

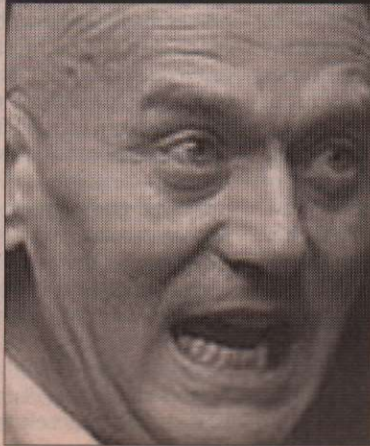
workers power

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Far right on the rise

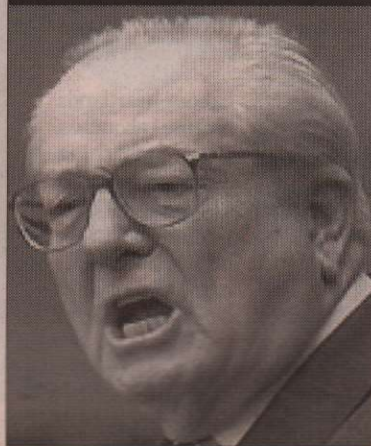
Netherlands



Burnley



France



THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY is a fascist organisation. Their attempt to pose as "respectable" politicians, in an attempt to mimic the successes of Le Pen in France, should fool nobody.

They have won three seats on Burnley council and scored high votes in Oldham, Gateshead and Dudley. This isn't a fascist breakthrough, but it is a real threat.

The reason for their growth is exactly the same one that allowed Le Pen to get through to the second round in the French presidential elections - and the coming election bid of far right Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn: the miserable betrayal of the working class by the traditional socialist parties.

Blair has been in power for five years. He has attacked the working class without a break during this time. In particular workers in some of the most deprived and ravaged towns in the north feel completely abandoned.

In desperation they have looked for scapegoats and the BNP lie-mongers appeared in order to provide them with ready made ones - blacks, Asians, asylum seekers.

But the BNP would have got nowhere without New Labour. It has betrayed working class hopes and led an ugly chorus of racist rhetoric, especially against asylum seekers.

As BNP leader Nick Griffin said two years ago, Labour's attacks on refugees is "doing our work for us". On the eve of the elections Blunkett's "swamping" speech was music to Griffin's ear - more votes in his ballot box.

An urgent task now is to stop the BNP from growing any further. We must smash them in their strongholds. This means:

- mobilising all anti-fascists, anti-racists and workers on the streets against the fascists
- trade unionists working for the council refusing to co-operate with them
- disrupting their attempts to use the council chamber to spread their poison
- refusing to allow them the use of any council facilities - imposing this by direct action
- breaking up their meetings, rallies, paper sales and demos - no platform for fascists
- organising self defence in the beleaguered Asian areas of Burnley, Oldham, Dudley
- demanding the TUC name the day for a national demo against racism and fascism to march through Burnley.

But the elections also proved the importance of building an alternative to New Labour and to the fascists.

Saying don't vote fascist is not enough. We need a mass socialist alternative. The Socialist Alliance provided the beginnings of such an alternative in many council elections. But much more is needed.

Millions of people reject global capitalism and the poverty, war and racism it brings. A mass socialist party committed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism must be built to unite these millions in its ranks.

Teachers fight back against Blunkett's racist rhetoric - page 4

SMASH THE NAZIS!

Build the socialist alternative

Monkeys, Nazis and Robocops ...the full fruits of Blairism

On the eve of this month's local elections, media pundits were pondering the significance of five years of New Labour government. What was Tony Blair's lasting achievement? What's been Blair's impact on politics. On 2 May they got the answer.

Hartlepool elected a man in a monkey suit as mayor, Middlesborough gave a landslide to a zero-tolerance police chief, and Burnley put three fascists into the council chamber. Meanwhile in Wyre Valley, a pressure group formed to resist the effects of private involvement in the NHS took over the council.

Internally New Labour is not in crisis – yet. But the relationship between working class people and the party they created is fragmenting – both to the right and to the left.

Fascist councillors are what you get when you adapt to the language of the racist right; "robocop" mayors are what you get when you adapt to the right wing agenda on crime – and fail completely to address crime's real causes. Monkey-suited populism wins when tens of thousands of workers begin believe Labour councils are stuffed full of useless, corrupt careerists.

Working class radicalism has not disappeared. But what Tony Blair has done, as the elections showed in full technicolour, is undermine working class solidarity – and with it loyalty to the labour movement. The destruction of manufacturing, which Thatcher started and Blair has gleefully carried on, does not just mean decaying factories replaced by tin-roofed greenfield warehouses and call centres. It destroys decades and centuries of self-organisation. Privatising public service delivery brings the same result. Whole union branches of health ancillary workers have been lost as the workforce is broken up and passed around between different employers like a tray of biscuits.

To the Labour elite and their media friends working class culture and solidarity are so much old fashioned junk. But the election shocks show why they're the building blocks of any progressive response to the problems ordinary people face.

Take crime. Crime is an issue the "liberal" left feels uncomfortable with: it knows repression is wrong, it knows poverty is the chief cause. But because it has not got the stomach to tax the rich to get resources for the deprived inner cities it knows it has to live with crime. New Labour's most basic response to crime is to massage the figures and issue morality lessons.

So it leaves the right to set the agenda on crime. But because working class people are the main victims of crime, it's not a side issue in our communities: it can become a central issue. Unless you confront it head on with a working class answer, the right – and particularly the populist right like Middlesborough's Ray Mallon – will always make the running.

Mallon won favour as the first "zero tolerance" police chief. But he was ousted when it became clear his strategy relied on doing deals with local crooks. American political history has been full of figures like Mallon: his populist rhetoric is political camouflage. He will no doubt crack down on council corruption like he cracked down on crime. But he will not build solidarity. He will not advance one centimetre to creating real social cohesion, nor can his single issue populism address poverty. But poverty and the destruction it brings to



**Election 2002: Hartlepool elects monkey (above)
Burnley elects animals (right)**

social solidarity are the basic causes of crime.

Take immigration. Labour has always linked racism and immigration: if we stop immigration, goes the Labour theory, then racism will calm down. Socialists have always said this is rubbish – and the current rise of racism shows why. The racism that fed fascism its election victories, and strong votes, in some working class areas is not being caused by new immigration nor even asylum seekers. It is breeding on the poverty and hopelessness of working class communities in areas where economic growth and prosperity will start to pass out of living memory in the next decade.

The BNP has been taking seats in

Labour heartlands because Labour has stopped preaching any positive vision of the future. If you're unskilled, poorly educated, low paid, badly housed and you live in a small Northern town Labour's message is: tough. The BNP comes in and says: blame the Asians. It says: look how well "their" candidates do in elections, look how effectively "they" lobby for council money. If only "us white folk" – as BNP bomber Tony Lecomber described the party's membership – did the same, we could redress the balance.

For Blunkett, Blair and Jack Straw, the answer to this is to use the language of racism. Blunkett dropped the term "swamped" into the political debate with all the subtlety that Thatcher did the first time round. Political received wisdom is that the Nazis were defeated in the late 1970s because Thatcher drew their sting. That much people like Straw remember from their student days. It's only half the story of course – because the NF was also driven from the streets by socialists and trade unionists.

However, the political logic does not work. The fascists that left the NF joined the Tories in large numbers – so much so that many "wet" liberal Tories were forced out of leadership positions. The Tory party in the 1980s was full of closet fascists. Meanwhile Thatcher implemented a draconian anti-immigration policy and racist policing crackdown: because it is action rather than language that fascist-voting racists respond to.

So, Labour's adoption of racist rhetoric is not only a tragedy: it will not work. Not a single Zimbabwean asylum seeker locked up in Harmondsworth jail will stop white racist in Burnley hating their Asian neighbour. Only the class

struggle and socialist politics can bring hope back to depressed areas and turn people's anger against the real enemy, not their black and Asian brothers and sisters.

The victory of the Wyre Forest pressure group Kidderminster Health Concern – which now holds the majority on Wyre Forest council – is the flip side of the populist and fascist victories. The KHC hammered New Labour in the general election, putting Dr Richard Taylor into parliament as the only real independent MP. The issue then was the PFI scheme at Kidderminster Hospital that led to the removal of emergency services. The main slogan then, as now was "We are all entitled to proper medical care within reasonable reach". In the council election the group also campaigned in opposition to a proposed waste incinerator. Above this, the main action points proposed by its council candidates were a typical list of more money for local schools, improved grass verges, pelican crossings, skateboard facilities and anti-graffiti strategies that form the staple diet of most ward-level politics. But the key promise was to "represent people in the ward".

All council election candidates promise to do this of course. But the KHC candidates got elected because people believed them. Contrary to wishful thinking on the left they were not socialists. But they expressed the populist radicalism that is growing up to replace Labourism. Labourism, while it promises everything from better grass verges to the abolition of poverty by 2020 clearly cannot deliver anything to anybody who has not got a million pounds to donate or a champagne reception to throw.

That is what millions of working class people have begun to understand. That is why Gordon Brown knew he had to make some form of radical gesture in the budget – albeit one paid for out of better-paid workers' wages.

None of this means Labour and Labourism are set to disappear as the dominant force in working class politics. Labour mobilised its base in Burnley. It got increased votes in big working class urban centres like Sheffield and staved off defeat in Birmingham – though its flagship housing privatisation programme had already been defeated by a grass roots campaign.

But it does open up an opportunity for the left. The fundamental fact of 2 May – not mitigated by a few postal voting experiments – is that two out of every three people did not vote. Many of those that did voted for alternative candidates that expressed their frustration with mainstream politics.

In private the government and the whole establishment are terrified at this phenomenon. Labourism and bureaucratically dominated trade unionism have acted like the valve on a pressure cooker for capitalism. By attacking trade unionism and replacing Labourism with Tonyism – a pious mixture of the phoney and the Tory – they have blocked that pressure valve. The steam escapes in different and unpredictable ways.

The task for socialists now is to intersect with the anger at Labourism and direct it towards a positive outcome – the building of a mass socialist alternative to Blair.

Socialist Alliance must build on increased support

The Socialist Alliance stood ninety candidates in London and around 200 across the country. Its campaign provided the possibility for rallying workers to a socialist alternative.

Compared with the disappointing results in the general election the Socialist alliance did a lot better this time. On average it tripled its vote compared with the general election. By linking the election campaign to solidarity with the Palestinians and building the big Mayday demonstration it reached out to workers and youth on the big political issues as well as on local struggles against privatisation and cuts.

In some areas – notably Hackney in London – the alliance got consistently more than 10 per cent and up to 22 per cent.

Swindon, Leeds, Oxford and a host of other towns and cities saw significant increases in the Socialist Alliance vote. In any fair election system – that is, one based on proportional representation – there would be Socialist Alliance councillors today.

Predictably this rise in the socialist vote has been ignored by the media which has focused exclusively on the BNP success. But the Socialist Alliance results are no cause for complacency.

After the elections opportunity for the Socialist Alliance lies in two directions.

First, shock waves will be felt among old-Labour loyal reformist workers and activists after the BNP and Mallon victories.

When they ask: how did we lose, we can give them the answer – by consistently betraying the working class, treating them like voting fodder, despising their poor education, diet, ill-health and ways of speaking; by pandering to racism and draconian anti-crime strategies.

In the coming weeks socialists need to ram this message home to the supporters of Jack Straw

and Alistair Campbell, who, unlike their aloof leaders, now have to bear the brunt of living with the consequences of the fascist victories.

And linked to this the Socialist Alliance must throw itself into the unfolding industrial struggle which will bring more and more workers into direct conflict with New Labour.

The second opportunity is the chance to mobilise the anger and frustration of those who already see through the lies of the mainstream parties. Many will remain "reformists without reformism" – like the Wyre Forest campaigners. But they can and must be won to an alternative working class party.

The third, missing element in this picture, are young people – especially those in the anti-capitalist movement. To them the fascist victories have to also be a wake-up call.

Fighting the fascists, driving them off the streets, persuading workers to break from racism in their communities: these jobs can't be done without organisation, roots and politics that go beyond single issue protests.

The anti-capitalist youth are one of the most dynamic and vibrant elements in struggle today – but they too have to break from single issue politics if their movement is to become a real player in the fight to stop the rise of racism and fascism and in the struggle to rebuild working class solidarity.

But the real challenge for the Socialist Alliance now is to put itself at the centre of all these movements and to be more than a name on a placard.

If it does not do this – if it goes into hibernation between elections – the danger is that the alliance will not only fail to build on the gains it made on 2 May but fail in the longer term task of building a real socialist alternative to New Labour.



osing a sister in February, and then your mother in April would normally invite a compassionate response from all but the most heartless. But when the grieving person is the Queen of England and her flagging golden jubilee celebrations are in need of a dramatic boost, it is tempting to believe that the timing was not accidental.

It would not be beyond the Buckingham Palace dirty tricks department to arrange the demise of the gin-soaked pair to elicit public sympathy for the beleaguered royal family given, as one unnamed senior courtier told the Times in January, "there is great nervousness at the level of public response."

As the Channel Four and BBC 2 documentaries on royal history repeatedly show us, ruthless royal infighting comes with the territory!

In January opinion polls suggested that apathy for the jubilee was so widespread that the whole celebration was destined to flop. In 1977 more than 100,000 street parties took place; five million lined the streets of London to watch the main parade and 500 million watched on TV.

Yet this year there will be nothing like this level of response. In Wales only five of the 22 local authorities have planned any jubilee events. And the trip to the West Country to kick off the "Jubilee Tour" would have been a miserable flop had not thousands of schoolchildren been dragooned into lining the streets and waving plastic flags.

And this, as they say, is no accident. From the investiture of Prince Charles in 1969 through the 1977 silver jubilee to the wedding of Chas and Di in 1981, the monarchy could be said to be getting a "good press".

But the 1990s proved a public relations disaster as divorce, adultery, drugs and failed business ventures dogged the Queen's progeny. Less Prince Albert's illustrious successors, more a cast of characters from Albert Square. Even attempts to curry favour, such as the decision of the Queen in 1992 to pay income tax, Charles' work with the Prince's Trust, nor even ultimately, the rock-star death of Diana in 1998, could stem the fall from grace of the House of Windsor.

The fact is that the young people of 1977 who sneered at the forelock tugging deference of their parents are now the parents who are embarrassed or outraged that this parasitic feudal encrustation still exists.

You know it is bad when even the Minister of Tourism, Kim Howells, says of the Windsors that "they are all a bit bonkers". But unfortunately most criticism of the royal family rests at the same superficial level. It is claimed that they are "too extravagant", or surround themselves with "too many hangers-on"; or that the minor royals do not work hard enough; or that they are "out of touch with ordinary people".

Meanwhile, their defenders reply: they are "good for tourism", "cheaper than a President", and are a focus for "national unity".

Either way it would be wrong simply to mock and jeer at the choreographed "spontaneous" outpourings of a nation's love for the Queen.

There is a poisonous centre to this sickly confection and socialists and democrats should use the occasion to draw attention to just how reactionary the monarchy is and why we should get rid of it.

The first thing to note is that we are all "subjects of the Queen" not citizens; soldiers swear an oath of loyalty to her and not to anything so mundane as a constitution (we don't have one) or even parliament. This power is not purely ceremonial, but allows the monarchy at critical moments to become an organising centre for political reaction within British "democracy".

Of course, we are told in school, her powers (see right) would never be used.

Fifty years too long

Yet they were used throughout the 19th century and they remain intact "in case of need". Meaning, in case the class struggle gets out of hand.

In 1978 these powers were used by the Governor of Australia (appointed by the Queen and with her powers) to sack Gough Whitlam, the Labour prime minister, replacing him with Tory Malcolm Fraser.

Despite this, the myth remains in the minds of many people that the British monarchy is a neutral body, standing above party politics and class conflict. Let us examine the reality.

The Queen is a well informed, active participant in the business of state, spending three hours a day reading state papers.

These include all cabinet minutes which even many MPs don't get to see, and secret documents relating to defence, security services, and all matters sensitive to the affairs of state. In addition she is briefed in a weekly meeting with the Prime Minister. During the last Labour government in the 1970s Prince Charles even sat in on Cabinet meetings.

Who pays for all those funny hats?

The Queen is one of the biggest capitalists in the country. She receives £35 million a year in Head of State Expenditure, which includes around £9 million (Civil List) for her personal upkeep and those of her parasitical litter, and more than twice that for the maintenance of her palaces.

The Queen and Charles also receive massive amounts of money from the land they own. The Queen, for example, is estimated to have a personal wealth of about £1.1 billion. Charles "earns" so much from the Duchy of Cornwall that, after giving half of it voluntarily to the Treasury he still takes home millions a year.

Of course some of this is farmed out to charity, but like all good capitalists Charles "puts his money to work" in stocks, shares and securities. Just how much, and where, is of course, a closely guarded secret.

In addition the royals have extensive art treasures, jewels plundered during the heyday of colonialism, gifts donated from foreign heads of state. In short, wealth that few of us can imagine.

The so called "neutrality" from political and class conflict is a sham. In every acute social conflict there is a strong sentiment among the backward layers, fostered by our rulers, to the effect that "the politicians have made a mess of it. We need a strong man to stop the squabbling".

In such cases the ruling class is able to rely on the "neutral" army, police and courts to crush democracy. They can do this precisely because capitalist "democracy", a sop to the working class that the ruling class is only willing to grant so long as it can afford it, always leaves the state machine out of direct control of parliament.

Trotsky wrote in the 1920s: "The royal power is weak because the instrument of bourgeois rule is the bourgeois parliament and because the bourgeoisie does not need any special activity outside parliament. But in case of need, the bourgeoisie will make use of the royal power with great success as a concentration of all non-parliamentary, i.e. real class forces armed against the working class."

In Britain the monarchy is then not



Ten things you should know about royal power

1 Public servants and members of the armed forces and the police swear an oath of loyalty to the monarch not parliament. They swear to fight her enemies "without and within" - and that means you.

2 The monarchy has the right to advise and warn the government of the day. The Queen's representative in Australia actually dissolved the Labour government of Gough Whitlam in a clear breach of democracy.

3 A Bill does not become law unless it is approved by the monarch. No monarch has refused to sign a bill since 1707 but the right still exists.

4 When the need arises, the monarch calls the leader of one of the political parties and invites him or her to form a government. By convention, the monarch usually calls the leader of the party that won the most seats at the election. However, it is possible that if no one party has a clear majority of seats, the monarch will have to exercise some discretion.

5 The monarch decides when to dissolve Parliament and call an election, on the Prime Minister's advice. It would cause an outcry if the monarch refused to do what the Prime Minister asked. However, an election might be refused if Parliament could form another government without one.

6 The government, using the Royal Prerogative, can decide when to declare war or commit resources to a war. The government asked Parliament to approve its declaration of war in the Gulf four days after fighting had begun.

7 The government can sign treaties without checking with Parliament because of the Royal Prerogative. In 1993 the government, threatened with a Tory backbench revolt against the Maastricht Treaty, stressed that because of the Royal Prerogative they did not actually need Parliamentary approval.

8 During states of emergency the Queen can govern through the Privy Council without reference to Parliament. This council - which is not elected - is made up of the most senior and trusted statesmen and women and is accountable to the Queen not parliament.

9 The original plan for the death of the Queen Mother was for the BBC to go into 3 days of sombre music and wall-to-wall mourning. It was dropped for fear of alienating the majority.

10 The Queen is one of the richest people in Britain (See box, left).

FE teachers set to strike against low pay

It was with disbelief on 16 April that Further Education (FE) staff received the news that they were being offered a pay rise of 1.5 per cent. Some suggested that perhaps the decimal point had been put in the wrong place!

The joint union claim is for a substantial flat rate increase for all college workers to tackle the shocking low pay of many administrative staff.

The lecturers are claiming a flat rate increase of £3,000. This would go some way to bringing about parity with schoolteachers – college teachers are 10 per cent behind their colleagues in schools. This latest offer increases the difference between the salaries of the two sectors to 12 per cent.

The offer is the lowest made to any public sector workers in this year's pay round. Some areas in FE are unable to recruit staff because qualified teachers will not take pay cuts in order to work in FE rather than schools. The FE teachers union NATFHE is balloting for a two-day national strike on 28/29 May.

The bosses in the Association of Colleges (AOC) say they cannot afford any more because of the gross underfunding of FE. Indeed this first insulting offer may be part of their pressure on central government for more cash.

The FE sector has suffered from underfunding for years. The situation has become acute since "incorporation" – the semi-privatisation of the colleges that was carried through by the Tories in the mid-1990s.

Core funding currently stands at 90 per cent of 1995-6 levels. Each college has to bid for funds and scabble around for extra sources of cash. The last few years have seen cut-throat competition and the driving down of wages and conditions.

Now the new unelected quangos, the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), are supposed to sort out the mess. The danger is they will make things worse by putting work out to cheap-skate training providers and force more mergers and rationalisations.

NATFHE's national leadership is fol-

lowing a dual strategy to try to recoup lost ground on pay. On the one hand it is calling national strike action. On the other it is mounting a joint campaign with the employers over funding.

There does need to be a massive campaign to get proper funding for FE – but it can't be done in conjunction with the AOC bosses. NATFHE members on the ground feel little common cause with their senior managers. These are the same people who derived huge benefits from incorporation, paying themselves inflated salaries, swanning off on foreign trips, pulling all kinds of dodgy scams. At the same time they happily held down workers' wages and tore up contracts.

The real allies in the campaign for decent funding, pay and conditions are fellow trade unions and students. UNISON is not calling a national strike ballot (it will not risk a legal challenge) but there may be a chance of getting action in some colleges. Cross college and area action committees can help mobilise support.

A series of dangers lie ahead. First, the employers are likely to come up with an "improved" offer on 20 May to undermine the strike. But there is no evidence that this will be anything like enough to justify calling off or moderating the action.

Last year further offers came later in the summer. These, together with separate money given in the Teachers Pay Initiative (TPI), convinced the leadership and then the membership to settle last year's dispute. This was a mistake that must not be repeated. TPI money had to be negotiated for on a college by college basis, further undermining national salary scales and giving huge patronage to the bosses.

In Wales, lecturers had to take strike action to force managers to hand over money specifically allocated by the Welsh Assembly for wages.

We must organise across all the unions in our colleges to form action committees to ensure the two day strike called for 28/29 May shuts down every college. We won't wait for Unison's lead-

ership, but we must go ahead and organise jointly with UNISON members in the colleges.

Nor do we trust our own leadership to take the action forward in a way that will win our full claim. A two day strike – with the bosses knowing when we'll be back at work – may not win the claim. Many militants in NATFHE know this and recognise that we must escalate the action. This will be the choice facing the National Conference in early June.

We must organise ourselves across colleges throughout England and Wales. A dynamic rank and file movement has been missing from NATFHE over recent years – the current Rank and File tends to focus on NEC level matters and elections.

It is essential that we go beyond this and build a rank and file network of militants which can ensure all members have access to the arguments, can put pressure on the leadership but can also organise action whenever the leadership pull back.

Tired of waiting on London weighting

Unison members across the 32 local councils in Greater London are poised to strike on Tuesday 14 May in what looks likely to be the start of a prolonged campaign of industrial action.

Britain's biggest union notified the council bosses of the impending strike after more than 70 per cent of members had voted in favour of action in a postal ballot. Nearly a third of members voted – a considerably higher level of participation than that recorded in the 2 May local elections in such model New Labour boroughs as Camden and Newham.

The dispute stems from the hard-nosed rejection by the local authority bosses of a joint union claim for an across the board increase in the London Weighting (cost of living) allowance to £4,000 a year.

Union negotiators had lodged the claim over a year ago, only for the management side to take seven months to respond with a refusal to offer any rise in London Weighting and the implicit threat to scrap universal allowances for council staff working in Europe's most expensive city.

Since January stewards and activists in many branches have found themselves overwhelmed with interest in the union's campaign. A consultative ballot in March saw a whopping vote for action. As with the NUT's action over London

Weighting in March, the Unison fight-back over pay in the capital has spurred recruitment.

Camden Unison vice-chair, George Binette, commented: "Whatever the motivation behind the argument for the consultative ballot, activists seem to have made good use of the additional time, identifying a number of weaknesses in union organisation and starting the process of rebuilding."

The "yes" vote in the official poll was lower than in the consultation exercise, largely because managements sat up and took notice of the initial poll, sending out anti-strike propaganda over the e-mail. But official action, with a clear commitment of resources from the union's Greater London region, will draw any waverers back on side.

There has not been a London-wide strike in local government since July 1989 and many council staff have no previous experience of industrial action, making it all the more important that stewards and activists mount lively picket lines, keep the information flowing and make every effort to involve a new layer in planning and implementing action.

However inexperienced, though, few members believe that a single of action will be enough to make the local authority bosses and ultimately the New Labour government budge. George Binette said: "The campaign in Camden and, no

doubt, elsewhere has generated interest among younger members and revitalised a fair few old hacks. Locally, we are seeing the emergence of a promising nucleus for an effective strike committee."

The London Weighting dispute has an impetus all its own, but should also serve to kick-start the campaign for a national strike over the scandal of low pay in local authorities across England and Wales.

The top brass of the three main local government unions – Unison, the TGWU and GMB – have delayed the start of a ballot until 10 June, with no action planned before mid-July despite overwhelming opposition to the lousy three per cent "final" offer tabled by the employers.

The Unison United Left across London has done a good job of building for action in the capital; now it needs to show its potential on the national stage by giving a decisive lead to union members who are sick to the back teeth of falling real wages, growing job insecurity and the constant threat of privatisation.

● Unison members from across London will be assembling at Temple Gardens (nearest tube station: Embankment) at 12 noon on Tuesday 14 May for a march to the TUC's HQ, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London.

Teachers fight back against Blunkett swamping rhetoric

Newham teachers, supported by Newham Teachers' Association (NUT), have launched a petition affirming that refugee children are welcome in schools and opposing any moves towards segregated schooling as proposed by the government.

The petition condemns the comments made by David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, that refugee children have "swamped" local schools. The Home Office plans to establish special "accommodation centres" where asylum seeker children will be educated separately from others in remote areas of the country.

In the past, refugee children have received strong support from other school students, often leading to highly energetic schools-based campaigns against any deportation attempts.

The petition is for teachers, parents, schoolchildren and students and can be signed by people anywhere in the UK. Newham Teachers Association hope that the petition will become a national initiative to show the strength of feeling after the Home Secretary's comments. Other NUT branches are being asked to adopt the petition, subject to approval from local officers.

The petition can be downloaded as a Word file from: <http://www.carf.demon.co.uk/RefugeePetition.doc>. Or as a PDF file from: <http://www.ncadc.org.uk/letters/News26/teachers.html>

Newham teachers invite everyone in the world to sign this petition.

It can be freely photocopied and distributed and needs to be returned by 31 May 2002 to the Newham Teachers' Association
NTA Office
The Credon Centre
Kirton Road,
London
United Kingdom
E13 9BT

Jackson's election tricks exposed

Things are looking bad for Sir Ken Jackson, co-general secretary of merged super union Amicus. Jackson was forced to stand for re-election by left-wing challenger Derek Simpson. Simpson's supporters were bemused to find a team of Jackson's supporters turning up at one branch after another and voting to nominate Sir Ken for leader. A check with the union computer showed this team of union full timers had been changing branches (a process that usually takes 6 months) faster than you can say Rupert Murdoch. Sir Ken's massive was caught bang to rights when it was revealed that one supporter had voted in Dagenham Motors branch one day before actually joining it. And the main ballot is still weeks away...

Second strike victory for low paid journalists

Low paid journalists on local papers have won a second landmark victory in the wave of industrial action that is sweeping the regional media.

Things looked bad at Greater Manchester Weekly Newspapers when management derecognised the National Union of Journalists straight after a 100 per cent vote for action.

They reckoned without the determination of the workforce – some of whom were earning less than £10,000

a year – with wages capped at a maximum £17K for non-managers.

Two days of strike action saw a total turnaround by management. They recognised the union, instituted pay rises for trainees of nearly 25 per cent, ended patches of pay inequality among other worker and conceded a whole list of other pay rises and other payments. The newspaper group's management clearly got a rocket from its parent company the Scott Trust, which

owns the *Guardian* and the *Observer*. A campaign of letter writing to key *Guardian* managers clearly helped.

Strikers were joined on the picket lines by delegations from other NUJ chapels. The victory maintains the momentum of the NUJ's northern low pay campaign, which is being supported and led by top union officials, and comes on the heels of victory in a low pay strike at Bradford Telegraph & Argus. ● badlypaid@hotmail.com

Michael Moore's new book, *Stupid White Men*, pokes fun at the racist elite that runs America – and it's a number one bestseller, writes **Andy Yorke**

Wisecracking the capitalist system

This book has been number one on the New York Times best seller list for over a month now, gone #1 in Canada and is heading there in the UK and Ireland.

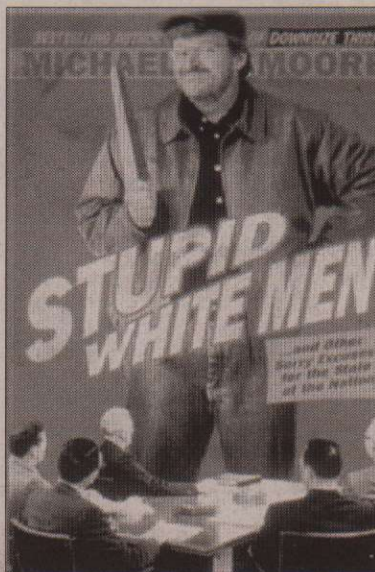
As it goes into its 19th print run in the space of a few weeks, book signings around the US have been mobbed by thousands of people. Yet there has been almost no media coverage in the US. And after September 11th the publishers wanted to pulp the book.

Michael Moore attacks all this head on in his usual take-the-piss style:

"If you are a newspaper editor or a TV producer, PLEASE do NOT pay any attention to this book! Just because more Americans are reading it than any other book in the country for the past month should NOT persuade you to ask crazy questions of yourselves like, 'How can this be happening when the 'President' has the highest approval ratings ever?' Just concern yourselves with repeating your mantra of the past 7 months – 'America Loves Bush! America Loves Bush!'"

And it's got to be said that you can see why they are ignoring it. First it gives George Bush a right pasting in chapter after chapter (starting off with "A very American Coup" about the "Thief-in-Chief and the whole Florida vote fraud). After a 200 page build-up, it then pulls the curtain aside from the Democrats' image as relatively progressive and wipes the floor with them. He finishes an exhaustive list of Clinton's policies with the telling statement: "Bill Clinton was one of the best Republican Presidents we've ever had". Then he savages Gore's election campaign, noting that in the debates with Dubya the two contenders found that they agreed on more than they disagreed! The right wing corporate media will hate this book. And the fact that millions are reading it will make them hate it more.

What makes Moore different from Noam Chomsky, George Monbiot, or Naomi Klein is that he's got a sense of humour. Instead of wordy academic analysis he musters short sharp facts to prove his point and humour to demolish the spin, marketing and plain lies of his targets: politicians and big business. It is written mostly for an American audience though it is completely read-



Moore lambasts the profit ethic, corporations, politicians, and union leaders, but is his alternative of voting for the most progressive option enough to beat them?

able if you aren't from the US. Unlike Klein and her focus on marketing and consumerism, this is focused much more on racism – and working class issues like poverty.

That's not surprising. The son of a Flint, Michigan car worker, Moore made his name with the film "Roger and Me". This revealed his hallmark style: a tale about an innocent, wide-eyed Moore trying to "get in touch" with Roger Smith, General Motors CEO who was in the process of sacking 40,000 Flint car workers. He chases Roger from situation to situation trying to let him know what's happening, because surely he will put it right. Trying to take the elevator up to Roger's office at GM headquarters; attending the GM convention; going to his country club.

Extremely funny and extremely angry and sad, images of chief exec Roger running away are cut with those

of 20,000 unemployed queuing up for government food, families being evicted by the police, the town being boarded up, a black man with mental illness shot by the police. The film brought home what globalisation means on the street, to working class people and especially black people. This was 1989, long before the anti-capitalist movement, and it was unlike any other film you'd ever seen. It was a step in the radicalisation of a whole generation in America. Moore became a cult hero using humour to bash the rich and powerful with his spoof expose show "TV Nation" through the Nineties.

Moore's central concerns in his new book are more traditional political issues than globalisation. Politicians, corporate profiteering, poverty and collapse of public education and services is a central theme. He is also scathing about the intense racism of the USA, tracing it back to slavery and taking white hypocrisy head on. For instance on the gangsta rap lyrics scare, he quotes positive lyrics from Wu-Tang Clan and Tupac – and contrasts them to Johnny Cash ("I shot a man in Reno/ just to watch him die") and Bruce Springsteen ("I killed everything in my path/I can't say I'm sorry for the things that we done"), who are feted as "all-American" musicians.

Brilliant. It never occurred to anyone before about all the "violence" that Country and Western celebrates, though it's right in front of everyone's face! He shows up the politically correct corporate diversity seminars, equal-opportunity policies for the reality of discrimination behind them: "To pass the time, I now play a game with myself, trying to clock how long it will be before I spot a black man or woman who isn't wearing a uniform or sitting at a receptionist's desk...During my last three trips to Los Angeles the clock never stopped: the black head count was zero...now THAT's an incredible feat, testimony to the strength of our commitment to be a segregated society. Think of how much energy has to go into something like this, so that I don't have to be troubled by any black people! How did the white people out there keep the one million black citizens of Los Angeles county hidden from my view? Sheer unadulterated genius!"

Rejecting the media's racist crime hysteria and identikit "black suspect" stories, he shows that the people who we should really blame for destroying our lives are Stupid White Men.

Moore's approach of simple analysis, outrageous facts and humour mean that he doesn't always hit the target on the head, but more importantly that this book has the potential to reach a much wider audience than No Logo.

He always has a practical section, much of it legalistic (a cut-out copy of the 14th amendment guaranteeing equality) some of it pushing non-violence, some of it a bit over-practical (the eternal leaving the toilet seat up debate and telling men to shower more in a chapter on women's oppression). Some of it is just plain silly, like in his one foray abroad – American foreign policy and trouble spots around the world. Here "Mike's Comprehensive Peace Plan" sorts out Northern Ireland (all the Protestants should convert to Catholicism ...hmm...no) but is excellent on the US support for Israel, naming it as apartheid and calling for a general strike in Palestine against Israel!

But then he goes on to write a letter to Arafat calling on him to adopt Martin Luther King and Ghandi style civil disobedience and just have everyone "sit your ass down" on the road in the face of IDF violence. In the former Yugoslavia he calls on the US government to bring Tito back from the dead with a Lazarus Project – and counsels the Balkan peoples to admit they are addicted to violence AA-style and turn their lives over to the UN and Nato! As Michael Moore would say, I don't think so!

There are other weaknesses in the approach. He has become a bit of a guru like Naomi Klein – though to a much wider and more working class audience – and sometimes he comes across as a bit self-important ("Mike's Comprehensive Peace Plan").

Like her, you hear a lot about him and his experiences, but little from activists or campaigners. Even more than Klein he comes across as an alternative journalist rather than someone actually involved in the movement – a Mark Thomas without the anti-capitalism, since there is not a single mention of the anti-capitalist movement,

though "Stupid White Men" was written in 2001! This glaring omission is complemented by his national-centeredness, which is refreshing for its down-home flavour after all the coverage of the global movement of the last 3 years, but also a weakness.

For all his iconoclasm and his insight into using humour to lampoon capitalism, at heart Moore is an old-style populist. His folksiness means that he can teeter on the edge of using religion or sexism by talking about God or fancying women, though to his credit he always pulls back and makes it clear that he endorses none of these ideas. But with his constant references to "our country" and "the nation", the charge might stick that Moore ends up reinforcing the nationalism that he explicitly lambasts in chapters like "We're Number One!"

More importantly, politically he is completely reformist, with a basic message in the 2000 elections of vote Gore where you must, vote for Ralph Nader's Green Party where you can.

Moore lambasts the profit ethic, corporations, politicians, and union leaders, but his only alternative is get out and vote for the most progressive option. "Use your power" to make the US a democracy for all its citizens is a call for voting, non-violent direct action, volunteering, and campaigning, with a strong union and anti-racist element. So in the final analysis, while Moore has begun the job of demolishing the golden self-image of US capitalism, the workers of the Americas will need a different set of ideas to finish the job.

That said, *Stupid White Men* is well worth checking out and giving to that mate of yours who you can't quite get involved. It's really easy to read and has you laughing, which means it won't just remain in the radical movement and in the universities.

Most of what he says is totally relevant to Britain, and we could do with a bit more of his approach here, as we try to deepen the links between the anti-capitalist movement and the working class and black community. Maybe we can do an international cultural exchange and swap him for George Monbiot...

■ www.michaelmoore.com

A world to win



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How to connect

Throughout the world, strikes, demonstrations and revolts are taking place against the bosses and their policies. But how do revolutionaries win over the majority of the workers and youth? *Mark Hoskisson* examines the united front and the Socialist Workers Party call for a new form of it

The pace of political struggle across the globe is quickening. Argentina is in revolt against the IMF's financial vandalism. In France the electoral success of the fascist Le Pen has brought millions onto the streets in protest. The Italian workers have just staged one of the biggest general strikes the country has ever seen. In Germany IG Metall is about to launch a massive strike.

Despite the predictions of the "experts" that the anti-capitalist movement was finished after 11 September, in the US itself 100,000 recently took to the streets of Washington DC against globalisation and war. And across the world – notably in Britain and Italy – hundreds of thousands of anti-capitalists and trade unionists have joined others in protests in support of the Palestinians and against the threats of the USA and Britain to extend the "anti-terrorist" war to Iraq.

Traditional politics – the two or three party sham democracy that the bosses use to conceal the rule of profit and their regime of exploitation – are being stirred and shaken to their foundations. At a time when any dissent from neo-liberal policies has been ruthlessly purged from political life, new movements and parties are springing into existence to challenge the charlatans and downright crooks who lead the established parties.

Of course some, perhaps most, of these new forces are reformist. They denounce globalisation, capitalism and imperialist warmongering. But they do not set out to overthrow them.

All of this points to the urgency of revolutionary Marxists taking the lead in building the parties and an international organisation that can give a strategic coherence and direction to the millions in conflict with capitalism. The conditions for fulfilling this task are very good. But what do we need to do in order to translate potential into reality?

The largest far left organisation in Britain – and possibly in Europe – is the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In the April 2002 issue of its magazine, *Socialist Review* (all quotes are from this article) one of its leaders, Alex Callinicos, argues that the united front is pivotal to the success of revolutionaries in the present period.

He is absolutely right. So long as revolutionary socialists remain a minority within the working class and within the broader anti-capitalist movement, unity in action is a key means of placing ourselves alongside the majority of workers and youth who are ready to fight but who have either not yet realised the need for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism or not understood that you have to win over mass forces to this goal if you are to succeed.

It is also correct, as Callinicos argues, that it would be quite wrong to exclude from the united front those reformist leaders who head serious working class forces.

But where he tries to elaborate "new forms of united front" in order to relate

to today's situation, "characterised by a much higher level of generalisation that embraces a substantial minority of the British population", Callinicos goes seriously astray from the tradition he claims to uphold.

His principal examples of the "new" type of united front are the Socialist Alliance and Globalise Resistance. What distinguishes them from the classical united front is that "their political platform is much broader than some relatively narrowly defined campaigning issue." What also distinguishes them, of course, is that the SWP is the absolute majority in both and its politics and perspectives have shaped the course and direction of both. Within these bodies the forces of outright reformism are minuscule.

Callinicos insists that they are not party fronts "in the old Stalinist sense which are manipulated from behind the scenes". But the sheer strength of the SWP in both cases has so far ensured that it has been able to restrict them to exactly what it wants them to be. And while it wants them to be more than old style fronts, it also wants to restrict their dynamic towards anything that might challenge its core project – building itself as the revolutionary party – or threaten its hegemony over them.

This becomes clear in Callinicos' analysis of what the Socialist Alliance is and where he sees it going.

The Socialist Alliance, he argues, is "seeking to provide an alternative to New Labour, especially, though not exclusively, at elections, in England and Wales,

If this is the new form of united front favoured by Callinicos it is not at all adequate to the tasks facing the working class

and thereby to offer disaffected Labour Party members and supporters a new political home." The new form of the united front, therefore, becomes a political home, rather than a short-lived agreement for action.

But the problem is, for most people "home is where the heart is". It is a relatively permanent fixture. And people can become very comfortable within it. How on earth are we going to move people from this home to an entirely new one?

In plain language, for the SWP the Socialist Alliance must, at one and the same time, be the basis of a socialist alternative to Labour, yet stop short of becoming the only viable alternative that workers will turn to, namely a party. For if it moved towards becoming a party it would challenge the SWP's project of building itself as the party and building everything else as satellites.

To get round this obvious contradiction Callinicos describes the Socialist Alliance as a "hybrid". It is a hybrid politically, because its programme "leaves open the decisive strategic question of reform or revolution". It is also "a hybrid organisationally. It does some of the things that parties normally do."

What Callinicos doesn't point out is that the Socialist Alliance has these peculiarities primarily as a result of the SWP's deliberate policy. It was the SWP that voted against the alliance answering the decisive strategic question of reform and revolution at last year's policy conference when it opposed an amendment from Workers Power which pointed to the need for a revolutionary workers' government. Likewise it voted against our constitutional proposals at the structure conference in December that posed the need for the alliance to resolve its hybrid organisational character by committing itself to the project of a party.

The hybrid nature of the alliance is therefore not accidental – not the product of some sort of diagonal between revolutionaries and reformists pulling in different directions. It has ended up as neither an electoral bloc of distinct forces nor an embryonic party thanks to decisions by the SWP.

If this is the new form of united front favoured by Callinicos it is not at all adequate to the tasks facing the working class. Its hybrid character means that falls between the two stools of united front and party. For the former its programme and policies go too far for a fighting bloc with most real life militant reformists – members and leaders. Yet for a party this programme, which dares not pose the question of power and how to win it and hold it, it falls far short of what is needed.

The Socialist Alliance cannot respond to events in the way that a party could,

with clear policies and a democratic structure and a centralised leadership capable of implementing them. Nor can it be effective as an electoral united front since it is now based on purely individual membership – not an agreement between organisations to fight together for the duration of the election.

Because these "individual members" are overwhelmingly members of "affiliated far-left organisations [who] maintain their own independent structures and activities" in between elections they inevitably, and justifiably, prioritise building their own organisations. Thus the Socialist Alliance's boast that it was not like the Labour Party, which only comes knocking on your door at election time, turns out in many areas to be an empty promise.

The presence of the Socialist Alliance in the localities and workplaces between elections is extremely patchy. In fact only a party with real local branches, with groups in the workplaces and on the estates could hope to make good this promise. Without this, good election results will rely entirely on protest votes and these will go up or down depending on what Labour is doing, whether it is in government or in opposition.

For Marxists elections can never and



SWP says Socialist Alliance and Globalise Resistance are new forms of the united front

should never be separated from the rest of the class struggle. They are not "the road to power" but a register of the revolutionary party's success in getting through to ordinary workers on all the battlefields of the class struggle – the fight against war, the fight against racism, the fight against exploitation.

Offering the electorate a political and organisational hybrid, that plays second fiddle to other organisations between elections, is self-defeating. Ultimately it is a barren hybrid which will not seed or spread.

Why then have the SWP created such a hybrid? Callinicos cannot avoid the fact that the Socialist Alliance is very different to a normal united front. It crosses the boundary between front and party. But it cannot be allowed to challenge the SWP's own party building project.

To get round this Callinicos advances arguments against the types of party that the alliance could become – namely, a revolutionary party, a broad socialist party like the Scottish Socialist Party, or a centrist party.

- It cannot be a revolutionary party because this would "slam the door on Labour Party supporters who have rejected Blairism but who have yet to break with reformism".

- It should not go down the SSP route because today this would mean "the Socialist Worker platform would still more than outgun all the others put together" and it would therefore really be the SWP under another name.

- It should not become a centrist party because there is no reason why the masses should have to pass through a centrist party prior to joining a revolutionary party: "the development of a mass revolutionary party doesn't necessarily depend on revolutionaries building centrist organisations."

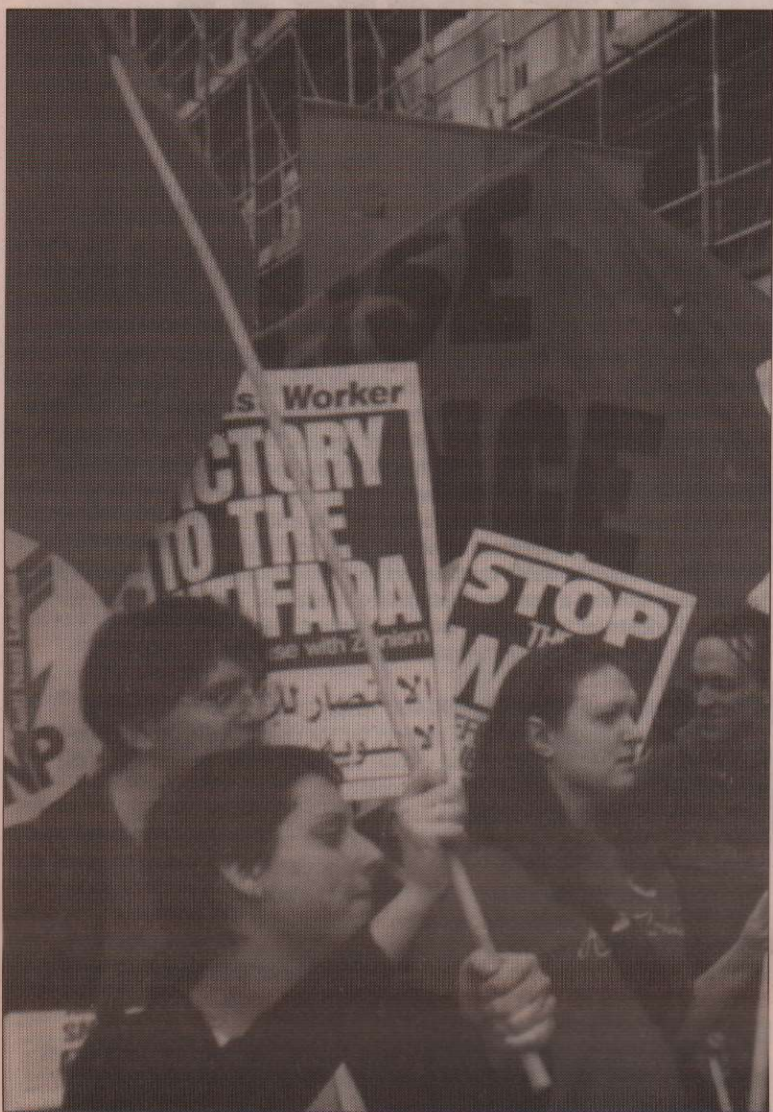
As an alternative to these options Callinicos argues that the Socialist Alliance should basically stay as it is and in the meantime we should build both the united fronts and the SWP. The united fronts can advance the general movement. As for revolutionaries: "The existence of a strong revolutionary pole within the movement is essential to ensuring the defeat of ideas that directly, or indirectly, reflect the influence of capitalist ideology and the articulation of a strategy that can achieve victory."

Let us look at these arguments and the SWP alternative, beginning with Callinicos' last point on the role of revolutionaries within the wider movement.

How do revolutionaries fight the influence of capitalist ideology if not by fighting for revolutionary answers on each and every issue? Of course doing this does not preclude united action around limited goals. But should we start by flagging up that we must only fight for minimal goals? No, we should use unity in action as the starting point for pushing towards revolutionary solutions. If we don't, other solutions, which "reflect the influence of capitalist ideology" will triumph and the revolutionaries will be guilty of helping them to triumph if they haven't fought hard for a revolutionary alternative.

A concrete example illustrates this. At the policy conference of the alliance last year the SWP backed an amendment that deleted "disarm the police" from the programme. Of course the SWP do not believe that we can get to socialism with an armed (capitalist) police. But instead of arguing like revolutionaries they felt obliged to protect the tiny minority of committed thought-out

with the masses



reformists. In fact they were caving in to a key aspect of capitalist ideology – the idea that the police can be reformed, that we have no need to disarm them by our own efforts and with our own organisations.

Without SWP support this position would have had very little support inside the alliance. Disarming the police is something that the families of the many black people murdered by the police would eagerly support – even though they were not revolutionaries. Revolutionaries had a responsibility to point out to reformists that dropping such a demand would weaken the appeal of the alliance with large numbers of the most oppressed in our society.

The SWP are quite wrong if they think that revolutionary policies are only for revolutionaries and that ordinary workers will always reject them out of loyalty to being consistent reformists. Quite the reverse is true. Workers, where they see a burning need will, out of sheer realism, be able to accept one (or more) policies from the revolutionary programme.

That is exactly what Workers Power did by opposing the amendment. The SWP did the opposite. And were very wrong to do so. When Brixton police shot an unarmed black man dead the Socialist Alliance was left with a feeble policy on the issue when everyone around us was demanding that the guns be taken from the police.

This example shows that the SWP in practice falls well short of Callinicos' prescribed role for revolutionaries within the movements – of combating bourgeois ideas. But it does fit in with the SWP's perspective of counterposing the Socialist Alliance as a shared home to it being the starting point – even if it is only one of several potential starting points – for a party.

On the party question itself we agree

that there is no need for the working class to pass through a stage of centrism. Indeed, prescribing such a stage is dangerous since a centrist party could lead the working class, or a section of it, to disaster as the POUM did in Spain in the 1930s.

But the problem is that the SWP is restricting the Socialist Alliance itself to being a bloc for issuing right-centrist and left reformist electoral propaganda. For it is an individual membership based party-like organisation and it "leaves open" the question of reform or revolution. And by the way if you "leave open the question of revolution" then given the dominant ideas in the British labour movement reform is exactly what will be understood by most people.

Callinicos' criticism of the idea that centrism has to be a stage workers go through towards the revolutionary party applies with full force to the Socialist Alliance. Why is there a need to go through a left reformist or centrist electoral machine either?

As for the SSP model, it is not simply the problem of the SWP's numerical advantage that would limit the usefulness of us taking the Socialist Alliance along this route. A broad socialist party – a right centrist party – will fail the first test of a major crisis and break apart into its constituent elements. This is the lesson of the "broad socialist parties" that existed at the time of the Second International. They were coalitions of revolutionaries and reformists that, faced with the test of war, broke apart. We do not want to prescribe that as the road for the Socialist Alliance to take.

Finally, does arguing for a revolutionary party slam the door on as yet reformist workers. Certainly, if Workers Power was arguing that the Socialist Alliance should, as Callinicos suggests (though he doesn't name us) keep

"left social democrats out of the alliance for the sake of revolutionary purity" we would be guilty of sectarianism. And if we were arguing for the alliance to become a party tomorrow (or even the day after) we would plain stupid. But we are neither, and we have not argued for either of these things.

Here is our alternative – spelt out many times, but equally ignored many times in the course of debates on the future of the Socialist Alliance – to the idea of maintaining the alliance as a hybrid (and letting the SWP get on with the job of building the revolutionary party).

In its current phase of development the alliance is, in the main, a coalition of groups and indeed individuals who claim to be revolutionaries. We have not yet broken a significant number of reformist workers to its ranks from Labour.

In these circumstances it was entirely justified to advance, in the general election for example, revolutionary policies in order to test how much resonance they have in the working class and in order to win workers over to such policies – without them having to go through any intermediate stages.

This is not for the sake of revolutionary purity. It is because we believe in the validity of our policies for the working class as a whole and not just for a handful of revolutionaries.

In the course of formulating such a revolutionary manifesto we could have engaged with the small numbers of reformists within the Socialist Alliance and tried to win them over to the value and relevance of such policies.

Provided decisions on such policies were taken democratically why would this have slammed the door on anyone. After all, when the reformists won on certain policy issues it did not mean that revolutionaries got up and walked out. Surely if we can accept being in a minority then so too can the reformist comrades. To coin a phrase – that is what democracy looks like.

Moreover, we were talking about the policies of an alliance for an election, not the programme of a party. And if we do not argue for revolutionary policies within the alliance how are we ever going to articulate "a strategy that can achieve victory"?

On the question of a new party the issue is not whether or not we want one in the near future, but whether we see the possibility of fighting for one, within the Socialist Alliance, at all. In effect the SWP have excluded this possibility.

But the developments inside the unions show the folly of such an exclusion. The Socialist Alliance trade union conference tapped into a mood of dissent – union members are angry about their political funds going to the party of privatisers and a debate has begun inside the unions on developing alternatives to this. We all agree that we should democratise the unions' political funds. But to what purpose? Surely ending Labour's monopoly only makes sense if we want to build an alternative – a new party, which is what workers both want and need.

This does not mean declaring a new party. But it does mean uniting with groups of trade unionists around the project of forming one. If we call on them to break from Blair – as we do – we have to provide an alternative. An alliance is not a viable long term alternative. A party is.

In our view the door is wide open to unity with workers who have not yet broken with their old reformist ideas around the project of building such a party. There should be no conditions and no ultimatums in this. The programme is something that the future party will have to discuss and decide on.

We will be in favour, and will argue, for it to be a revolutionary party. We are confident that if all revolutionaries argued hard and patiently for their ideas and if they showed in practice the superiority of the revolutionary methods of

struggle then we can win the majority of militant reformist workers over to revolutionary politics.

But even if we lose this argument then provided the new party is democratic we will stay loyal and carry on the argument. If we win then it will show workers are ready for a revolutionary programme. A real struggle, with real and sizeable working class forces, will decide that. It is not a literary game.

But, if you exclude in advance – as the SWP have done – the Socialist Alliance uniting with groups of workers to form a new party then it is you who are slamming the door shut on such workers. Instead of mobilising workers and thereby increasing the opportunity of building a mass revolutionary party the Socialist Alliance will be restricted to a small scale alliance of far left groups and reformist individuals.

The oft-quoted home favoured by the SWP will become more like a block of bedsits. We are all in the same building. We can all hear each other. Every now and again our paths cross but we carry on leading separate lives.

In our view that is the main danger facing the alliance at the moment. We are altogether but have not got an agreed common purpose.

To any but the most wilful, it should be clear that we are not proposing the immediate founding of a party. What we are proposing is that we agree to pose the need for such a new workers' party to the working class itself.

As the class struggle intensifies, as the break up of Labour continues, as class polarisation sharpens the possibility for such a party being founded as a revolutionary party will increase.

That is one of the ways by which we combine the building of the movement with the building of the party. It avoids the sectarianism that the SWP rightly warn against as a danger in the new period. It also avoids the opportunist tendency to lower the revolutionary banner in the name of the united front.

The "new" united front and freedom of criticism

In his analysis of the classical form of the united front – as developed by the Communist International in the early 1920s and thereafter by Leon Trotsky – there is much we agree with in Callinicos' article. But he leaves one very important element out. Namely, the right (and duty) of revolutionaries to criticise their reformist partners, when the reformists hinder the struggle. Here is how Callinicos explains the classic united front: "By bringing revolutionaries and reformists together in a common struggle, Communists could demonstrate to the social democratic rank and file, in practice rather than words, the superiority of their politics. The united front thus had two aspects: (1) it united revolutionaries and reformists in a common struggle around issues of concern to the working class as a whole; and (2) it involved a struggle for political influence over the masses between revolutionaries and reformists."

The "struggle for political influence" necessarily involved criticism when the reformists were found wanting. Yet all Callinicos has to say about "criticism" is a warning about those from the "orthodox Trotskyist tradition" who have used the united front "as a vehicle for denouncing everyone else".

We are not in favour of denouncing everyone else for the sake of it. But nor are we in favour of diplomatic silence when our political opponents hold back the struggle. We believe that criticism within the united front can be conducted in either a fraternal way or in a sharp way, depending on the situation, the scale of the reformists' errors and so on. But unless the right to make such criticism exists, and unless revolutionaries exercise that right when it is called for, there will be no real struggle with the reformists. There will be "a non-aggression pact" rather than a united front.

Trotsky wrote, in explaining the united front to the French

Communist Party: "We broke from the reformists and centrists in order to obtain complete freedom in criticising perfidy, betrayal, indecision, and the half-way spirit in the labour movement. For this reason any sort of organisational agreement which restricts our freedom of criticism and agitation is absolutely unacceptable for us. We participate in a united front but do not for a single moment become dissolved in it. We function in the united front as an independent detachment." (Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Volume Two, p91)

It is quite false to see any form of united front as some sort of mixing together of revolutionary and reformist politics. That is why revolutionaries emphasise unity in action not common propaganda, which must by its nature be reduced to what the reformists will tolerate.

In the Socialist Alliance the results of this "new" form of the united front has meant the self-limitation of the alliance's politics. Since no reformist leaders of any real national status came forward the strictures on criticism have not been put into practice.

But in Globalise Resistance there have been long periods when the SWP refused to criticise leaders like Susan George, George Monbiot and the activity of ATTAC in Porto Alegre, despite the fact that at key junctures these people either promoted dangerous reformist strategies or even criticised the "violence" of the anti-capitalist movement.

This tendency to "put up with" reformist leaders and "shut up" criticism of them, even for a temporary period, fits in with Alex Callinicos' "new" version of the united front. It is not actually very new and it will not help build the revolutionary Marxist current within the broader movement. Rather it will obscure the real dividing line between revolutionaries and reformists.

Italy's bosses reeling from general strike

Paolo Rossi reports on the aftermath of Italy's 13 million strong general strike and where the movement goes next



Berlusconi (top right) predicted that the strike would fail but millions took action, such as in Bologna (above), putting leaders such as Sergio Cofferati, leader of the CGIL (bottom right) under pressure not to sell out



On 16 April, Italy was paralysed by a general strike in protest against the government's proposed modifications to Article 18 of the workers' statute. These would give bosses the right to sack workers at will and replace them with casual labour. The strike's impact was absolutely massive.

Ironically, the main reason for this was a complete black-out on information, since newspaper and television journalists, including those working for the three television stations owned by prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, had come out in force. The silence was deafening, and spoke volumes.

The precise scale of the strike, however, only became clear the following day. Before the event, Berlusconi had been confidently predicting that it would only be "partial" and not general. He based this on the fact that the three main unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) which had called the strike "only" number five million. But there was a shock in store for the leader of Italy's gang of corrupt cronies.

Thirteen million workers downed tools, pens, steering wheels and computers, and three million of these joined in mass demonstrations and rallies held all over Italy. Production and the country's entire infrastructure came to a halt. Thus, while Berlusconi likes to boast that he is "working for history", for the second time in just three weeks, it was Italy's workers who were making history.

The government and the bosses' organisation, Confindustria, have been doing their utmost to downplay the effects of the strike and the numbers of people who supported it. Berlusconi declared that it had been "contained". When no one believed him, he changed tack. On an official visit to Romania he argued that while there were, "a lot of

people" it "hadn't amounted to much." He also showed his usual contempt for workers by arguing that only 2 out of 10 knew what they were on strike for.

At FIAT, there was 100 per cent participation in some of its nation-wide bases. In Turin, although the FIAT bosses' claim that only 50 per cent of the workforce joined the strike, the plant's car park was empty and production was halted.

So "contained" was the strike that the reasons giving rise to it, plus its impact, are being felt both at home and abroad by bosses and workers alike. In Italy, the Confindustria is reeling. Having just completed its annual conference, it reconfirmed D'Amato as leader, but this was with a loss of twenty votes compared to two years ago and with almost one third of the delegates not attending at all.

D'Amato has also sacked Emma Marcegaglia, former head of the Confindustria youth section and now European adviser, who dared suggest that the fight over Article 18 wasn't worth it and that concessions should be made.

There's a lot at stake in this strike, and not only at the national level. The international bosses, together with his close friend Tony Blair, are still rooting for Berlusconi in his fight with the Italian working class.

This boss class solidarity needs to be matched by international workers' solidarity. In a brilliant start unions in Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Spain, France, Germany, Britain, Austria, Malta, Ireland, Greece, the USA and Canada, protested at home and/or sent letters of solidarity to Italian strikers.

However, the strategy of Sergio Cofferati, leader of the main union federation the CGIL, has just one objective: how to open up negotiations with the government over labour flexibility.

For him, the whole issue is how to convince the Berlusconi government of the need to negotiate with the bureaucrats as social power brokers. Not surprisingly it was left to the rank and file Cobas to bring the internationalist issues of imperialist war and Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people to the demonstration as themes to be fought for alongside the defence of Article 18.

Missing from the demands of the official union leaders was any notion that the rights defended by Article 18 need to be extended to include all workers, and not only those in workplaces which employ more than 15 people. Once again, this theme was brought to the general strike by the Cobas and by the social forums.

But Cofferati may find the route to class collaboration blocked. Despite formal declarations that they want to "re-open negotiations with the unions after the general strike", the government's actions since the strike suggest a broadening of their attacks.

Since the strike, the government passed legislation which allows the suspension of union rights for three years for workers whose black market bosses decide to go legal and start paying taxes.

The next day, in a press conference in Bulgaria, Berlusconi announced he was on his way to take over the three national television stations of the RAI. He said that two journalists and a comedian working for the group, all of whom had spoken out against him during the election campaign last May, should be sacked.

There is an urgency to take the strike movement out of the hands of Cofferati, who is less concerned with workers' rights than he is with safeguarding his own privileges and status in society. He never even wanted the general strike in

What are social forums?

The build up to the magnificent general strike in Italy was marked by the increasingly bold and broad activity of the social forums writes *Jeremy Dewar*

But what are the Italian social forums? Social forums are fighting organisations of all those in conflict with the system. They were built up across the length and breadth of Italy in the run up to, and the aftermath of the huge international demo against the G8 meeting of the big capitalist countries in Genoa last summer. They have transformed the situation in Italy.

Drawing in rank and file trade unionists, anti-racists, peace activists, democratic and human rights campaigners and anti-capitalists, the Italian social forums have initiated a number of interlinked campaigns. They have fought for democratic rights for immigrants, mobilised against police repression and started the ball rolling in the campaign against prime minister Berlusconi's attack on Article 18.

The social forums organised a 100,000 strong demonstration in Rome in February to coincide with and build support for the rank and file Cobas strike over Article 18. The strength of that display forced the CGIL leaders to set the date for the massive general strike last month.

But it is the breadth of the social forum actions that have been most impressive. They called out school students in their tens of thousands to Rome to oppose the government's proposed restrictions on the right to education. They surrounded and then invaded and took apart - brick by brick - a refugee detention centre in Bologna. And most recently and most bravely they sent out hundreds of activists, in rotation, to bring medical and food relief to the occupied West Bank, staying with Palestinian families so that the Israeli Defence Force has to humiliate and risk killing EU citizens if it wants to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure.

The forums form a loose network permeating every province and town across the country. Their make-up varies from place to place: in Naples and Turin, the militant metalworkers' union, FIOM, is well represented, but in Milan there seems to be virtually no union participation. Interestingly, it is in the smaller cities and towns that the social forums are most effective and active.

The social forums are cross-class anti-globalisation umbrella groups. That is, they involve trade unionists alongside Catholic peaceniks, working class youth from the anti-capitalist movement alongside middle class "Clean Hands" anti-corruption campaigners. But this does not appear to have limited the scope of their activity, nor blunted their direct action, militant edge. On the contrary, the social forums appear to have strengthened the confidence of all the participants and provided each cause with solidarity and activists.

Obviously, these class forces have ultimately different historic interests and should Berlusconi be replaced by a new Olive Tree coalition government, they could split - or, worse, demobilise the struggle and unite behind the new capitalist administration. But that is certainly not the case now, although it underlines the importance of maintaining and arguing for a working class perspective. Indeed, despite an initial hostility to the organised working class and socialist parties, revolutionaries are increasingly able to operate within the forums with little or no restriction on their activities.

Workers Power believes that building social forums in Britain could enormously aid our struggles. Capitalism is a social system that involves exploitation at work, racism, war, ecological destruction and the systematic oppression of vast parts of the planet. It depends for its survival on keeping the inevitable resistance to these various elements of its dictatorship divided and isolated from one another. Social forums are an excellent means of uniting the struggles and building on each other's strengths through effective solidarity.

True internationalism is not just about solidarity with people from other countries. It is about learning from their methods of struggle and adapting them for local use. The Italian class struggle is the most heightened in Europe. And now the Italian social forums have called for a European Social forum to be held in Florence or Naples in November this year. We should build on their experience of social forums - and initiate them here - both to build for the November gathering and to strengthen the anti-capitalist and workers' movement.

the first place and was only forced into calling it by a very militant and combative working class.

But alternative political leadership is badly lacking in Italy. The centre-left opposition is running scared, not of Berlusconi and his "reforms", but of the possible long term repercussions of the general strike. They have promised no further mobilisations but a campaign of parliamentary obstruction which can be easily countered by the government calling a vote of confidence. The response of Rifondazione Comunista is also inadequate, it has promised to launch a

referendum campaign should the government pass its legislation against Article 18.

The government's attacks, the massive scale of the general strike and the inadequacy of the "official" labour movement, left and right, all underline the importance and the urgency of building an anti-bureaucratic movement in all the unions and fighting to win it to a political strategy committed, not to yet another compromise with Italy's bosses but to an all out fight with Berlusconi and the bosses who back him.

By the time this paper goes to print, Jacques Chirac will have been re-elected President of the French Republic, most likely with a percentage of votes unheard of in democratic elections.

Since the first round saw the Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, eliminated in favour of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the fascist leader of the National Front, mass demonstrations have taken place all over France.

The presence of Le Pen in the second round has opened up a crisis in France. The "political earthquake" that has hit the country has exposed the undemocratic nature of the Presidential elections: despite an abundance of candidates in the first round and a wide distribution of votes, only two candidates are eligible to stand in the second round. In this case, the "winners" of the first round together represent a mere 36 per cent of the vote. The majority thus lose out completely.

The mass demonstrations that have taken place almost daily culminating in the magnificent one million strong demo on the streets of Paris on 1 May are testimony to the anger that French workers and youth feel over an electoral system that permits a fascist to get through to the second round. However this anger has been rapidly channelled into a call to vote for the right-wing Chirac, a man who has been discredited as a crook and a liar.

Chirac is also a racist who not so long ago referred to the "noise and smell of immigrants". While the desire to block the road to Le Pen is understandable and correct, workers and youth are wrong to think that a vote for Chirac is the answer. The pressure to vote Chirac has been gaining ground since the first round. The minority who dare to go against this false solution have met with increasing hostility.

To win the argument against the "Republican Front", strong leadership and clear arguments from revolutionaries are necessary. Unfortunately, the two main revolutionary organisations in France, Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR - French section of the USEC) have proved incapable of providing this. Both groups responded to the results of the first round by making vague and confusing statements that were then ridiculed by the media, and subsequently changed. LO retreated into its traditional abstract sectarianism and the LCR was rapidly sucked into the "Republican Front".

Lutte Ouvrière

LO's election night statement went down particularly badly. Their candidate, Arlette Laguiller, concentrated on justifying her candidature rather than making a resolute attack on the FN and calling on workers to mobilise on the streets against Le Pen. This was then compounded by implying that there was no difference between Le Pen and Chirac. LO's first advice to workers for the second round was shockingly complacent: no abstention, no vote for Chirac or Le Pen, workers should vote according to their conscience!

Since then, despite the increasing pressure to vote for Chirac, LO has decided to advocate a spoilt ballot paper.

However, the arguments put forward to justify their position demonstrate their inability to grasp the significance of Le Pen's "victory" or to relate to the healthy anti-racist spirit of the demonstrators, to offer a strategy to combat the rise of racism and fascism and to defeat an offensive by Chirac and the right against workers' gains.

LO's "killer" argument in favour of a spoilt ballot is not so much principle as electoral mathematics. Chirac can win with the votes of the right alone, therefore he doesn't need the votes of the left to beat Le Pen. There are two problems with this argument. First, it doesn't address the argument of those who say that the left has to ensure that the percentage that Le Pen gets is so small as to minimise his electoral influ-



French Left fails the test

Christina Duval, in Paris, argues that Le Pen can be defeated not by the left's existing strategies but by mass mobilisations

What we say

LRCI comrades in France have been arguing against the republican front and for a spoilt ballot paper. However, unlike LO we have stressed the need to step up the fight against the FN in workplaces and workers' communities, on the streets - to confront the FN wherever they appear.

This means organising committees in schools, colleges and workplaces to mobilise against the FN, to stop their meetings, to refuse their members access to state resources, to expel their members from work places and trade unions, to fight against repressive laws that are used against second and third generation immigrant youth and to fight against the immigration laws.

We have also raised the need to build a political alternative to the Gauche Plurielle, which has been so discredited in these elections. The mass mobilisations, the hundreds of thousands of youth who have spontaneously demonstrated are the living proof that such an alternative is possible.

We believe that a new revolutionary party of the working class is a burning necessity. After all 12 per cent of the electorate before this crisis erupted voted for candidates that call themselves

ence. Le Pen himself has said that anything under 30 per cent will be a defeat.

Second, it demonstrates a fatalistic acceptance of LO's lack of influence in society and a refusal to take responsibility for their positions. A revolutionary has to take a lead and aspire to make a minority position popular amongst the majority.

If LO's position was taken up by the mass movement, it would not be excluded that Le Pen could "win" the election, although the real balance of forces would be in favour of the radical workers and youth and a new situation would be opened up. LO, however, does not want to face such issues, since it sees them as a diversion from the economic fight of workers in the workplace, rather than its concentrated, political,

expression.

LO have traditionally underestimated the danger of racism and fascism gaining a foothold in working class communities. Its economism leads them to downplay the specific struggles for the rights of immigrants (as well as women and other oppressed groups such as lesbians and gays). The economic struggle is seen as an automatic solution that will end the division of workers along such lines.

LO's economism has led them for many years to refuse to take up the struggle for voting rights for immigrants, arguing that democratic issues were unimportant in relation to the struggle on the factory floor.

Its response to the rise of racism amongst the most marginalised work-

revolutionary. The working class base of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party is disillusioned and in major flux.

Now is the time for all serious revolutionaries to raise the slogan for such a new party - to propose mass meetings, debates, to launch the fight for it.

In this ferment, in debating out the issues facing workers, youth, immigrants, we are confident that a revolutionary programme can win mass support and give a whole new direction to the labour movement. What the working class does not need is the present policies of LO and the LCR - sectarian economism and opportunist tailing of the confused moods of the masses.

It does not need them in either electoral competition with one another or in some sort of rotten compromise.

We believe that a real, durable break with the politics of the Gauche Plurielle and with the centrism of LO and the LCR means uniting the working class around a revolutionary programme and a disciplined but democratic party capable of leading the class in a fight against both the FN and the capitalist system if feeds off.

ers is hardly any better. It points out that the existence of a mass workers party (such as the PCF - French Communist Party - in the past) is an important barrier against ideologies that divide workers. But a workers' party that does not actively take up the fight against racism and nationalism leaves the most downtrodden and unorganised workers wide open to reactionary ideas.

The trade union struggle alone is not sufficient to break down divisions within the class. The PCF's 70 years of pandering to nationalism poisoned the working class. That workers who previously voted for the PCF can swing to the FN shows the dangers of relying on pro-working class rhetoric and trade unionism to fight racism and xenophobia within the class.

Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

Like LO, the LCR started off with an ambiguous position, which basically left it up to individuals to decide whether to vote for Chirac or not. The organisation did not call for a vote for Chirac, but would not call on people not to vote for Chirac. This then gave way to a call for a vote for Chirac. In *Rouge*, the LCR weekly paper, the words "vote Chirac" do not appear.

However their leaders, when pressed have admitted that this is in fact what they are saying: "The Central Committee of the LCR confirms the position it adopted from the evening of 21 April and in this context underlines the necessity of blocking the road to the extreme right in the street as well as at the ballot box. This translates itself into voting against Le Pen on 5 May and preparing from 6 May the conditions for a 'tous ensemble' (united mobilisation) against the policies of Chirac."

The LCR's new position is a reflection of the aspirations of workers and youth to stop Le Pen from winning the election and to minimise his vote. It is calling for a vote against Le Pen, which is how the demonstrators view their support for Chirac - they are not voting for Chirac, but rather against Le Pen.

The vote for Chirac is being portrayed by the LCR as temporary tactical bloc with the "republican right" to keep out the far right. A massive victory for Chirac, they argue, will not be seen as legitimising his presidency. The more votes he gets, the more ridiculous he will look since many of his votes will come from a left electorate that has no confidence in him.

The LCR's position is a flagrant break with the fundamental position of Marxists never to give support to bourgeois candidates: a position reaffirmed by Trotsky with regard to Germany and France in the 1930s when the threat of fascism was considerably greater.

Our principle is always to urge the working class to rely solely on its own independent forces and on allies won in struggle. The workers must never hand over their votes to the bourgeoisie.

But don't we have to stop Le Pen? Yes indeed, but this is not the same as saying we have to help Chirac to beat Le Pen because he is a lesser evil. We do not accept for one minute the idea that fascism rules in France the moment Le Pen enters the Elysées.

Even if Le Pen were to win the presidency because of a massive spoilt ballot or abstention by workers, his democratic credentials with the masses would be nil and he would be the immediate target of a mass movement to bring him down.

The LCR's alternative is to give Jacques Chirac a "republican mandate" to defeat fascism and hope he will not use it to attack the gains of the working class - if he can gain a majority in parliament in June. In fact this is like handing a loaded revolver to your most dangerous enemy.

No matter how weak and illegitimate Chirac appears today, his presidency will be strengthened by a massive electoral victory.

A challenge to his legitimacy has to come now not later, while workers and youth are mobilising in the streets. True, the LCR calls for such a mobilisation "on the Monday following" but it will not be massive for the simple reason that most people will say - the crisis is over, we stopped Le Pen, let's give Chirac a chance or at best vote Socialist later to tie him up with another "co-habitation".

If there is not a mass movement the end result of everything will be a strengthening of Chirac and the right - a right that will be more than ready to attract FN voters by hardening their positions on crime and immigration and that goes on to ravage the workers' gains, give tax cuts to the rich, erode or eliminate the 35-hour week and so on.

Two days after being ousted from the presidency by a military coup, Hugo Chavez was back as President of Venezuela after a popular uprising overthrew the generals' stooge. But *Stuart Mckee* argues that the masses need to organise themselves against imperialism and their own bosses

Why Bush wants Hugo Chavez out

Hugo Chavez came to power in Venezuela in February 1999 promising radical reform.

In 1992 as a Colonel in the Paratroops regiment he had been given a long prison sentence for leading a failed military coup against the government, but was released after only two years.

Chavez had come to the leadership of a group of young military officers disgusted by the corruption of the political elite in Venezuela. A country rich in oil had been plundered for decades by its two ruling parties, Accion Democratica and the Christian Democracy (Copei), hand in glove with imperialism. By the end of the 1980s Venezuela had been saddled with debt, its agriculture left to wither, its industry driven into crisis and with 40 per cent of its population languishing in dire poverty.

In 1997 Chavez organised a new party, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), which was initially dominated by his military supporters. But he needed a broader base than this. He also needed ideas and political organisers. He turned to the traditional left for help. By 1998 the MVR had been joined by several other parties to contest the presidential elections as a "patriotic pole". The most significant allies were left groups which had split from the Communist Party, the Movement for Socialism (MAS) and the "Fatherland for Everyone" (PPT).

By winning over these organisations and several smaller ones, Chavez was able to present his movement as a coalition of parties for change in the 1998 presidential elections. The "patriotic pole" won 56 per cent of the vote.

President Chavez moved swiftly to neutralise the old congress, dominated by Accion Democratica and Copei. In April 1999 a referendum was held to set up a constituent assembly to write a new constitution, in July elections were held for the assembly, with Chavez's coalition receiving 90 per cent of the votes. In December the new constitution, which enshrined state control of oil and other extractive industries, allowed limited abortion rights, and gave new rights for indigenous people, was passed with 71 per cent in favour and 28 per cent against.

Further elections for president and the new single chamber parliament were held in May 2000. Again Chavez's coalition swept to power and the old parties were reduced to rumps. Chavez had launched a mass movement that expected radical change. His most fervent supporters were the poor and the dispossessed, a huge part of the population. The Fifth Republic, Chavez promised, meant a new start where the poor would share in the oil wealth of the country.

Chavez pursued a radical nationalist programme. At its heart is the income from the oil industry which makes up 40 per cent of government revenue. Chavez has set about becoming a leader in OPEC, the oil producers' cartel, so as to push up the price of oil which was at historic lows of \$9 or \$10 dollars a barrel in the late 1990s.

Venezuela cut production by 4 per cent, took the lead in rallying the Arab states to setting a target price for oil and even persuaded Mexico (outside OPEC) not to increase production. By the end of 1999 oil was selling at \$20 a barrel.

The rise in government revenue was used to launch ambitious programmes to help the poor. Money is funnelled through the Social Fund (FUS) which is in the hands of one of the pro-Chavez military officers, appointees who are present at every level of government. The money is used for welfare, public works projects to help the unemployed, for hospitals and schools.

This is linked to Chavez's personal initiative "Bolívar Plan 2000", which aims to integrate the army at local level with community organisations and reconstruction projects. Chavez has grand plans to re-locate people from the poor urban areas into a revitalised interior of the country. His aim is to stimulate the neglected agricultural sector by constructing infrastructure projects - schools, houses, roads - and encourage new co-operative farming ventures as well as small industrial enterprises.

The MVR government wants to carry out this programme in alliance with the Venezuelan business community. In his weekly TV speeches Chavez regularly calls on the rich to "develop a sense of solidarity" while calling on the poor to be patient because change is under way. While rejecting "savage neo-liberalism" as a strategy, Chavez has made quite clear that the market and foreign investment are important for the implementation of his programme:

"Our project is neither statist nor neo-liberal: we are exploring the middle ground, where the invisible hand of the market joins with the visible hand of the state: as much state as possible as much market as possible."

After he visited Britain he declared himself attracted to Blair's "third way" but later decided that Blair was too close to the US and expressed a preference for the German model instead.

None of this made the Chavez government anymore acceptable to Washington. The US made clear its hostility to Chavez from the outset. It cannot tolerate a government that regularly attacks neo-liberalism and the dominance of the United States over Latin America.

Chavez has close relations with Fidel Castro and has obstructed the US's growing intervention in Colombia. His government has refused to allow US military planes to fly over Venezuelan territory to pursue its so-called anti-drugs war in Colombia. Chavez has gone out of his way to court world leaders opposed to US power - ostentatiously inviting Saddam Hussein, Colonel Gadafi, and the President of Iran to attend OPEC meetings in Caracas. As far as Bush is concerned Chavez is a marked man.

Chavez wants to pursue radical change, to reduce inequality, to develop the country's industry and economy, to gain independence from imperialist exploitation, yet he wants to do this arm



Bike riders for Chavez

A coup made in Washington

Just after the democratically elected President of Venezuela had been overthrown in a military coup, Dennis McShane, Minister at the UK's Foreign Office, referred to the former president as "a ranting demagogue". Twenty four hours later Hugo Chavez was back in power and McShane was tight lipped.

He was not the only one to be caught out. Spokespersons from the Bush Administration could not contain their joy at the overthrow saying it was the actions of Chavez that "had provoked the crisis". After he was back in power Condoleezza Rice declared that "he had been moving in the wrong direction for a long time" and now he had the opportunity "to correct his course". "Or else", she could have added.

It rapidly became clear that Washington had been up to its neck in planning the coup. When reports appeared that officials in the administration had been informed months ago about military plans for a coup, it was said that Washington had "discouraged it". The Financial Times revealed it had been sent an email, a week before the coup, originating from an official employed by the Pentagon who had lunched with a senior Venezuela military officer. This outlined a scenario whereby a strike at the state oil company would be used to oust Chavez.

This is indeed how the events that led to the coup started. The strike against Chavez's sacking of the company management was turned into a general strike by the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV) and supported by big business. A demonstration to the presidential palace turned violent and 11 people were killed. This was immediately blamed on armed Chavez supporters and the private TV stations repeatedly ran doctored film footage "showing" Chavez supporters firing on the crowd. It was later revealed that unidentified gunmen, probably police or military special forces, had fired on the crowd. The Chavez supporters defending the palace had fired back.

This was the signal for the generals to arrest Chavez. Announcing that he had resigned they placed Pedro Carmona, leader of the business federation in power. But things went badly wrong. Carmona dissolved the parliament and started reversing laws passed by the previous government. The poorest sectors of Caracas came onto the streets and surrounded the palace; the CTV leaders withdrew support; the army split and Carmona resigned. Within 48 hours Chavez was back.

The human rights bureau of the State Department is now being forced to investigate hundreds of thousands of dollars sent to Venezuela by the Congress funded "National Endowment for Democracy". The funds directed to Venezuela quadrupled in the last few months.

The US union organisation, the AFL-CIO funnelled \$154,000 of the funds to the CTV, probably to organise its campaign against Chavez. Another \$340,000 was passed to "party building projects" in Venezuela through the International Republican Institute. The institute's US president hailed the military coup saying, "the Venezuelan people had risen up to defend democracy". Like McShane he said nothing about Chavez's return to power!

in arm with the very capitalists who are dependent on imperialism and the exploitation of the poor for their survival.

As a result Chavez, like many before him, looks to the state (and the military) to become an "arbiter". He must bully local businesses into becoming "more patriotic" and "responsible" and at the same time ward off the attacks of imperialism. To do this he must mobilise the masses, and try to "radicalise" the armed forces, for his own defence. Yet every attempt to do this makes imperialism and its internal agents more determined to overthrow his government.

The Venezuelan capitalists might have had their main parties defeated at the ballot box but they are not giving up their control of the economy and other levers of power. The employers federations, like Federcamaras, have been mobilising behind the scenes, with the generals, and on the streets. The media, including all the TV stations, bar one government channel, is in the hands of the big capitalist combines. They are universally hostile to Chavez and played a major role in laying the groundwork for the April coup.

A major part of the trade unions organised in the CTV, whose leadership has for decades been part of the corrupt government system, have been mobilised to hoodwink the workers into participating in an imperialist backed coup. And there is no shortage of generals in the high command, trained in the USA, willing to strike on Washington's behalf when the time is ripe.

Chavez's government is in a cleft stick. His first attempt to speed up his reform programme (by taking more control over the state oil company and its revenues) led the bosses to launch a furious campaign in the streets as a prelude to the April coup attempt (see Box).

Chavez was weakened by the coup attempt and business leaders, the army generals and Washington are demanding concessions and changes in the government. Already a number of ministers have been moved or sacked, some leading figures in the MAS. Washington has said "normalisation" of relations depends on whether the Chavez government has learnt the lessons of the coup attempt.

Chavez's concessions will only embolden the coup mongers. As long as the employers are allowed to organise without the threat of expropriation and imprisonment they will continue to plot to overthrow the government. As long as the army command remains intact it will be used by Washington as a weapon. The limits of Chavez's radical nationalism have been revealed.

Only a movement committed to breaking the power of the capitalists and the army, and establishing a revolutionary workers' government can defend the country from imperialism and deliver real gains for the masses.

The lesson of the April coup attempt is that the workers and poor need to quickly organise their own organs of defence. Popular defence committees should be built in every working class area, drawing on the organisation that thwarted the April coup. A popular workers' militia needs to be organised, and the rank and file soldiers won over and drawn into the defence committees.

Above all the rank and file workers need to settle accounts with their bought and paid for union leaders - they must sack all those implicated in the coup, and reclaim the unions as fighting organisations that can aid the struggle for workers' power.

There should be no reliance on Chavez and his military dominated MVR to defend the Fifth Republic. His actions should be given support only insofar as they aid the struggle against the coup mongers and imperialism.

Between explosion and desperation

Michael Gatter reports from Argentina on the resistance to the latest government attacks

The crisis of Argentine capitalism is total – economic, social and political. It is no surprise that in such a situation the very regime of the ruling class totters on the edge of an abyss.

Economically the country is in free fall. The IMF estimates that in the fourth year of recession the country's GDP will shrink again – by 10-15 per cent. But this is only the beginning of the misery. To resolve this crisis in their own interest the ruling class must massively increase productivity. So the bosses are forced to launch a tremendous attack on the living standards of the working class and the middle classes.

The results are already unbearably painful for ordinary people. Nearly 200,000 lost their jobs in the first three months of this year alone. Around 15.5 million people (40 per cent of the population) have fallen below the official poverty line. Every day 10,300 have to be added to this figure.

The traditional lunch for school children, which is often their only meal during the day, is now cancelled in many places. Public employees don't receive their wages.

Officially 24 per cent of the working population is unemployed. But the real figures are much worse because a huge number are underemployed – not earning enough to live on. The growing desperation of people is summarised in one of the many slogans on the walls of Buenos Aires which says "Jobs or Death". Together with the sharp price increases that are really taking off just now it is not difficult to see that Argentina is becoming a social slaughterhouse

The political system and its institutions have lost any legitimacy. Today robbery is done in the name of law. Banks are simply stealing the money of the people by refusing to give them their savings back. Parliament then makes this robbery legal!

Corruption is widespread. When a well known Peronist politician, Grosso, who has been convicted many times, became a minister in the short-lived government of Rodriguez Saá last December he remarked disarmingly: "You should judge me by my skills, not my criminal record."

The recent resignation of several ministers has laid bare the weakness of the government. Its roots lie in the revolutionary character of the period that opened last December. It is reflected in a wave of daily strikes, road blockades and protests of the "ahoristas" – the small bank account holders of the middle class. Again and again hundreds of enraged citizens surround the parliament and attack the deputies.

The police act cautiously out of fear that they could provoke another uprising like last December. A media tycoon admitted recently that the rich elite is ready to flee the country by helicopter taking their assets with them.

So it is not surprising that the Duhalde government is tottering. Duhalde comes from the apparatus of the Peronist party (PJ) – a bourgeois-populist force founded in the mid-1940s. One of its main characteristics is its roots in the working class via the unions. But these roots have been massively eroded in the 1990s by the neoliberal policy of Carlos Menem. The CGT lost many

members and is split now in two factions. In addition a new union federation, the CTA, has come into existence, which is mainly based in the public sector and the unemployed

The central problem of the Duhalde government is that no class in society sees it as its authentic representative. Imperialism and the majority of the Argentine bourgeoisie consider Duhalde as an untrustworthy populist. In December he was able to stabilise things due to his traditional Peronism and his links to the union leaders.

Imperialism is wary of Duhalde and he is even isolated within his own party. Whilst the powerful Peronist provincial governors do not want him to fall nor do they want to be too closely associated with him because of his mounting unpopularity.

The governors themselves are split between pro-IMF lackeys like the powerful figures Reutemann and de la Sota and others like the governor of the province of Santa Cruz, Kirchner, who pushed a more populist line. So the core of the government is reduced to the Peronist party apparatus of the province Buenos Aires

The middle classes are naturally opponents of the regime too since Duhalde – despite his promise to give them back their dollar savings – has continued the regime of the corralito.

Despite the growing combativeness of the working class the majority of the union bureaucracy still act as willing lackeys of the government. Since the December upheaval they have called an entirely one-sided truce. While hundreds of thousands of workers are los-

ing their jobs the CGT and the CTA refused to act against the government. Worse the CGT offered Duhalde their support and became a crucial prop for his government.

In exchange for this the bureaucrats hoped to get more influence and posts. To a certain degree their manoeuvre was not without success. The latest governmental changes meant that the former minister for labour, a man with a union background, Atanasof, has been promoted to become chief of the cabinet.

At the same time we can see a divide emerging inside the unions. The right wing around CGT chief Daer seems prepared to follow Duhalde to the bitter end. On the other side the more far-sighted bureaucrats, under the pressure of intensifying class struggle, are now distancing themselves from Duhalde.

Moyano, head of the so-called dissident CGT, is denouncing the government, saying that it has not got the courage to stand against the demands of the IMF. He has announced a strike for 14 May. The CTA leadership too has stopped its participation in the regular consultations with the government and also announced a strike for the last week of May.

It is possible that faced with a radicalisation of the class struggle, Duhalde will fall sooner rather than later. The bourgeoisie might then resort to new elections to draw the attention of the masses away from the streets and the enterprises to the ballot box.

Since mid-April a wave of workers' struggles in the provinces has grown in size and scope. Organised by the unions

tens of thousands workers, most of them public employees, have gone on strike to demand their wages be paid. In provinces like San Juan, Jujuy, Rio Negro, there have been repeated clashes with the police. In Rio Negro the teachers have been on strike since the beginning of March and in San Juan thousands of public sector workers occupied the regional governmental buildings for days on end.

Another expression of the growing radicalisation of the working class is the increasing number of occupied enterprises where workers continue to run production under their own control. The most well known example is the ceramic factory of Zanon in Neuquen, which the workers have been occupying since last October. Another example is the women workers of Brukman – a garment factory in Buenos Aires which has been occupied since last December. These women have stood against all attempts by the bosses and the police to break their struggle.

We can now see the opening of a new chapter of the revolutionary process in Argentina. The organised working class – particularly in the provinces – has begun to enter the battlefield.

The decisive question is that of leadership. What is missing is a mass revolutionary workers' party which can challenge the union bureaucracy and lead the working class to the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. It is this question which the comrades of the Workers Party for Socialism (PTS) in Argentina are throwing all their strength into addressing. The LRCI will do its best to support them in this.

May Day 2002: reclaimed by workers and youth

In 2002 the bosses' media just couldn't hide the fact that it was May Day. The press and the broadcast media predicted mayhem and militancy. Huge mobilisations of police were resorted to across the globe.

Our masters just hate it when people take politics – especially class politics – onto the streets. But that's just what we did. In many countries mobilisations this year were much bigger, fuelled by the USA and its allies' war drive, by the murderous Zionist persecution of the Palestinians, by the rise of the racist right and by right-wing governments trying to demolish workers' gains or solve crises at their expense.

France



Over one million people demonstrated in Paris on May Day. The massive anti-Le Pen rallies dwarfed the turnout of the few thousand scum who turned out to support the fascist demagogue.

Some 400 regional protests were staged, the largest in Lyon (50,000), Bordeaux, Toulouse and Grenoble (40,000), Marseille, Lille and Nantes (30,000) and Strasbourg (15,000). Even smaller cities, such as Saint-Nazaire (14,000) and Rouen (13,000), witnessed sizeable mobilisations.

In Paris the crowd was so vast that police had

to open other streets for the marchers. Many were still marching into the evening.

The crowd was representative of the French working population and the unemployed: trade unionists, sans papiers, people from the Arab, African, Vietnamese and Turkish communities. Above all there were young people, who have been the backbone of the daily protests since April 21. They came in vast numbers from schools, colleges, universities and workplaces.

Germany

Over 500,000 participated in about 500 DGB (trade union federation) organised demos and rallies all over Germany. The largest ones were in the big cities like Berlin with 25,000 Frankfurt, Stuttgart, the cities in the Ruhr. The turnout was much higher than last year.

The reason for this is the up-coming strike in the metal industry which will start in Baden-Württemberg on Monday, 6 May, a decisive struggle between Germany's bosses and the huge union IG Metall.

Already the pro-strike ballots in Baden-Württemberg and Berlin-Brandenburg (90 and 86 per cent respectively) showed a growing determination of the workers to fight.

Australia

Demonstrators clashed with police in Sydney, Australia. Trades unionists, socialists, anarchists, environmentalists, and students were in the crowd of about 500 driven back by police as it tried to approach offices of a company which runs the notorious detention centres for asylum-seekers – Australasian Correctional Management

They fought with police, blockading buildings and burning political effigies. Dozens of marchers were arrested after demonstrators attempted to blockade the Sydney stock exchange.



Protesters in Brisbane threw themselves on the road to try to prevent police vans taking those arrested away. "The world belongs to the people. The streets belong to the people," they shouted.

Authorities put up barricades around stock exchanges in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth to deter demonstrators. But it did not and thousands of protesters fought with police in cities right across the country, blockading stock exchange buildings, big corporation offices and city streets.

In Melbourne 10,000 unionists marched through central city Melbourne in a show of considerable industrial force – demanding an end to attacks on unions but also linking up with struggles around refugees and against sweatshop labour. Speeches emphasised solidarity with refugees because Mayday is a day of international solidarity.

Britain

For the first time in years, Mayday was celebrated by over 10,000 workers representing unions from the Fire Brigade to the Transport and General Workers, from Amicus to the Communications Workers. It was a glorious day and for once the weather was with us!

Revolution, the socialist youth organisation, toured its sound system past SOAS university to

pick up Revolution members there on our way to meet other students who were participating in a students' strike, meeting up at Kings Cross. About 60 of us took the road and walked along Farringdon, past the Mount Pleasant sorting office where many workers were getting ready to join the demonstration down to Clerkenwell Green.

Joining over 10,000 trade unionists and anti-capitalists, Turkish and Kurdish workers and other community and political groups at Clerkenwell Green, we started to move towards Trafalgar Square. There was a festive and militant atmosphere as we chanted anti-war and anti-capitalist slogans. The police were omnipresent but did not interfere with the demonstration.

Another highlight of the day was the Sex Workers Soho Carnival Parade. We made our way up to Soho by 5pm and the Rhythms of Resistance samba band was already in full swing. We sambaded around Soho for about an hour before the cops started blocking us off.

At the supposed "hotspot" there were only cops and cameramen, no protesters. It looked like a media stunt to justify the £4 million being spent on the police operation. The police used this opportunity to shut down the party in Soho and Section 60 anyone that was left in the vicinity.

The demo and carnival were fantastic examples of how to bring anti-capitalist youth and trade unionists together. It is something we must build on in the months ahead and not just each Mayday.



Butcher Sharon covers up Jenin massacre

**ISRAEL OUT
OF PALESTINE!**

As Yasser Arafat emerged from his ruined headquarters in Ramallah after agreeing to arrest or exile Palestinian freedom fighters as the price for his own freedom he can hardly have expected gratitude from Ariel Sharon.

But neither did he get a word of thanks from the world "policeman" to whom he repeatedly appeals to restrain Sharon and his murderous colonialist thugs. Colin Powell, the supposed liberal in the US Administration immediately warned Arafat that this was his "last chance" to show leadership (i.e. speed up the betrayal of the Palestinian cause or we'll find another stooge to do it quicker).

Arafat, it seems, is to be persona non grata at the White House. He has to earn George Bush's "trust" all over again. He can do this only by "curbing terror". Is this Alice through the Looking Glass - where everything is strangely reversed? It must be. After all, Ariel Sharon, butcher not only of Sabra and Shatila but now of Jenin and countless smaller scale atrocities all over the West Bank, can drop into the White House any time he likes.

From September to the end of March, just before the killing began in earnest, the death toll of Palestinians was already 1,286, over 80 per cent of them civilians. More than this number have been slaughtered in the recent invasion.

Since Sharon came to power, 34 new

militarised settlements have been constructed, on Arab land. The Israeli state has re-occupied the tiny urban areas relinquished to the Palestinians since the 1993 the Oslo Peace Accords and now it exercises the right to bomb, bulldoze and assassinate wherever it wills.

The UN Security Council's call for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian Authority areas of the West Bank has been contemptuously ignored by Israel. So has the pathetic attempt by the United Nations to send a fact-finding mission to Jenin, the scene of a horrendous massacre.

Human Rights Watch says it has found evidence that the Israeli army committed numerous war crimes in the refugee camp and that almost half the Palestinian dead identified so far in Jenin were civilians.

The outrage that Palestinians feel at these evil men and their cynical game is felt by every sincere democrat, let alone anti-imperialist, worldwide. But rage is not enough. We have to understand why this happens and then decide how to stop it- what is to be done?

Israel is a colonising settler state bought and paid for by the United States. It would collapse in weeks, not months, if the US was to cut off its massive military and financial aid.

Aid to Israel constitutes 30 percent of the US foreign aid budget for the whole world. A little odd you might think



for the world's sixteenth wealthiest country. Israel receives an average of \$3 billion a year, \$1.2 billion in economic and \$1.8 billion in military aid. If you also count in federal loan guarantees this brings the total US aid to Israel to about \$5 billion per annum, or \$13.7 million per day.

Clearly the US is getting something back for all this. Of course it gets a lot straight back in the purchases from US arms corporations. But you would also have to be one hell of an anti-Semite to believe that it is the "Jewish lobby" that brings this about. No it has nothing to

do with Judaism (or Islamophobia either). It has everything to do with imperialism - the systematic exploitation by US and EU giant corporations of the oil and mineral wealth of the Middle East and beyond.

To exploit the natural resources of the region the wedge of a colonial settler state had to be driven in again and a again. It fragments, weakens and divides the bourgeois states of the Middle East. It makes their rulers slavishly dependent on the USA and to a lesser degree the EU. It provides the military and logistical base for the occasional attacks necessary on

any states in the region which threaten imperialist rule.

Therefore the enemies of corporate capitalism, of the war against terrorism must do everything they can to see that the USA and its vicious little colony is thrown out of the Middle East.

We must have no illusion that peace can be brought about by the rotten deal brokered by the US and the EU that is being plotted at the moment. Its aim is to force the cruelly oppressed to humbly recognise the rule of the oppressor. The Palestinians - all the Diaspora - must have the right to return. The racist Zionist state must be demolished to allow this to happen.

Those Israeli Jews who seek no political and economic privileges, those courageous opponents of Zionist expansionism, have the right to be equal citizens of a secular state in Palestine. Anti-Semitism is not only, as Engels said, "the socialism of fools"; it is the anti-imperialism of fools too.

But we must also be under no illusion that this can be achieved apart from a world revolution against imperialism. This means that the cause of Palestine is the cause of the world working class revolution. Wherever workers and youth fight back against capitalism and imperialism they must add to their slogans and demands, a free Palestine - a socialist Palestine in a socialist Middle East.

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Palestine**

**End the Israeli occupation
March and rally 18 May**

Assemble: 12 noon Hyde Park, London
Leave: 1pm for rally in Trafalgar Square

Called by Palestine Solidarity Campaign. For further details tel: 020 7700 6192 or go to www.palestinecampaign.org