

workers power

revolution
against
global
capitalism

British section of the League for the Fifth International

October 2003 ★ Price 50p www.workerspower.com Issue 279

**We need to get
organised**

And take action

**To overthrow
capitalism**

**SOCIAL FORUMS
IN EVERY CITY AND TOWN!**

FOR A EUROPEAN GENERAL STRIKE!

**FORWARD TO THE FIFTH
INTERNATIONAL!**

COME TO THE SECOND EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

PARIS 12TH-16TH NOVEMBER

Labour after
the conference
page 4

US & EU defeat
at Cancun
page 7

European Social
Forum
pages 3, 8 & 9

Revolution in
the Middle East
pages 10 & 11

How women
won the vote
pages 12 & 13



Civil Service pay dispute looms

by Yuen Wong

Another potential crisis is brewing in public sector pay - this time in the Civil Service union PCS. It's now October and still there's been no pay rise for staff - 25 per cent of whom earn under £13,250 per year.

Government Departments and Agencies have been ordered to clamp down on rises and a range of 3.2 per cent to 4 per cent has been set. The Treasury is denying they have capped pay awards but the union knows that this isn't true. Pay remits are being bounced back and forth between Treasury and Government Departments. PCS reps in dozens of organisations have reported that limits of between 3.2% and 3.7% have been clearly stated. In the Immigration section of the Home Office, management have made an initial offer of 1.6 per cent, which is a pay cut in real terms. These derisory offers, usually with strings attached about working conditions, cover the total

pay awards including natural annual pay increments. With price rises of 3 per cent (plus 1 per cent on National Insurance) the total rises will not mean much more money for workers. This creates a looming crisis over pay for members in many bargaining units, which is added to by the lengthy delays in making offers.

Over 30 organisations have missed settlement dates by at least a month (in many cases 2 and 3 months or more) without any offer being made.

Civil Servants are being treated even worse than workers in NHS or Local Government. Pay awards in other parts of the public sector are related to basic pay increases alone (pay progression, usually annual increments are dealt with separately), whereas Civil Service pay awards are usually described by total payouts. Pay differentials also mean that there can be differences of up to 30 per cent for Civil Servants doing the same job in different departments.

This shows the importance of a return to national pay bargaining. The last PCS

National Conference voted to move to national pay bargaining. It is planned that any future national pay claim would also ask for a 35 hour working week and 30 days annual leave for all workers.

On 27/28 October, the Employment Appeal Tribunal will hear a crucial case concerning equal pay in the Civil Service. An Employment Tribunal previously ruled that the Civil Service is just one equal pay area - a decision which the Government is appealing. At a local level, groups are still taking action. 6 equal pay cases in the Department of Works and Pensions WP will be lodged by the end of September.

Public services in this country have been built on the backs of a skilled and dedicated, and predominantly female workforce - a workforce traditionally undervalued and underpaid. A motion passed at the PCS Conference 2002 made it compulsory to equality proof pay deals. The last "moderate" NEC refused to action this. Now they have been voted out, pressure will have to be maintained on the new NEC to make sure

that this is now done.

On 27 November, a London branch forum will be held to discuss the 2004 London weighting campaign. PCS is claiming £4,000 weighting/pay differential over the national rates. It has been agreed that PCS will link up with Unison and other unions over this issue.

The NEC has said that if present negotiations fail and members vote to reject offers, then the Union will seek to co-ordinate strike action. All affected Bargaining Units (BU) will be asked whether they are going into dispute. Reps from the BUs will be invited to a meeting on the 8 Oct to hopefully decide on some action. Whatever action is agreed will be discussed by the NEC, which is meeting on the 14/15 October.

PCS is planning a week of action during the first week of November. 30 membership rallies have been initially planned across the country for that week. Events will be kicked off by a lunchtime rally on Monday 20 Oct in London. During the week PCS will run a local and national media cam-

paign with publicity stunts.

This is all well and good but shows an inherent weakness in the union. There is no active rank and file movement so what will stop the leadership from cutting a deal or derailing action they consider to be too militant? Media campaigns are good for building awareness but they are no substitute for activists building support on the ground, in local areas as the firefighters did so successfully. As surely as night follows day, the media will turn on workers during a strike, as shown in the FBU dispute.

An official, elected rank and file strike organising committee is needed drawing in delegates and activists from all regions and all branches. If the union is going to take on the Government then it must expect a dirty fight. And activists have seen from the firefighters dispute that members cannot always rely on their leaders - even ones like Mark Serwotka who have taken principled stands on issues such as Iraq and who are not tied to Labour.

Sit-in at threatened shipyard

Workers are staging a sit-in at a north Devon shipyard amid fears the closure of the site and the loss of 550 jobs. Many people from the local community joined the workers in blockading the yard.

The unofficial action at Appledore Shipbuilders, England's oldest commercial ship builder, showed the anger of workers facing redundancy.

The workforce has already been on short time working for 15 weeks, taking home 75% of normal earnings when they learned that the yard was to be closed on 30 September.

One of Appledore's directors said last week that the business was on the brink of closure after the failure to secure a multi-million pound order to build a barge.

Gary Smith, senior GMB organiser for the South West, said up to 100 workers were involved in the occupation.

He said: "As far as manufacturing goes, this is one closure too far

because Britain needs ship building. "If this yard closes, it will turn north Devon into an economic dustbowl."

Contact the work-in

Union Offices, Appledore Ship Builders, Bideford, North Devon, EX39 1LX, Tel: 07800 545844

Send Solidarity messages & donations!

Make cheques payable to: Appledore Shipbuilders Welfare Club

email us your messages appledorefuture@hotmail.com

Links

GMB Southern Region
Western Morning News coverage
LabourNet UK coverage
Fax the MP for Torridge and West Devon, John Burnett
Use the web based 'Fax Your MP' Service

Anti-SATs campaign news

The anti-SATs campaign continues to garner support from the country's leading writers for children. To coincide with Children's Book Week, five authors have got together to publish a collection of essays arguing that the government's literacy strategy is destroying children's love of reading and actually lowering the standard of their writing.

Phillip Pullman, Bernard Ashley, Anne Fine, Jamilla Gavin and Chris Powning have all written essays in 'Meetings with the Minister', a book which emerged from discussions that the authors have had with Charles Clarke, Minister for Education. They believe that they may have had some effect since Clarke later announced the greater use of teacher assessment in tests for 7 year olds but they don't think he has really listened.

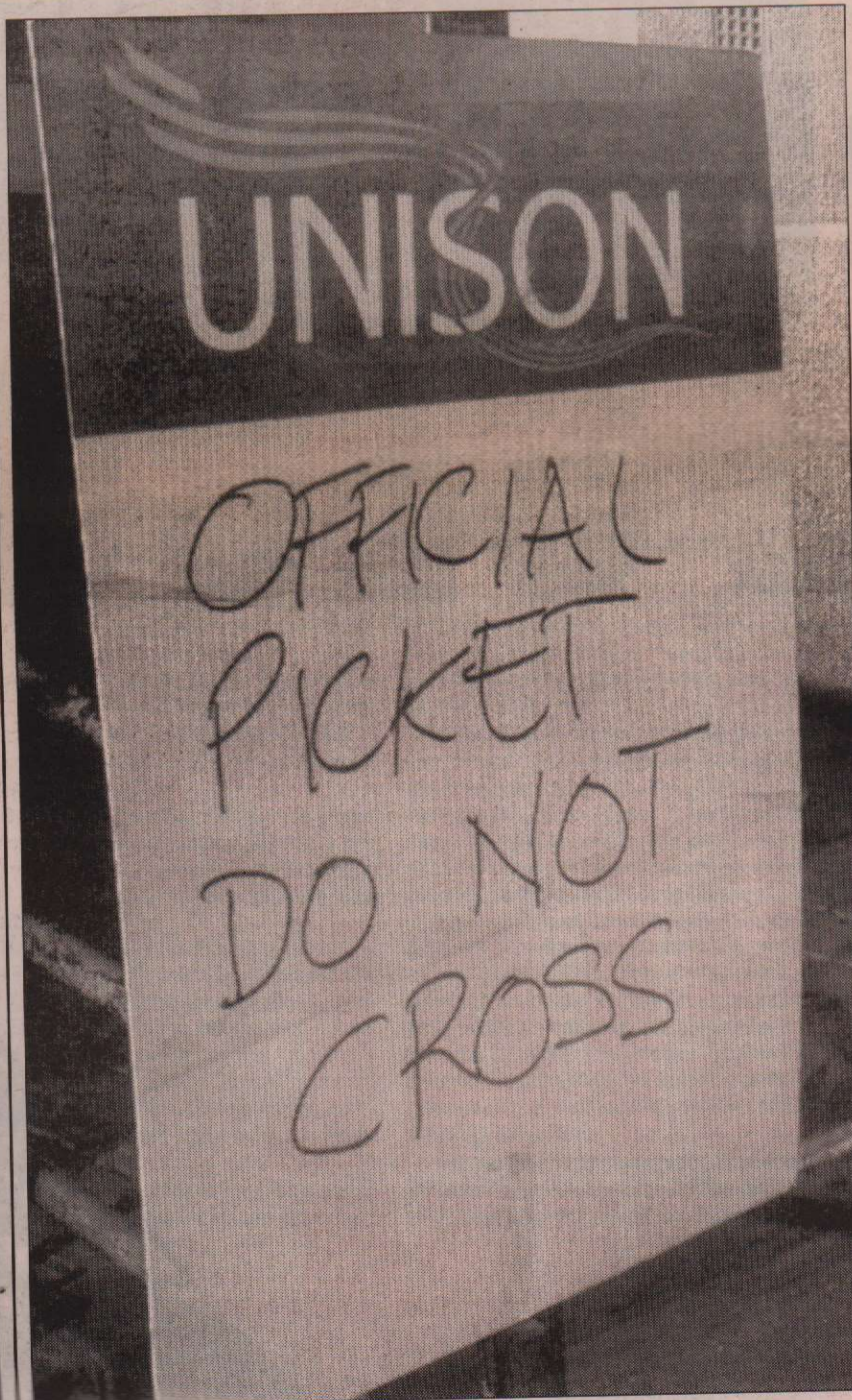
The anti-SATs campaign is a long term struggle against the government's literacy strategy. It is a struggle for the right to a rich and varied curriculum for all children. It is a struggle for the right to a curriculum that is not based on the narrow and limited goals of SATs. It is a struggle for the right to a curriculum that is not based on the narrow and limited goals of SATs. It is a struggle for the right to a curriculum that is not based on the narrow and limited goals of SATs.

extensive testing regime:

"I am concerned that in a constant search for things to test, we're forgetting the true purpose, the true nature, of reading and writing....we are creating a generation of children who....hate reading and feel nothing but hostility for literature."

Anne Fine bemoans the effect the literary strategy and SATs tests are having on children. Her experience, based on being a judge for endless children's writing competitions, is that the tests are destroying children's creativity.

This book will be an important new weapon in the campaign against SATs. The arguments within it will help to build the campaign, explaining to both parents and teachers exactly what these tests mean for children. It is possible to be growing children who are good at tests, who are confident, who are happy and who are creative. This book will help to build the campaign, explaining to both parents and teachers exactly what these tests mean for children. It is possible to be growing children who are good at tests, who are confident, who are happy and who are creative.



Activists face state repression

It's time the left, the anti-war movement and anti-capitalists campaigners started to work together to fight the increasing use of state repression against political activists. Only last month the protest against the arms fair DSEI led to the arrest of over 150 people. The police went as far as using some of the new so-called anti-terror legislation. The civil liberties group Liberty is now challenging this in the courts.

Simon Nelson, a Workers Power supporter, is being framed for assault and will be in court on 27 November (Stratford Magistrates Court), along with other DSEI defendants.

There are numerous outstanding cases resulting from anti-war actions. A school student from South London, Karl Debbaut, one of the thousands who walked out of school on the day the attack on Iraq started, is still facing prosecution. Originally three students were up on charges but the police have since had to drop the charges for two of them. It is important we show our solidarity with Karl.

There will be a picket outside the court on the day of his trial:

Friday 24 October, 9.30am
Belmarsh Magistrates Court,
Belmarsh Road,
London SE28.

Tens of thousands of local government workers in London are set to walk out, for the day on Thursday 16 October as UNISON renews its campaign for a £4,000 cost of living allowance across the capital. UNISON members in London's 32 boroughs voted by a margin of more than four-to-one to relaunch industrial

action in pursuit of a claim first lodged in July 2001.

The walk out looks set to coincide with a further strike by London CWU members fighting for a similar claim. The day should mark the best opportunity yet to mount a united campaign across public sector unions for a living wage in Europe's most expensive city. Greater London UNISON has called a march on 16

October, assembling at Temple Place on the Embankment marching to Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park in Kennington, SE11. UNISON is now pledged to call further selective action on a sustained basis, focusing on schools from early November.

Workers Power urges all its readers in schools to honour UNISON picket lines.

The ESF: The battle for the leadership of our movement

When the second European Social Forum gathers in Paris next month, it will be meeting at a crucial time for the anti-capitalist movement.

Yes, it will be a time to encounter new ideas, to debate and to network. But it will also have political tasks put before it if not by the major participants, by the struggle itself. The great anti-war movement, the collapse of the WTO at Cancun, Lula's election in Brazil and the general strikes in Europe have raised the question of strategy and goals to a higher level than ever.

If we don't learn the correct lessons from this year of mass struggles, our movement will go backwards, not forwards. That's why every activist should come to Paris with one aim in mind: How can we defeat capitalism.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MOVEMENT...

Over the last decade, global capitalism has massively increased the grip of monopoly capital on all parts of the globe. This was a direct result of the collapse of Stalinism. At first it led to retreat and demoralisation in the working class. Yet from the mid-1990s onward we have witnessed a recovery of struggles against global capitalism and its institutions, imperialism and its wars.

A new, anti-capitalist movement, internationalist in its reach and ambitions emerged, most signally after the street battles in Seattle in 1999. This movement brought together activists and organisations from a wide spectrum of anti-capitalist groupings, socialist, anarchist and communist organisations, trade unions, anti-globalisation campaigns, peasant organisations, NGOs, and left reformist parties from all other the world.

It mobilised hundreds of thousands against meetings of the IMF, WTO, and G8. It has held Social Forums on international, continental, national or regional levels, bringing together tens of thousands.

The anti-capitalist movement is a response to global capitalism. It is a recognition of the need for international co-operation and joint initiatives to win the battle against the monopolies, against exploitation and oppression, against racism and imperialism.

The anti-capitalist movement is a developing, living mass force; one which could not simply be put down by police repression. By killing Carlo Giuliani and brutalising hundreds of others on the streets of Genoa it provoked a massive wave of strikes

and demonstrations. Not only did its mobilisations continue but its activists became, after 11th September, anti-war and anti-imperialist too.

The first European Social Forum in November 2002 called for the historic demonstrations on 15th February, a world mobilisation of 20 to 30 million against the imperialist war threat. The workers' movement and a whole new generation of youth joined with it in these actions. It gave a foretaste of what could be achieved, if the anti-capitalist movement united with the workers movement, the anti-imperialist struggles, the immigrant communities, and the youth.

This promise was expressed in the growth of the Brazilian landless movement and the election of Lula, a former strike leader; in the heroism of the second Palestinian intifada; in the development of new, more militant currents in the unions.

A CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

However, all these struggles suffered and suffer from one tremendous defect: a crisis of leadership.

The tremendous possibilities of the anti-war movement were derailed by the trade union and reformist leaders who failed to use 15th February to build an international general strike against the warmongers. Rather, the great marches became the end-point of the struggle.

Lula - who came to power via the unions, the unemployed, the landless peasants - is now doing the job for the IMF, ruling together with the liberal bourgeoisie and attacking the working class who elected him.

In the anti-capitalist movement, we can observe a similar development. Initially, it was a movement of "many yeses but one no" - capitalist globalisation. It was clear that this political "neutrality" about which goals the movement should adopt was a weakness, but the reformists in the movement supported such neutrality - certainly for the time being, since it gave them protection against more militant and revolutionary ideas.

But time has moved on. Precisely because the anti-capitalist movement is a developing, living mass force - if it doesn't continue to go forward and overcome the obstacles in its path, it will inevitably go backwards.

More and more in the anti-capitalist movements have felt the need to go beyond common initiatives, for this or that gathering of the globalisers. 60,000 activists came to Florence not only to discuss how to



Seattle 1999: we've come a long way since but where are we heading?

take common actions, but also to discuss what strategy, whose policy, what programme does the movement need?

This is the burning question not only for this movement. It is also a burning questions for the millions who struggle against capitalism and imperialism in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia. For the militants of the Intifada, for the workers and youth in Iran, for the millions in Turkey, all of whom are threatened with being squeezed between the dead ends of political Islam and nationalism.

A BATTLE OF IDEAS

Inside the anti-capitalist movement, the neo-reformists of Attac, Bernard Cassen and Susan George, plus figures like George Mon-

biot in Britain, are now trying to impose on the movement their agenda for "another world", for a capitalism with a human face. They are allied to the Brazilian PT, its accommodation with capitalists, and its fraud of "participatory budgets", the Italian Rifondazione Comunista, the French Communist and Socialist "opposition" leaders.

Revolutionaries have to oppose any attempt to commit the movement to this political agenda. The workers who join in the Social Forums in countries like Italy, who are attracted to the movement because they are fed up with the dead end of reformism in the unions and social democracy deserve and need something better than a "new" brand of the very same reformism.

The reformists - as well as the Socialist

Workers Party in Britain, and Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire in France - have put forward manifestos, programmes, perspectives for the movement. Many of them give a detailed account, some a sharp, even inspiring, critique of the madness and insanity of global capitalism.

But none of them dare give a revolutionary answer to this cruel and insane system. How can the working class smash it and replace it with a fundamentally different world? What kind of state do we have to replace the bourgeois state apparatus with, in order to build "another world." The leaders of the movement are afraid to call this a socialist world and to name class struggle and revolution as the means to achieve it. Yet in Florence and on the streets of Europe this spring, in Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico and India millions have mobilised who show no fear of these words.

The crisis of mankind is essentially the crisis of working class leadership. Overcoming this is only possible if revolutionaries fight for what is necessary, for a programme for working class power.

In order to achieve this they have to fight for the anti-capitalist movement, for the Social Forums, for the (re)emerging working class rank and file structures and organisations, for the youth and anti-imperialist struggles to create an organisation which can lead - not in order to replace these forms of organisation, but in order to make them stronger and more effective and able to mount a real challenge to the capitalist system.

A NEW INTERNATIONAL

In short, the anti-capitalist movement, the workers movement, the oppressed and the youth must be brought together to create a new, Fifth international - a world party of socialist revolution. The current movement, the reshaping of the working class, the crisis of capitalism and reformism all mean that the new international can be a mass international from the very beginning. While mobilising against privatisation and unemployment, social cuts and debt, imperialist wars and the martyrdom of the Palestinians it can debate and decide on a new revolutionary strategy.

With such a tool the working class and the oppressed will meet the challenges, master the risks and take up the chances of the new, pre-revolutionary period which is opening before our eyes - a period in which the international working class needs to set itself the goal of the final overthrow of the system on a global scale.

After ballot fiasco post workers regroup

By Kate Foster

If the union-bashing management at Royal Mail thought that last month's vote against national strike action was the all clear for redundancies and victimisations, then they were wrong.

The loss of the ballot, announced on 17 September, was clearly a major defeat for the Communication Workers Union (CWU) facing the loss of a possible 30,000 jobs and the imposition of draconian new working conditions. But postal workers in Oxford and London have shown that they still know how to fight.

The day after the national ballot result

was announced - 50.95 per cent against strike action, 49.1 per cent for action - the management called the union into a meeting, which lasted all of ten minutes. They told the union that the pay and restructuring plans were no longer negotiable, there would be no increase in London weighting and they would be imposing new procedures for industrial relations.

But the very next day, when local managers in Oxford started to throw their weight around, they got given a good lesson in the class struggle. On Friday 19 September, in response to the high-handed treatment of their union reps, postal workers at the Oxford Mail Centre walked out. They were

joined by workers at the Headingly Delivery Office. Persuaded to return to work by CWU officials, they walked out again after management sacked two drivers for refusing to carry out work beyond their normal duties. The unofficial action, organised by rank and file workers, spread rapidly to other delivery offices. No other sorting offices would touch the Oxford mail.

The action was successful and both of the drivers, Andy Craft and Aimar Butt, were reinstated. Meanwhile, in London, 72 per cent of CWU members voted in favour of strike action to win a London allowance of £4,000. The first strike took place on 1 October and more are planned. One day of strike

action may take place to coincide with a strike of Unison local government workers on 16 October. London Unison members are fighting for the same claim.

The strikes have shown that postal workers are not about to lie down and let the management walk all over them. While the past two years have seen the union's policy of negotiated job losses demoralise certain sections of the post, clearly some rank and file CWU members still know how to organise an action.

The actions of Oxford and London must also be used as a springboard for a rank and file revival throughout the postal sector and the CWU as a whole. The strategy of Billy

Hayes and the CWU executive has been exposed as inadequate. Instead of watching more than 15,000 jobs vanish before calling a national ballot, Hayes and co should have been supporting workers' action - including strikes - against each and every cut. By allowing jobs to go and workloads to rise, the ballot for many came too late.

By co-ordinating and spreading local walkouts and sectional strikes, activists can put a national strike back on the agenda - and build a rank and file movement which is capable not only of electing new, left leaders, but holding them to account and organising independently of them when necessary.

Labour left pull their punches

Despite the predictions that Blair would receive a bruising at the Labour Party Conference, he came away laughing. *Mark Hoskisson* explains how the left in the party let him off the hook and where that leaves their strategy for reclaiming the Labour Party



The idea of "reclaiming the Labour Party" is really reclaiming it for the trade union bureaucrats so they can operate as equals alongside the parliamentarians

Trumpets blared and crowds of hacks from the media yelled with expectant delight. At long last the annual conference of the British Labour Party was set to be a right royal row. There was going to be blood on the carpets. But it didn't happen.

Far from the angry "rank and file" reclaiming the party from Pretender Blair, the leader emerged with his reputation intact, his control unchallenged and his determination to press on with a raft of right-wing policies stronger than ever. Echoing the language of his idol Margaret Thatcher, who famously declared that "this lady was not for turning", Tony Blair told his members - and the watching public - "I can only go one way. I've not got a reverse gear."

The substance of his speech was clear enough. He was right to wage war on Iraq. He was right to press ahead with PFI and foundation hospitals. He was right to scapegoat asylum seekers. He was right to press ahead with right wing law and order and social policies. In other words, he was right on everything and to hell with anyone who opposes him.

This speech earned him an incredible seven-minute ovation from the conference. Bill Morris, outgoing leader of the TGWU and supposed critic of Blair's policies, even welcomed his speech as a sign that at last he seemed to be willing to "listen" to others! Constituency members praised him for capturing the mood of the party so well. Spin doctors scrambled to any media microphone they could find to declare that Blair had repaired all of the damage done over the preceding months and was now ready to press on to a further election victory.

Only the harder elements of the Labour Left raised criticisms. The suspended Labour MP, George Galloway compared the event to a Nuremberg rally. Other left MPs condemned the further shift to the right that his speech represented. But amidst the self-congratulatory din it was very difficult for anyone to hear these dissidents.

The big news was that, faced with "his most difficult conference yet" Blair triumphed.

WHERE NOW?

So, what does it all mean? Is Blair more secure now? Will Blair stroll to yet another election victory with a mandate to

carry on privatising and warmongering? Is the left finished once and for all as a force inside the Labour Party?

The Labour Party was in trouble in the run up to this conference. Blair's leadership was even under threat. The prime cause of these troubles - shown by the defeat in Brent East and the fall in Blair's popularity ratings - was the war. Millions opposed the war on Iraq. The great demonstration of 15 February had rattled Blair and led directly to a huge parliamentary revolt against him. Despite this opposition he went to war. In the aftermath of the conflict it became clear that the pretext for war - the threat of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction - was based on a complete lie. A lie exposed by the failure to turn up any weapons in Iraq and the revelations of fabricated 'intelligence reports' that emerged during the Hutton inquiry.

But the mass opposition around the war also fed into broader opposition to the policies being waged by New Labour at home. The anger felt by millions was anger that this government wouldn't pay firefighters a decent wage, was inflicting even higher tuition fees on students, planned foundation hospitals that would produce a two tier NHS and wanted to continue privatising what was left of the public sector. In the face of this growing hostility Blair began to lose allies. Alan Milburn resigned from the cabinet to 'spend more time with his family', Alistair Campbell soon followed.

The upshot of all this was that Blair's rival within the party leadership, Gordon Brown, suddenly looked a viable alternative. Many of Brown's supporters - Robin Cook, Chris Smith and Frank Dobson - had become casualties of Blair's regime and were restless on the backbenches. The centre right union leaders had a soft spot for Brown because he sometimes put a "redistributive" spin on his pro-business policies. Above all he wasn't as closely identified with the war. Indeed Brown's own speech to the conference looked like a leadership pitch. His talk was of Labour values, not New Labour. But the problem is Brown cannot openly challenge Blair for leadership.

Whether or not this goes back to a pact in an Italian restaurant is not the point. The point is that challenging Blair would risk opening up a divide in Labour that would immeasurably weaken its ability to win elections. Brown simply will not risk this.

So, when Blair bounced back the following day - restoring the pluck of his parliamentary allies in the process - Brown knew that any thought of a take-over would have to be postponed. Brown will remain a leader in waiting as opposed to a challenger. And Blair's chances of leading Labour into the next election - and emerging as a winner - have been strengthened. It will take a renewed round of struggle of massive proportions to open up the possibility of bringing Blair down. But if Brown is the only alternative, then, as George Galloway has said, "God help us". It should not be forgotten that Brown was a leading architect of New Labour and is inordinately proud of his close links with 'the city'.

THE LEFT'S WEAKNESS

The fact that Brown is the one person many look to, including a so called hard left MP like John McDonnell who compared him favourably to Blair after the leader's speech, exposes the terrible cowardice and ultimately, treachery, of the left in both parliament and the union bureaucracy.

Take the left MPs first. On the basis of the anti-war movement they had the perfect opportunity to challenge Blair as leader. They should have done it at the height of the anti-war movement but they delayed saying "wait for conference". As conference approached they failed to challenge Blair for leadership. Their argument is that they wouldn't have won. In truth they were hoping Brown would come to their rescue. The man who champions PFI was viewed as their saviour.

But winning - or getting Brown in - was not the objective in challenging Blair. Saying to the millions who opposed the war, to the millions against foundation hospitals and PFI, to the countless activists who rallied to support the firefighters, "here's a left-wing challenge, we stand with you in openly challenging this warmongering Labour leadership", could have strengthened the movement and weakened Blair.

The left chose not to do this. They ran away. With the exception of Galloway - who is wrong on many issues but who resolutely stuck to his principled opposition to Blair - the left MPs have failed the momentous test of the last year and have revealed once and for all that they remain a useless and impotent crew of critics, incapable of taking decisive action at the crucial hour. They are as culpable as Brown in enabling Blair, the war criminal, to remain at his post.

RECLAIM LABOUR?

This failure of the left stands as our answer to those in the unions who have been swayed by the argument of their leaders that the time has come to "reclaim Labour". Key union leaders, like Woodley from the TGWU, Prentis from Unison, Curran from the GMB and Simpson from Amicus have sponsored the idea that the Labour Party can be "won back" to its roots. In the aftermath of Blair's speech they spoke with one voice, criticising the leader for his refusal to budge on his core policies. Woodley denounced Blair's "theatrical speech", while Curran branded it as "light on substance".

These men, together with other union leaders like Billy Hayes of the Communication Workers are desperately trying to stop their own members from deserting Labour. It is, according to Simpson, "the only political party" that can represent the working class. Yet, thanks to Blair, thousands of rank and file union members have either torn up their party cards in disgust or voted to cut funds from Labour. The rail union, the RMT, has actually decided to end its automatic

support for Labour and is opening up its political fund to other political parties.

To contain and misdirect this pressure the leaders of the main unions are upping their criticism of Blair and even sanctioning limited struggles against aspects of his policies. But they are doing this in order to outflank the very real push from the rank and file for a break with Labour. They are doing it in order to save the party that gave us Blair, not reclaim it for the working class.

For the truth is that the working class has only ever been represented in the Labour Party by the union bureaucracy. That bureaucracy has been content with Labour for 100 years - a 100 years marked by class collaboration and betrayal of working class interests on the altar of big business. But under Blair they have found their influence and their power within the party dramatically reduced. They have found it more difficult to sell the lie that Labour is a party of the workers. And they have found it irksome to have their carefully crafted class collaborationist schemes, like partnership in the workplace, laughed out of court by a Labour Party that proved it was willing to smash an entire union Thatcher style - the FBU - rather than cut a deal in the "old Labour" way.

In other words, the idea of "reclaiming the Labour party" is really reclaiming it for the trade union bureaucrats so they can operate as equals alongside the parliamentarians. After all, the bureaucrats never allowed their members to decide which way block votes were cast, who was represented on the key Labour committees, which MPs should be supported and which not. And they are not talking about introducing any such democracy for their members now. That's why they like Brown. He may be a cutter, slasher and monetarist - but he cultivates and "listens to" the union leaders.

And, just like the left MPs, these union leaders have failed the test of struggle. For all their huffing and puffing they didn't blow Blair down at the conference and have no intention of doing so after it.

All of this makes the case for breaking from Labour and building a new workers' party even more important. But it also makes the fight for such an outcome more difficult. For unless the rank and file - the most open to the case for a new workers' party - are mobilised in struggle it will be more difficult to prise them from the union and parliamentary leaders.

Those leaders are promising them, in papers, journals and newsletters, that everything is changing for the better, that the defeat for Blair over foundation hospitals at the conference signals a new era of the party being responsive to the views of the masses. The reality that Blair says the conference vote won't make any difference to plans to push through such hospitals is neither here nor there. The fact that he lost the vote and the unions won it will be held up as proof that Labour is being reclaimed.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain. Because of the attacks Labour will launch on the working class and because of the profound instability that prevails in the world (politically and economically) there will be struggles and there will be mass movements against future wars. And in those struggles thousands upon thousands of activists will see for themselves, not only that Labour is not for them - reclaimed or not - but that the new working class party we need must be one committed to the root and branch destruction of the very system that brings us permanent war and attacks on our livelihoods, that it must be a revolutionary alternative to Blair.

The Brent East By-election

Dear Comrades

No doubt the paper's editorial board felt obliged to comment on the first parliamentary by-election since the imperialist war against Iraq and the first since Workers Power's break from the Socialist Alliance in July this year. But the coverage of the recent Brent East campaign in the September issue of Workers Power was at best confused and at worst dangerously misleading in two respects.

The article, authored by Jeremy Dewar, called on readers in the constituency "to abstain or mark their ballot papers: UK Out of Iraq". In effect, Workers Power appeared to be equating passive abstention with an active campaign to encourage voters to express their opposition to the ballot box to the continuing occupation of Iraq by US and British forces. While there may indeed be instances where abstention is a perfectly principled position, I certainly hope that on this occasion the sentence reflected sloppy sub-editing rather than the editorial board's worked out position.

There was plenty of passive abstention among the potential electors of Brent East with just over 36 per cent of voters taking part - confounding still lower predictions by media analysts. Surely, however, revolutionaries do not want to encourage a rising tide of abstention among predominantly working class voters. The secular decline in voter turn-out in the USA seems not to

have signaled a surge in class consciousness among American workers but rather a slide into apathy and despair among millions in the most marginalised sections of the working class. A broadly similar process seems to be underway in Britain as the plunge in electoral participation at the last general election to 59% is not a reflection of millions suddenly seeing through the sham of bourgeois democracy.

Dewar understandably wanted to make plain the background to Workers Power's decision to withdraw from the Socialist Alliance and withhold electoral support, but in doing so he failed to characterise the actual nature of the Brent campaign. In this instance the SA stood on the basis of opposing war and privatisation, supporting renationalisation of the rail and explicitly defending asylum seekers. Its candidate, Brian Butterworth, is certainly a long-standing SWP member but also a prominent trade unionist as secretary of Brent UNISON, the largest union branch in the borough. Whatever the previous intentions of John Rees and other leading figures in the SWP and despite the deficiencies of its programme, this was in no sense a "popular front" campaign. Of course, Dewar never claimed that it was (though some readers inferred otherwise) but a serious analysis of the by-election should have considered these facts.

The SA, while coming fifth among a total of 16 candidates in the actual poll, achieved a derisory vote of 361, only 1.7% of the total.

Despite a significant investment of time and resources the SA again failed to prove a pole of attraction to previous Labour supporters who opposed the war, increasingly despise Blair and want to see an end to the privatisation of public services. With the exceptions of last year's Hackney mayoral election and Michael Lavallette's victory in Preston on 1 May, the SA has suffered a string of very poor results since the June 2001 general election.

The Brent result is likely to worsen what even Socialist Outlook's Alan Thornett has labeled a "crisis" in the SA and Workers Power may well have been right in refusing to call for support for Brian Butterworth, but the result is certainly of little comfort to revolutionaries outside the SA committed to the fight for a new workers' party as opposed to the Campaign Group's "reclaim Labour" project.

Finally, given the fact that the Liberal Democrats had already emerged in the campaign as the most likely recipients of an anti-Blair/anti-war vote, it would have made sense for an article about the campaign to emphasise the thoroughly pro-capitalist and ultimately pro-war character of the Liberal Democrats, a party for which workers should never be voting but clearly did in significant numbers in Brent East.

Yours in comradeship
Geoff Aylward

Dear Comrades,

There is an ongoing debate about the nature of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) controlled Socialist Alliance (SA) project within your pages and I write in order to contribute to it. First I am not at all surprised that your organisation felt the need to leave the SA. The leaflet (Why we are leaving the Socialist Alliance) you issued at the time correctly criticised the nature of the SWP's opportunism. Any attempt to do deals with either reactionary Islamic or Stalinist forces will only shackle socialists to their agenda not ours. Additionally if what I understand about the SWP's treatment of some Birmingham comrades is true, their control freakery makes me wonder whether describing them, as centrist is adequate. It seems to me that they are pushing at the Stalinist envelope. Their Central Committee clearly fights for what it thinks is good for them not what is good for the working classes.

The question however is what the Left does now not only in the arena of bourgeois elections but in terms of building a wider audience within the working classes for our arguments. I am sure you will agree that the SA project was a good opportunity to try to break out of the years long traditional sectarianism of the British Left. It was an opportunity to build credible leadership where there has all too often been a vacuum. If this is to be abandoned what should we do now? Worryingly Jeremy Dewar's recent contribution to your paper (Letters and reports September 2003) is both disingenuous and devoid of answers.

He argues that Workers Power (WP) has

in the past "...called for critical support for SA candidates at the polls." This gives the impression that WP had little to do with the SA. Actually I was under the impression that WP was a founder member of the SA, stood candidates and had members on the national organising committee. This attempt to distance yourself from the SA after the event does yourselves no favours. Or is WP covertly trying to say that they are no longer in favour of some kind of Left Unity but are not willing to say why?

Nowhere in the September issue of Workers Power is there any mention of the fact that you have left the SA or an explanation for this decision as given in the earlier leaflet. If I had not seen this I could be forgiven for not knowing. Equally there is no indication of what attempts you have made to approach other forces both inside and outside the SA to explain yourself and to seek to construct an alternative.

This attitude is more of a problem when you consider the current external political climate. Blair is in trouble, the unions are reviving, and people are looking for answers to difficult questions. There is no evidence that the Tories fortunes are significantly reviving. A worker who is angry about New Labour's deceit over Iraq is not going to change votes to the Tories. Their only criticism of Blair was that he was not aggressive enough. Jeremy is right to say we should not call on workers to vote for the Labour party in Brent in September, or anywhere else for that matter. So who should we call on them to vote for? He lamely suggests abstention. Well it won't work because no

one who is political wants to abstain. It won't work because workers haven't broken with bourgeois elections yet and because this is the only access to democracy they have at the moment. If the SWP/SA is standing a candidate in this or other elections and they are openly doing so on an anti-imperialist platform then now is the time to offer critical support, not claim that you did before, when in fact you did support and canvass for the SA.

At the same time where physically and financially possible you could seek to stand your own candidates. This might be especially worthwhile where you could find ways of combining with others on a mutually agreeable platform. If the situation in Birmingham for example is as bad as some claim then it may be a good area to start.

As we all know on the Left (I think?) elections are not, the end of everything. There is much that revolutionaries need to be doing other than opposing Labour etc. at the ballot box. It would however be a mistake at this point in time to leave this area of the struggle uncontested. This is especially true because the SWP has failed to grasp the real importance of electoral campaigning for socialists. It gives us another avenue into the class struggle. Consistent work around issues that are important to workers in their localities/communities can help us to build the base that we are still lacking. Curious that this first form of SA has consistently opposed activists operating in this way.

John Grimshaw

Dear Comrades,

Workers Power's call for an abstention in the Brent by-election was wrong.

By saying that a vote for Labour 'would be seen as an endorsement of Bomber Blair' WP implies that it is Labour's programme and actions that determine the electoral tactics of revolutionaries. If this were the case, we would never advocate voting for a reformist and pro-imperialist war party like Labour.

Labour's support for the war in Iraq doesn't make a decisive difference. Workers Power has been for a Labour vote during elections when Labour governments have had troops occupying Northern Ireland.

In elections, Marxists are guided, principally, not by Labour's policies, but by what Labour represents in terms of its organic link with the unions and its mass working class base.

That doesn't mean that revolutionaries

are always for voting Labour. It is a tactic. But where there is no revolutionary candidate standing, nor a candidate that represents significant forces moving to the left - as the Socialist Alliance no longer does - then Marxists still have a duty to put Labour to the test in front of its working-class supporters.

Comradely,
Julian Scholefield (Chesterfield)

Our reply

Comrades,

In the Brent By-election we judged that there was no candidate that we could support on a principled basis. In such circumstances, abstention is both principled and mandatory for revolutionaries.

Of course, Geoff is right to point out that this would have been better expressed by a campaign to urge voters to spoil their ballot papers. The fact that we had not the resources to mount any kind of sustained campaign in Brent and that our paper returned from the printers within 10 days of the polling day led us to putting a vague, but wrong formulation at the end of the article.

However, this is a side issue.

The brutal war and occupation of Iraq led many thousands to withhold their support for Labour. New Labour's policies on foundation hospitals, top-up tuition fees have provided many with even further reasons to no longer vote for New Labour.

Of course, Labour has always been acted as an imperialist government and has always attacked the working class whenever it has held office. We have never based our decision to give it critical support to Labour in elections on its programme, nor on its record. Neither did we this time.

Thousands vote Labour because they have illusions that it is a party that represents the working class or can be forced to do so.

Our decision to offer it critical support in the past was based on this. So long as workers hold these illusions, we believe that the best way for revolutionaries to disillusion the working class is to help them put Labour to the test of office. The current crisis in, and the mass dissatisfaction with New Labour is evidence that we have been correct in these perspectives in the general elections of 1997 and 2001.

In the Brent East by-election there were two factors which led us not to use this tactic.

Firstly, the question of government was not at stake. Labour would enjoy an enormous majority, whoever won in Brent East.

Secondly - and, for us, crucially - the most progressive and dynamic mass movement Britain has seen for thirty years, the anti-war movement, has blown a hole in the democratic camouflage. The "democratic deficit" was there for all to see.

Revolutionaries believe that parliament is useless for the task of transforming society in the interests of the majority. Therefore, our message in any election must be, "To change the world, workers must

take revolutionary action. There is no parliamentary road to socialism." Therefore, participating in elections is always dependent on the need to break illusions in the democratic process.

We judged that in this specific case, it was better to relate to a large section of the working class who had actively begun to break from both the idea that parliament is a legitimate expression of the people's will and from the idea that Labour could defend and extend the interests of the working class.

The election results themselves prove that our judgment was correct. The Labour vote dropped from 18,325 in 2001, to 7,040 in the Brent East by-election.

On the Socialist Alliance, we have documented on numerous occasions why we think it has consistently failed to win sections of the working class to its banner. At its last national conference in May 2003 we put forward a document saying that the way for the SA to grow was to campaign for the unions to break with Labour and fight for a new workers party. This was rejected by the overwhelming majority of delegates.

Our decision to leave was based on the decision of the national council not to rule out in advance the idea that the SA would operate a "popular front" policy and stand in elections on a common platform with bourgeois forces or their petit-bourgeois agents.

Does this mean we thought that Brian Butterworth was a "popular front" candidate. No. We merely drew attention to the fact that the SWP has recently "flirted" with this idea - and is likely to do so again.

On paper the program of the SA is to the left of New Labour, and even calls for an end to the occupation of Iraq and the immediate withdrawal of US/UK troops.

But the SA has no significant support in the working class. Indeed, its 361 votes (1.73 per cent) after a near-national mobilisation and during a huge dip in Labour's support proves this. It has consistently shown that it is unable to adopt correct tactics to win working class forces to its banner and we think that the decisions taken at its last national conference will only add to its failure.

Under such circumstances it would be criminal for revolutionaries to call for workers to vote for such an organisation simply on the basis of its left reformist programme. To do so would be to build illusions (that do not exist now) that the SA and its biggest component part, the SWP, would be able to meet the needs of the working class.

Workers Power

Mario Bango writes...

Thank you very much for your picture postcard that I got today. I am living in suspense these days because in a couple of days time I go before the judge again (8-10 Oct.). You need not apologise for not writing frequently because I know that you all have a lot of revolutionary work to do in this explosive period. Yesterday I got revolutionary greetings from our Czech and Slovak comrades, which gave my spirits a boost.

I write whilst thinking about the court case coming up. I suppose that the judgement will rule against me but despite this I believe in victory in the end. No matter how the judge rules, we will be free.

I am very thankful for your preparation of a benefit concert asking groups like Asian Dub Foundation and Chumbawumba. I send my greetings to these groups.

Comrades stand strong - smash fascism,

smash capitalism. Victory to the Intifada. Victory to the workers' revolution throughout the world.

My mind is with you. Long live the 5th International.

ONE SOLUTION - REVOLUTION.
With revolutionary fervent greetings
Mario Bango
Bratislava

Letters should be sent to:
paper@workerspower.com

or
Workers Power,
BCM Box 7750,
London WC1N 3XX

Are you 'British' enough?

Last month, Home Secretary David Blunkett announced that from next year immigrants applying for a British passport must pass a test in English language and citizenship. *Rekha Khurana* looks at how this most recent piece of nonsense fits into a pattern of racism.

Do you remember Norman Tebbit's famous "cricket" test where if you supported the English cricket team, drank tea and ate scones whilst sitting on a village green, then you were British - even if you happened to be a Scot or Welsh? Well, Blunkett, clearly affected by the New Labour obsession with mimicking everything the Tories did, announced his own test last month.

What will Blunkett's "Britishness" test mean?

You have to be able to speak English, Welsh or Gaelic and know about "core" aspects of British life including

- British national institutions that the very same institutions reports such as Macphersons found to be racist
- Britain as a multicultural society - a society where you are told you have to speak English in the home and where the government and media regularly attack asylum seekers
- British laws and the legal system - that would be the same legal system which discriminates against blacks and Asians and lets the killers of Stephen Lawrence go free

Blunkett says that the test is not supposed to be discriminatory but is meant to help immigrants integrate into "British" society. If you don't pass the tests you will still be allowed to stay in the UK but you will not be able to get a passport or be able to vote.

Blunkett has repeatedly tried to blame immigrants themselves for the lack of integration into British society and for racism in general. After the race riots in Bradford and Oldham, he demanded that immigrants should be willing to accept British "norms" of

acceptability, and should work hard to demonstrate their "Englishness". He also backed proposals set out in the Cattle Report, supposedly written to find the cause of the riots, that immigrants should sign an oath of allegiance and also demonstrate their "clear primary loyalty to this nation". He blamed the riots on the Asian community's lack of ability to integrate with neighbouring white communities, mainly due to the fact that some can't speak English! Nothing to do with the fact that the BNP, NF and Combat 18 had a strong presence there and the police were protecting these fascist groups; nothing to do with poverty, deprivation and unemployment.

Blunkett went on last year to attack Asian communities by stating that the fact some of us don't speak English at home created "schizophrenic rifts between generations and communities". This went hand in hand with Blunkett's racist and ignorant description of Muslim culture as a mixture of "enforced marriages" and the practice of "genital mutilation". These subjects have been debated and fought over in Asian communities for decades. Yet Blunkett made it sound like was the first time anyone was calling it wrong.

As recently as the Labour Party Conference, Blunkett went one step further. Now apparently, asylum seekers are responsible for the rise of the BNP. According to Blunkett, if you want to stop the fascists, you have to crack down on asylum seekers. Imprisoning people, splitting children from their parents, moving families from their homes in the dead of night - this is supposed to stop fascism?

And what is this "Britishness" anyway? Is it when you bomb a country killing thou-

sands of people in the name of democracy and civilisation and then occupy it, leaving its people without electricity and clean water as Britain is currently doing in Iraq? Or is it when you colonise countries, enslave the people and rape their land of resources? Blunkett's "Britishness" is nothing to be proud of.

Since September 11, the rise in Islamophobia has been very visible and the demonisation of asylum seekers has become increasingly acceptable. Racist politicians and the media are asking whether or not Britain's ethnic minorities and asylum seekers will ever "fit in"? Words such as "swamping", "uncivilised cultures", and "terrorists" have whipped up a frenzy of fear and hate against asylum seekers and Muslim and Asian communities in Britain today.

Muslims are portrayed as religious fanatics who, given the choice, would blow themselves up, as people hostile to British life who therefore choose to live in self-imposed ghettos, thus creating divisions in communities.

This is nothing new. Jewish immigrants fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries were accused of bringing into the country foreign systems of thought; including Bolshevism. They were labelled as a threat to British workers just as asylum seekers are today. The Jews too were accused of creating ghettos. But the real reasons they were isolated from society was not through choice, but a combination of their economic position in society and the anti-Semitism whipped up by the government and the press. When the Bengali community ended up in the slums of London's East End it wasn't because this was their preferred choice of housing but because that was



all they could afford. Bengali immigrants settled in areas together because they felt safer faced with violent and murderous attacks. Similarly Black and Irish immigrants who came to Britain in the 1950s were forced into certain areas. Many "British" landlords would have signs in their windows stating "No Blacks, No Irish, No dogs".

These are the same reasons why today's ethnic communities end up concentrated in poor areas, not through choice but through poverty and fear of racism.

Will taking a "Britishness" test mean we all live together like one big happy family? No. The "Britishness" test will not stop racism; it is part of racism.

Taking a test in "Britishness" does not bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. It will not change the inequalities in resources for jobs, education and health facilities between rich and poor areas or between races. Blunkett wants to use this test to further divide the working class along the lines of race and religion.

We must all fight together against these attacks on immigrants' rights. Black and White, Muslim, Christian, Hindu or Jew. Only then can we truly begin to build a society that is full of diversity and difference and not Blunkett's vision of a "multi" cultural society where if you can't speak English - you're out!

Social Forums update

Cardiff By Natalie Green

Cardiff Social Forum (Fforwm Cymdeithasol Caerdydd) has been one of the success stories of the anti-capitalist movement in the UK. Launched out of the South Wales Coalition to Stop the War in May 2003, CSF has from its inception been a network for debate and education, but also a body that plans actions. CSF began by organising parallel events in Cardiff at the time of the G8 summit at Evian.

It came into its own mobilising for DSEI and a subsequent military exhibition in Cardiff. It is currently mobilising for the European Social Forum in November, organising a People's Assembly event uniting left campaigns in the Cardiff area, and spearheading the fight against ID cards. Details of this, and other CSF activities, can be found on the forum's new website at www.cardiffsocialforum.org.uk.

Following the model of the Italian social forums, CSF has met on a regular basis, with all agendas agreed and circulated in advance. There is a solid core of activists from a variety of backgrounds, including Workers Power, Cardiff Anarchist Network, Friends of the Earth, the CPGB, as well as numerous independents. Notable by their absence, has been the Socialist Workers Party who opposed the forum at STW meetings and have undoubtedly hoped it would quietly die ever since. So far, CSF has only constructed the bare bones of a genuinely representative forum in Cardiff. Its mem-

bership contains relatively few workers, and with this in mind CSF is forging links with local unions - Ramon Corria, secretary of the local trades council, was guest speaker at the last monthly meeting. CSF also needs to reach out to the many ethnic minorities of Cardiff; the fight against racism will therefore be an important component of the upcoming People's Assembly type event.

At present, CSF serves as a kind of rent-a-crowd for various campaigns, without holding positions as a body. Workers Power members in Cardiff are now arguing that this needs to change. The CSF has coalesced sufficiently to act on a range of issues. In the same way as "Stop The War" was a slogan for common action, "Stop ID Cards" or "Trade Union Rights For All Workers" should form the basis for new campaigns.

Manchester By Tina Parker

Over 100 people gathered in the centre of Manchester for the city's Second People's Assembly. Workshops covering trade union struggles, the occupation of Iraq, civil liberties and building social forums attracted wide interest from Manchester activists and put out calls to action to mobilise on a whole series of issues.

The ongoing struggle against war and occupation of Iraq was a major theme, together with the need to build social forums. Everyone recognised the way in which the anti-war movement had brought

together a whole series of grievances over the attacks on our rights and living standards and the onward destructive march of neo-liberalism on a global scale. The first national People's Assembly was called in response to the "democratic deficit" exposed by the war - 2 million in the streets of London to demand no war against Iraq ignored by Blair and his cabinet cronies. But the "democratic deficit" exists on a series of issues - foundation hospitals, privatisation, tuition fees, pensions, civil liberties. Which is why Manchester STW organised its first People's Assembly in June.

Workers Power comrades argued that we need to build on the anti-war movement and organise social forums in every town and that the Manchester People's Assembly initiated by Stop The War Coalition is an opportunity to build social forums in Manchester. SWP comrades have been arguing against STW broadening out its struggle. They consistently argued in workshops that the struggles were interlinked but refused to take this argument to its logical conclusion and support creating the kind of organisation that can mobilise around all these issues. As a result local activists decided that the People's Assembly/social forums have to be built separately from STW instead of the combined meeting that we have had in Manchester.

A resolution from Workers Power calling for the PA/STW to continue to act as a single body, making the most of our resources and activist networks in order to democratically plan actions and build for the ESF in

Paris wasn't even allowed to be discussed. The sad result will be that both movements will be weaker, the dynamic STW isolating itself from broader anti-capitalist issues and the embryonic PA lacking the local weight and impact of the STW committee.

Despite this setback, the second Manchester People's Assembly shows that in Manchester, as elsewhere, the desire to build social forum type organisations is strong among activists. The test for the future is to ensure that we can go beyond the hundred activists present on Saturday and build local organisations that can draw in the thousands of Mancunians who have been demonstrating against the war and occupation in Iraq.

London By Dave Ellis

The meeting of the London Social Forum (LSF) on 4 October was an excellent opportunity to organise wider forces as part of the anti-capitalist movement.

At its height around 250 people attended. A number of speakers introduced the work of the LSF. Anita, a speaker from the Italian social forums, was able to happily report that, the day before, the Disobedientes had dumped tons of cow dung outside the home of Berlusconi. The international nature of social forums was confirmed as the next two speakers were from Greece and France.

After the initial plenary the Forum broke down into workshops. Subjects ranged from the media to Palestine, from Argentina to democracy.

There was a broad spectrum of organisations and individuals including ATTAC, solidarity groups, the WOMBLES and ecological

groups to name but a few. The SWP however, boycotted the Forum.

The Forum reconvened at a plenary discussion where there were report backs from the workshops and a discussion of a statement agreed at the previous organising meeting of the LSF. This statement should have been a clear statement of how to take forward the organisation of the LSF. Instead it was a deliberately ambiguous statement offered only as a framework and giving no direction to the people gathered there. The statement did not propose one single campaign or practical activity the LSF should do. An alternative resolution was put forward by Workers Power setting out that the LSF must link the anti-capitalist struggles. It also proposed the establishment of local social forums and raised three main issues for the LSF to campaign on: against the occupation of Iraq and Palestine; in defence of asylum seekers; against privatisation. In the end no decision was taken and neither of the statements were agreed upon.

Most of the workshops had resolved to go away and do things. But many of these things would happen anyway. The Colombia Solidarity Campaign will continue to organise around repression in Colombia, the Palestinian and anti-war activists will continue to fight the occupations of Iraq and Palestine. This would happen with or without the LSF. The opportunity was missed to try to agree a series of collective actions of all those assembled. The need for social forums in London remains and as a first step all those involved around the LSF and other forces must begin to build local forums in the London boroughs. They must aim to co-ordinate different organisations and campaigns, linking their struggles under the umbrella of the forums.

Globalisers suffer defeat at Cancun - but what will it lead to?

Last month the World Trade Organisation met and fell out in Cancun. *Frank Kellerman* examines the future prospects for the WTO and for international capitalism after its representatives failed to reach an agreement.

“Globalisation is like a bicycle,” say its supporters, “if it stops it falls over”. Well, at Cancun it got a puncture.

An alliance of countries fed up with the bullying arrogance of the USA and the European Union (EU) refused to sign up to an agreement on agriculture: the alliance ranged from rich Australia to poor Bangladesh. It was egged on by a layer of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have grown in influence in the trade ministries of the world – and by a courageous group of protesters that brought together Korean farmers, European anarchists and Mexican socialists.

The ostensible aim of Cancun – like the previous WTO ministerial conferences at Seattle and Doha – was to push back the barriers to “free” trade. But it was also to expand the remit of WTO agreements into new areas. The three rich imperialist blocs, the USA, EU and Japan, walked into the process with their usual agenda: the poorest countries must open up their agricultural markets in return for minimal concessions on opening up markets in the rich countries.

But they also wanted to open discussions on the so-called “Singapore Issues”: investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation. There is already agreement at the WTO that services should be “globalised” – i.e. that the rich countries should be able to buy up and exploit the developing world’s railways and waterworks. The Singapore agenda would have allowed Washington and Brussels to dictate to any country the way in which they regulated investment and government procurement. It would have allowed them to dictate “policy” in other countries. It would, in short, have explicitly extended the WTO’s remit from globalisation of trade to globalisation of capital investment.

THE ACHILLES’ HEEL

The WTO is one of the few multilateral bodies backed by international law. The IMF can starve a country but the WTO can prosecute and convict a country, forcing it to do something by means of allowing other countries to wage trade war against it. The WTO system allows organised “retaliation.” In other words, adopting the Singapore Issues as part of the WTO remit would have added the backing of international law to the arm-twisting efforts of global corporations to get their hands on capital in countries where they currently find it hard.

The determination, especially on the part of the EU, to push the Singapore Issues provided the anti-globalisation movement with a perfect opportunity. As early as February 2003, anti-globalisation theorist Walden Bello argued:

“If derailing the drive for free trade at the 5th Ministerial is indeed the goal, then the main tactical focus of the strategy becomes clear:

Consensus decision-making is the Achilles’ heel of the WTO and it is the emergence of consensus that we must prevent at all costs... Winning or losing in Cancun will be largely determined by whether or not we are able to stop or stalemate negotiations on the new issues.” (Bello, *The Road to Cancun* 25 February 2003)



Protesters attack the fence surrounding the WTO summit in Cancun

In the event, the forces opposed to the US-EU alliance succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. As in Seattle, it was a combination of protesters and reticent third world governments that did it, but with the roles reversed. The protesters, although they achieved the aim of bringing half the world’s media to see a spectacle, were not decisive: it was suit-wearing bureaucrats from across the globe that delivered a blow to globalisation.

US/EU ARROGANCE

The first five days of the conference were dominated by the draft agreement on agriculture. From the beginning it was clear that the USA and EU were determined to push through a demand to open up developing countries markets in return for agreements that would effectively leave their subsidies to their own farmers intact. Agricultural dumping would continue, starvation would continue.

Meanwhile, days after 70 developing countries had politely asked that the WTO not raise the Singapore Issues at Cancun, they arrived to be presented with a draft agreement on two of them! To say this pissed them off would be an understatement.

The arrogance of the US-EU alliance, and the behaviour of the WTO bureaucracy itself, were major factors in uniting opposition to them. The new book “Inside the WTO” became required reading for activists in the weeks before Cancun. Based on a series of anonymous interviews with trade delegates to the WTO’s Geneva HQ it revealed a regime of bullying, bribery and harassment. Step out of line in the WTO’s swish conference hall in the Swiss Alps and you will soon get a late night call from your home capital asking: why is the USA threatening to withdraw our aid package?

At Cancun, then, an unprecedented alliance was formed between the less developed countries, a set of medium-developed large economies, and the agricultur-

ally rich former colonies of the Cairns group. The Cairns group is an alliance of 17 agricultural exporters that account for one-third of the world’s food exports, including South Africa, Australia, Indonesia and Argentina. In general it has been pro-WTO and, given the nature of its governments, not greatly saddened by the anti-globalisation protests. The typical economic problem of a Cairns group country is how to develop its own industrial and service sectors so as to reduce reliance on agriculture, and break free of the diplomatic stranglehold of the USA. In Marxist terms these are developed semi-colonies or minor imperialist powers.

The voice of the poorest countries at the WTO had begun to coalesce around an alliance, led by members of the Cairns group together with India and China, called the “G20.” It is now called the G20+ since so many smaller countries signed up to it as soon as it was clear that it was going to defeat the “subsidy superpowers.” The actions of India and China were crucial. These are both countries that have developed rapidly under the impact of globalisation – but they are hardly adverts for free trade.

The average tariff on imported goods in India is 50%; in China the WTO’s rules on “intellectual property” cannot stop millions of people walking round in fake Gucci and Armani clothing or listening to millions of dollars’ worth of pirated CDs. Having built their economies to space-race status behind a fortress of protectionism, both India and China are now ruled by highly nationalistic bourgeoisies who know the next step is onto the world stage as global economic superpowers.

India and China know it is inevitable that they will have to open up their economies. They know they are entering what is currently a two-horse race. To gain leverage they are drawing around them an alliance of poorer countries who, for now, have a common interest in rolling back the power of the USA and Europe. The defeat they

inflicted at Cancun was summed up by Walden Bello:

“The WTO has been severely damaged. Two collapsed ministerials and one that barely made it – Doha – recommends the institution to no one. For the trade superpowers, it is no longer a viable instrument for imposing their will on others. For the developing countries, membership has not brought protection from abuses by the powerful economies, much less serve as a mechanism of development.”

AFTER CUNCUN

So what will be the fallout? It is clear that both the USA and EU are in the process of building a system of bilateral and regional free trade agreements outside the remit of the WTO. This marks the emergence of a series of rival regional trading blocks that the WTO was designed to stop. Already Europe and America are at each other’s throats over GM crops, steel and bananas. China, despite its willingness to make a mockery of the WTO, recently showed its preparedness to wade into the rivalry: it sponsored a claim by one of its calligraphers that the Dow Jones news service had “stolen” one of his characters in its logo. He won.

But while NGOs and activists are rejoicing after Cancun, the victory poses the movement with two major problems: the reliance on emerging imperialist governments who systematically rip off their own people; and what to do if the WTO collapses. Both issues bring to the fore the previously semantic difference between being “anti-globalisation” and “anti-capitalist.”

Some NGOs, like the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), see momentum for reform. “There is the potential for a real positive outcome following this collapse in Cancun. Now we may get real negotiations on the difficult issues confronting the global trading system,” said Mark Ritchie, President of the IATP. “It is clear that we are seeing a shift in the power

dynamic at the WTO. No longer are developing countries going to roll over for the US and EU – particularly on issues of vital importance to them.”

More fundamental opponents of globalisation like Bello argue that the world doesn’t need the WTO. But what does Bello advocate in its place? A series of rival capitalist trading blocs whose ambitions are held in check by a 19th century style “balance of power.” He writes: “What developing countries and international civil society should aim at is not to reform the WTO but, through a combination of passive and active measures, to radically reduce its power and to make it simply another international institution coexisting with and being checked by other international organisations, agreements, and regional groupings. These would include such diverse actors and institutions as UNCTAD, multilateral environmental agreements, the International Labor Organisation (ILO), evolving trade blocs such as Mercosur in Latin America, SAARC in South Asia, SADC in Southern Africa, and ASEAN in Southeast Asia. It is in such a more fluid, less structured, more pluralistic world with multiple checks and balances that the nations and communities of the South will be able to carve out the space to develop based on their values, their rhythms, and the strategies of their choice.”

THE ALTERNATIVE TO CUNCUN

Bello’s vision is a dangerous utopia. For capitalism there are two ways out of the WTO crisis. The first is that the imperialist powers manage to browbeat their kid brothers in Canberra, New Delhi and Beijing into accepting some form of agreement at the next ministerial conference. If the big imperialist powers can overcome resistance among their own farming populations (who in the EU amount to around five per cent), they can scrap the subsidies (the CAP and the US Farm Bill). It may take a decade but they can do it. In return they get agreement not just on third world agricultural markets but on services. The GATS treaty has been signed but stalled: there needs to be a round of bilateral horse trading where poorer countries agree to open up their state-owned industries to ownership from abroad. If a big shift takes place in the imperialist blocs, away from subsidised agriculture, they will expect the semi-colonial world to open up their services and industries. That option is still in play and, if successful, could turn the world over a period of decades into one giant integrated capitalist economy.

The other option is the collapse of globalisation, the reversal of the growth of world trade (it is already down to a two per cent growth rate, down from 12 per cent in the heyday of globalisation).

The working class has to offer an independent future, separate from both. An international economy regulated by a world government and world democracy. We aspire to nothing less. The condition for it is the removal from power, not just of the representatives of Exxon and Microsoft, but of India’s Tata and China’s Chinamobil. And that power being put in the hands of the workers, farmers and poor peasants who, at Cancun, may have seemed like a brave, jubilant and determined sideshow, but who in fact represent the way forward for humanity.

The European Social Forum

Come to the ESF!

250 activists - from Russia to Portugal, and from Ireland to Greece - attended the preparatory assembly for the European Social Forum at the end of last month. *Jeremy Dewar* and *Joy McCreedy*, attending on behalf of the League for the Fifth International, give a flavour of what to expect

The European Social Forum will be big and diverse, if nothing else. Thanks to the tireless work of the activist translators of Babel in the conference room, and the goodwill of bilingual go-betweens in the corridors we were able to meet activists from all over Europe.

A miners' representative from Poland told us about their great demonstrations and pitched battles with the police in the past month - news that has been completely blacked out by the British media. Then there was a young agricultural activist from Portugal, part of a giant, radical farmers' federation, a dozen or so immigrant "sans papiers" representatives from the very Parisian suburbs the ESF is going to be held in, and... well, you get the picture.

By the way, everyone loved (some of) the Greeks, because they came in three separate (and warring) contingents.

An incredibly wide-ranging programme of plenary sessions, seminars and workshops has been organised - and soon available on the website (www.fse-esf.org) so you can plan your week in November. In addition there will be a day, Wednesday 12th November, put aside for women's campaigns and issues on the one hand, and trade union networking and policies on the other. There is even a space set aside throughout the ESF for local social forum activists to come and share experiences.

There will also be debate - by the bucketful. But beware. Unless you know some of the codes, you will waste valuable time finding out who's who. The reason for this is because the ESF operates on rules laid down at the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, under which political parties are not allowed to be directly represented and all decisions have to be made by consensus, that is, 100 per cent agreement. As a result, it was often difficult to see who anyone was and

what their relationship was to anyone else. Activists often couched their arguments in such a way that it could mean one thing to one set of people and something else to another set, in order to reach an accord.

For example, The International Socialist Tendency - the SWP in Britain - was the largest and most united delegation at the assembly. But you couldn't have known this from their credentials. They came declaring themselves representatives from Globalise Resistance (Ireland and UK) Agir Contre la Guerre (France) Attac (Switzerland) Genoa 2001 (Greece) En Lucha (Spain) and so on. Similarly, members of the Fourth International (Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire in France) could not come out and say which party they were speaking for.

The hypocrisy of this was spelled out by the chair at one point when she described how all the four or five trade union federations in France were tied to one or other of

the workers' parties, the Communists, the Socialists, LCR, etc. So, the ban on parties - if it was not to exclude the trade unions - could not be comprehensively implemented. And the same is true of many campaigns.

Another defect of the preparatory assembly was caused by the rule not allowing majority voting. As a result, the meeting made no decisions on what sort of demo we would have, on what action the Declaration of the Assembly of Social Movements and Actors will call for and, crucially, where and when the next ESF will be.

All decisions have to be made by consensus, that is, 100 per cent agreement. So in theory - and in actual practice when we were debating the venue of ESF 2004 - three people can block the decision of 97 others! These are rules we will have to get rid of.

The Italian delegation was very impressive with representatives from the Disobedienti libertarians through to the mass CGIL union federation. Their proposal was for a "social 15th February": a day when we could call monster demonstrations across Europe in opposition to pension "reform" welfare cuts and privatisation.

They also - more controversially - wanted to link it to the EU's drawing up of a new, neo-liberal constitution for Europe. Some wanted us to have "another constitution for another Europe" but this would obviously be impossible to agree on. After all, would it defend private property or call for workers' control and socialisation?

But the proposal hit the rocks in a very interesting way. The CGIL rep got up and pointed out that the neo-liberal attacks may be co-ordinated across Europe, but they were

not synchronised. The rhythm varied in each country. For instance, the Italians were planning a general strike on 24th October - before the ESF! He said that workers took action in defence of or to achieve specific gains - not against neo-liberalism in general. Finally, he wanted the ESF to consult with the unions before setting any date.

All this was undeniable. But what struck us was that the CGIL was saying, "We don't mind being part of your movement. But when it comes to working class issues we, the union official leadership, will make the decisions, thank you very much."

It was the age-old debate that has divided our movement for a hundred years: should the union bureaucracy decide working class politics, or should the socialists? Our resolution, effectively an amendment to the proposal, put us firmly on the side of the socialists. A CoBas (rank and file Italian union) representative signed our resolution during the debate.

The other big, unresolved issue was when to hold the next ESF. Some of the liberal and reformist right wing wanted to move to two-yearly ESF. They claimed they were "fatigued" by the rhythm of big international forums. In reality, it seemed they were more tired of having to speak in front of thousands of young, radical activists who might hold them to account for their actions over the year! Again, our resolution calling for more democracy and voting seemed to hit the nail on the head.

But for the answer to this - and to see how all the other important disputes pan out - we urge all our readers to come to the ESF in Paris, 12th-16th November!

Is Globalise Resistance an SWP front?

A dispute has recently broken out in the Globalise Resistance steering group. Initially over the choosing of speakers for seminars at the ESF, it spilled over into a discussion about the role of the Socialist Workers Party within it and how GR is perceived in the wider movement. Here, *Jeremy Dewar*, a founding member of the GR steering group, contributes to the debate

Globalise Resistance was founded in the spring of 2001. The SWP organised a series of conferences with big-name speakers like Kevin Danaher and George Monbiot, which succeeded in drawing in thousands of youth, trade unionists and a broad range of anti-globalisation campaigners. Building on this success, a conference in May established GR with the immediate aim of mobilising for the Genoa anti-G8 protest.

There are many - on the right wing, as well as among the libertarians and anarchists in the movement - who have their own, generally sectarian reasons for belittling GR. But the truth that these people cannot stomach is that GR has had a positive effect on the anti-capitalist movement in Britain.

It has taken the arguments of the movement out of small rooms and into large conference rooms and even into television studios. As a result, a whole new generation of youth and a whole new layer of trade union militants have tapped into the debates and directly associate the injustices of this world with the bosses' profit system. Anti-capitalism became cool. Strikers wanted to do "something with an anti-capitalist flavour" to further their disputes.

Globalise Resistance has been crucial to dragging the trade unions into the movement. Billy Hayes is one of a number of trade union leaders to have shared GR platforms with leading figures of the anti-capitalist movement. Today, even the TUC has agreed to back the ESF coming to London next year.

Even more importantly, GR offered individuals a way to get active. Before GR was founded, the anti-capitalist movement in Britain was controlled by a very small group of activists around Reclaim the Streets, EarthFirst! and various anarchist cliques.

GR opened the door and said, "You don't have to already be in an 'affinity group' to get involved, You can join GR".

As a result, many more people came to Genoa, celebrated May Day, attended the first European Social Forum. This is a good thing. The anti-capitalist movement wasn't just something you read about. You could join it!

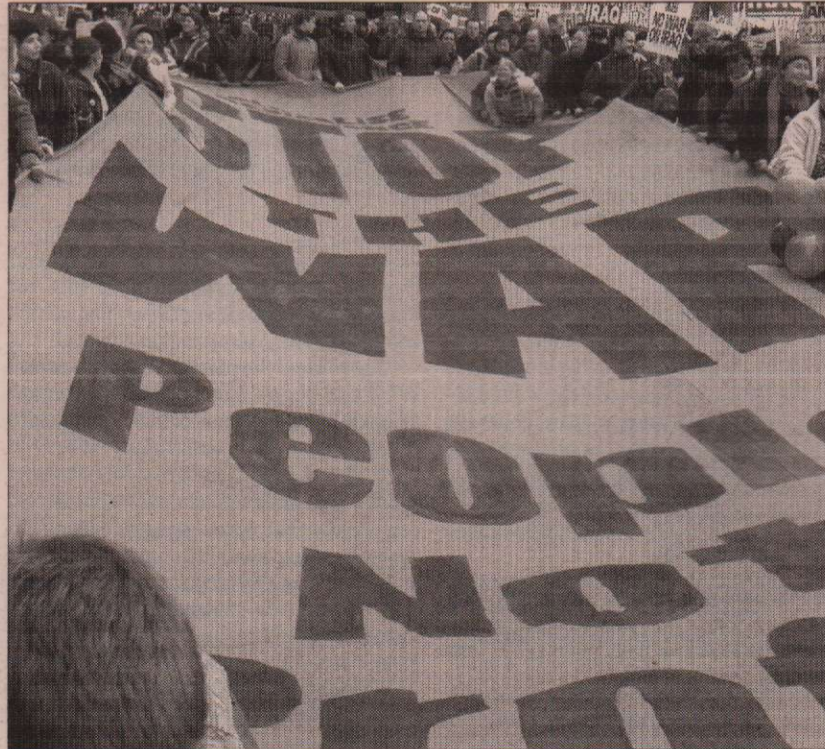
Finally, but not unimportantly, GR has been a force for the left in the European movement. It is good that GR comes to the ESF meetings and proposes actions and advocates ideas that combat the right wing liberals and reformists.

However, two and a half years after its launch, GR still has little over a thousand members and has a mere handful of active local branches. If anything, its high-point was at its launch. Why is this?

Anti-capitalist organisations grow by taking action. Big mobilisations like the ESF or the Evian protests this summer are great for providing a unifying focus for grass-roots activists, but what happens when they come home? Globalise Resistance has never provided a satisfactory answer to this question. But without local branches carrying out real, week-in week-out campaigning work, we cannot attract new activists to the movement, nor can we keep old ones involved.

It's not as if there wasn't issues to campaign over. Water privatisation, foundation hospitals, the commercialisation of education, sweatshop labour, environmentally sustainable transport systems, lack of social housing, McDonalds... all of these have local angles that can be worked on. All that is needed is local GR branches and "brain-storming" sessions, real workshops to develop the campaigns.

But local branches, carrying out real actions, means you've got to have real democracy in the organisation. Because GR does not have a real, active member-



Globalise Resistance: massive banner or mass movement

ship, everything is decided at the top and decisions are handed down. And it is this that leads activists - not just enemies of GR, but quite a few ex-GR members - to claim that GR is a front for the SWP.

Why does Chris Nineham get chosen as the main speaker for GR at every significant event? How come none of the priorities of other activists in GR become priorities for GR? Why do the political positions the SWP wants to project onto GR become GR's political positions?

In fact, the SWP's political dominance is so thorough in GR that it is not surprising that leading activists start to dis-

regard even some of the most basic democratic norms of any organisation. Jonathan Neal, for example, told the ESF preparatory assembly that he was speaking "on behalf of GR" when he motivated against Workers Power having a speaker at a seminar. I actually had to take the microphone to explain to the meeting that GR had in fact never discussed the issue!

Globalise Resistance steering group is to have a "strategy and process" meeting this month to try and clear the air. Good.

I will come with simple, but radical proposal: that GR puts its authority and resources into building social forums with

real, social forces in every city, borough and town across the country; and dissolves itself.

The truth is that GR is, to use Naomi Klein's phrase, a contaminated brand. There is too much suspicion that GR is and always will be controlled by the SWP. Social forums are, by definition, open spaces where anti-capitalist organisations - including the SWP - and individuals can come and openly argue for specific policies and campaigns. They have no "membership" whose lists can be used for other purposes. They have no bureaucracy of full-timers who can make decisions without seeking a mandate.

Social forums are not guaranteed to succeed in every city or town. Nor are they immune to bureaucratisation. We know this from our own experience. However, it can be said that social forums are necessary to take the movement forward, that they are unlikely to develop in the near future without the support of the SWP, and that GR is likely to continue to flounder without them.

To take this bold step, the SWP will have to break with its policy of seizing control of its united fronts and bureaucratically controlling them. The Socialist Alliance recently suffered splits and devastating divisions because the SWP swamped meetings and kicked out "dissidents" (i.e. political opponents). The Stop the War Coalition is run by closed meetings of the officers, who disregard conference and People's Assembly decisions that the SWP and Communist Party of Britain dislike. Is GR to go the same way?

If it does, then the SWP will be guilty of gross sectarianism. For purely party gain - being able to pose in Europe as the British anti-capitalist movement, and using GR as a recruiting ground - the SWP will have refused to take the necessary steps to build a mass, active anti-capitalist movement in Britain.

Transform the European Social Forum

The European Social Forum was set up to allow the movement a time and space to reflect on its achievements and political positions. But it should not be divorced from action. If it becomes so, it will become just a talking shop.

That's why last year's decision to call for a European-wide demonstration against the war on 15th February was so important. It set a common goal, across borders, forcing us to build the movement and giving us a measurement by which to gauge our success.

The second ESF must keep that link to action. Also, if the movement is to continue going forward, it has to set goals that build on last year.

Social 15th February

The Italian Social Forums have proposed a "social 15th February" in this context. While the war against Iraq was a unifying theme that everyone felt passionately about, this year there is a concerted attack on workers' pensions, healthcare provision, education systems. Privatisation and welfare cuts are not just general truisms about globalisation - they are specific, co-ordinated attacks on the European working class.

Already we have had general strikes this year against the attacks in Austria, Italy and France. The Italian unions have called for another general strike on 24th October. A one-day European general strike is both feasible and necessary. It would escalate the fightback and would be an important step towards stopping the European wide neo-liberal attacks.

The capitalist class is far more co-ordinated than we are - and it shows. Europe-wide action - which demonstrates our ability to hit at their profits, as well as our numbers on the street - would send shockwaves through the corridors of the Commissions and the meetings of the multinationals. Even if it might be truly general only in a few countries, and remain limited to just the most militant unions in Britain, like the RMT, CWU and FBU, it would enormously increase the confidence of all workers.

The League for the Fifth International's (L5I) resolution also links the call for the general strike to building the kinds of organisation that can deliver it and prevent it from being sold out by bureaucratic misleaders. The lesson of all the European strikes this year has been that workers respond with enthusiasm to clear calls to action, but the union bureaucrats have been able to control the strikes and crucially call them off before the workers have won. Social forums can become action centres, an alternative authority to the union bureaucracy, to democratically co-ordinate and lead the struggles.

Democracy

Our second resolution takes this potential as its starting point and links it to the need to democratise the ESF, and make it more responsive to the fighting needs of the movement.

At the moment no voting is allowed at the ESF, and there is a ban on the direct participation of political parties. There is some confusion and haziness about where these rules came from, who made them and why we can't just change them.

Some suggest that the movement would split if there was majority decision-making. But no one is prepared to admit that they are the ones who would split. Certainly, the L5I - of which Workers Power is the British Section - would not. And if we are not allowed to discuss and change our own rules, surely that makes the ESF less reformable than the IMF.

But, more importantly, we need democracy, not for its own sake, as an end in itself, but to clarify our policies, our goals and actions, in short, to fight better. Of course we need full discussions, and we must work hard to achieve large majorities and the smallest possible minorities. But we also

need to vote.

The alternative, the current consensus method, is essentially anti-democratic. As we saw in Paris last month, a tiny minority of two or three can stop the majority from action. And since action is key to our movement, the minority can kill the movement.

This method also leads to unelected and unaccountable leaderships. Deals are done in secret - in backrooms and corridors, thrashed out by the "big players". Only decisions made in this way really get listened to in the big assemblies. Amendments or counter-proposals simply do not get taken seriously. Do we really want the ESF to have its own Security Council like the UN, or a WTO-like system of "Green Rooms"?

That's why we're calling for one day of each ESF to be set aside for delegates from local social forums to decide on major campaigns and political positions, and to elect an international co-ordination that can meet and deliberate during the year.

Parties

We also need to lift the ban on parties.

For a start, the ban does not work. All the French trade unions are tied to political parties, and the same is true of many campaigns and newspapers (which are allowed). So parties operate inside the ESF. The ban merely obscures this reality. Surely we have the right to know which parties are in the movement and who represents them.

Secondly, the ban in reality bans some parties that are fighting against war and neo-liberalism while giving influence to Lula's Workers Party (PT) which is cutting pensions and working with the IMF and the capitalists.

Attac's right wing publicly denounced striking public sector workers in the summer and backed the negotiating stance of the conservative, neo-liberal French government at the WTO in Cancun.

So where is the ban on parties getting us. It is not stopping their influence in our movement - but it is stopping us from influencing them! We should demand from those political parties that want to participate in the ESF that they break with the capitalists as a condition of entry.

But, again, it is only by building strong,



democratic grassroots organisations - social forums - that we will be able to control our leaders and decide which, if any, parties represent us.

The open competition between the various political parties within the anti-capitalist movement and the re-establishment

of the link between the ESF and mass, direct action are the two steps needed to take the movement forward. And, if we take them, we will also be taking a step towards forging a new, consistently anti-capitalist party, a world party of socialist revolution, the Fifth International.

Support these resolutions to the Assembly of the European Social Movements and Actors

After Feb 15th lets step up the action... For a Europe wide general strike to stop the neo-liberal attacks!

The governments and central institutions of the European Union have launched a concerted offensive against our social and public services, jobs, and pensions. This is dictated by globalising capital - the giant industrial financial and trading corporations. They demand that public transport, health, social welfare, pension and education systems be privatised or subordinated to the "laws of the market".

We the providers and users of these

social services and public utilities totally reject this logic, based on ignoring the needs of the many in favour of the greed of a few. It will lead to ever greater exploitation, unemployment, inequality and insecurity. We say: Enough is enough!

This year alone - in Italy, Austria, France and other countries - working people and youth have protested in the streets, taken strike action, shown their rejection of this attack. We have to continue and spread this campaign yet further. The working people, the social movements right across Europe

must mobilise for action

"Tous ensemble!" we declare war on the policies of privatisation, austerity and cuts. We mobilise in defence of all our social gains and their improvement. If capitalism cannot afford a decent life for all, at school, at work or in retirement - then we cannot afford capitalism! The huge antiwar demonstrations of February 15th and the mobilisations against pension "reform" in June and July show that we can build such movement. Above all we need UNITY IN ACTION.

This Assembly of the European Social movements calls for a European Day of Action to demand an immediate end to all these attacks. This action should include a general strike and mass demonstrations. This should take place on (a working day to be decided by the representatives of the social movements in Paris but in any case no

later than the next European summit in June)

To mobilise for this day of action and to continue the campaign to victory we call for the setting up in every town and city of social forums. These should include representatives of the trade unions, organisations of the unemployed, the small farmers, immigrant communities, women, school and college students, anti-war and anti-imperialist campaigns and those political parties fighting neoliberalism.

These social forums should at the same time promote solidarity between all of these struggles and continue the campaign against the threats of new wars, the occupation of Iraq and Palestine, as well as the corporate plunder of the so-called global south.

Develop the ESF into a democratic and fighting body. Forward to the Fifth International!

Our movement now plays a central role in the opposition against capitalist globalisation and imperialist war. We proved on February 15th that the forces gathered here can mobilise many millions of people on the streets. The challenges are getting bigger. The rulers of this world are hell-bent on carrying through their war against the workers, peasants and oppressed peoples of the worlds.

We need a clear perspective how to go forward. For this we need a full and democratic debate in our movement and the ability to translate the will of the activists into action. In short, we need DEMOCRACY in the movement.

Democracy means not only

recognition of differences - even the bourgeois democratic state allows dissent for some periods - but decision-making and turning decisions into action. Democracy means discussing and voting. Of course we need to win the biggest and most wholehearted majority for such action to make it effective. But not to follow the wishes of the majority after a full and fair debate - to allow a minority to block action is the opposite of democracy.

The present modus operandi - the consensus principle - is in reality undemocratic. Moreover it is far from transparent. It means that decisions are really made in small circles behind closed doors. We have a de facto leadership which is not accountable in any way.

The European Social Forum should therefore include within its annual gatherings a one day assembly composed of delegates from national

and local Social Forums and organisations about its main campaigns and political positions. It should also elect a co-ordination which can make statements and calls in between the annual meetings.

A vital step towards transparency would be to lift the ban on political parties' participation in the ESF. In fact the ban is total hypocrisy since in fact political parties are not only participating anyway but also playing a leading role. Many of the organisers and speakers at the ESF are members of political parties with specific political goals. There is nothing whatsoever wrong with this but it should be open and transparent. Every activist of the Social Forum movement has a right to know which parties are participating in the movement and who is a member of which party. Will this lead to a dominance of the movement by bureaucratic and conservative Parties - by members of parliament, officials etc who do not want to fight the system and who seek privilege at the movement's expense? This is indeed a danger, but the ban on parties has not prevented it and cannot prevent it. There are two vital things we must do to stop this happening. The first is to create real and full democracy in our movement. If we build local, regional and

national Social Forums under the control of hundreds of thousands of rank and file activists, they will be able to decide on policy and action, and elect people who will pursue their interests, replacing them if need be. It will then be up to the rank and file to decide if they want to have members of political parties as their representatives or not.

The second way we can prevent Parties from dragging the movement into accommodation with capitalism is to demand that these parties break all alliances with capitalist politicians. To fight consistently against capitalism. Parties must declare that they will not govern in coalition with the capitalists or on their behalf but will struggle to overthrow them.

In this way, we can unite the ESF (and the WSF too) not only into a democratic forum and co-ordinator of action, but also into a new World Party - a fifth International - to struggle for an end to the rule of global capital and the establishment of the rule of the majority of humanity.

Roadmap to permanent revolution

The Middle East rulers have failed miserably to unite their people and can only kowtow to imperialism. It is the masses that must fight for independence, democracy and equality in the struggle for socialism, writes *Mark Robbins*

The next war in US imperialism's unending War on Terror has been declared. US President George W Bush wants regime change in Palestine, in much the same way that he wanted regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq. In his address to the UN General Assembly on 23 September, Bush boasted that the advance of democratic institutions in Iraq, as implemented by the US occupiers, is "setting an example that others, including the Palestinian people, would be wise to follow." He went on to say that the Palestinian cause had been

The failure of the Arab governments to prevent the invasion of Iraq by diplomatic means and the demoralising speed of the Iraqi military defeat have exposed the lack of democracy in the Arab world as a source of weakness in the face of imperialism

betrayed by "leaders who cling to power by feeding old hatreds, and destroying the good work of others." (The "others" is presumably a reference to the US State Department, which has in vain expended so much energy trying to persuade the Palestinians to surrender their national rights.)

While he conceded that the Palestinians "deserve their own state," he made clear that they will gain that state only "by embracing new leaders committed to reform, to fighting terror, and to building peace."

As the Palestinian ceasefire collapses and the short-lived premiership of Mahmoud Abbas ends in disarray, and as Israel refuses an offer of a new truce from the Palestinians, it is becoming increasingly clear just what sort of state the US Road Map For Peace has in store for the Palestinians. It will be a state existing on a fraction of the territory occupied by Israel in 1967, itself only a fraction of historic Palestine. It will be a discontinuous state surrounded by ghetto-like "security walls" to separate Jews from Arabs and Palestinians from their land. It will not express the national self-determination of the Palestinian people, but will serve to police the Palestinians on behalf of Israel and imperialism.

Nevertheless, it will appear to have all the symbols and trappings of a state, if only to placate Arab and Muslim sentiment. Just as US civil administrator Paul Bremer has appointed a collaborationist Interim Governing Council in Iraq to supervise the country's transition to "independence," the Palestinians are to have leaders appointed or approved from outside. Their role will

be as interlocutors with US imperialism as it carries out a carve-up of the Middle East.

Most of all, these must be leaders free of the stigma of terrorism, that is, leaders unencumbered by the legacy of actually leading a struggle for national liberation. What is unacceptable is that the Palestinians should be free to choose their own leaders, however flawed, lest this give the impression that "terrorism pays." Under no circumstances should the Palestinians be allowed to believe that their state, has emerged from their bitter and bloody struggle. The state's leaders will gain credibility with Washington and Tel Aviv only insofar as they repress popular struggles for national freedom.

Having failed to persuade or coerce former Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas into playing this role by starting a Palestinian civil war, US imperialism has given

Israel the green light to administer the final blow to the intifada by trying to liquidate the leadership of Hamas and the other militant organisations, and by bringing forward plans for Yasser Arafat's forcible removal. While the projected means may differ, Bush's vision of the final outcome here coincides with Ariel Sharon's. US policy remains to pressure the Palestinian Authority to reform, while isolating Arafat and his closest intimates. In the wake of the fall of Baghdad, the Likud-led coalition looks set to go a few steps further by eliminating Arafat and once more expanding the boundaries of the Zionist state.

While the US may officially disapprove of Israel's more provocative statements about killing or expelling Arafat from the country, it will do nothing to prevent such an outcome, as shown by its veto of the Syrian-sponsored United Nations resolution calling on Israel to refrain from any actions against the elected Palestinian leader.

The Bush administration hopes that, following the decisive crushing of Palestinian resistance, a more "pragmatic" Palestinian leadership will emerge to negotiate a sell out. Mahmoud Abbas is being kept waiting in the wings to serve this purpose should the opportunity arise.

All this occurs just as the Arab masses are reeling from their sense of defeat following the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. However, imperialism's plans will not proceed unopposed. The war drive that preceded the invasion of Iraq triggered mass protests in all the main Arab countries. In Egypt and Jordan, where the governments tacitly supported US plans while



Demonstrators protest against United States' policy in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan in Los Angeles.

voicing feeble warnings, the mass protests were led by the Islamists and the secular left and met with state repression. In Syria, anti-war demonstrations were orchestrated and controlled by the ruling Ba'ath party.

Nevertheless, in all the Arab countries where anti-war protests took place, there were signs that the US war drive was linked in popular consciousness with issues such as the devastating social and economic effects of neo-liberal globalisation, the oppressed position of women and national and religious minorities and the absence of genuine democratic rights. All Arab governments, regardless of their position on the war, are keen to sweep these under the carpet. Most importantly, as the Cairo Conference in December 2002 showed, the leaders and supporters of the anti-war protests are making links with similar mass movements, including the global anti-capitalist movement.

The failure of the Arab governments to prevent the invasion of Iraq by diplomatic means and the demoralising speed of the Iraqi military defeat have exposed the lack of democracy in the Arab world as a source of weakness in the face of imperialism. While Saddam's regime was exceptional in the region for its intolerance of any signs of independent self-organisation among the masses, being surpassed only by the absolutist monarchy in Saudi Arabia, there exists in none of the Arab countries anything that might be recognised in the imperialist west as a functioning bourgeois democracy.

In some countries (such as the Gulf oil monarchies like Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE), there is almost no effort to legitimise the existence of the ruling cliques in bourgeois democratic terms. In others (such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria) some semblance of bourgeois democracy exists. There are weak parliaments alongside all-powerful presidents or princes. There are rigged elections, feeble legal opposition parties, and a censored press. In the meantime, there is a ban on working-class organisation, even in the form of independent trade unions.

This lack of democracy exists alongside a myriad of unsolved national, ethnic and religious problems. Lebanon remains a country without a nation, its society compartmentalised by a political system based on religious confessionalism and dominated by its Christian Maronite minority. The oppression of the Kurds continues apace in Syria, Turkey and Iran, even if their position in Iraq has been temporarily improved by their leaderships' close relationship with the US occupiers. Non-Arab and non-Muslim minorities elsewhere (such as the Berbers in Tunisia and Algeria, Coptic Christians in Egypt and Jews in Morocco) struggle to be accepted in societies where they have lived for centuries. And while the sit-

uation of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation is well known in the West, that of the Palestinians in Jordan, who form the majority of the country's population but have second class status, or the 500,000 or so Palestinians in Lebanon (who live mainly as unwelcome refugees) is not.

Considered alongside the continuing struggle for women's rights and the secularisation of public life, these issues form what Marxists commonly refer to as the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. That is, these are tasks that historically were accomplished by the bourgeoisie in its struggle for power against feudalism and religious reaction. That the Arab bourgeoisie, in common with the ruling classes in other countries oppressed by imperialism, has failed to accomplish these tasks testifies to its division, its weakness and cowardice in the face of imperialism and native oligarchies. Above all, however, the Arab bourgeoisie has an all-pervasive fear and suspicion of the popular masses in whose name it so frequently claims to rule.

However, just because the bourgeoisie has not accomplished and cannot carry out these tasks does not mean that they simply disappear from the stage. They remain as capable of sparking off a revolutionary crisis as any set of economic demands by the organised working-class, and, in fact,

Leon Trotsky's assertion was that the democratic struggle would have to end in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in order for the working class to render permanent its the democratic gains

often more so. The key for revolutionary socialists is to bring the working-class movement to the head of all of these struggles, for democracy, secularism, national freedom and women's rights, so that it is seen as the tribune of all the oppressed, and not merely the self-interested representative of a narrow section of society. This is especially important in under-developed countries such as those in the Middle East, where the working-class is not yet an absolute majority of society, and where the peasantry, the urban poor, the lower ranks of the petit bourgeoisie and the intellectuals are important potential allies of the workers' movement.

The popular mobilisations – the legendary "Arab street" – which despite heroic protests and the self-sacrificing struggles of its youth, has yet to overthrow any of imperialism's puppets in the Middle East, will achieve its potential only insofar as it

allies itself with the organised working class, and adopts that class's methods of struggle. Without this, it will either remain trapped in the impasse of the repression of peaceful mass protests by authoritarian regimes, or it will be forced down the blind alley of urban guerrillaism and individual terrorism, with its associated self-isolation from the masses and mass political activity. Only the organised working class has the social weight to shut down production, to paralyse the armies and police forces of the Arab princes and hereditary presidents, to organise the other oppressed and exploited sections of society, and to overthrow the rotten regimes that preserve the status quo.

And, while the democratic questions unresolved by national bourgeoisies may prove the detonator for revolutionary crises, there is no reason to suppose that the workers' movement will stop at purely democratic measures. In fact, far from merely safeguarding its achievements in this sphere, it will be forced to struggle against capitalism at home and imperialism abroad.

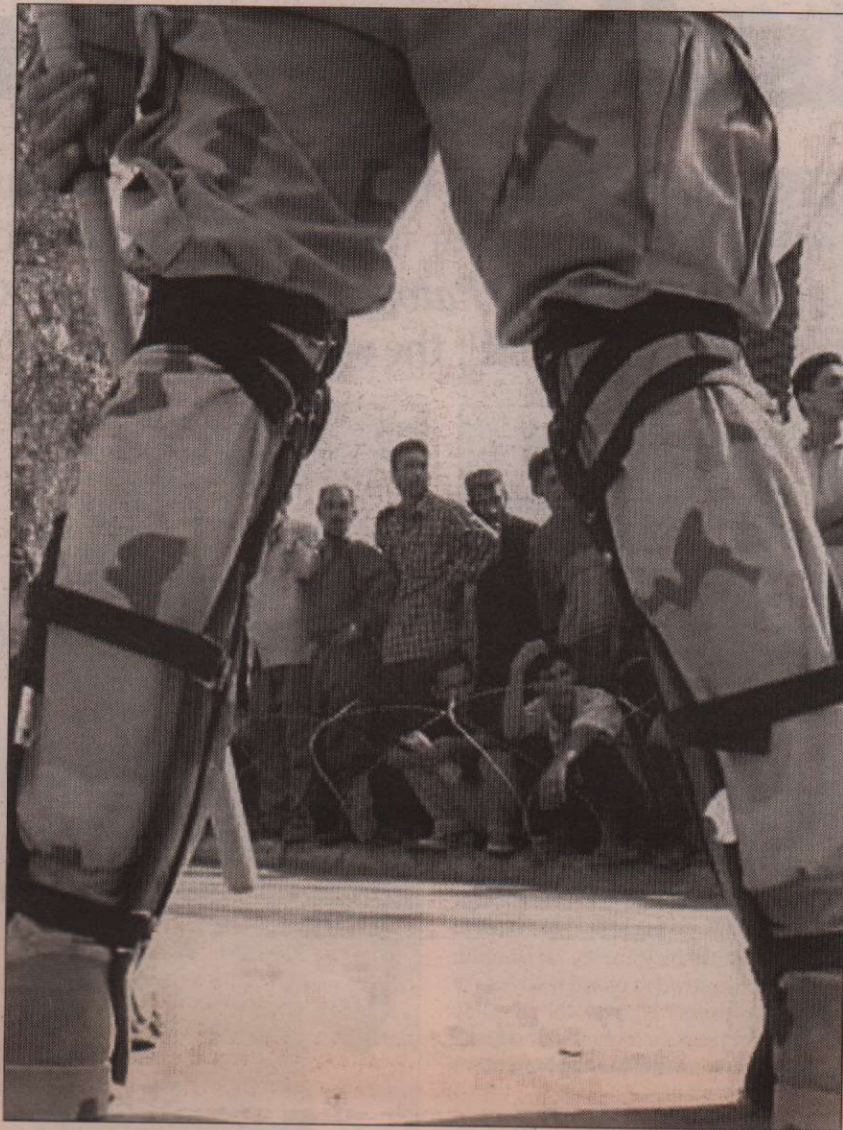
Leon Trotsky's assertion was that this struggle would have to end in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in order for the working class to render permanent its accomplishment of democratic gains. In contrast to the imperialist west, the choice does not exist of having a long period of capital-

ist development under bourgeois democratic conditions. The socialist and bourgeois-democratic revolutions in the countries oppressed by imperialism are thus different aspects of the same struggle led by the same social force, the working class, and distinguished from each other not by an intervening period of time but by the specific tactics used to struggle for each.

As the Palestinians have by now discovered, heroic resistance in the face of overwhelming odds may be possible for a whole period, but it cannot possibly win on its own. If the working-class movement does not step into the breach created by the absence of a leadership for the struggle against imperialism and its agents in the Middle East, then other forces will: chiefly the Islamist parties with all their in-built hostility to women's rights, the freedom of national and religious minorities and the democracy of the masses. And, as the experience of Iran has shown, when they inevitably betray their erstwhile supporters among the exploited, we will be right back to square one, albeit with the names and costumes of the rulers changed.

From occupation to revolution

The occupation of Iraq has rapidly generated resistance, not only by the remnants of the Ba'athist regime and the forces of radical Islam, but also by the Iraqi working class, which has come out onto the streets in mass protests and is increasingly organising to defend its interests. What path should the growing Iraqi working-class movement take? Some organisations, such as the Worker Communist Party of Iraq, take a narrowly economist view of the tasks facing the working class, neglecting to tackle the broader political issues attendant on the imperialist nature of the occupation. In a speech given recently to a meeting in South London, **Richard Brenner** puts forward the position of the League for the Fifth International



The occupation of Iraq and the emergence of a popular resistance movement pose one very important question, 'Who is going to rule Iraq after Saddam Hussein?' Currently the US satrap Paul Bremer has untrammelled authority. The US appointed Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) is a rubber-stamping body for endorsing US decisions

The Iraqi capitalists' representatives have scrambled to get on board this unelected body. Several religious leaders have been co-opted and even some of the political Islamists sit on the authority. Unsurprisingly the Iraqi Stalinists - the Iraqi Communist Party - with their strategy of seeking a long-time alliance with the "patriotic bourgeoisie" also joined. While claiming to fight for "a stable bourgeois democracy" they are happy to collude with the anti-democratic occupation forces and manoeuvre for influence for its party against the democratic aspirations of the mass of the Iraqi people.

There is a simple conclusion that we should draw from this, which is also a very radical one: that the Iraqi bourgeoisie and its political parties cannot secure even bourgeois democratic rights in Iraq. That task falls to other social classes.

There is more to the picture than that, however, because it is abundantly clear that the mass of the population of Iraq, after very briefly celebrating the downfall of the Ba'athist regime, immediately moved into opposition to the occupation. It is clear from all independent accounts that up to 1,000 Iraqi civilians are murdered each week while the occupying armies look on. In that context, it is absolutely inevitable that the Iraqi people themselves will mobilise against the occupation in a variety of forms.

On the one hand, former Ba'athists and elements of political Islam are engaging in

guerrilla attacks against the US and British forces. This includes shootings of soldiers, ambushes of vehicles, etc. On the other, there have been mass protests, so far of two distinct types: general mobilisations of the people more or less under the banner of Islam, and (a real element of the situation) mobilisations of the working class.

Of course, it would be naïve to imagine that these are two completely distinct groups in society - that no workers hold to the Islamic faith, and that none of the Islamic demonstrations involved working-class people. Mass demonstrations, for example, have celebrated religious festivals of the previously-suppressed Shia brand of Islam. Those celebrations have taken place on a very large scale and with great enthusiasm. People are asserting democratic rights that they did not have before.

The unemployed have also organised protests. The USA immediately abolished the Iraqi army, rendering a very substantial proportion of the male population unemployed. At the same time, there has been no systematic attempt to redevelop the infrastructure of Iraq. Mass unemployment has arisen almost overnight. There are no benefits, and there are no jobs on the horizon. Therefore efforts to organise an unemployed workers' union of Iraq have fallen on fertile ground indeed and grown rapidly.

The Unemployed Union of Iraq claims 130,000 members. Its demands are simple and direct and can therefore be expected to rally more and more people to it. It calls for jobs or \$100 a month unemployment benefit paid by the CPA. Its most recent demonstration was suppressed. At the same time, in the northern areas of Iraq, the oil workers have begun to mobilise. Reports have come through of the organisation of a workers council in Kirkuk, which arose out of an assembly of the oil workers in August.

In this context, the question of what policy the working-class organisations should

adopt arises very sharply. The Worker Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI), which has been instrumental in promoting and organising the UUI, insists that the struggle against the occupation must take place through the development of organisations of the workers and unemployed. Build the UUI and organise trade unions and workers' councils while avoiding bureaucratisation, so that the workers can struggle for power, can choose their own party and seek to bring it into government based on the workers' councils themselves.

This in broad outline is something which all revolutionary Marxists should endorse.

However, it leaves one major question unaddressed: the vast and growing movement, increasingly visible, vocal and influential, which is organising resistance to the occupation in the form of marches and militant military action under the banner of radical Islam. For it is not true that all political Islamic organisations support the CPA, nor that the actions against collaborators and the Authority have only been carried out by Ba'athists.

There are forces in Iraq who seek to come to the head of the movement against the occupation in order to establish not bourgeois democratic freedoms or a bourgeois constitution, and certainly not a working-class state, but some form of Islamic republic based upon the suppression of democratic rights, and on the continued suppression of the rights of women - a variety of the clerical rule established in Iran in 1979.

The question is, therefore, who will come to the head of the movement against the occupation and lead it to victory? Whoever can do that will rule in Iraq after the expulsion of the invaders. From our point of view, the task of working-class political organisations in Iraq is not only to organise the unemployed and the trade unions, but also to participate in and seek to build alliances with all forces from all social class-

es in Iraq who are aiming to expel the Americans and the British.

This does not mean that working-class demands should be abandoned in favour of a permanent alliance with other classes, but that through coming to the head of the struggle against the occupation, the working-class movement can replace the CPA with its own rule - preventing the abortion of the by the Islamists, and being able to go forward to reconstruct Iraq in the interests of its working people rather than as a capitalist economy enslaved by the West, independent only in name.

To succeed in this, the working class organisations have to direct a very simple and unambiguous appeal to the masses of people that are following behind Islamic slogans, and leaders, for all mass forces to unite in action, including armed action, against the occupation. We should say to all the young people, workers and women, "Why are some of these Islamic leaders collaborating with the Authority? Why is it that when the Unemployed Union in Fallujah sets up its office and attempts to organise the unemployed, armed gangs from the Islamists come down and attack them? Why is it that the US forces have been collaborating with the political Islamists and vice versa to suppress independent working-class organisation?"

Those currently following the Islamists will then be able to see that what the revolutionary socialists propose, is not to destroy their religion or take away their rights, but rather a series of steps which are indispensable to liberate their country. In this way the working-class organisations can begin to exert greater influence over those currently looking to radical Islam.

It is no use arguing, as some do, that Islam is growing only because of foreign interference. Yes, I'm sure they get a lot of support from Iran, but the real reason why Islamic organisations are growing is that they're against the American occupation, and millions of people across Iraq are against the American occupation. They want their country back, they don't want their oil and their economy stripped down and sold off to the highest bidder.

That's why people are rallying to these forces, and therefore the working-class movement has to contend with them for leadership of the movement against the occupation. We are not saying that the daily life of a working class person under a reactionary Islamic regime would somehow be better than under a pro-imperialist regime. What we're saying is that no advance for working people in Iraq is possible while Iraq is denied national independence. Therefore the task today is to struggle against the government, the regime and the armed force that rules in Iraq.

The Islamists must be treated as a great threat - one that can only be overcome through the most careful tactics. Because unless the working class comes to the head of the democratic and national struggle, there'll be no constituent assembly in Iraq. The Islamists and the political Islamists oppose democracy.

By contrast it is in the interests of the working class that the greatest possible democratic freedom under capitalism be established. Therefore, against the CPA the demand of the working class movement should be, "For a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage" - all men and women over 16 years, and that assembly should rule Iraq. There'll be no consistent emancipation for women unless the working class can come to the head of the struggle - the Islamists have made that abun-

dantly clear. They support the traditional division of labour in society in its most repressive form and oppose all of the freedoms for women that the working-class movement has championed throughout its existence.

So how can the workers and the communists in Iraq challenge that? Not simply by organising the women and pointing out to the women what the consequences of Islamic rule would but also, critically, by mobilising women against the occupation. The Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq bravely warns of the dangers of an Islamist regime for women, but should also organise great demonstrations of women to advance on the occupying troops to shame them - this can have a great effect not only on public opinion but also on the soldiers themselves. Let the Islamists then turn on the working class movement and say, "Your proposals for women's freedom will lead us into a corrupt society in which women are abused."

By what means can the occupation be overcome? Marxists look for the most successful means of struggle and ally them to historical and necessary goals. We don't say "There are certain tactics which for moral reasons, we will not apply." We judge them by one criterion only: how effective they will be in raising the self-organisation and consciousness of the working class. Therefore we should not condemn guerrilla attacks on the occupation troops. But guerrilla action must be allied to the organisation of the popular masses. If the Islamists can organise their own militia, then the working class itself can and must organise a militia to press forward its demands, to defend its democratic institutions and its demonstrations, to resist terror attacks against the working-class movement by the Islamists - which are already happening - and to press forward the military struggle against the occupier.

Allied to that is the question of the workers themselves - despite mass unemployment there are still workers, most notably in the oil industry. The organisation of trade unions to conduct strike action, protests and occupations aimed not only at restoring production under their own control but also at demanding the expulsion of the troops, is absolutely essential.

The final point I wanted to make, therefore, is the form that rule needs to take. The answer is simple. While we call for a democratic constituent assembly to take democratic rights as far as they can go under the capitalist system, there is no need for us to stop there. The independent organisation of workers' councils as in Kirkuk poses the possibility not only of co-ordinating the struggle but of making the decisions in society, of suppressing the right of the capitalists to continue to exploit the people of Iraq, of organising and planning the reconstruction of Iraq not in the interests of American oil companies, but in the interests of its own people. In short, to carry out certain tasks of the bourgeois revolution in Iraq - national independence, freedom from foreign control, democracy - will be the task of the working class in Iraq.

But why stop there? Why should the working class, having succeeded in expelling the invader and uniting the country, then pipe down and go back to work for the capitalists rather than for themselves? It is by coming to the head of the revolution and making it permanent that those bourgeois tasks can grow over into the task of socialist construction in Iraq. And that will be a huge beacon to the masses of the Middle East and all around the world, who are watching events unfold in Iraq with great concern, great anxiety, and great interest.

Votes for Women: socialists and feminists in the suffrage movement

One hundred years ago this month the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded. The WSPU became the militant wing of a mass movement of women fighting for the vote. Within this organisation many of the direct action tactics used today were first developed. *Kirstie Paton* and *Stuart King* explain the origins of the movement and the divergence of the two wings of the WSPU: the socialists and the feminists.

On October 10th 1903 half a dozen women met in a house in Nelson Street in Manchester, called together by Emmeline Pankhurst a leading Manchester socialist. Emmeline was an important figure in the Independent Labour Party (ILP). The Pankhurst women, mother and three daughters - Christabel, Sylvia and Adela - were all to play leading parts in the struggle for the vote.

Emmeline and her husband Richard had been politically active in the 1870s and 1880s on the radical wing of the Liberal Party and had fought to extend the franchise to women. By the late 1880s, having moved to London, they were swept into the burgeoning unemployment and labour struggles in the capital. Tom Mann, William Morris, Walter Crane and many other socialists frequented their flat in Russell Square. They marched with the unemployed on Bloody Sunday in 1887, where police killed two demonstrators in their attempt to disperse the 'illegal' demonstration, and Emmeline helped out in the famous Match-girl's strike of 1889. In 1888 Emmeline met Keir Hardie, later to become the first socialist MP and leader of the ILP, at an international trade union conference. He was to remain a lifelong friend and supporter of the WSPU.

When the Pankhursts returned to Manchester they were quickly attracted to the ILP which was founded in 1893. After Richard's death in 1898 Emmeline became more active in the ILP, even though she was the sole breadwinner for the family. She was soon joined in the ILP by her older daughters, Christabel and Sylvia.

Following Richard's death a memorial fund was set up by the ILP in his name. Emmeline had asked for it to be used to build a hall in Salford for ILP meetings. The hall was decorated by Sylvia, already a trained and talented artist. But the opening was a disaster. Emmeline discovered that the local ILP branch, which was using the hall as a social club, did not admit female members! Sylvia reports her mother as declaring "We must have an independent women's movement!" and immediately calling the meeting which founded the WSPU.

WOMENS SUFFRAGE AND LABOUR

The founding of the WSPU was, however not merely Emmeline's angry response to this example of gross sexism in the ILP, but the result of differences between the Pankhursts and the ILP/Labour leadership on equal electoral rights for women.

Not only women but also the vast majority of male manual workers were disenfranchised. In the late 1880s 40% of men over 21 did not have the vote. Proposals for women's enfranchisement that came before parliament, supported by the very moderate National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Millicent Fawcett, involved giving better off women the vote on equal terms with men. There was regularly a parliamentary majority for such bills but, as successive governments refused to give time for them, they never went further than a first reading.

The WSPU was founded on the basis of fighting for an 'equal terms' bill, whilst opposing the passive tactics of the NUWSS - which were clearly not working. The emerg-

ing Labour Party opposed the "equal terms" position for both good and bad reasons. It counterposed to it the demand for "full adult suffrage" encompassing both men and women. While this was a perfectly correct position, the problem was the Labour Party did little to campaign or fight for it. As a result it appeared increasingly to the Pankhursts, and to other women, that Labour was saying women would just have to wait for equal treatment until socialists had a majority in parliament. As Christabel put it in a polemic in the ILP News in 1903, 'One gathers that someday, when socialists are in power, and have nothing better to do, they will give women votes as a finishing touch to the arrangements. Why are we expected to have such confidence in the men of the LP? Working men are as unjust to women as are those of other classes'

THE NEW MILITANCY

Despite their differences with the Labour leadership the WSPU developed alongside the growing Labour Party/ILP relying on the parties' organisations and meetings to get their ideas across. Indeed in its early years the WSPU acted as a women's section of the ILP, which unlike the Labour Party, was eventually won over to the WSPU position. But it was the turn to militancy from 1905 which transformed the WSPU from a small pressure group of a few dozen into a mass movement.

In 1906 during a speech by Sir Edward Grey, a leading Liberal, at Manchester Free Trade Hall, Christabel and a new recruit Annie Kenney jumped up on their chairs, unfurling a banner demanding "Votes for Women". They had to be removed forcibly from the meeting. For good measure Christabel slapped a police inspector in the mouth outside in order to get arrested. In court Christabel declared "We cannot make an orderly protest because we do not have the means whereby citizens may do such things". Both were sentenced to seven days in gaol after refusing to pay a fine.

The first militant steps had been taken. Two thousand protestors greeted the women when they were released from prison. Keir Hardie told a packed Free Trade Hall meeting "20 years of peaceful propaganda have not produced such an effect."

Christabel Pankhurst increasingly moved into the driving seat of the WSPU's campaign, with her mother willing to defer to her in tactics and politics. Her actions shocked 'polite society' where middle class women were expected to be passive and obedient with decorum as 'wives and moth-

ers'. Christabel broke all the rules and was denounced from all sides, by the leaders of the NUWSS and by Ramsey McDonald. But her tactics struck a chord with tens of thousands of women who saw the refusal to grant the vote as a symbol of their oppression and who were determined to fight.

MOBILISING THE MIDDLE CLASSES

In 1906 the Liberals had won a resounding victory with a massive majority in parliament, but votes for women were low on their agenda.

The WSPU held its first major rally at Caxton House in Westminster. There were many well off ladies from Chelsea and Kensington in attendance as well as a contingent of working class women from the East End who arrived singing the Red Flag.

Christabel had no doubt who was the most important. Politicians she said would be "more impressed by the demonstrations of the feminine bourgeoisie than of the feminine proletariat". The WSPU set about under her direction to recruit the rich and influential as well as large numbers of middle class women. Fred and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, well off ILP members, were important recruits to the central leadership. They added important fundraising skills to the Pankhurst's flair for publicity and daring. They quickly took charge of bringing out a women's paper for the WSPU, 'Votes for Women', which by 1909 had a circulation of 22,000.

Militant action was extended from disrupting Liberal meetings to street protests at Downing Street and parliament. The tactic of "rushing parliament" was developed, turning apparently peaceful lobbies by hundreds of women into attempts to rush the chamber and disrupt proceedings. The activists of the WSPU developed an enormous variety of methods of protest. Pavement chalking was used to advertise meetings and actions. The banner drop was invented with one group of women occupying the top of the Monument in the city and dropping a 'votes for women' banner. Barges were floated by parliament festooned with political slogans, while door-stepping ministers offices was developed into an art form.

Because of these actions, 1906 and 1907 saw increasing numbers of arrests and imprisonments - Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia were all locked up for shorter or longer periods. In February 1907 the first 'Womens Parliament' was held at Caxton House to coincide with the opening of parliament. Hundreds of women poured out to march to Parliament and were charged



by mounted police. The Liberal government was accused of using "Tsarist methods" by the popular press. The Daily Mirror, then a new 'picture paper for ladies', was particularly pro the WSPU whose actions always provided newsworthy pictures and copy. It was the Mirror which popularised the term 'suffragette' to distinguish the militant WSPU from the moderate 'suffragists' of the NUWSS.

The WSPU now had a national profile. Branches were being set up throughout London and the south. Full-time organisers were sent to Scotland and towns in the north to set up new branches. With the wealthy patrons money poured in. By 1909 the WSPU had an income of £21,000 a year, while the Labour Party had to make do on under £10,000.

BREAKING FROM LABOUR

The WSPU's turn away from working women led to growing tensions with the ILP and Labour Party. Labour had returned 40 MPs in 1906, often only successful because the Liberals stood aside. In the commons they appeared largely as a tail to the Liberals. This aided Christabel's desire for a split. She increasingly looked to the Tories as a weapon against the Liberals.

At the Cockermonth by election in 1906, where the Labour Party was standing, Christabel arrived and announced that the WSPU would not be supporting the Labour candidate. In 1907 Emmeline and Christabel resigned from the ILP. This change of policy, accompanied by the 'exclusion' from the WSPU of ILP women who continued to support Labour candidates, led to the first split. Teresa Billington, the Scottish organiser, and Charlotte Despard, both ILP mem-

bers decided to challenge the decision at a planned WSPU national conference. But the conference was cancelled and a London meeting convened by Emmeline and Christabel appointed a new national committee without the rebels. Emmeline explained her attitude to democracy within the movement: 'The WSPU is simply a suffrage army in the field. It is purely a volunteer army, and no one is obliged to remain in it'. And of course Emmeline and Christabel were the self-appointed general staff!

The split with what became the Women's Freedom League, an organisation that worked more closely with the Labour Party, failed to dent the upward rise of the WSPU. June 1908 saw the first great suffragette demonstration in Hyde Park, 30 trains were laid on to bring in demonstrators and 20 platforms of women speakers were set up. The march set off from 7 separate locations in London with over 700 women's banners. The official colours of the movement, "purple for dignity, white for purity and green for hope" received their first outing. The papers estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 gathered in Hyde Park. The march was the first of a series of mass demonstrations, pageants and exhibitions organised by the WSPU to propagandise for women's rights.

FROM MILITANCY TO TERRORISM

For all its militancy and influence amongst wealthy circles of women, the WSPU found that it could not shift the government on votes for women. Christabel had turned away from the only force that could have brought about radical change, the millions of working class women and

men who had the power to bring the country to a standstill. This was no pipe dream. In Belgium full manhood suffrage had been won in 1893 only as a result of a series of general strikes, and Britain in the pre-war period was moving into an unprecedented upsurge of trade union and syndicalist led struggles.

Having turned their backs on the working class, in 1912 the WSPU resorted to ever more outrageous acts aimed at terrorising the government and the Liberal Party into granting the vote for women.

Individual politicians were targeted and had to be given police protection, something unheard of in Britain at the time. Windows in government buildings and Oxford Street stores were smashed. Pillar boxes were set ablaze with burning rags. Liberal rallies were bombarded with slates from roof tops, trains carrying ministers were stoned and derailed. MPs homes were bombed and set on fire. Priceless pictures were attacked with axes in the national and other galleries. Parliament was targeted by ever more militant demonstrations, one involved two removal vans arriving full of militant suffragettes who threw open the doors in front of stunned policemen and rushed the commons. Emily Davison, originator of many of the more militant tactics, threw herself at the Kings horse at the 1913 Derby, gaining a martyr's funeral organised by the WSPU.

Police repression increased massively. Their press and papers were seized, their offices regularly raided. More and more women were gaoled. The suffragettes went on hunger strike and the government resorted to force feeding. Later 'the Cat and Mouse Act' was introduced allowing the prison authorities to release ill prisoners only to arrest them at will when they had recovered enough to be locked up again.

Individual women made heroic sacrifices, but their tactics and isolation from the mass of working class women meant that in the period 1910-1913 the WSPU went from being a mass movement to a tightly knit guerrilla organisation, working largely underground. Christabel fled to Paris in 1912 to avoid arrest and continued to direct the movement from abroad.

Further splits and purges ensued, even extending into the direct family. Adela Pankhurst was regarded as 'too socialist' and she was despatched to Australia where Emmeline thought she would be out of the way. In fact she became a founder member of the Australian Communist Party. Sylvia was seen as a similar threat. She was summoned to Paris in 1913 and told that the East London Federation was no longer to be part of the WSPU.

FROM EXILES TO PATRIOTS

The outbreak of war in August 1914 was to change the situation of the WSPU dramatically. The Home Secretary's amnesty for all suffragette prisoners was enough to allow a return to England. Emmeline quickly announced the suspension of all militant activity and the publication of the WSPU's paper 'the Suffragette' ceased. When it re-appeared in 1915 it was as a pro-war paper called 'Britannia'. For the rest of the war Emmeline and Christabel became ultra-patriots. In contrast many of the active ILP and Labour Party women joined the anti-war and pacifist movement.

The end of the war finally saw the government offer votes for all men, but only for women over the age of 30. Two days after the measure was passed in 1918, Emmeline sat down to breakfast with Lloyd George the Prime Minister and declared, "Now we must work harder than ever to keep women out of the clutches of Macdonald and co." But in the post-First War world the WSPU leaders no longer had the authority or hold over militant women. Despite standing for parliament - Christabel as the head of a short lived Women's Party, Emmeline as a Conservative - neither was elected.

Nevertheless the Suffragette movement they led had changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of women. A woman's role in society was never seen in the same way again. The movement had broken the shackles of decorum and passivity in the most startling way possible.

Sylvia Pankhurst and the east end suffragettes

Sylvia Pankhurst developed a very different view from her mother and older sister of how the vote for women could be achieved. Although she did not speak out against it, she was opposed to the 'terrorist' turn which she believed "retarded a wonderful movement which was rising to a great climax". For Sylvia a successful fight to win women the right to vote had to be based in the mass forces of the increasingly organised and politicised working class - both men and women.

In 1912 Sylvia chose to return to work in the East End of London where, in 1906, the WSPU had organised the first working class women's demonstration of 500 women to march from the East End to parliament. The new campaign took off when George Lansbury, Labour MP for Poplar resigned his seat in 1912 and ran again on the single issue of 'votes for women'. However the opportunity to seize this chance and build a mass campaign was thwarted by Christabel's increasing resistance to working with men and, in particular, working class organisations. After an initial flurry of activity, the WSPU did little to support Lansbury who was defeated by a Conservative. After the defeat, the WSPU wanted to close down their operation in the East End, but Sylvia and other WSPU activists were determined to carry on the work they had started.

The East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) was more than just a suffrage campaign. Sylvia understood that the question of democracy was inextricably linked to the struggle against poverty and exploitation. Women outnumbered men two to one in the sweated industries of the East End. Dominated by the docks, the vast majority of women tried to raise families in squalid housing and on poverty wages. Prostitution was widespread, along with alcoholism and high infant mortality. For a suffrage campaign to mean anything, it had to take up all of these issues.

The ELFS was a community and political organisation that allowed men to join, but was led by women. Sylvia wanted to build an organisation that could give a voice to women and in doing so, strengthen the working class as a whole. After finding an office on Roman Road in February 1913 they held their first public meeting in Bromley Public Hall, after which they marched to the local police station where some windows were broken. Sylvia and her American co-worker, Zelig Emerson, were arrested and imprisoned for two months with hard labour. This was the beginning of a vicious and brutal campaign aimed at sapping and demoralising the suffragette activists. When working class men and women were jailed, their sacrifices were far greater than those of the respectable 'West End ladies'. Jobs were lost, families were broken up and the treatment endured by working class prisoners was far worse than that experienced by the rich and influential.

ORGANISING AGAINST REPRESSION

Sylvia, along with hundreds of activists used the tactics of hunger strikes to expose the brutality of their treatment by the government. Force-feeding and other forms of humiliation were meted out to the suffragettes, but despite this the campaign continued to grow amongst women in the East End.

The ELFS was a vibrant organisation. They had meetings in the afternoon and evening to ensure that both housewives and workers could attend. Classes were set up to train women speakers. Rose Leo took charge of these, but often men such as George Lans-



Sylvia Pankhurst speaking outside the suffragettes' building in east London

bury or John Scurr (a leading docker) would be invited so that the women could heckle and learn how to deal with hecklers! Its success was built on the support that Sylvia drew from the dockers' community. Born leaders and agitators like Annie Barnes and Julia Scurr (dockers wives), Charlotte Drake (ex-bar maid and mother of five) and Melvina Walker (one time ladies maid and a dockers wife) gave their blood and sweat to the movement and inspired thousands of other women to do so.

In December 1913 a week long school was held with lectures covering a range of topics from sex education, wages, housing, trade unionism, socialist history and female psychology. For Sylvia, the struggle for the vote was the struggle to ensure that women played an equal role to men in the movement to build a socialist society: "We must get women to work for themselves and feel they are working for their own emancipation."

Repression continued and the 'Cat and Mouse' Act was used regularly. Between February 1913 and August 1914, Sylvia was arrested eight times. Each time she went on hunger strike, was released, would defy the government by appearing on platforms in the East End while on 'licence', and was then hunted down by the police. Her arrests were always resisted violently by the community and her mixed bodyguard of women and dockers. It was during this period that Sylvia helped establish the Peoples' Army - a community self defence organisation that at its peak had 700 women. Sylvia was clear that only armed self defence could protect the working class against capitalist brutality: "I say to you that not until there is a popular uprising will you secure for us the vote. That is necessary. There is going to be drilling in the East End...Arm yourselves. Let us fight and we will win."

Sylvia's conception of the Peoples Army was that it should be more than just a force that could protect meetings. She saw it as an organisation that could draw women into other mass actions. In late 1913 the ELFS called for a rent strike across the East End, a tradition that went back to the Great Dock strike of 1889. The ELFS also played a

key role in delivering solidarity to the Dublin Lockout in November 1913. Influenced by the textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, they organised the evacuation of children to the homes of workers in England.

EXPULSION FROM THE WSPU

It was Sylvia's participation in this campaign of solidarity that was too much for her sister Christabel to stomach. In December 1913, Sylvia was called to Paris to meet with her sister in exile. Christabel failed to convince Sylvia to abandon her work and so the ELFS was expelled from the WSPU. Sylvia summed up Christabel's views: "A working women's movement was of no value: working women were the weakest portion of the sex; how could it be otherwise? Their lives were too hard, their education too meagre to equip them for the contest. Surely it is a mistake to use the weakest for the struggle! We want picked women, the very strongest and the most intelligent!"

For Christabel, the suffragette campaign was the struggle for privileged and educated women to take their seat in their government and represent their class interests. For Sylvia the struggle for suffrage was the struggle for freedom from want, poverty and oppression. It was the struggle for working men and women to build a new society based on socialism. These two struggles would become diametrically opposed when the British Empire went to war in August 1914.

THE ELFS AND THE WAR

The First World War brought enormous pressures on the suffragette movement. The ELFS went through a radical transition. It began a campaign to protect working class families from the ravages of war. It campaigned against price rises, for equal pay and a moratorium on debt. In the factories, as women replaced men called to the front, the ELFS exposed the conditions they suffered and sought to unionise and support women at work.

In March 1916, the ELFS was renamed the Workers Suffrage Federation. Again this indicated the further radicalisation that



George Lansbury speaking at a suffragette demo.

Sylvia and WSF went through under the influence of war. The WSF was explicitly anti-war, supported conscientious objectors and fought against conscription. The Russian Revolution was met with enormous enthusiasm by Sylvia and the WSF. Not only did the WSF support the revolution, but later in 1920 Sylvia was able to use the respect she had won amongst the dockers of the East End to persuade them not to load ammunition onto the ship the Jolly George which was bound for Poland's war with Russia. After the war, Sylvia and the WSF were to play an important role in the founding of the Communist Party in Britain.

Popular history likes us to believe that the vote was won by the courageous acts of individual middle class women such as Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. The experience of Sylvia and the East End suffragettes tells another story: that real social change comes from the actions of many, not just the few; that when working class communities come together, as the Dockers and the suffragettes of the East End did, they forge powerful, creative movements that challenge capitalism and strengthen the class as a whole in the fight for socialism.

Could a recession threaten Bush's re-election plans?

George W Bush's poll ratings are near an all-time low because the "triumph" in Iraq has turned into a bloody quagmire. He hopes that an economic upturn will come to his rescue in time for November 2004 presidential elections but, as *Keith Harvey* explains, he may well be disappointed

This year, the United States economy has been growing steadily. Between April and July 2003 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was rising at an annually adjusted rate of 3.1 per cent, twice the rate for the first quarter of the year.

Unemployment fell last month for the first time since January. Consumer spending continues to drive this recovery but private business investment also rose in the second quarter of the year at the fastest rate since the stock market collapse began in the spring of 2000. Industrial output rose by 0.5 per cent in July for the third successive month.

Productivity growth has been sustained through the recession – and not just because jobs have been cut faster than output. Hourly output outside of the agricultural sector rose 4 per cent last year and this rate has been sustained into 2003. On the back of this – alongside stagnant, if not falling wage levels – profits have rebounded strongly. From their low point in mid-2001 profits have risen by 65 per cent to summer of this year.

So the recession of 2000-1 and stagnation of 2002 is over. Now, however, the question has become: can the recovery gain momentum or will US capitalism's underlying weaknesses undermine it?

The answer to this question is critical for the world economy. Growth in the US between 1995 and 2000 accounted for 65 per cent of the overall increase in world output. The Eurozone (and crucially Germany) has been barely growing for the past two years while Japan has seen GDP grow by an average of little more than 1 per cent a year for the past decade.

As the *Economist* put it in its survey last month, the world economy has been and continues to fly on a single engine. If this falters and stalls then the global economy would crash.

The previous two recessions began when a sharp rise in inflation was countered by a sharp rise in interest rates. These, in turn, increased both corporate and household debt to such an extent that investment, and then consumer spending collapsed.

In contrast the 2000-1 recession started when falling profits in 1999 led companies to cut back sharply on spending on new capital equipment. At that point (March 2000) the four-year-long stock market bubble burst as share prices collapsed 48 per cent in a matter of weeks.

This crash reinforced the recession in the real economy as a considerable part of household wealth was based on high share prices. For many companies debt burdens became unmanageable as the new, lower, market valuation of their shares hit them.

Faced with this disaster the government used all the monetary and fiscal levers at its disposal to pull the economy out of recession. The Federal Reserve – led by Alan Greenspan – cut the prime rate to 1 per cent, the lowest since the 1950s. The Treasury cut taxes and increased spending. The result was a recovery that took more than 4 years and in real terms was



The Bush team has boosted arms spending to the tune of \$85 billion to finance the invasion and occupation of Iraq. More than half of all GDP growth in the USA this year

are negative, since inflation is above 1 per cent.

The most immediate and durable effect of this monetary policy was to keep US consumers spending and hence the economy afloat during 2001-2, even though businesses were retrenching.

Despite the fact that US households were hit hard by the stock market slump, the lower interest rates more than compensated them. Many cash-strapped consumers borrowed time and again against the value of their homes (house prices have risen steadily as a result of lower interest rates making properties more affordable and in greater demand).

In 2002 homeowners borrowed \$130 billion (£85 billion) against the value of their homes (twice the level of 2001). This year the huge majority of homeowners are using the cash to buy goods (mostly sucking in credit) and to pay off their credit card debts. Interest rates on home loans are half those on credit cards and are also far more stable.

Naturally, low interest rates make it pos-

sible for many US businesses to survive their huge debt burdens, which had resulted in a massive borrowing binge to finance new investments in the late 1990s. However, when profits started to recover last year they were invariably used to pay off debts rather than finance new investment.

OVER CAPACITY

Massive overcapacity remains in most branches of industry. Hence, until very recently, companies have played little role in keeping the US economy afloat or stimulating recovery.

In addition to an aggressive monetary policy the Bush administration has pursued some classic Keynesian counter-crisis measures in terms of the federal government's tax and spending policies.

In 2002, Bush announced a \$1.7 trillion (£940 billion) package of tax cuts, the bulk of which were a give-back to shareholders and big business in the form of much lower taxes on share dividends and corporate profits. But it also included income tax cuts and bigger child tax credits that were released this summer. These injected a further \$30 billion into the economy.

Last but not least, as part of the "bread and guns" economic package, the Bush team has boosted arms spending to the tune of \$85 billion to finance the invasion and occupation of Iraq. This surge in military spending has accounted for more than half of all GDP growth in the USA this year.

So, in many ways, the surprise is not that a reasonably robust economic recovery has finally taken hold but that it remains so weak. In fact, as we shall see, it is beset with problems.

A prolonged recovery in US capitalism requires the economy to move beyond its short-term dependency on tax cuts, lower interest rates and more arms spending, to reliance on a rising tide of increased output and employment as a result of sustained improvement in profits and investment over several years.

There are good reasons to doubt this can happen. The first set of problems centres on existing levels of debt and overcapacity. Companies are gradually writing down their debts with profits. The profits have by and large not been re-invested. Generally speaking, the new cycle of capital spending remains anaemic, largely because there is so much spare capacity in both manufacturing industry and the service sector. This probably amounts to between 15 and 25 per cent of total capacity.

So output can be raised from present levels for some time without investing in new plant and equipment – or hiring additional workers. The recent rebound in production may, in fact, prove a function of the fact that warehouse inventories are now at a six-year low and stocks are finally being rebuilt.

At this stage at least, the recovery remains crucially dependent on sustaining household spending. While low interest rates have helped boost it, households, according to the Congressional Budget Office in Washington, have a "dangerously low" ratio of savings to income. If they decide to save more rather than spend, then a significant part of the recovery will falter. This scenario could unfold

for several reasons.

First, there is still the fear of unemployment amid the "jobless recovery" (see opposite page). This fear may well cause a retrenchment in household spending.

Second, consumer spending may be hit by an increase in interest rates and an easing of house price inflation. Already in many areas, house price rises have levelled off abruptly due to a glut of new house building. This itself was caused by the surge in demand for houses when mortgage costs were lowered so dramatically in 2001-2.

But a rise in interest rates presents the greatest threat to the recovery. These cannot be lowered any further but they could rise because of debt levels in the economy as a whole.

The Bush administration's economic packages have turned a federal budget surplus under Clinton into a huge and growing deficit. It will be \$300 billion this year and twice that next year; it would top \$1,500 billion in 10 years, but most sympathetic commentators believe the projected deficit would become unsustainable as early as 2005-6.

DEFICIT

In addition, the current account deficit (the difference between what "USA plc" earns and what it owes the rest of the world) is 5 per cent of GDP, already an historic high and still growing. This deficit exists as a result of the US sucking in imports while exports have faltered due to the high value of the dollar. Servicing this debt is already onerous and would become more so if interest rates were to rise in order to attract desperately needed money from the rest of the world.

The "bash China" lobby is gaining more support in Congress as Beijing is blamed for the loss of manufacturing jobs in the USA. While they focus on the "artificially low" value of China's currency they are not so keen to point out that it is US multinationals that are relocating production to China in order to take advantage of low wage costs and boost profits.

Since the summer, the Bush administration has been trying to engineer a controlled fall in the value of the dollar to boost exports and erode the value of the country's debt. But the costs of this in turn would be quite high. The US must continue to attract foreign investors to buy US bonds and stock market assets in order to finance the current account deficit.

Lowering the value of the dollar – and hence the assets foreign investors hold – will make them reluctant to invest. In turn a rise in interest rates to attract them back could have a disastrous effect on the present recovery. Catch 22.

The next year will see whether the Bush administration and the Federal Reserve have any more tools to steer US capitalism in the direction of a sustained upturn, or whether the high levels of debt, extensive overcapacity and looming interest rate rises choke the recovery before it picks up speed.

Such a scenario would not only pose a further threat to George W Bush's prospects of another four years in the White House but the stability of global capitalism as a whole.

US workers: break from Democrats

As Bush falters at home as well as abroad... it's time to break the Democrats' grip on the unions, argues *GR McColl*

When George W Bush, clad in a naval flight suit, staged the ultimate photo-op aboard a US warship in May, most US commentators assumed that his re-election in November 2004 was a sure thing. Of course, Bush's melodramatic announcement that the war in Iraq was essentially over proved to be wishful thinking.

Since the imperialist occupation began US casualties have far exceeded those sustained in the official war between 20 March and the fall of Baghdad to US forces on 12 April. With American forces bogged down in a low-intensity but bloody guerrilla conflict, Bush's astronomical opinion poll ratings have come down to earth with a bump. His approval has slumped from 66 per cent in April to 45 per cent, no different from the summer of 2001, immediately prior to the attacks on New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The erosion of support has occurred nationwide, with polls in traditionally conservative states such as Arizona showing Bush is in serious trouble.

The corporate media may still wrap itself in the Stars & Stripes and provide an endless stream of pro-war propaganda, but network television news also regularly features images of flag-draped coffins, grieving widows and high school photos of dead soldiers. Such imagery has fuelled mounting anxiety and even anger against the Bush administration. The post-Vietnam syndrome has never really been exorcised from mass consciousness in the US, and the impact of daily casualties has grown just as the fabric of lies woven into the case for war publicly unravels on both sides of the Atlantic.

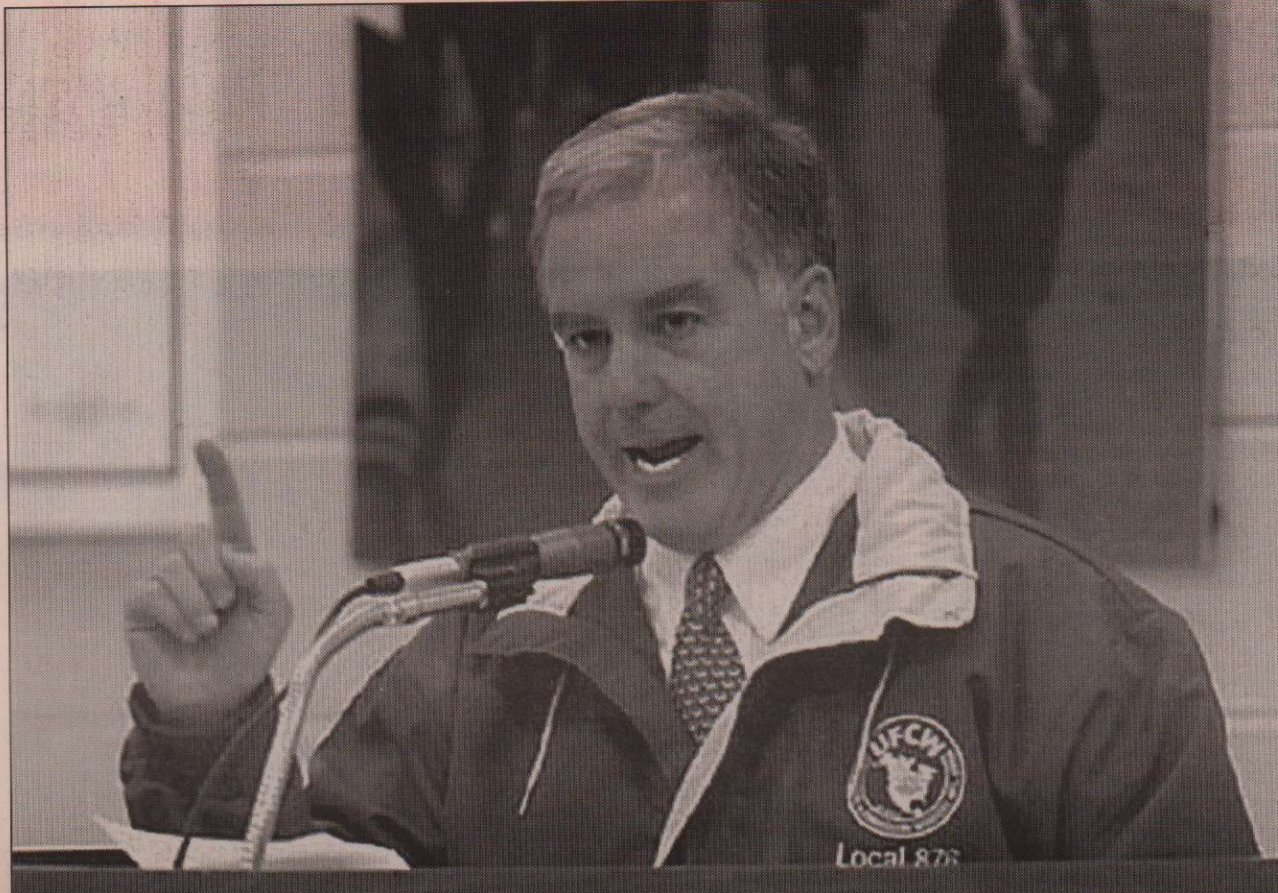
There is suddenly a sense of déjà vu and many mainstream pundits are suggesting that Dubya could follow in his father's footsteps as a one-term president. The sheen came off the first Bush's administration in 1991/92 largely because of a steep recession and the "jobless" recovery has compounded his son's potential problems.

Unemployment in August stood at 6.4 per cent, two percentage points higher than when Bush strode into the White House in January 2001. In August 2003 the total number of employees on US payrolls fell by 93,000. All told, some 2.5 million jobs have disappeared in the past 30 months and the official figures show that more than nine million Americans are out of work. Lawrence Mishel of the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute has characterised the slump in jobs as "the greatest contraction in private sector employment since the Great Depression" of the 1930s.

Meanwhile, the Bush prescription for the economy has amounted to little more than tax cuts for the rich, while most workers have seen a fall in real wages, down 1.4 per cent since the end of 2001 for the "median worker". At the same time, the reduction in support from the federal government to states and local authorities has triggered cuts and layoffs in social services, higher education, schools, fire departments and even policing. California, with its Democratic governor now fighting for his political life, is only the most dramatic example of the kind of budget squeeze affecting many state administrations. Against such a background Bush's call for an appropriation of another \$87 billion (£53 billion) to bolster the occupation of Iraq has hardly struck a resonant chord with his fellow Americans.

Little wonder, then, that what had appeared as a group of no-hopers in the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination has become the focus for international media attention.

The race in the other main political party of US capital has itself been transformed by the recent entry of a tenth candidate, former NATO commander General Wesley Clark. Like Bill Clinton, Clark grew up in



Howard Dean addresses the Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO's 18th constitutional convention in Madison Heights, Michigan.

Arkansas and was a Rhodes scholar. Again like Clinton, he has been painted as "liberal" on a range of social issues such as abortion rights, same-sex marriages and affirmative action. Crucially, though, from the perspective of Democratic Party fixers, he was a cautious opponent of the war on Iraq, who in sharp contrast to commander-in-chief Bush has actually seen combat.

In fact, Clark has been a loyal, life-long servant of US imperialism and its military ventures from Vietnam's Mekong delta to the former Yugoslavia. Clark has been described as the principal architect of the Nato war against Serbia in 1999, widely depicted as a "humanitarian battle" to liberate Kosovo from the bloody tyranny of Slobodan Milosevic and other Serbian chauvinists. Of course, this campaign featured a massive aerial bombardment of Serbia, resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths and massive infrastructural damage as well as hundreds of Kosovan casualties. In the wake of two months of warfare and the passage of more than four years the Kosovan national question remains unresolved and the country is an unhappy Nato "protectorate".

But Clark is still far from capturing the Democratic nomination. Candidate Clark has not yet been subjected to serious media scrutiny, and though donations have poured in since declaring his candidacy, he still lags behind several of the other nine hopefuls in terms of fundraising. Despite the initial flurry of enthusiasm, Clark has still not overtaken former Vermont governor, Howard Dean. Dean has been loathe to back cuts in the Pentagon budget and publicly reiterated his support for both the war against Afghanistan and the Zionist regime in Tel Aviv. He made his name as a fiscal conservative during his time as governor of the small New England state and, taking a leaf from the Clinton book of cynical electoralism, he has emphasised his support for the death penalty.

Of the other Democratic candidates Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, who once joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War, has since become a career politician - to the right of his supposed mentor Ted Kennedy. He has backed calls for still more troops to Iraq. Richard Gephardt commands some support within the AFL-CIO union bureaucracy but has sparked no enthusiasm among rank-and-file members.

The African-American candidates, self-styled civil rights campaigner, Al Sharpton, and former Senator Carol Mosley-Braun, simply lack the funds to compete.

Whoever emerges as the Democrats' nominee, however, Bush's defeat is not a foregone conclusion. Remember... the current occupant of the White House has already benefited from one fraudulent election victory in 2000.

The danger is that some activists are so desperate to defeat Bush at the polls in 2004 that they have backed the "draft Clark" call. Among them was the radical populist writer and film-maker, Michael Moore, who devoted an online column to urging Clark to stand. Moore's crudely pragmatic rationale was that Clark was the only candidate likely to beat Bush.

The California Federation of Labor expects to spend more than \$5 million to urge the 2.1 million members under the AFL-CIO umbrella to follow its recommendations: no on recall, yes on Democratic Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante for governor. California Federation of Teachers spokesman Fred Glass explained the psychology the union tops are resorting to, in order to drum up support:

"I think the fear factor is important. [Union members] are not wildly enthusiastic about Davis as a person, but they see he has tried to hold the line in times of fiscal austerity for education spending."

The "fear factor" is not insignificant. The AFL-CIO reckon the official figure of 9 million out of work masks a reality of 15.5 million jobless. And the Democrats' willingness to impose austerity on the working class is indisputable.

But many union activists are particularly anxious to kick Bush out of office because of his quiet war on the unions. In March 2001, Bush told 10,000 workers of Northwest Airlines that they could not strike for 80 days. The President also told United Airlines strikers that unless they agreed to further concessions the administration would refuse the \$1.8 billion that the airline needed to avoid bankruptcy. Most famously, after 9-11, Bush invoked the Taft-Hartley Act forcing West Coast dockworkers in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) to return to work - ending a lockout and giving the employers' the backing of the federal courts.

Bush has outlawed more strikes than any previous president. As a result, less than 10 per cent of the private sector is now unionised. Strikes - often local but extremely bitter - continue to demonstrate the fighting capacity of the US working class. 3,300 members of the Teamsters Union, for instance, have gone on strike against private-sector garbage services in the Chicago

area. Blue-collar university workers at Bush's alma mater, Yale University, also recently led a successful strike in their battle against low pay.

But the big union leaders are a powerful obstacle to the development of such strikes. The United Auto Workers have just agreed a four-year plan with Ford to close two factories and an assembly plant - the first such shut-down in 19 years. Ford is planning to cut 12,000 manual jobs, while announcing a grotesque \$1.3 billion profit for the first half of this year. And the UAW has signed up to it!

Union activists must urgently challenge and reverse this scandalous double betrayal: handing over union funds and votes to the big business, warmongering Democrats with the one hand; and signing away low paid jobs to billion-dollar profiteering companies with the other.

The first step must be to link the growing anger at the economic situation to the anti-war movement. US Labor Against the War has won the official support of a third of all the unions and called a march on Washington on 25th October to end the occupation, linking the illegal and bloody occupation of Iraq with wage cuts, the slashing of welfare budgets, attacks on immigrants and the dismantling of civil liberties.

By linking the issues and fighting US imperialism - at home and abroad - American socialists and workers can begin the fight for their own party, so that never again will the Democrats be the only option against the "neocons" around Bush. The fight for a US workers' party must go alongside the fight for a political programme that points to the overthrow of the system that squeezes living standards at home, impoverishes billions internationally and holds out the promise of little more than a series of imperial adventures in the name of democratic rights that it is daily stripping away.

US Labor Against the War End the Occupation of Iraq! Bring the Troops Home Now!

Who Pays For Bush's War Of Oil & Empire in Iraq?

*G.I.s. Already almost 300 dead, 1,500 wounded - mostly workers and people of color from our communities. \$1 billion per week for another Vietnam war, another \$87 billion more on the way. And no end in sight.

*Iraqis. Up to 8,000 dead, 20,000 wounded; a despised U.S. occupation so that union-busting companies like Halliburton, Bechtel and Verizon get multi-billion dollar contracts to plunder Iraq.

*Workers at Home. The very same corporate thieves get huge tax cuts, while slashing our wages, jobs, schools, housing, transit and health care, while trampling on the right to strike, civil liberties and immigrants.

What Can We Do?

Millions of workers around the world - including labor bodies that represent one-third of union members in the U.S. - have opposed Bush's war for oil and empire.

Iraqis demand an immediate end to U.S. occupation. Our friends and family in the military want to come home now.

US Labor Against the War, mass leaflet distributed in New York City

LOOK WHO'S COMING TO TOWN

LET'S GET BUSH

George W Bush is coming to London! His visit is a provocation to every anti-war activist, anti-capitalist and trade unionist in the country. He expects to receive a standing ovation from the House of Commons to boost his ratings back home. Like the Roman Emperor he thinks he is, he hopes for a triumphalist tour of his UK outpost.

Let's send him packing back to the US on a wave of revolt and revulsion.

Staying at Buckingham Palace, toasted and applauded at banquets, he will arrive Wednesday the 19th November and leave on the 21st after a three day junket.

Bush is an all-round right winger. There's not a cause he hasn't trampled on, so every progressive organisation in Britain should unite to give him a bashing.

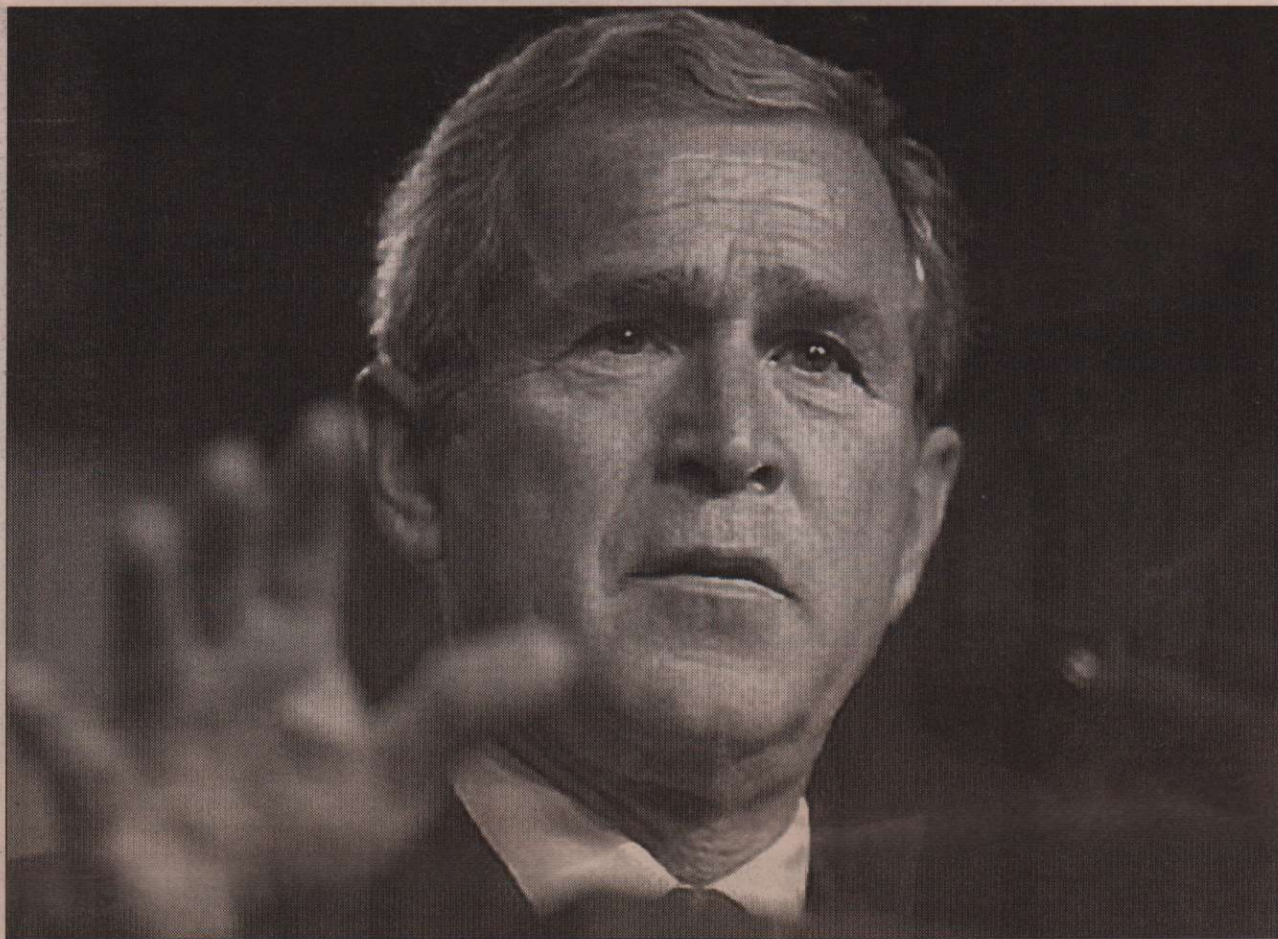
Everyone will want to protest against Bush's wars and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq. He is responsible for 1,000 Iraqi civilian deaths a week - and that's after the end of the aerial and land bombardment in which thousands perished.

And all this so that US oil companies like Halliburton can control the second largest oil reserves in the world. Another company from the Bush stable, Bechtel, is now profiting from the "reconstruction" after arms manufacturers made a bomb out of the destruction of Iraq.

Hundreds of prisoners of war in Afghanistan have been executed in cold blood. Others sit, hooded in cages, in Guantanamo Bay. Around the world, POWs are subjected to "Torture-lite", as one CIA agent called it. Even the US Army imam and the Arabic translator attached to prisoners in Camp X-Ray have been charged with treason.

The Bush administration is now developing battlefield nukes and ripping up anti-ballistic missile conventions in order to build their Star Wars defence shield, using bases in Britain such as Fylingdales. When it's not firing them off itself, the USA is the biggest gun dealer around - no regime too dodgy, no dictator too unsavoury - as Bush's pet project Plan Colombia shows.

Dubya launched the War on Terror as a "crusade" - implicitly defining Islam as the enemy. This also meant a war



at home on civil liberties.

The chillingly-titled "Department of Homeland Security" has rounded up and disappeared 2,000 US citizens of Muslim or Arab background.

This kind of racism isn't surprising of course - the Thief in Chief got "elected" due to his brother Jeb, governor of Florida, denying the right to vote of up to 100,000 black voters (Bush won the state, and the Presidency, with a mere 537 votes).

In October 2001 Bush forced West Coast dockers back to work on the pretext that their strike threatened national security. Bush has outlawed more strikes than any previous US president. Yet the bosses are free to cut wages and destroy jobs - even during the economic "recovery". And just as Iraqis and Afghans have been exposed to full-scale privatisation of services, so too have US workers.

Unable to convince the United

Nations Security Council to back his conquest of Iraq, Bush went ahead anyway, declaring France's use of its veto "unreasonable". Then when Israel declared it would assassinate Yasser Arafat, the elected president of the Palestinians, Bush's man vetoed a UN resolution condemning the policy.

Bush also ripped up the Kyoto agreement on global warming, so that his friends and family in the oil business can continue to burn a hole in the stratosphere.

He has imposed his "family values" on the third world's poor by banning US aid to family planning organisations, forcing charities to close clinics and let go doctors. Now he is trying to block the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, another treaty his right-wing cronies cannot stomach.

George Bush represents the most rapacious elements of imperialist cap-

italism on the planet. Building the broadest, fighting alliance against Bush's visit is not anti-American. It's an act of solidarity with American workers, women, blacks and youth!

Millions in Britain simply see Bush as the face of US superpower arrogance (and ignorance) and would love to see him knocked down a peg or two. It is the "special relationship", the partnership of the US and UK governments, that represents the real "axis of evil".

Every city and town needs to set up Stop Bush committees to build mass action against him. There will be local protests up and down the country, with demonstrations and people's tribunals to raise awareness of Bush's crimes. Coaches will no doubt travel to London for a national demonstration and day of action.

We want tens of thousands lining the streets to greet Bush and Blair whenever they attempt to take to the streets.

To build it as big as possible, we need to mobilise on the same scale, and in the same way as we did for the day war broke out - Day X. Because Bush's visit falls during the week, we will need to organise strikes and walkouts.

This sort of direct action also punches a hole through the media blackout and increases the effect of the protest. Remember how the school strikes forced the media to cover the anti-war protests in March. This time, let's make sure they're not alone - unionised workers and college students should join the schoolkids on the streets!

Anti-war trade union leaders like Billy Hayes and Bob Crow should take the lead, calling strikes and vowing to defend anyone who is victimised for taking action. After all, Bush is a privatiser and a union-buster. Bush IS a trade union issue.

And if Bush comes to speak at the House of Commons, the anti-war MPs should walk out or disrupt parliament. This vote-stealer, from Florida to Iraq, has no place in any democratic institution, even parliament.

We want an army of Bush whackers out on the streets. A billion television sets around the world will be tuned in to watch his tour of London. News reporters from around the world expect to run the story that Britain, America's one true friend, welcomes war hero Bush.

Let's make sure that every speech, every soundbite and media staged event is ruined by a background noise of boos, drums and the chants of "Down with Bush, down with Blair, regime change everywhere!"

Instead of the flag-waving, greet Bush with placards, banners and burning Stars-and-Stripes and Union Jacks instead. Tens of thousands of well-prepared and angry protestors can really turn the tone of this state visit around, and deal a real blow to the "special relationship".

We can show the American people watching in the bars, schools and homes - most of whom despise their president - that Bush can't even step foot in Britain without arousing hatred. We can show them that the real "special relationship" is between the anti-war and anti-capitalist millions around the world. We can show them that another world is possible.

Get active, stay active, join Workers Power

Even the onset of war did not stop the global revolt against it.

Across the world the working class is coming together. Globalisation has forced workers and activists from different countries and continents to unite, work and fight together. There have been huge Social Forums of resistance in Europe at Florence, in Asia at Hyderabad and in South America at Porto Alegre.

Together with the LFI, which is represented on the European Social Forum, Workers Power campaigns to bring these movements together into a New World Party of Socialist

Revolution - the Fifth International.

This is a momentous time, one of those times when the true nature of the world we live in suddenly becomes clear to millions. Capitalism is revealing itself to be a system of war, conquest and global inequality. By taking to the streets against war and capitalism, hundreds of thousands of people are showing that they have seen through the lies.

Take the next step and join Workers Power. Phone us on 020 7820 1363 or e mail us at paper@workerspower.com.

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
 Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____
Address: _____

Postcode: _____
Email: _____
Tel no: _____

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month. I enclose:

- £9.00 UK
 £20 Europe
 £18.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____
Address: _____

Postcode: _____
Tel no: _____

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International (LFI)

Mail to: Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 020 7820 1363
Email: paper@workerspower.com

Print: East End Offset, London E3
Production: Workers Power (labour donated)
ISSN 0263-1121