www.fifthinternational.org/>

WORKERS' MOVEMENT

Bob Crow calls for new party

Jeremy Dewar, Vice-Chair of the Campaign for a New Workers Party, reports on significant new call by union leaders for a break from Labour at this year's CNWP conference

“**W**hat our members don't want to see is another Respect or Socialist Labour Party. They want to see a political party – and we've got to move towards it,” said Bob Crow to the second conference of the Campaign for a New Workers Party on 29 June. This is his most explicit appeal for a new party to date.

The general secretary of the Rail Maritime and Transport union was scathing of organisations and individuals – mentioning the Socialist Workers Party, George Galloway and Arthur Scargill – that grabbed control of new parties before they had rallied support in the working class. He emphasised that a new workers party needed to be “rooted in the community”.

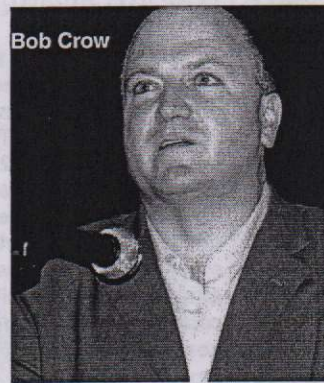
He was no kinder to the Labour Representation Committee, which maintained that if John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn and other left MPs left the Labour Party they

may they would lose their seats. But as Crow pointed out, and Simeon Andrews of the LRC admitted, when the current handful of left labour MPs have retired they would be replaced by loyal New Labour clones in any case.

Crow warned that the unions could end up “going down the American route, where unions only deal with bread and butter issues, like pay and conditions, with no unions affiliated to any party”.

New move

John McNally Vice President of the Public and Commercial Services told the conference of a new initiative. Left PCS leaders, including general secretary Mark Serwotka, want to discuss standing trade union backed candidates against Labour in elections. They hoped other union leaders would join them and co-sponsor a conference later this year on the crisis of working class political representation.



Bob Crow

As well as discussing the platform for a slate of workers' candidates – McNally suggested prioritising policies on pay, privatisation, war, racism and fascism – the conference could also address how to move towards a new party. While these were early days and there was opposition to the idea within the PCS, it was refreshing to hear both McNally and Crow stress the urgency the situation brought to the task.

The bosses and the Labour government will rain blows on our class during the economic crisis. Without our own independent party, resistance will be weakened. On the other hand, taking the first steps towards a new party could help generalise struggles and give them a political direction.

The CNWP can use this opportunity to build local and regional groups open to everyone in favour of a new party. Many striking workers on 16-17 July, militants at the Convention of the Left in September, and from shop stewards' network will respond strongly to a bold and clear call.

By involving as many workers and youth, who are already taking the fight to New Labour in discussions of both the structure and policies of the new party we can ensure that it becomes a powerful fighting organisation from day one. We believe that it must become an anti-capitalist and a revolutionary party too.

No holding back struggles to save Labour

Andy Young of the NSSN steering committee says more and more workers are wising up to the need for an independent organisation for rank and file trade union members

The second conference of the National Shop Stewards Network couldn't have come at a better time. Unison local government workers had just voted to strike on 16-17 July, with civil servants and Unite health workers set to follow.

Meanwhile, a rash of private sector strikes has broken out, following victories for Scottish oil workers and Shell tanker drivers. Anger against Labour and below inflation pay “rises” (really cuts) is mounting.

The conference drew 200 delegates and 75 observers, many of whom were leading key struggles in their workplaces. For instance, Caroline Johnson of Birmingham Unison explained how activists had held dozens of mass meetings, winning male workers to striking for equal pay for their sisters, and 2,000 new members for her branch.

But there were also tales indicat-

ing a new climate of victimisation in the workplace. One postal rep announced he had just been sacked that morning, due to his organising efforts. Karen Reissmann, sacked for fighting cuts at the Manchester mental health trust, said the problem was not the lack of solidarity – her branch raised £250,000 during their two week strike – but the union officials' idleness.

Indeed, many criticised the union leaders and recognised the need to organise without them where necessary. Despite workers' willingness to fight – over a million strike days last year – the union leaders have sold out a series of disputes, and witch-hunted militants. Tony Staunton of Plymouth City Unison was expelled after he stood for office against the right wing.

Workers Power submitted a short motion to the conference: “The NSSN will campaign for united action within and across the unions – with the officials where possi-

ble, without them with necessary.”

Dave Chapple, NSSN chair, conceded that the network's founding statement, which pledged the organisation not to “interfere in the internal affairs” of unions, could not mean standing by while comrades are witch-hunted. However, Chapple and NSSN secretary, Linda Taaffe ruled out any motions being discussed at the conference, so the conference – despite a number of delegates supporting unofficial action when strikes are called off – could not clarify its policy.

The danger is that, while bitterness is growing against the Labour-loyal right wing union leaders, such as Unison's Dave Prentice or Unite's Tony Woodley, who put the survival of the Labour government above their own members' interests, illusions in left wing union officials, particularly Mark Serwotka of the Public and Commercial Services union, are actually intensifying.

The closing speaker, the Social-

ist Party's Janice Godrich, president of the PCS, confirmed this by arguing that the PCS had a socialist leadership, whose conduct was above reproach. Yet the PCS leadership has wasted its members' sacrifice over the past four years on an endless and futile series of one-day strikes, so spread out as to have no effect.

With the media openly talking about a “summer of discontent”, let's remember one of the most important lessons of the 1970s: that left wing union leaders can also hold back struggles. For years, TUC lefts Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones called on workers to accept pay cuts in order to save the Labour government. By the time rank and file activists broke free from this line, the Tories were set to win the election and the Thatcher decade began.

Today, we must prepare workers to act independently of their leaders – left or right – when they hold back or betray our struggles.

UK

Young people harassed by Labour jobs!

Young people face poverty, racism and abuse from the press and politicians. *John Bowman* looks at the plight of youth under New Labour and how they can fight back.

For the second year in a row child poverty has risen. Children in poverty increased by 100,000 in 2006-7 on top of the 200,000 rise in 2005-6 (before housing costs). And that was at the height of the economic boom – the coming recession will make it worse still.

Figures for child poverty after housing costs are even worse, with 3.9 million living in relative poverty instead of the target of less than 3.3 million (relative being 60% of average earnings).

Thirty per cent of children – yes, that's nearly one in three – live in poverty in the UK (all statistics from government website) and the figure is rising despite New Labour's tax and credit reforms. Labour's promise in 1997 of halving child poverty may be missed by one million.

But the government's failings are even worse. Last month, the Children's Commissioners for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland released a damning report to the United Nations that highlighted how legal and political attacks on young people's rights and living conditions have intensified over the past few years.

The report highlights a "very punitive approach to misbehaviour" in the UK and that the UK has a low age of criminal responsibility (10 years compared with an EU average of 14), locking up many more children and young people than most European countries. In addition, the report exposes how severe child poverty makes the UK stand out from much of Europe, with bad health, poor education, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy.

There is a clear racial dimension to child poverty. The commissioners' report condemns the treatment of young asylum seekers who are "consistently treated differently" and experience "serious breaches of their rights", while a recent House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee report found that rates of poverty were twice as high among



Young people protest in London for more youth clubs and better treatment

children in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the UK.

Labour's approach to youth since 1997 has been underpinned with Tory rhetoric such as "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime", but in reality has focused on the former and not the latter. Anti-social Behaviour Orders (Asbos) have been used mainly on young people, criminalising youth for activities that under criminal law would not be offences. There's no 'innocent until proven guilty' when it comes to Asbos: no trial, no jury, no case for the defence. But it's a criminal offence to breach an Asbo – with penalties including heavy fines, and even imprisonment. The latest Home Office statistics (from 2006) show that 61 per cent of all Asbos on young people were breached. As part of the same package of legislation, dispersal orders have allowed police to ban gatherings of young people in certain places, which threaten groups of more than three young people with criminalisation.

Alarming, new technology has also started being used to target young people indiscriminately. The "mosquito" device projects a loud high pitched noise that can only be heard by young people in order to disperse them from an area.

Workers Power spoke to a young woman in Huddersfield who described its effect. "There is one

outside Kingsgate shopping centre which is on constantly. It doesn't hurt but it's distressing, it's really unpleasant and just makes you want to run away."

In a further attack, the Labour government has cut funding for youth centres, with many having closed or been threatened with closure, and has built on many of the remaining inadequate urban green spaces in the UK. Schools have sold off playing fields to developers. The result has been that young people in Britain have far fewer places to meet and socialise – important because young people often feel the need to escape the restrictive environment of home and family.

With widespread poverty, victimisation by local government and the police, racism and a deteriorating standard of life, young people in Britain have never been more alienated from society.

Despite the government's age discrimination laws, the minimum wage for young workers is officially lower than for over 21s. Lower pay in most workplaces and rising costs of living are forcing those who would choose to leave home to stay in unhappy family situations. School life is becoming increasingly difficult for younger teenagers who have had to put up with a huge burden of homework and examinations.

Little wonder then that the report

by the Children's Commissioners point to the fact that young people in Britain drink more alcohol and smoke more cannabis than in the rest of Europe. The report also shows that the mental health of children has deteriorated over the past 30 years, with one in 10 children between the ages of five and 16 suffering a clinically recognised mental disorder.

Young people are easy scapegoats for the cowardly Labour government. Its attacks on wages, education, social and health care are causing many social problems, and are increasing levels of poverty and crime. The media whips up panic about "chavs" and "hoodies" – this is another example of how young people are victimised for social problems caused by poverty and alienation.

But young people have shown that they can be the most energetic when it comes to fighting back. Young people led the way in organising demonstrations and walkouts against the Iraq war in 2003, and came to take a leading role in anti-capitalist struggles across Europe in early 2000-02. Today, young people have the potential to fight back against the poverty caused by the Labour Party today, and against racists like the BNP who are trying to take advantage of disillusionment to divide us against ourselves.

The trade union movement should break its silence on the issue of young people, and condemn the Labour governments attacks on youth. They should rally the support of young people for workers' struggles against low pay, privatisation and cutbacks. They should launch a huge recruitment drive to organise young workers, fight for equalisation for the minimum wage and an end to low pay.

Young people also need their own political voice: a revolutionary working class youth movement, run by young people, for young people, which can organise in the schools, colleges and workplaces to resist the government's attacks on the youth and link resistance to the worldwide struggle against capitalism.

BEIJING OLYMPICS

Beijing's Festival of Reaction

The Chinese Communist Party hopes that the Olympic games will earn it international praise, acceptance and stability. But a rising tide of class conflict points to a very different future for China, writes *Peter Main*

The Beijing Olympic Games will showcase many feats of athletic achievement and physical prowess - but that is not their main purpose. Less than 20 years ago, the same city echoed to the sound of tanks as the Chinese Communist Party massacred its student and worker opponents. The capitalist powers were united in their condemnation and threatened sanctions and penalties, to bring the dictators down. But as soon as those dictators began to dismantle the planned economy and open the country to overseas capital, the criticism turned to praise.

At root, the Games are a celebration of the survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Far from presiding over a socialist state, the CCP has reintroduced capitalism in China and its dictatorship rules on behalf of the exploitative bosses, not the workers. This year's games resemble nothing so much as the Berlin Games of 1936 when the Great Powers signalled their acceptance of the Nazis. Like then, the demonstration of wealth and sporting prowess, and the barrage of chauvinist propaganda, is intended to hide a reality of dictatorship and increasing economic inequality.

Unlike Germany in 1936 however, China is not living under a newly imposed dictatorship whose opponents are still reeling from defeat. The speed of social change, with hundreds of millions moving to new cities in little more than a decade, has weakened the Party's social control. Although illegal, strikes are an everyday occurrence in China. Such is the pressure from the workers that in the huge industrial centre of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, a new legal code covering workplace disputes virtually recognises the right to strike.

Against this background, the regime needs to reinforce its own prestige and divert attention away from conflicts by presenting a spectacle of patriotic fervour and



Police in London and other cities reacted violently to protests against the Olympic torch relay

national superiority. Since the turn of the year, Beijing has been buffeted by bad news. Inflation hit new highs in January as domestic food shortages and international energy prices combined to push the official price index up to 6.5%, the highest for a decade. And it has carried on climbing since, hitting 8% in May.

In February, heavy snowstorms brought transport chaos and revealed sub-standard materials and construction in the electricity supply system. March saw overt political opposition in Tibet that rapidly spread into China's western provinces with large ethnic Tibetan communities. Direct repression of the demonstrators was combined with a concerted media campaign that presented opposition as treachery aimed at destroying the unity of the "Chinese nation".

Internationally, Beijing's reputation was even tarnished by the typhoon that hit Myanmar in April, because of its failure to criticise the military junta's handling of the crisis.

The subsequent earthquake in the Chinese province of Sichuan came at an opportune time for China's rulers. When the earthquake struck on 12 May, Premier Wen Jiabao saw the opportunity to revive the regime's image. As the full scale of the disaster became clear so did changes in Beijing's political strat-

egy. In 1976, when an even more powerful earthquake destroyed the city of Tangshan, killing 250,000, news of the catastrophe was virtually a state secret - but this year even foreign news media were allowed virtually unlimited access.

A newly established emergency control system swung into action. State media were full of pictures of "Grandfather Wen" visiting the scene, encouraging the soldiers and comforting the bereaved. However, free access did not last long. Within days, the obvious fact that many of the 70,000 victims were schoolchildren and teachers, crushed as shoddily built schools collapsed, brought increasing accusations of corruption in the building industry. In China, that can only mean corruption in the party.

As victims and commentators began to raise demands for an inquiry, media access was closed down. Attention shifted to the spontaneous solidarity of people throughout China which was equated with the government's mobilisation of resources and the often heroic efforts of military rescue teams. Suddenly, the government was the hero of the hour and China was once again a 'people united in the face of adversity'.

The Olympics are designed as a showcase to prove exactly that. But, although there has been a wide-

spread crackdown on known dissidents, there is every chance that opposition to the CCP, whether from oppressed nationalities, democracy activists, trade unionists or even reactionary religious movements such as Falun Gong will make itself felt during the Games.

We don't know whether such protests, or the regime's response to them, will open a new chapter in China's political history, but we do know that long-term realities will. The impact of the credit crunch and the likely recession in the US, the slowdown in other major economies and the effects of China's own unfolding economic cycle will inevitably heighten social tensions and fuel political conflict. The regime's increasing reliance on a xenophobic nationalism is a calculated preparation not for foreign adventures but for internal conflict.

When the games are over, the underlying tensions and conflicts will remain. Not the least of them will be the aftermath of the earthquake and the demands for an investigation into the corruption that was the real cause of so many deaths. Across China, millions have been displaced from their homes and cheated out of compensation by the same corruption in the same party. Even more millions work for breadline wages without security or even the legal right of abode in China's new cities.

The task for revolutionaries in China is to give a voice to all those millions, to take the lead in mobilising them against the one-party dictatorship, to educate them against the xenophobic chauvinism of the Maoists and to organise them in independent trade unions, workers' and peasants' councils and their own self-defence forces. For that, the revolutionaries themselves must be organised as a political party committed to the overthrow of the party's rule, self-determination for national minorities, the expropriation of the capitalists, workers' control of production and a real socialist republic.

SUPPLEMENT - EU IN CRISIS

Ireland's "no vote" scuppers treaty

Below, *Bernie Mcadam* explains how Ireland's 'no vote' to the EU treaty was not limited to anti-abortionists and right wingers, but won huge support in working class areas. On the following pages *Dave Stockton*, editor of *Fifth International*, looks at the crisis now facing the EU.

In a major upset, the Irish decisively rejected the Lisbon Treaty by 53.4% to 46.6%. Yet the three major political parties, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party all called for a yes vote. Similarly the Irish Congress of Trade Unions supported the treaty, despite internal opposition. At the same time there was a massive state and media campaign in favour of the treaty. However, all this utterly failed to convince the majority of the electorate to go along with the projected European corporate super state.

The No Vote campaign was primarily led by Sinn Fein supported by the Left including the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party, and Irish Republican Socialist Party, united within the Campaign against the EU Constitution (CAEUC). The anarchist Workers Solidarity Movement also conducted a lively 'no' campaign. However, it was not just a campaign of the left and the Irish nationalists, also in the 'no camp' was the neo-liberal group Libertas which was set up by Declan Ganley, a billionaire, and Coir a far right Catholic anti-abortion group.

The media downplayed the Left elements of the campaign against the treaty but gave prominence to the reactionary Libertas and Coir campaigns. The former was able to put large financial resources into publicity for billboard posters and newspaper advertisements and that helped to advertise the campaign widely. Libertas, led by Ganley, President of Rivada Networks, a US defence contractor, expressed fears that the EU might impair the role of free competition and provide a back door to increased corporate taxation, thus ruining Irish enticements to foreign direct investment. Ireland is the entry point to the EU for much US capital which clearly has little wish to see the Franco-Germany super state project go forward, preferring the loose "free trade zone" with minimal political and military pretensions.

For more reactionary reasons Coir opposed treaty on the grounds that Euro laws could supplant bans on such things as abortion.

The main anti-treaty campaign, CAEUC represented the most active and progressive at a grass roots level, in terms of meetings, leafleting and had a handful of Teachtaí Dála's and MEP's mainly from Sinn Fein and ex Teachtaí Dála Joe Higgins from the Socialist Party. They clearly had an impact in urban



The Economist thinks the Irish vote has killed off the constitution

working class areas as in Dublin where the no vote won. Libertas or Coir would hardly cut any ice in these areas. According to the Irish state broadcasting company, RTE:

"In general, the picture is that working class and rural constituencies voted against, while middle class areas were in favour." One again this is a defeat for the "European project" imposed by the working class and the left. Middle class areas by and large voted yes. Most rural areas had 'no' majorities.

CAEUC focussed on several arguments against the treaty. The campaign raised the spectre of the growth of militarism in a new European super state where neutrality is lost forever. Also the increasing privatisation especially in the health sector was seen as a major problem as was the feeling that an anti-democratic constitutional treaty was being foisted on the people of Europe by undemocratic methods.

Inevitably the constituent parts of the campaign pursued their own agendas. Sinn Fein, the largest party amongst them, argued that the treaty should be renegotiated. They called for the government to go back and get a better deal for Ireland and stressed the loss of the Irish commissioner and the need to protect neutrality, secure vetoes on public services, taxes and rates of pay and protect workers rights, etc.

The SWP called for no vote for a corporate Europe dominated by big business, against a militarised Europe and to defend Irish neutrality. They noted Sinn Fein's

more left wing start to the campaign relating to workers rights and against militarism but later their turn to a more limited nationalist agenda stressing it was 'bad for business' and did not argue for the treaty to be scrapped. The Socialist Party also argued against a militarised Europe but concentrated on the impact to workers conditions, health, etc. and attacked SF for wanting to renegotiate the treaty. These criticisms are important because the nationalists on their own cannot fight for a truly progressive agenda, and often end up sinking into the position of defending their own national capitalist 'rights' against the 'tyranny' of Brussels. The working class has no interest in the EU super state, despite any bribes that might be thrown our way by the EU ministers.

The struggle against the EU has taken on a continental character, for instance, in the recent protests by truck drivers and fishermen. Fishermen from France, Italy, Spain and Portugal demonstrated outside the Berlaymont offices of the EU in Brussels in May 2008, effectively besieging it for several hours. Socialists counter-pose the EU capitalist project with our concept of a socialist united states of Europe, one where our advanced economies work for human need not corporate greed.

The Irish Republic, by throwing a spanner in the works of the European imperialist project, sends a signal that many people in Europe when given the choice of supporting the EU project or not will often vote against it - as the French and Dutch voters did when they rejected the EU constitution. Ireland is the only country in Europe where a referendum is required to adopt the EU treaties. Now the EU has a choice, it can either go on without Ireland, effectively wrecking the purpose of the so-called democratic project or it can wait before calling another vote. The Irish rejected the Nice treaty in 2001 but then accepted it a year later after significant pressure from the EU institutions and a huge marketing 'yes vote' campaign.

Whatever the outcome, the Irish no vote has set back the whole process, which for working class people across the continent is a victory for all of us.

SUPPLEMENT - EU IN CRISIS

Where now for the European Union?

After the no vote in Ireland, cries of woe and indignation erupted from political élites in the major European capitals, especially from Angela Merkel in Berlin and Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris. Germany and France are the main powerhouses driving through this tinkered-with version of the European Constitution. The latter was signed in Rome in October 2004, but torpedoed by French and Dutch referenda on 29 May and 1 June of the following year, rejecting it by 55 per cent and 62 per cent respectively. In these countries, all the main parties, including the "Socialists", urged a "Yes" vote - in vain. In France, it was primarily the "No of the Left" campaign that defeated the Constitution by successfully exposing its neo-liberal, anti-working class, and anti-democratic character.

A European Superstate?

Not to be thwarted, the EU leaders, led by Angela Merkel, set out to ratify the same thing in essence, by changing its title to a treaty and removing any terminology that too clearly revealed their super-state ambitions. Above all, they persuaded the EU states not to put it to their peoples in a referendum. Ireland alone was unable to comply because any treaties which alter its own constitution cannot legally be adopted without a public vote.

Thus it is that, once again, three years after the French and Dutch votes - with not one of the major bourgeois parties supporting a "No" - a coalition of small "civil society" campaigning bodies, the far left and Sinn Féin have called the whole imperialist super-state policy into question.

The simple fact is that the bourgeoisies of the continent are seeking to create a "united Europe" on the most unattractive basis imaginable:

- Without any recognisable democratic process - even a bourgeois democratic one such as referenda, whilst -
- forcing through a series of

neoliberal "reforms" in the interests of the monopolies, aimed at undermining the social reforms and wage levels of the post-1945 era, and lastly -

- furtively creating a European army that can act "out of theatre," engaging in wars and occupations in the third world.

As the referenda in France, the Netherlands and now Ireland show, the population has rumbled their politicians and wherever they are given a say, they say "no."

The Democratic Deficit

The aim of the big capitalists of the continent, led by Germany and France, is to catch up with America's free market system - a process that we have called "Americanise or bust." This means a wholesale attack on the wages, pensions, and social services of workers, youth and the immigrant communities. At the same time they want to break the EU's dependency on the US as the 'world policeman'. In the longer term, they want the EU to be able to challenge and defy US interests whenever they clash, as they will do increasingly over the coming decades. But this is an unappealing objective to ordinary working people and so it has to be hidden in favour of an anaemic and phoney Europeanism.

They cannot find any way to get democratic consent for this unappetising concoction, especially from the working class and the small farmers of the continent. The problem is that they never dared to envisage democratic processes such as had won democratic rights in the national states, and for one simple reason: the real driving force for these had been class struggle and revolution, bourgeois and proletarian. To pose the idea of a constitution without even a referendum, never mind elections to a European constituent assembly, able to draw up and debate drafts submitted by the people, doomed it either to be imposed by grossly undemocratic means or to collapse.

But as well as resistance from below it has been incredibly difficult to get agreement amongst the ruling classes and their states. Germany and France wish to drive this process forward as fast as possible but the British and a constellation of smaller states (covertly backed by the USA or Russia) want to slow it down. They are not too worried that every last small newcomer to the club can hold up procedures and wring concessions from the big states. Britain in particular needs Uncle Sam (and Nato's monopoly of out of theatre operations) as a world policeman and as a counterweight to the Franco-German powerhouse.

After the Irish vote, both France and Germany have urged the remaining EU states to press ahead with ratification. The options are either to pressure the Irish to re-vote and this time "get it right", perhaps with the aid of a few economic bribes or to work out some legal procedure whereby the remaining ratifications are concluded and the Irish are obliged to "stand aside." The Foreign Minister of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier hinted at such a measure and Jean-Pierre Jouyet, the French Europe Minister, said: "The most important thing is that the ratification process must continue in the other countries and then we shall see with the Irish what type of legal arrangement could be found." The German-Czech President Vaclav Klaus has, however, remarked that the treaty is finished, and it is likely that in those states that delayed ratification because of massive public hostility, the process will probably slow to a snail's pace. In the Czech republic itself the treaty has been referred to the constitutional court which might rule against it.

The neo-liberalised "socialists" and "communists" have, if anything been more muscular, threatening the Irish with exclusion for daring to upset their imperialist apple cart. Thus Axel Schäfer, SPD leader in the Bundestag's EU committee,

raged: "We cannot allow the huge majority of Europe to be duped by a minority of a minority of a minority.... We think it is a real cheek that the country that has benefited most from the EU should do this. There is no other Europe than this treaty." Former veteran Communist and present Italian President Giorgio Napolitano said, "Now is the time for a courageous choice by those who want coherent progress in building Europe, leaving out those who despite solemn, signed pledges threaten to block it."

Any protracted delay will, however, be a heavy blow to the European imperialist project. The treaty of Lisbon was designed to streamline EU decision making by removing many of the present vetoes that the smaller states can impose by introducing "qualified majority voting" on many issues. Alongside that, it would stealthily create the beginnings of a European executive; a President of the European Council and a High Representative for Foreign Affairs - that can represent the EU as a whole and begin to lay down a European foreign policy.

There is widespread criticism from the smaller liberal parties of the so-called democratic deficit of the EU. Deficit? There are no democratic aspects to the EU beyond those that the masses have established in the national states. Our rulers have made sure of that. Liberals believe that a few more referenda and more widespread media debate would enable the project to progress. But this is an illusion. As long as the EU is based on an imperialist project to rival the USA in the struggle to divide up and dominate the exploitable countries of the world (the semi-colonies - countries which are independent only in the most minimal terms), as long as it is based on the capitalist exploitation of the workers and poor farmers of Europe, it simply cannot be democratic in the sense of allowing the working majority to determine their own future. Indeed, the EU is doomed to sink deeper and deeper into undemocratic practices

unless and until the working class of the continent seizes power in state after state, each helping the other.

A nascent European imperialism

Another major aspect of the entire constitutional project is the European Security Strategy - a policy approved by the European Council held in Brussels in December 2003. This is aimed at becoming the counterpart of, and potentially a rival to, the National Security Strategy of the United States. It is no accident that the drive to adopt it occurred when the majority of the EU states, led by France and Germany, were strongly opposed to the unilateral invasion and occupation of Iraq by George Bush and his poodle Tony Blair - because they felt their own political and economic interests were threatened.

The ESS policy sets out to create a European command and defence force that its promoters hope will one day be able to act independently of the USA and the US-dominated Nato. Of course, this all has to be strenuously denied, until such time as it is achieved.

So, preparatory to this and to subvert popular opposition to "foreign wars" and the cost of a new arms race, they have to claim they are purely interested in mounting "humanitarian" or "human rights" interventions. Nevertheless, the EU is beginning to flex its muscles in a modest way. Leaving aside its member states' own imperialist adventures in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, the first EU "policing" interventions were in March 2003 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, then with EU "peacekeepers" in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Most important so far has been the deployment in Chad and the

Central African Republic in 2008.

Deployment of the 3,700-strong EUFOR is due to be completed by June. Most of the soldiers come from France, the former colonial power that has continued to dominate Chad and many other west and central African states as its semi-colonies. However, France is seeking to share this role (and its costs and casualties) with its EU partners, thus fending off accusations of neocolonialism. However, the participation of 160 troops from traditionally neutral Austria, opposed by 73 percent of the population, has provoked widespread opposition, including demonstrations. Also the Chadian rebel leader, Isshak Bechir, warned the European force that beyond its supposed humanitarian purpose: "They should keep out of everything else", saying, that whilst he did not expect any fighting between EU troops and rebels "we are prepared if it happens."

Revolutionaries should of course oppose the sending of these pseudo-humanitarian missions, demand their immediate withdrawal and support any indigenous resistance to them.

The leaders of the "No" have no alternative

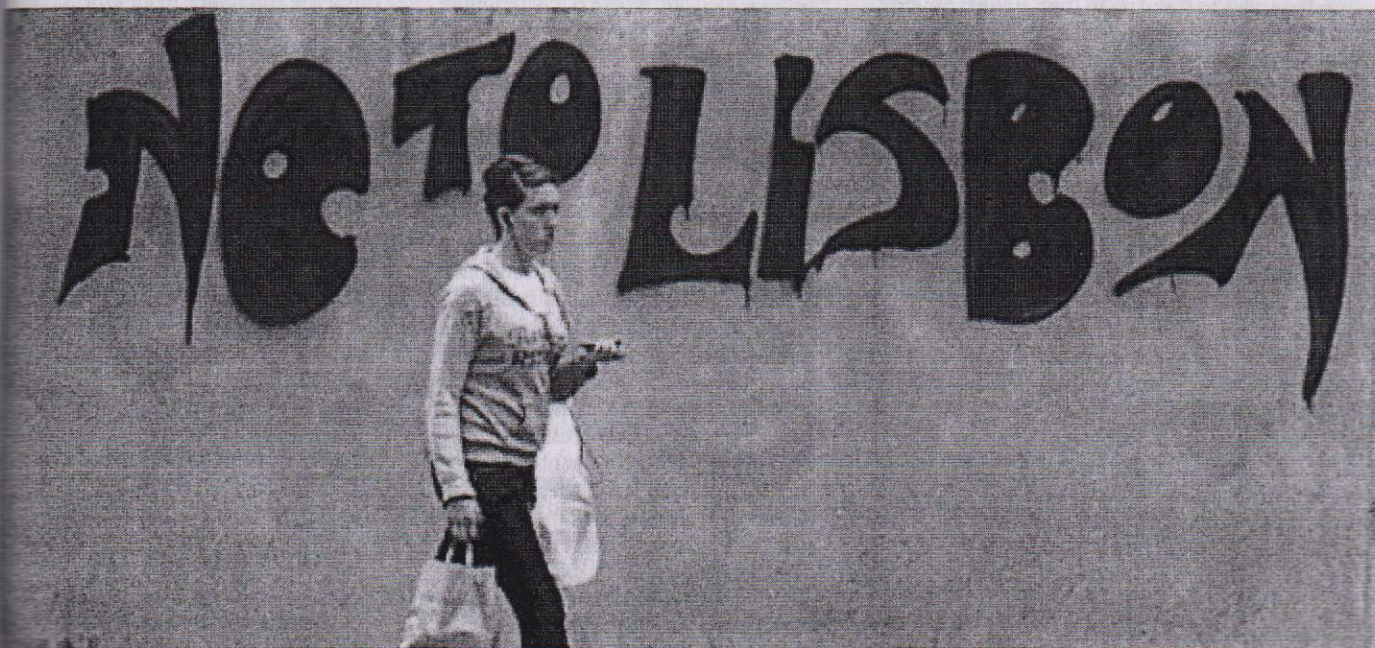
Of course workers and youth across Europe, already fighting the "reforms" to public services, education, privatisation and the anti-immigrant measures of "fortress Europe" will be celebrating the Irish victory. But as with the whole string of "no" votes to the European superstate project, such purely electoral successes will not stop it. In reality it can only be stopped by mass action on the streets in the workplaces. It can only be stopped by forces with an alternative vision, that of a Europe without capitalists, those who are driving the project

forward. Unfortunately most of the political forces behind many of the "no" campaigns have no such vision and no plan to mobilise the working class, the only force capable of stopping the imperialist superstate and installing a Socialist United States of Europe.

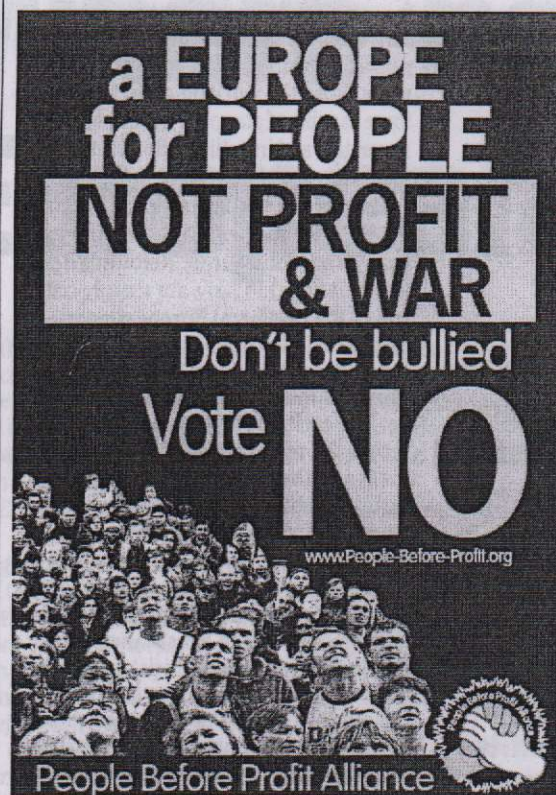
Parties like the French Communist Party (PCF), The Left (Die Linke) in Germany and Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione) in Italy, are sharply critical of the neoliberal Europe supported by the main bourgeois parties and the social democratic and labour parties. They call instead for "a social Europe", i.e. for a capitalist EU but one which preserves the social gains of the post-war years and the systems of class collaboration established in many European countries (social partnership, codetermination etc.). However, these deeply reformist parties, and the trade unions linked to or influenced by them, have no intention of leading a resistance to the point where it causes a crisis of governability in their respective countries. Whenever mass resistance has approached the point where the next step - all out strikes or a general strike - would have posed the question "who rules?", "who is the master in the house?" the European Left parties have, without exception, sounded the retreat and tried to divert the struggle into electoral channels.

Here they face the dilemma that, given their size, they cannot hope to govern alone and the only coalition partners available to them are their big brothers, the social democratic and labour parties, perhaps with small liberal capitalist parties tagging along. Such governments, however, always carry out the same old neoliberal policies and this eventually discredits their "left" partners, causing

"As well as resistance from below it has been incredibly difficult to get agreement amongst the different countries ruling classes"



SUPPLEMENT - EU IN CRISIS



The Irish Socialist Workers' poster from their electoral front against the EU treaty

them electoral disaster at the next poll. In France, this approach has reached the point where the once mighty PCF has sunk to half the percentage vote of the far left Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. In Italy, it has seen Rifondazione and the Party of Italian Communists swept out of parliament altogether.

The leadership blockage

An integral part of the creation of a European superstate, able to stand up to the USA, is the copying of the latter's neoliberal economic system and its domestic strong state (armed with union-busting laws) which has enabled it to keep workers' wages and social benefits below European levels for a quarter of a century. The EU monopolists and financiers have looked with lustful eyes on these advantages of their transatlantic brethren. That is what the Lisbon Agenda of 2000 is all about; privatisation of goods and services, scaling down of social welfare provision, weakening of the power of the trade unions, shifting of tax burdens and pension contributions from the employers onto the workers and the poor. It has provoked a wave of class struggle across continental Europe from Portugal to Greece, with France, Germany and Italy figuring largely in all this.

In France, in particular, powerful movements on the streets, mobilising youth and public sector trade unionists, has repeatedly upset the government's

reform plans. But now, across Europe, there are right wing governments committed to serious attacks to break up the post war gains and undermine the strength of the labour movements, just as Thatcher did in Britain in the 1980s. A serious economic crisis will speed up and intensify this offensive against the working classes' living and working conditions. These governments, especially in Italy and France, are also using anti-immigrant racism to divide and weaken working class resistance. Recent pogroms in Rome and Naples, Berlusconi's threats to deploy the army on the streets, indicate that, in Italy at least, the moment of truth is approaching.

Clearly, despite their role in the EU constitution 'no' campaigns, the left parties have no alternative to a capitalist EU, no programme for a socialist Europe, no action programme to defeat the Lisbon agenda and the bosses' offensive. They are, in short, part of the problem facing Europe's workers, not part of its solution. This problem is an acute crisis of leadership. Despite magnificent struggles, despite weakening and even pushing out right wing governments, the working class has not been able to make its victories long lasting or complete. The right comes back again, just as it has done in the shape of Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel and Silvio Berlusconi. The French, German and Italian workers are now, once more, facing a fight for their lives, a fight to avoid strategic defeats that would massively affect all the workers of Europe. But as well as such defeats the workers of these countries and the continent also have the possibility of winning serious victories. The European capitalist classes are far from confident of victory and for good reason. But, if we are to win this time, we need better, much better leadership. Where is it to be found?

**“The
European
capitalist
classes
are far
from
confident
of
victory”**

A new leadership

The much smaller parties and groups of the European Anticapitalist Left (EAL) and the social forum movement, hitherto strongest in Italy, the smaller militant trade unions like Cobas in the latter country and SUD in France, all have an enormous responsibility to summon the working class, youth and immigrant communities to battle against the imperialist EU project and the offensive of the bosses and their governments. The assembly of the social movements, which will meet at the European Social Forum in Malmö in September, presents a golden opportunity to thrash out a strategy for a continent-wide coordinated resistance. Will these forces do it? To wait in passive hopefulness for them to do so would be, to put it mildly, naive. The EAL has a regular habit of capitulating to its “big brothers” in the trade union bureaucracy and the European Left parties when the high point of struggle comes

and the latter betray.

However, even though these forces can swing to the left as the struggle surges forward but then swing back to the right when it faces serious political challenges (what Marxists call centrism) there are signs that the EAL has some realisation of the urgency of the situation. The main party of the EAL, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, has recently abandoned its strategy of seeking an alliance with the PCF and launched a project for an anticapitalist party in France. The LCR has played a prominent role, headed by their young presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot, in the resistance to Sarkozy.

Militants should demand that the LCR and the other anticapitalist forces and the more militant trade unions with a greater degree of rank and file democracy, support the call for a programme of direct action resistance in Malmö, to be fought for in every country. If these forces utilise the tactics of the united front from above and below, that is, they call on the leaders of the big trade unions to mobilise whilst directly approaching their rank and file, drawing them into co-ordinations, action committees, etc at a grassroots level, then a real step forward can be taken to break the leadership log jam. We could then look forward to a return to the militant European mobilisations of 2000-2003 and those in France, Germany Italy and Greece in the following years. What should the axes of such a mobilisation be?

We propose Europe-wide demonstrations and strikes against the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. If they press ahead with ratification we must demand referenda in every country and launch serious campaigns to mobilise people to vote against the EU proposals.

Unite the resistance to all aspects of the Lisbon agenda: privatisation, pension, health and education “reforms”.

- For trade union resistance to inflation and rising unemployment as the crisis deepens!
- For a sliding scale of wages and hours - Europe wide!
- For action committees with delegates from the enterprises, schools, universities and localities; for the creation of a Europe-wide coordination!
- For the withdrawal of all EU member states' troops from countries they are occupying (Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Chad etc.)
- For a Socialist United States of Europe!

The capitalist class is responsible for all these attacks on our democratic rights, our services, and our jobs, therefore our slogans must be: one enemy - one struggle! *Tous ensemble* we can win!

US ELECTIONS

Why has Obama become so pro-Israel?

Millions are looking to Barack Obama to put an end to US aggression in the Middle East. So why has Obama publicly backed America's puppet Israel and its expansionist policy? *Mark Booth* reports

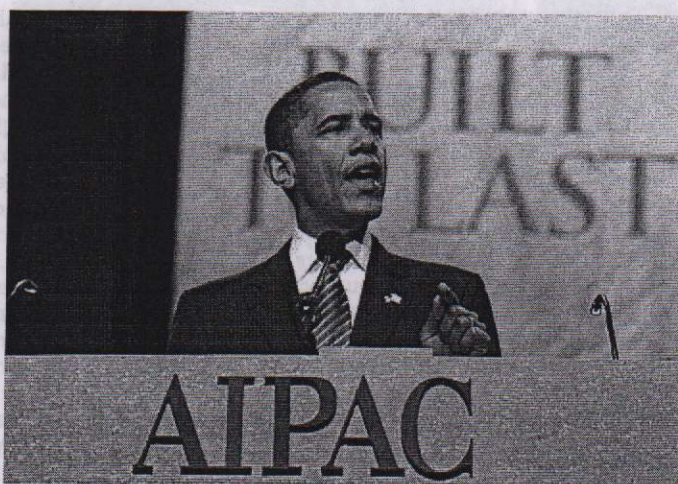
Obama is the first candidate for the US presidency who has a chance of winning. Millions of Americans hope that this will mean an end to the Iraq war and to the Bush administration's aggressive foreign policy of occupation and war. But if Obama's recent statements are anything to go by, they will be sorely disappointed.

Now that he is the official Democratic Party candidate, currently a massive 15 points ahead in the polls, Obama has a real chance of being America's first black President. So he is now working overtime to reassure the US capitalists and state – the financial and military establishment – that he is a safe pair of hands to look after their interests in an increasingly unstable world.

Proving his loyalty to Israel was top of the list. Many black people in the USA instinctively oppose Israel, easily recognising its rhetoric about having to 'defend itself' from the resistance of the occupied Palestinians as the typical language of racist colonists. So Obama had to prove that Israel would continue to get unconditional support if he reaches the White House. In his very first policy speech after winning the nomination, he spoke out loudly and unambiguously in support of Israel and threatened to attack Iran.

The Zionists gave Obama his cue, launching a huge military training exercise in early June with over 100 fighter and bomber planes carrying out manoeuvres over the Mediterranean sea and Greece. This show of strength was clearly aimed as a warning to Iran that could soon be levelled against it, with one US official admitting it was "a rehearsal for a potential bombing attack on Iran's nuclear facilities."

Of course many experts have stated that Iran is nowhere near developing a nuclear weapon and



Barack Obama speaking at the influential Zionist organisation AIPAC

it is not even clear that they want to. But these 'facts' were echoed by Obama who said "there is no doubt that Iran poses an extraordinary threat to Israel and Israel is always justified in making decisions that will provide for its security."

This follows hot on the heels of a speech to the pro-Zionist lobbying group American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in which Obama reaffirmed his support for the US imperialist project and its Israeli puppet. He declared that US support for Israel was "unbreakable today, unbreakable tomorrow, unbreakable forever" and said he spoke as a "true friend" of Israel.

In a provocative statement which exposed his total capitulation to the key demands of Israel he added, "any agreement with the Palestinian people must preserve Israel's identity as a Jewish state, with secure, recognized and defensible borders. Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided."

What does this mean for Obama's foreign policy and his position on Israel's continued occupation and oppression of the Palestinians? Basically a continuation of US policy to date. He has pledged to continue

funding Israel to the tune of \$30 billion over the next 10 years and said that that Israel's security was "sacrosanct" and "non-negotiable".

Obama says he is willing to enter into talks with Iran using "tough and principled diplomacy". Yet at the same time he has said he will do "everything in my power" to prevent Iran getting a nuclear weapon. The first comment is a sop to the illusions in him held by millions of progressive workers and youth, that he will negotiate with these regimes and not drag America into another bloody and fruitless war of conquest. But the second comment is reassurance to his capitalist backers that he will do everything to carry out their wishes and ensure America's continued dominance of the Middle East. It is a clear sign that Obama is willing to be a nuclear hawk if that the US establishment demand it.

For the Palestinians, Obama's announcements destroy any hope that he could help force a just solution to their plight. There can be no real peace for the Palestinians without allowing the Palestinian refugees the right of return, and no just peace will preserve Israel's exclusively Jewish identity, which is artificially maintained by an

apartheid system of laws and immigration controls which prevent the return of the Palestinians who were expelled from their land in 1948, while allowing Jewish people the world over to settle in Israel with immediate full citizenship rights.

Obama's declared support for a "two-state solution" is in reality no advance over the existing position of the Bush administration. It is simply support for Israel's continued oppression of the Palestinians. The Zionist state will only allow the Palestinian national Authority to exist if it remains confined in a network of isolated enclaves with all transport and trade routes controlled by Israel and its Army, the misnamed Israeli Defence Force.

The reality is that despite the vast scale of illusions that people naturally have in Obama, his open support for Israel makes him an enemy of consistent anti-racists, of anyone who opposes the oppression of the Palestinians, of the millions who resist US imperialism's occupations and wars.

The Democrats hope to position themselves as the 'progressive choice' compared to the Republicans but are tied to the US capitalist class and business interests by a thousand strings. It is these strings that will control any president Obama. The only solution is for the US working class to rely on its own strength.

Like the struggles of the International Longshore Workers Union who called for an international day of action against the occupation of Iraq in May and won backing from workers in Basra, southern Iraq. And like the immigrant workers who organised huge strikes and marches last year. These workers need to build their own party, one that does not threaten resistance movements in the Middle East, but offers them its solidarity; one that is not tied to the Pentagon and Wall Street, but fights to overthrow them.

ZIMBABWE

After the stolen election – how can dictator Mugabe be ousted?

After terrorising his way to another term as president, Robert Mugabe faces increasing pressure to step down. *Keith Spencer* charts the history of his regime and argues that it must be overthrown, not by foreign intervention but through the struggle of the workers and peasants of Zimbabwe.

Robert Mugabe has cheated and terrorised his way to another term as president. Despite the criticisms of the United Nations Security Council or the South African Development Community (SADC) the people of Zimbabwe face another four years of misery, famine, violence and poverty. The strategy of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – reliance on pressure from the “international community” whilst at home playing the “peaceful democrats” – has proved a miserable failure. Only mass action – by workers, the small farmers, the huge numbers of unemployed – can bring the tyrant down.

Electoral terror

The MDC makes a speciality of missing the boat. After its victory in the first round of the presidential elections it appears a shattered Mugabe was thinking of standing down and some of his key supporters wanted to ditch him. The MDC kept the masses off the streets and, as a result, the regime regrouped and went on the offensive.

The Thursday after the election, police raided the Harare offices of the Movement for Democratic Change and beat up and arrested supporters inside. Morgan Tsvangirai fled the country to appeal to the SADC leaders.

Mugabe then set up the Joint Operations Command (JOC) with five of his most trusted supporters, who are steeped in blood and corruption, and the governor of the Bank of Zimbabwe, who has been running the printing presses, fuelling the hyperinflation, to pay the army and Mugabe's Zanu-PF militias. Leaked reports show the JOC unleashed a wave of terror to drive MDC MP's and officials from their constituencies, beat up and kill their supporters, burn houses and villages and drive away election monitors. There were also plans to march electors to the polling stations and force them to vote for Mugabe by watching them vote or beating them if they did not show a finger with red ink (which was proof of their voting).

Police banned or broke up opposition meetings, while Zanu-PF held “re-voting” rallies where MDC supporters were beaten or forced them to back

Mugabe in the re-run.

The MDC's national election director, Ian Makone, was forced to go underground and can only meet party workers at night. The party's secretary general, Tendai Biti, was held in jail on treason charges. Another MP, Prosper Mutseyami told the UK Guardian newspaper that the army came looking for him three times, arrested 28 of his leading party workers, and drove away any independent election monitors. A human rights lawyer told the same newspaper that the jails are full of MDC supporters, ranging in age from 14 to 94, “In all my sixteen years as a human rights lawyer, I have never witnessed this,” he said.

Trade unions were also arrested and left organisations such as the International Socialist Organisation had its offices raided and smashed up.

Initially the terror was in the countryside but it soon spread to the suburbs of Harare and Bulawayo and into the inner where the MDC is strongest. Finally, the Sunday before the election, militias occupied a stadium in Harare to prevent an MDC rally from being held. It was this that finally convinced Tsvangirai to withdraw from the election.

So far the MDC claims about 80 people have been killed (although other sources claim up to 500), 10,000 wounded, 20,000 houses destroyed with 200,000 people fleeing their homes figures which are backed up by Human Rights Watch and other credible bodies.

State TV and radio broadcast Zanu-PF propaganda all day while the opposition had no access – even Tsvangirai's withdrawal was not mentioned. After all this terror, Mugabe was able to say as he went to vote that “he felt very confident” of winning.

MDC response

The response of the MDC was yet again to duck a fight with the regime. Tsvangirai withdrew from the election citing concerns over the safety of his supporters. This was done in consultation with several other regional MDC officials who said that it was impossible to take part in the election.

However, some people criticised the withdrawal. Rank and file members were

**A human
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The
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reported as saying that: "The MDC was not there to give us confidence... what were we supposed to do," others said: "People would have voted, Tsvangirai has betrayed us."

Instead of offering leadership, the MDC has ended up abandoning many of its own supporters, ending in the bizarre call by Tsvangirai for people to vote for Mugabe to ensure their own safety, a call that most people did not respond to, preferring to stay at home and face the consequences rather than vote for the dictator.

The MDC's refusal to fight back against Zanu-PF and pursue a course of action outside of normal electioneering has failed. But it isn't the first time this has happened.

The whole of the MDC's existence has been one of refusing to mobilise the masses at the critical moment. Instead it has placed its faith in diplomacy aimed at getting economic pressure from the imperialists, winning over South Africa and hoping for a split within Zanu-PF.

In 2000, when it contested its first rigged election, it did little to organise mass resistance while in the following year it called off a mass campaign against the economic policies of the government.

In 2002, the MDC actually opposed the taking over of the white farmers land despite the popularity of the move (and the bureaucratic way it was done to reward Mugabe's cronies), instead calling for a 'commission'. It also came out in favour of neo-liberal policies such as privatisation and free trade, which would have only harmed the people of the country.

In 2005, the MDC did little while Mugabe's henchmen drove out of Harare about 700,000 shantytown dwellers, who would have been mainly MDC supporters.

Last year, the MDC disappointed many of its followers by doing a deal with Zanu-PF, overseen by South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, for a new constitution and electoral law. The number of MPs was doubled from 110 to 220, mainly in the countryside where ZANU-PF is strongest. And while the electoral law sneaked in some concessions that would safeguard "fair voting" against the might of the state they were meaningless scraps of paper.

Finally in the aftermath of the first round of the presidential election in March, a two-day strike was



Mugabe's dictatorship rests on support from the army

organised, but Tsvangirai left the country for six weeks tour of regional capitals looking for elusive support.

And yet the MDC could have been different. It was born out of workers' resistance to the 1990s structural adjustment programme, which attacked living standards, pay and welfare services and saw the sell-off of state industry. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (Zactu) had broken from Zanu-PF over these policies and from 1995 embarked on a series of militant struggles including general strikes. It was during this period that Zactu's Secretary General Morgan Tsvangirai came to prominence.

But the movement for a party was soon co-opted by NGOs, multinationals and the white farmers who came together to replace the working class militancy with electioneering and mobilising international pressure. Instead of creating a workers party with support among the poor and landless peasants, targeting the rich white farmers for expropriation, a popular front party of workers, businessmen and the white farmers was built. The result was what we have seen throughout the last decade: the MDC supporting the white farmers, the multinationals and neo-liberal policies thus allowing Mugabe to don the mantle of national liberator, anti-imperialist and even a socialist.

And to cap it all, international pressure has failed to rescue the people of Zimbabwe from economic disaster. To this mirage the MDC leadership sacrificed leading the workers and peasants in a revolutionary struggle against Zanu-PF.

This strategy has failed. The only

alternative is to return to the goal of building a working class party with a revolutionary programme not a coalition with 'progressive' capitalists.

What next?

Recently, speaking from the safety of the Dutch embassy, Tsvangirai called for a transitional government, i.e one that would include Zanu-PF. But any attempt to form this will take place behind the back of the masses and will necessarily preserve much of Mugabe's corrupt regime. It would probably subordinate the country even more to the imperialists since their "humanitarian aid" will be tied to economic strings that will open the country up to greater exploitation. Instead the workers of Zimbabwe through their unions and political organisations need to fight for

- The release of all political prisoners including trade unionists and leftists. An end to repression. Disarm the "war veterans", police and army back to barracks.
- No to foreign intervention and no "talks" or "transitional governments" to save Mugabe's skin. Put the Zanu-PF tops on trial.
- For committees of action to organise strikes, protests and demonstrations against the Zanu-PF election robbery.
- Such committees must also organise food and fuel distribution, take it out of the hands of Zanu-PF bureaucrats and the multinationals and give it to the people.

Faced with intimidation and murder the trade unions and the youth need to build a workers defence militia to defend themselves.

The international solidarity the people of Zimbabwe need is that of the workers of the region, such as the South African dock workers when they refused to unload Chinese arms shipments to Zimbabwe. Now the South African trade union confederation Cosatu is organising demonstrations of support for the people of Zimbabwe and planning to block the border to prevent imports used to strengthen Mugabe's regime. This example should be followed by other trade unions in countries bordering Zimbabwe. Cosatu is also calling for Mugabe and his cronies to be boycotted whenever they step outside of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's workers should also fight for:

- An emergency economic plan: aid without strings and cancellation of all debts. Nationalisation under workers and peasants control of multinationals and companies owned by Zanu-PF bureaucrats. The banks must be nationalised: this is the only way to stop the hyperinflation. The economic levers of society need to be put under workers control and used to supply the masses with food, shelter and give the unemployed work.
- An agrarian revolution, based on the expropriation of all the big farmers, and the Zanu-PF leaders who have corruptly acquired land. Land to those who work it both the small peasants and the farm labourers.
- Only a workers and peasants government can implement such an extensive plan and fight against the capitalists and imperialists to defend it. Kick out the capitalists and the bureaucrats; no to imposed solutions by the west.

All this requires the masses to break from the MDC and form a revolutionary workers' party. By promising land to the peasants such a party can win support in the countryside, among Zanu-PF supporters and sections of the army too. Most soldiers are poor peasants paid in almost worthless notes.

Only a mass revolutionary workers party can hope to defeat Zanu-PF and end imperialist exploitation of the country through smashing the capitalist state and installing the power of workers councils - thus issuing a rallying call to revolution across southern Africa.

ZIMBABWE

How Mugabe betrayed the national liberation struggle in Zimbabwe

The ruling party in Zimbabwe argue that the current election is a fight against the British and colonialism. For that they have some backing from other African leaders and support from people in Zimbabwe who see him as a national liberation leader against western imperialism. Recently Mugabe condemned the MDC as being a creature of the British and said: "We fought for this country, and a lot of blood was shed... We are not going to give up our country because of a mere X [on the ballot paper]. How can a ballpoint fight with a gun?"

Mugabe and his cronies are willing to use anti-colonialist and anti-racist rhetoric in their struggle to maintain power.

Yet since coming to power in 1980, Mugabe has conceded to imperialism on several crucial issues, and in so doing has brought Zimbabwe to the economic and political crisis it is in now.

But how did the national liberation movement of the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) and its leader Robert Mugabe fare in their fight for national liberation against the white racists of the Rhodesia Popular Front of Ian Smith?

The UK government brokered

the Lancaster House Agreement that ended white-only rule in 1979. It gave black people the vote and in elections in 1980, Zanu was swept to power against the white racists and other more conciliatory movements of Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Joseph Nkomo.

But the agreement included several key "safeguards" for the white minority and international capital that prevented the black majority from exercising full control of their country. In doing so it condemned Zimbabwe to domination by international capital, which has created the current crisis. Here we examine the concessions and their effects.

Democracy

The Lancaster House agreement ensured that 700,000 white people would elect 20 (white) MPs while the 11 million black people would elect 100 MPs. In addition to defending a white-only voting college, Mugabe and his cronies set out to attack supporters of the rival liberation movement the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), mainly popular among the Ndebele people.

Between 1983-5, Zanu loyalist troops and thugs killed between 10,000-20,000 people in Matabele-

land and by 1987, the Zimbabwe African People's Union was forced into a merger with Mugabe's party to form Zanu-PF. At the time, few people in the west bothered to raise a cry over murder of thousands of people as Mugabe ensured continuing business.

In every election since 1980, Mugabe has used force against any challenges to his power. And for most of the 20 years until 2000, white farmers and multinationals went about their business unscathed. So much for democracy.

Land

The ownership of land was a key driving force in the Zimbabwe liberation struggle. But another concession in the Lancaster House agreement enshrined in the constitution was that there would be no forceful land distribution. In 1980s, Zanu gave land to about 70,000 families (the biggest slice going to Zanu bureaucrats or even white commercial farmers). In the 1990s further attempts of land redistribution were stalled by Zanu's carrying out the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) at the behest of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Even by the start of the farm invasions in 2002, 4,000 white commer-

cial farmers still owned 11.2 million hectares of land, while one million black families were crowded into 16.3 million hectares. So much for land redistribution.

Independence

Zimbabwe achieved formal independence in 1980 but the next 20 years saw Zanu kowtow to the IMF and the World Bank. In 1991 the World Bank and IMF forced many African countries to implement structural adjustment programmes including Zimbabwe (the ESAP). The few reforms carried out by Zanu such as free schooling and health services gave the world's economic powers an opportunity to demand cuts in budgets and free trade: attacking the living standards of workers and peasants. Mugabe's government loyally carried out these reforms until the late 1990s when the rising tide of workers' resistance defeated his attempts to free prices and hold down wages. Like all other structural adjustment programmes, Zimbabwe's version failed; GDP never went above 2 per cent, inflation stayed at around 30 per cent, and debt grew. Added to this was a war veterans' campaign for pensions.

In 1997, Mugabe passed a budget that paid out to workers and war

The futility of diplomacy

Workers Power is against intervention in Zimbabwe by the imperialist powers by political or military means. Any such action would have the effect of subordinating Zimbabwe to the diktats of the imperialist powers and their African proxies. An imposed solution denies the will of the people who have already voted in two elections to reject Zanu-PF rule.

However, we recognise that many people in Zimbabwe believe international pressure is the only way to end Mugabe's rule and the economic disaster that has engulfed the country. So while there are many governments that appear to be against Robert

Mugabe, what are they actually proposing and will it have any effect?

A "transitional government"

The most trenchant criticism has so far come from Kenya, which called Mugabe's regime illegal with its prime minister Raila Odinga saying that Zimbabwe "is a disaster waiting to happen". It has called for African peace keeping troops to be sent in, for the release of all political prisoners, the ousting of South Africa's Thabo Mbeki as the head of Southern Africa Development Community's negotiators, and a transitional government leading to new elections (a position supported by Tsvangirai). Tanzania also supports the idea of a transi-

tional government.

The transitional government is supposed to prevent Zanu-PF intimidation and murdering and secure the release of MDC prisoners and independent election observers. In effect it would normalise politics in the country and organise a "credible election". But it leaves open the make-up of such a "transitional government" and who would lead it – the current military rulers are unlikely to hand over power quietly.

The SADC has been the body most involved in mediating. Until very recently Mugabe could count upon the support of figures in SADC such as Angola's president Eduardo Santos and South Africa's

Thabo Mbeki. But it has recently (two days before the election) criticised Mugabe's handling of the elections, calling for their postponement and for meaningful talks between Zanu-PF and the MDC. What the "meaningful talks" should achieve and what will happen on the ground when they take place isn't mention.

But even this is too much for Mbeki, who did not turn up to the SADC meeting that issued the statement, despite being the lead negotiator on Zimbabwe.

The African Union is holding a summit in Egypt at the beginning of July to discuss the crisis, but Mugabe has already announced his intention to attend and deal



Police beat MDC members in the streets

veterans (a grant of 50,00 Zimbabwe dollars and 2,000 pension month). The result was a financial crisis in November of that year as foreign capital punished Zanu for its largesse. The result was more severe cuts in living standards and workers resistance with the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai leading a strike wave the following year and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions taking the first steps in setting up the Movement for Democratic Change.

The MDC was able to defeat Mugabe's constitutional reforms in 1999 and looked like it would defeat him in the following year's presidential election. In fact, it would have done without widespread vote rigging and intimidation. Again, for the first 20 years of Zanu's rule it has done the bidding of international capital. Since then it may take measures against white farmers but the Zimbabwe stock exchange was voted the best performing market in 2005-6 by the Africa Stock Exchanges Association.

Maintaining power

Since 2000, Mugabe has been able to rule by mobilising his supporters in land grabs, intimidating and killing MDC members, driving 700,000 shanty town dwellers into the countryside in 2005, using anti-colonial rhetoric and purging his own party of any threats.

What Mugabe hasn't done is carry out a consistent struggle against imperialism. For most of his time in office he has been its willing tool in attacking workers and peasants. Only turning against the IMF and World Bank when his own power was threatened but still maintaining links with business.

Mugabe has ruled over a divided party as a Bonaparte, he has risen above the factions and maintained control by purges and policy shifts. In the 1990s, the party became dominated by neo-liberals. Then Zimbabwe became embroiled in the Congo war in the late 1990s, which enriched Mugabe and the generals but plunged his country into even greater debt.

He has purged his rivals such as Simba

Makoni (who stood as an independent in the first presidential round and was a leading free marketer in Zanu-PF before being kicked out in the earlier 2000s) and one time information minister Jonathan Moyo, who was expelled from Zanu-PF by Mugabe in 2005 for alleged plotting.

The threat of an MDC win in the presidency has now pushed Mugabe back into the camp of the Joint Operations Command, which appears to be dedicated to ensuring that Mugabe survives along with their robbery of the country's wealth.

The misery and death now endured by the people of Zimbabwe is the result of a Stalinist-led anti-colonial struggle that failed to solve any of the key questions of the liberation movement primarily land, democracy and the economic independence of the country. The same tragedy is unfolding in other countries such as Kenya and South Africa, which has seen the élites of national liberation movements enrich themselves while allowing the continued exploitation of its people. Africa provides plenty of examples of how wrong the Stalinists, are to believe that national independence can be allied to capitalist development, even as a supposed stage towards socialism.

Only the working class, leading the urban poor and peasants, fighting for a socialist revolution can ensure that the issues of democracy and economic development can be solved in a progressive manner. This is the strategy of Permanent Revolution as fought for by Leon Trotsky. Stalinists have been proven wrong in Zimbabwe and in many other African countries. It is now time to follow the ideas of Trotsky and fight for working class power in alliance with all the exploited and oppressed.

intention to attend and deal with any opponents.

"The poll is a fiasco"

The UK, France and USA have been leading the rest of world opinion. Both have been pushing tougher sanctions and have refused to recognise Mugabe's poll or government. They have also pushed through the UN Security Council the toughest statement yet blaming Mugabe for the election fiasco although stopping short of refusing to acknowledge the result (apparently because of South African objections). Which means that the UN can do very little as it condones the result.

The other hamper on international action is the fear of being branded racists or a colonial power. The UK and US have ruled out any military intervention and emphasised there must be an "African-lead solution." Any western intervention would quickly turn into the military quagmire like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Pressure for talks have only forced

Mugabe to say he might talk after the election - when he is in a position of power. Furthermore some of the heads of African states involved in pressure have had long relationships with Mugabe and Zanu and are often as corrupt.

Sanctions have been ineffective or hit the poor worse (just as in Iraq). Why? Because the western banks and multinationals don't want to open the books to expose their dealings with various dictators or take action that would damage their profits.

That leaves military intervention, which only a few African countries, and some MDC officials, have mentioned.

All this diplomacy has shown that the bosses can only rely on the power of their capital, in other words the pressure they can exert on an economy through finance, business and trade. But where the economy is busted, little influence can be brought to bear. As the Financial Times stated: "When the economy is collapsing the threat to tighten sanctions

on a handful of people is meaningless."

Even if talks did go ahead, the result would halt the violence but the country would be delivered over to a neo-liberal amalgam of the MDC/Zanu-PF, which would be offered aid with very tight strings – privatise the economy, hand back land to the white farmers, open up the country to trade. In short a brief respite would have been earned for a future of greater exploitation and misery.

Mugabe is so confident in his own power and resilience that he recently declared "only God can remove me from office". In fact there is an earthly force that can remove the dictator - a revolutionary mobilisation of workers and peasants. This must start from the desperately needed measures needed to feed and employ the masses, as well as their democratic rights. But to fulfil these demands a revolutionary workers and peasants' government is necessary.

LATIN AMERICA

Chávez stabs Colombian resistance in the back

When Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez called on the Colombian FARC guerrilla movement to lay down their guns he struck a devastating blow to the beleaguered resistance against the gangsters and murderers of the Colombian regime. *Tim West* examines Chávez's sharp move to the right.

It has been a terrible year for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - the FARC. In February there were, for the first time, huge popular mobilisations against the FARC's policy of taking hostages. Then on 1 March, Colombian troops violated the territory of neighbouring Ecuador to kill 12 FARC fighters - among them number two leader Raúl Reyes.

One week later Ivan Rios, another member of its seven-strong secretariat, was killed by his own bodyguard to claim a \$1 million government bounty. Then charismatic FARC commander Nelly Avila Moreno, known as Karina, surrendered after making a deal with the government. Finally on 26 March FARC's historic leader, 77-year old Manuel Marulanda, died of a heart attack.

The 250,000 strong Colombian military claims to have considerably reduced the areas in which FARC can operate and that many guerrillas are deserting and joining "re-integration" programmes. Even friendly commentators, like Marxist writer James Petras, concede that FARC is down to 10,000 fighters from a peak of about 20,000. It seems that its two separate fronts, the area at the base of the Andes and the south-eastern jungles, are out of regular communication with one another.

The FARC emerged as a reaction to the ruthless exploitation by of imperialism and the Colombian oligarchy of the peasantry. In 1948 populist presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitan was assassinated by right-wingers alarmed by his appeals to the working class and poor peasants. Colombia entered a long period of heightened polarisation, especially in the countryside, as increasingly impoverished, hungry and landless peasants - many the descendants of ex-slaves - were confronted with monopolisation of land by a super-rich tiny elite. Around 300,000 were killed by the army as the peasantry - then mainly placing its hopes in the Liberal Party - was brutally defeated. But guerrilla bands continued to resist.

The FARC was founded in 1964 as the armed wing of the Communist Party of Colombia, from the remnants of the armed opposition to the oligarchy, state apparatus and Conservative Party which had emerged during the 1940s and 1950s. It was rooted in peasant organisations that enabled it, with little or no outside help, to sustain its 44-year long struggle. Nevertheless from its inception the FARC was isolated from the urban working class and operat-

ed a strategy of rural guerrilla war aimed at eventually encircling the cities.

The FARC followed the official Stalinist strategy of the 'stages theory' - an essentially Menshevik strategy of promoting first a democratic stage of independent capitalist development of Colombia through an alliance between the working class and the 'patriotic' liberal capitalists. Socialism was to be a stage to be pursued in the distant future once the bourgeois demo-



Happier days: Hugo Chávez with FARC leader Ivan Marquez in 2007

cratic stage had been completed. This strategy meant that the FARC's aim was to force the Colombian capitalist class to negotiate with it, to break the country from the grip of US imperialism and carry out progressive land and democratic reforms. Despite the heroism of its struggle against a brutal military machine and two failed peace processes in the 1980s and early 2000s - both of which collapsed due to the intransigence of the Colombian right and its US backers - the FARC has drifted into heavy reliance on unpopular kidnappings for ransom and reliance on a take from the huge narcotics trade.

In the last few years the FARC seemed to find new support from left wing leaders elected in Venezuela (Hugo Chávez), Ecuador (Rafael Correa), Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega) and Bolivia (Evo Morales). Though these leaders did not explicitly support the FARC, they condemned the Colombian regime's human rights violations and called for peace negotiations.

Tensions build

At one point Venezuela even seemed to come close to war with Colombia. Outraged by the violation of Ecuadorian territory when Colombian forces crossed the border and killed the FARC leaders, and incensed by Colombian government accusations that computers found in Ecuador showed that Chávez was funding them to the tune of \$300m, the Venezuelan president expelled the Colombian ambassador and mobilised troops on Venezuela's border with Colombia. Furthermore he demanded international recognition of the FARC as "a belligerent force" and made a series of blistering denunciations of Colombian president Álvaro Uribe.

So when Chávez, on his live television show *Alo Presidente*, suddenly called on the FARC to unilaterally release all their hostages and cease their armed struggle, it was a shock to everyone and a heavy blow to the FARC, many of whose fighters listen to Chávez' broadcasts. He said:

"At this point in Latin America, an armed guerrilla movement is out of place. Guerrilla wars are history. Enough of all this war. The time has come to sit down and talk peace".

Chávez added that the FARC's struggle has become "a justification for the American presence in Colombia, and thus a threat to Venezuela."

He went on: "I think the time has come for the FARC to free everyone they have in the mountains. It would be a great humanitarian gesture in exchange for nothing."

He claimed that Venezuela and a number of other countries would be ready to help their reintegration into democratic life in Colombia, after peace accords are signed. The BBC commented with justification that "the effect on FARC morale was likely to be devastating." No wonder Colombia and the USA rushed to praise the Venezuelan president for the first time in many years.

Chávez's cringing climb-down comes at a time when Uribe has been waging a fierce war of words with Nicaragua's president, Daniel Ortega, and with President Rafael Correa of Ecuador - accusing them both of supporting the FARC. He has his united front with them at just the time when news is circulating that the US intends to open a major military base in Colombia, replacing the one in Ecuador that Correa has refused to extend the lease on.



FARC soldiers on the march

Revolutionaries should unequivocally condemn Hugo Chávez's call on the FARC to surrender.

The FARC's programme

Of course the FARC's guerrilla strategy, their mass hostage taking, and their embroilment with the drugs cartels, is deeply flawed. It is fundamentally the wrong way to overthrow the murderous Colombian elite and its US backers. But our criticism of the FARC has nothing in common with Chávez's wretched appeal. Criticism from the viewpoint of an alternative revolutionary strategy, based on the leadership of the heroic Colombian working class in alliance with the peasantry, is something altogether different.

Such a strategy must break from the Stalinist stages approach and base itself on the theory of permanent revolution: the simple recognition that in countries like Colombia today, the national capitalist class is too weak and too tied to

US imperialism to pursue a 'bourgeois democratic revolution' to a conclusion. To win true independence from imperialist subordination, to establish lasting democratic freedoms, to effect a revolution in agriculture that can free the peasants from underdevelopment – all these things depend on the ability of the working class to come to the head of the revolution. In doing so they will be able to overthrow the capitalists and take power and property into their own hands in a socialist revolution.

Such a strategy cannot renounce all guerrilla resistance on the part of the peasants and indigenous peoples, faced with the Colombian landlords' notorious death squads and the US-backed army. It cannot renounce armed self-defence for the working class and the trade unions, given the murderous record of the regime.

But Chávez's call is not for a better revolutionary strategy but for a reformist capitulation. Quite apart from the fact that socialism, whether of the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first century variety, can never, anywhere, come via peaceful and democratic means – in Colombia of all places – to invite disarmed forces to participate in elections would be simply suicidal and would leave the party, trade union and peasant union militants to the mercy of the death squads of the mine owners and landlords.

In the last 15 years more than 4,000 trade unionists and peasant activists have fallen victim to right-wing death squads, to which Uribe is undoubtedly connected. As an example of the legality and human rights that workers experience in Colombia we have only to look at the most recent case. On March 6 2008 over 200,000 people participated in the "March Against State Terror". Yet between March 4 2008 and March 11 2008, hundreds of organizers and human rights activists were threatened. The organiser of the march and four other human rights spokespeople were killed, along with four

trade union leaders for the Confederation of Colombian Workers.

Ridiculous and reactionary too is Chávez's idea that their surrender would ease US pressure on Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua. Quite the opposite. Colombia is the principal agent of US policy in Latin America and has received billions of US Dollars over the past decade, under the infamous Plan Colombia. In reality this project has resulted in the destruction of the livelihoods of countless Colombian peasants in the Amazon Basin. Upwards of three million peasants have been displaced from their lands as planes dump defoliants and destroy crops en masse, as well as poisoning peoples' supplies of food and water.

James Petras's condemnation of Chávez rings true:

"To say that the FARC's armed struggle is a pretext for imperialism is pure stupidity (.....) Chávez doesn't explain how the FARC can hand over their prisoners when it has 500 guerrillas rotting, tortured, malnourished, sick in the dungeons of Uribe's prisons. I believe that my question is why President Chávez wants to sacrifice the lives of the guerrilla prisoners to take up the flags of Uribe, Sarkozy, et cetera; a total unilateral surrender."

FARC today is declining in membership and suffering repeated military defeats, and its popularity is as low amongst the Colombian masses as it has ever been. Its ideology and tactics are a block to the formation of a mass workers and peasants party and isolate the peasantry in areas it controls from the working class, and the organisation is a tool of a bureaucratic leadership which manipulates the mass base for a strategy which does not even set the goal of socialism before the Colombian masses.

Nevertheless a defeat for FARC against the state remains a defeat for the peasantry by its class enemy. We must not forget FARC's roots as a force of self-defence for popular movements from savage right-wing repression, and as a reaction to the brutal living conditions of Colombia's peasantry – which persists today despite billions of dollars of US aid, corruptly pocketed by the elite. Our aim must be to say to its disoriented fighters and its supporters in the cities: find a better way. They will find none better than Leon Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution.

Unlike Hugo Chávez, we have to be clear that there can be no "peace" without justice, and that the Colombian terrorist state and the imperialists who loot the country will never let the masses of the continent live in peace and security. It must be overthrown and smashed in a socialist revolution that spreads across the entire continent, creating a United Socialist States of Latin America.

A defeat of the FARC by the Colombian state remains a defeat for the peasantry by its class enemy.



A right-wing death squad, usually off duty police, enters a village in Colombia

THEIR WORLD AND OURS

G8: the criminals gather

By Kam Kumar

The biggest eight thieves and warmongers on the planet will meet this month at their annual summit to divide up the world's wealth.

The G8 is made up of the leaders of the eight most powerful countries in the world: the UK, US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Russia.

Last year, mass protests greeted their summit in Heiligendamm, Germany.

This year, it will take place in Hokkaido, an island in northern Japan, to prevent demonstrators disrupting proceedings.

The Japanese state has already clamped down on protests on the island and instead non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are hosting an "alternative NGO summit" miles away. So this year there is no mass action planned to

attempt to shut down the summit.

This year the G8 will discuss the economic crisis and how to stabilise their economies. But any agreement will focus on propping up the banks and reducing inflation for the commodities that matter to the capitalists such as oil.

What the G8 won't do is take action on food inflation, which sparked mass food protests and riots across the world as the prices rose 40 per cent, or on housing where millions of working class families are facing evictions because they were sold "toxic" mortgages. Even action on oil will be to reduce oil prices for multinationals but not for the poor people around the world who need it for lighting and heating. These are examples of how capitalism fails to provide the basic commodities for the mass of people.

The G8 will also be attempting to solve the debt problems of Africa – again. For three summits in a row,

the G8 has discussed third world debt especially Africa. But the sums handed out in aid are tiny when compared with debt.

For example, Japan is to double its aid to Africa to \$1.8 billion by 2012 – sounds generous? No, in 2005, which was the year the G8 first made debt an issue at G8, Africa had debts of US\$330 billion and was spending US\$15 billion a year in interest payments (*source Jubilee Debt Campaign*).

These paltry sums won't rescue Africa from poverty because they continue to be strangled by Western powers and capitalist institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which advocate policies to keep poor countries in debt and tie them to neo-liberal trade agreements that dump subsidised western goods such as food onto local economies, destroying the jobs of farmers and workers.

At the same time, the G8 nations pour billions of pounds into the

occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and arm their supporters such as Israel. This year the G8 has said it will "send a strong message toward strengthening the non-proliferation regime" – making it clear that Iran's nuclear capabilities will be pretext for an attack.

The G8 leaders also wage war on their own workers and youth. They have attacked civil liberties, carried out vicious anti-immigrant and anti-youth campaigns, cut wages and welfare. All these issues of poverty, war, racism and freedom are linked and continue because of the G8's economic system: capitalism.

While we can't demonstrate on a Japanese island, the struggle against war, poverty and erosion of civil liberties is already being taken onto the streets all round the world. That is why the G8 are afraid of the masses mobilising at their summits – as the uprisings have already begun.

ESF: forum of resistance?

By Joy MacCreedy

As the programme for a bosses' Europe – the European Constitution – is defeated yet again in another referendum, the movement for another Europe is building its forces to meet at the European Social Forum in Malmö is September.

The ESF is hoping to attract the many social movements from across the region – immigrants, women, students, youth, workers, climate change and environmental activists, anti-racists, socialists, anarchists, and social justice activists – to come together and build common action against the neo-liberal Europe embodied in the Lisbon 2010 agenda.

The ESF was born out of the World Social Forum, which began as an opposing pole to the World Economic Forum meetings. At the WEF, the richest in the world come together to decide how to most efficiently divide up the wealth of the world among themselves. The WSF drew in the poor, the disen-

COME TO THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM Malmö, Sweden, 17 – 21 September

The ESF is based on 10 themes: social inclusion and social rights; a sustainable world, food sovereignty, environmental and climate justice; democracy and rights in Europe; equality and rights, acknowledging diversities; justice, peace and solidarity; labour strategies for decent work and dignity for all; economic and social justice; democratising knowledge, culture, education information and mass media; fighting against all forms of racism and discrimination; plus transversal activities.

During five days seminars and workshops will be mixed with culture, music, activism and demonstrations. As the Nordic organisers put it: "The forum is so much more than a meeting of a couple of days - now we in the Nordic countries and the rest of Europe have the chance to put forward alternatives for the future."

franchised, the exploited across the world from the landless peasants movement (MST) in Brazil, the German metal workers, the Bolivian anti-water privatisation campaigners – all those that were fighting oppression and ultimately the neo-liberal, privatisation assault by the imperialist nations.

The ESF embodies the best and the worst of the WSF. It embodies activism against militarism – it was

the Florence ESF in 2002 and the Assembly of Social Movements that sent out the call for the international day of action against the imminent war against Iraq. Across the world, more than 25 million people demonstrated against the US/UK war drive. But that was decided outside of the ESF for the WSF Charter, which the ESF adheres to, outlaws decision-making, saying instead that the WSF/ESF is just a

"space" and can't make decisions.

Workers Power, the British section of the League for the Fifth International, will be there fighting for a revolutionary socialist answer to the bosses' agenda, as we were in the four previous ESF's – Florence 2002, Paris 2003, London 2005 and Athens 2007.

The LFI and Revolution, a socialist youth group, has consistently argued for the scrapping of the WSF Charter and the setting up of an elected co-ordination body that can link up struggles across Europe to take the movement forward.

In 2005 Revolution was instrumental in co-ordinating a Youth Assembly where young people could truly participate through debating issues and planning action.

In Malmö, Revolution and other European youth organisations will be involved in a Youth Space to make our struggles more effective, whether it is against tuition fees or in support of asylum seekers.

• If you are interested in going e-mail workerspower@btopenworld.com

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 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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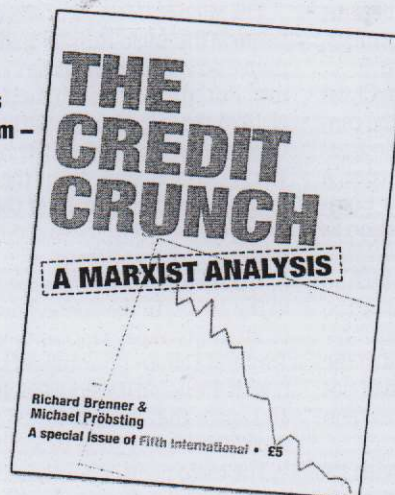
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The Rank and File Movement

By Dave Stockton

The National Shop Stewards Network initiated by the rail workers union has just held its second conference, amidst mounting union militancy over rising prices. It is high time to look at the history of such movements in the past, to learn the lessons for today.

The first great rank and file revolt was the Great Unrest of 1910-14. Workers began to take action not only against the employers but also against what activists identified as the "trade union bureaucracy" - the stratum of full-time officials, elected for long periods of time, even for life, and receiving several times their members' average pay.

Calling themselves syndicalists or industrial unionists, they demanded industry-wide unions and the election of worker representatives or factory committees. The syndicalist perspective - theorised by syndicalists in France and Industrial Unionists in America - was that trade unions could capture control of the workplace, and organise to eventually win control over the entire economy. The three unions that came nearest to the industrial union model - the Miners railworkers and road Transport workers formed the Triple Alliance in 1914, pledged to take joint action if one of them were attacked.

The Shop Stewards and Workers Committee Movement arose during the First World War. It stemmed from shop steward led resistance to lowered real wages, conscription and the replacement skilled by unskilled labour - all things supported by their national officials in the name of supporting the war effort. It is no wonder that this movement became a training ground for future communists, and anarchy-syndicalists.

The SSWCM built by the engineers on Clyde-side, Sheffield and London, became the central instrument in the fight back. It culminated in August 1917 in a national conference. A pamphlet by J.T. Murphy, *The Workers' Committee argued for workshop organisation as the agency of revolutionary change.*

In 1921 the Triple Alliance from which so much had been expected collapsed at the first challenge when the railworkers and transport workers failed to come to the aid of the miners. The syndicalists, it is clear had not solved the problem of how to control the union bureaucrats and their betrayals.

The struggle in Russia in 1917, with its workers councils and factory committees, its struggle to impose workers control on the employers and prevent their sabotage preceded and led the way to the October Revolution. The actions of the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary party, had a huge impact in Britain

and helped overcome syndicalist prejudices against politics and parties, seen until then only as electioneering machines, not as strategist of the class struggle and instruments for seizing power.

The Communist International in 1920 set itself the task, "to remove the old bureaucracy separated from the masses and replace it by the apparatus of factory representatives, leaving only the most necessary functions to the centre."

After Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 called for independent organisation of the rank and file "to fight the counter-revolutionary tendencies of the trade union bureaucracy, and to support the spontaneous direct action of the proletariat."

In Britain the National Minority Movement was founded in 1924 by a delegate conference representing 200,000 workers. It was initially a good initiative, operating on the slogan "with the leaders as long as they rightly rep-

With the officials where possible, without and against them where necessary

resent us, without them if they do not."

But tragically at this time the policy of the Communist International underwent a radical turn to the right, placing all its hopes on a clutch of left-wing general secretaries on the General Council of the TUC.

The Minority Movement was downplayed in favour of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee on which these leaders played a major role. But when it came to the General Strike of 1926 these leaders (with the exception of Cook the miners leader) betrayed the strike. The Minority Movement and the British Communists neither warned of the left leaders' treachery nor broke the Anglo-Russian Committee for moths afterwards.

The shop stewards' movement re-emerged in the 1950s. In the coming decades repeated attempts at pay restraint were made, by Tory and Labour governments alike, usually with the union leaders agreement, and time and again they were defeated by a militant workforce, led by shop stewards.

The main political force on the shop floor from the 1950-60 era was the Communist Party. Well placed on many shop stewards committees, its members were conveyors in the giant Longbridge plant with over 20,000 workers. The CP organised the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions that

organised political mass strikes against the Labour and Tory anti-union laws of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The high point of these struggles was in 1972 when a growing wave of protest strikes and demos forced the Tory government to release dockets' shop stewards imprisoned in Pentonville for illegal picketing.

In the 1970s, the Trotskyist groups also organised national rank and file conferences aimed at linking up activists within the workplace. The International Socialists, now the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), launched the "National Rank and File Movement" and the Workers Revolutionary Party, the All Trades Union Alliance.

But the Labour Party and the TUC were busy working out ways to tame the shop stewards, curb unofficial strikes and marginalise the revolutionary left who had made important steps forward from 1968 onwards. They encouraged the formation of a layer of full-time shop stewards. By 1977 there were already something like 5,000 in Britain. These with the convenor and senior stewards formed a distinct layer closer in social position to full-time officials than to lay stewards.

So the shop stewards movement lost its radicalism and its national coordination, becoming subordinate to left wing general secretaries. In the hard years that followed Thatcher's election in 1979 the shop floor organisations were further weakened, the left leaders sabotaged and betrayed the early struggles from 1980-84 that could have beaten the Tories. The anti-union laws, mass unemployment and the defeat of the miners after their year long strike completed the job of destroying the shop stewards movement and the power of the rank and file.

The lesson of the rank and file movements of the twentieth century is that political organisation is always necessary and stands at the core of all such movements, but here the question is posed: what sort of politics? If it is class struggle politics, not the politics of class collaboration, then the workplace organisation can lead to a powerful rank and file democracy and militancy. This class independence necessitates independence from the trade union bureaucracy which itself is structurally integrated into capitalism. Indeed, unless a rank and file movement sets itself the goal of dissolving the trade union bureaucracy altogether, it will time and time again fall victim to what the early twentieth century militants dubbed "the labour lieutenants of capital".

This is central task in the unions today. In today's struggles our motto must be - with the officials where possible, without and against them where necessary